Public Library System in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka: Contemporary Issues and the Way Forward

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Abstract

Public libraries are the centre of excellence in information dissemination to the society. In Sri Lanka, public libraries in the Northern Province were severely affected in terms of collection, infrastructure facilities and human resource, due to 30 years of unsettled condition prevailed in the region. This study aimed to assess the present status of these public libraries (managed by the Local government authorities), and identify the major challenges encounter in providing effective services. A survey method was adopted, which was equipped with data extraction sheet. Subsequently, collected data were analyzed by using SPSS. At present, 103 public libraries (out of 110) are functioning under 34 Local government authorities in this region. Among the functioning libraries, 43.7% (n=45) of the public libraries are graded by the NLDSB up to 2014. Except Jaffna Public Library, other functional libraries have poor collection. With regard to infrastructure facilities, library building, physical space, furniture, ICT facilities, and basic facilities (such as water, toilet, electricity) are pointed out as essential and urgent requirements. Regarding human resource, this study highlighted that these libraries are functioning with 26% Librarians, 30% Library Attendants and 16%Library Servaka, apart from other category staff. Moreover, 2015 statistics showed that there are 28% (n=33) and 24.5% (n=34) cadre vacancies exists in the Librarian and Library Attendant positions respectively in the Northern Province. Hence, this study implied that improving infrastructure facilities, collection and human resource of these public libraries are imperative to move towards user-centered service environment.

Keywords: Public library system; Challenges to libraries; Public libraries – Sri Lanka