

An Assessment of Public Library Services to Children in Jaffna District, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

IFLA guidelines states “Public libraries have a special responsibility to support the process of learning to read among children and must provide related services and resources”. This study investigates the present status of children’s section in the public libraries of Jaffna district, with the intention of improving the quality of services for children. A survey research method was adopted. A self-administered, structured questionnaire was distributed to Librarians in-charge for public libraries (n=60) attached to local government authorities (one Municipal council, three Urban councils and 13 Pradeshiya sabhas) in Jaffna district. Data collected through the questionnaire were analysed using SPSS. The response rate was 86.3% (n=53). Among the responded libraries, 75.5% (n=40) have children’s section to facilitate reading among children. In these public libraries, collection of children’s literature includes story books, textbooks, reference sources, children’s magazines, exercise books and past paper collection, audio-visual materials, etc. With respect to infrastructure, more than 50% of the Librarians in-charge are satisfied with space, furniture and electricity facilities of the children’s section. However, lack of computers and internet connectivity, inadequate financial support, and dearth of conducive environment and lack of staff were reported as limitations. Regarding the readers, children’s section of these libraries have only 10-20% of the total readership at present. Apart from lending books, storytelling (56.6%, n=30), drawing (49.1%, n=26), homework assistance (45.3%, n=24), creative activity (47.2%, n=25) and classes to improve creative and language skills (17%, n=9) are the services delivered for children, by these libraries. However, Librarians in-charge perceived that refurbishing the library space and infrastructure

facilities, modernizing the library environment with IT, commencing mobile library services (to disadvantaged groups, preschools and primary schools), introducing information literacy programs and library related competitions, and conducting language classes, leisure time activities, entertainment shows, etc., would attract more children to the library and enhance their reading achievement. Moreover, development of integrated policy for the establishment of children's section in the public libraries of the Northern Province, construction of conducive library environment for children and empowerment of the society in relation to public library services for children are also indispensable. Hence, this study implies the need for revitalizing the children's section of public libraries in Jaffna district, with the emphasis on information resources, infrastructure and services.

Keywords: Public libraries, Children's libraries, Children, Sri Lanka