Factors influencing outreach services for empowering underprivileged people by university libraries in sri lanka: librarian's perception

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ABSTRACT

Outreach has become a crucial element of library services in academic libraries. The paper deliberates various mechanisms of outreach programmess of university libraries in Sri Lanka. The study mainly focuses in categorizing the role of remaining outreach (OR) services in University libraries identify the objectives and outcomes of the OR services which imbued of influence created over the communities through university library OR services and culminate the potential obstacles in implementing OR services in Sri Lankan academic libraries and explore the remedial measures for those problems. The study highlights that in this changing landscape university librarians elaborate to provide specific directions and conduct the OR programmes as an ad hoc programme of the library. The Sri Lankan university librarians are competent to provide specific directions for making this endeavor worthwhile and sustainable in the long run through OR services and contribute to empower the disadvantaged people and national development. Time limitation (53%), human resources (60%), technology (80%) and communication, coordination and collaboration(80%) are the factors that manipulated the realization of OR services of university libraries. Based on the four influencing aspects found in this study, the finding suggests that, librarians can pursue these opportunities through broad-based direction support across the diverse services.

Keywords: Outreach services, university libraries, community   development, services to underprivileged people, services   to disadvantaged people

Introduction

University, the highest academy of scholars, is the focal point of higher education. It is a free space which teaches not only formal subjects but also permits expansion of the mind by unhindered interaction with large diverse groups of people for the positive benefit and advancement of all mankind. It also plays a significant role in accomplishing not only higher education but also research requirements according to the needs of the dynamic world. In achieving the vision of the university the library supports immensely providing the pertinent facts and information. The mission of the academic libraries is to support the educational and research activities of their parent institution through the acquisition of collections, provision of services, and user education. Providing support for teaching, learning and research is the focus of academic libraries. Academic libraries are vital to the success of the academic enterprise of their institutions whose research and teaching agenda are greatly enriched by libraries whose collections are broad, rich and diverse. It is the one and only systematic information line established, supported and administered by the university to meet the information needs of its students supporting its instructional research and service programmes. It opens up minds and inspires users to see vision because mind is the center point where progress originates. It is impossible to survive without this vital organ, so that the library has become the 'heart of the university'.

The library connects directly with the university education and also it renders a great service to the society.

Many scholars of Library and Information Science (LIS) have defined objectives of the libraries in various ways. Some specialists in LIS such as Dr. S.R. Ranganathan, Deshpanday (1979); Wilson and Touber (1956) have presented the objectives of the University libraries highlighting the importance of university libraries. According to their presentations, special information services to appropriate segments of the wider community with outreach activities of the university libraries take a significant part of the contribution to the community development. The library outreach services or extension services may be of internal and external type.

As Weibel (1982) thought, the term 'outreach' is used in library literature; a specific definition is not readily offered up to the mid-sixties. Outreach is often used interchangeably with synonyms such as extension and the phrases "service to the disadvantaged" or "un served", and "community" or "inter-city service". Modifications in goals or type of library service described can be seen over the period examined, while the interchangeability of terms and the lack of specificity of their definition remains.

Library outreach is a challenging concept to express. It is not just one process; there are as many ways to afford outreach as there are clienteles in a library. Outreach means diverse stuff for children, adults, regular library clientele and non-clienteles, falsehood readers, researchers, and computer users. But in wide-ranging, outreach can be seen as any service or activity that gets clientele or potential clientele interested in a library including various types of themes together with storytelling, good reading habit, mind mapping concept, getting ready for exams and the way of organizing home libraries etc. Librarians have always emphasized helping and serving people as well as organizing and disseminating knowledge to the community for its advancement.

Library outreach

Information is a crucial factor in community development and the ability to use information tools is considered as a source of power. Information is like a pin of national development as suggested by Achitabwino (2007) who later pointed out that for a national to develop it needs to have and provide relevant updated and adequate information on food, security, population, education, family planning, youth empowerment, gender equality, and environment among other sectors. In this study focus on the role of the academic/university libraries transforming development and mentoring their roles in improving society thinking, shaping a knowledgeable people and impact of academic libraries and economic growth.

Jayasooriya (2011) pointed and that in her paper on University Library services in Sri Lanka; a historical perspective the NILIS (National Institute of Library and Information Science) established affiliated to the University of Colombo in 1999 She has explained the objectives of the NILIS and the 3rd objective was research and disseminate the results to such research through publications, seminars; workshops and extension/ outreach services.

Objective(s) of the research

- to categorize the role of remaining outreach (OR) services in University Libraries

- to identify the objectives and outcomes of the OR services

- to examine the potential obstacles in implementing OR services in Sri Lankan academic libraries and explore the remedial measures for those problems

Methodology

The survey method used for gathering data and only the 15 national university librarians were the sample and self-structured questionnaire used as a data collection instrument.

15 questionnaires distributed through email among all 15 librarians of national universities in Sri Lanka.

Results and discussion

The questionnaire was in three parts. Part 01 elicited background information/ locations of the universities, part 02 elicited OR services of the university libraries, part 03 elicited librarians' perspectives on the factors influencing community focus OR services for empowering disadvantaged people.

The data was presented using simple percentage and frequency counts. Six universities out of 15 universities are located in Western Province. Although demographic data were not submitted by all participants, there was enough data to provide some approximations. Of the 15 university librarians who participated in this study were male (53%) far away from the Western Province (63%) and represented a variety of ethnic groups such as; various religious and strata of the society.

The results indicate that 80% in libraries haven't separated OR section and OR librarian to identify the needs of communities as well as to plan different programmes for different communities and minority of libraries (less than 50%) identified the needs of communities and planned activities to cater to meet their needs. The remaining OR services in university libraries are in Table 1. Majority of programmes were well thought-out by other institutes and the university librarians accompanied the programmes/ activities as resource persons.

TABLE 1: REMAINING OR SERVICES AND THE COMMUNITIES/ USER CATEGORIES

Name of the Remaining OR Programme / OR service	Community / User category
Role of Teacher librarian	School /teacher librarians
How to organize a school library?	School /teacher librarians
Organizing and Managing Public libraries	Public librarians
Cultural Performance	Rural Community
Book displays	-Do-
Training on library services/ Reader services	Public library staff
Training on library services/ Tech. services	
How to use e-resources for education (IL)?	-Do-
-Do- (IL)	School children (grade 1 – 5)
-Do- (IL)	-Do- (grade 6-8)
-Do- (IL)	-Do- (grade 9-10)
-Do- (IL)	-Do-(grade 11-12)
Counseling	-Do-A/L students (grade 11-12)
How to Market Yourself (Career guidance)	LIS graduate students / Uni. of Kelaniya
Library Training Awareness programme	Pregnant mothers
Awareness programme	Public library staff
Assisting uploading KOHA and training	School library staff
-Do-	Public library users
Book donation programmes	LIS graduates & Diploma holders
Consulting library trainees	Public librarians
Consulting librarians	Public library staff
Consulting library staff	School librarians
Consulting librarians	School librarians and staff, teachers and students
Developing of a school library and conducting information literacy session and Art camp for same school	Public librarians
Library automation & training	Public library staff
Staff training	Outside Researchers
Research Assistance providing information sources	
Training Programmes	Library paraprofessionals
-Do- of LIS	-Do-
-Do- of LIS	Outside Researchers
	Diploma students / SLLA
	-Do- / Uni. of Kelaniya
	Graduate students / Uni. of Kelaniya

The findings also indicate the university librarians affecting barriers for implementing OR services; time limitation (53%) is one of huge barriers for non-provision of seminars/ workshops as they requested, limitations of professional human resources (60%) to be assigned OR activities as they requested, due to

COVID 19 pandemic, the limited professional staff has to be developed to offer services in online platform but rural communities are lacking behind the technology (80%) and they couldn't get the benefit of the OR services and lack of communication, coordination and collaboration (80%).

In this case, librarian should take actions to fulfill cadres of the library, planning OR programmes which can be conducted as teamwork of changing attitudes of library staff and encourage to team works, make a good impression about university libraries and librarian profession, helps to upgrade the lives of general public by make them aware of information they need to solve their day to day issues and make the library as the bridge to meet different communities and it will be highly beneficial for the peace of the country. This approach allows the community to become self-sufficient (Hawkins, 2005) and human capital.

Conclusion and recommendations

In this changing landscape university librarians elaborate to provide specific directions and conduct the OR programmes as an ad hoc programme of the library. The Srilankan university librarians are competent to provide specific directions for making this attempt worthwhile and sustainable in the long run through community focused OR services and contribute to empower the disadvantaged people and the national development. Time limitation, human resources, technology and communication, coordination and collaboration are the facts that influenced realizing OR services of university libraries. Based on the four influencing aspects found in this study, the finding suggests that, librarians can pursue these opportunities through broad-based direction support across the diverse service; 1. Changing library's image, role, services 2. Supporting communities is interesting, enjoyable and the like 3. Making aware of the technology 4. Building relationships with professional communities 5. Being seen as a source of support and 6. Enlightening other aspects of the carrier.

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