

Addressing Educational Disparities: Analysis of Library Resources and Services in Urban, Semi-Urban, and Rural Schools in the Kandy District

Gunasekera, C

Main Library, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
chamanig@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study investigates the disparities in library resources and services among urban, semi-urban, and rural school libraries in the Kandy district. The findings reveal significant gender disparities among school librarians and diverse roles within the profession. Analysis of available information resources indicates variations across locations, with notable discrepancies in the availability of audio-visual materials. Similarly, disparities in library services and facilities are identified, impacting study spaces, reading materials, and technology access. The study emphasizes the need for targeted efforts to address these discrepancies and ensure equal educational opportunities. Recommendations include promoting awareness of diverse library services and resources and implementing improvements for enhanced effectiveness. The study contributes valuable insights to inform decision-making processes aimed at fostering equity in the educational system, regardless of school location.

Keywords: *Library use, Resources, Rural schools, School librarians, Urban schools*

Introduction

School libraries are invaluable facilities that significantly contribute to positive learning outcomes (CILIP, 2004) in the country. The school library serves as a vital source of information for both teachers and learners, playing a crucial role in achieving learning outcomes. In today's rapidly evolving educational environment, the significance of school libraries and the role of school librarians have become increasingly important. School librarians facilitate access to library

resources and services for the user community, making effective utilization of school libraries essential in promoting student learning and academic success.

Educational disparities, especially concerning library resources and services, are critical issues affecting the learning opportunities of students in various settings. These disparities are particularly noticeable among urban, semi-urban, and rural schools (Sullivan et al., 2018). Adequate access to library resources, including audio-visual materials, study spaces, reading materials, and technology, significantly influences the quality of education students receive. Addressing these discrepancies is pivotal to ensuring equal educational opportunities and fostering a more conducive learning environment for all.

The main objective of this study is to examine library resources and services available in school libraries, identifying gaps and discrepancies in the availability of information resources and library services & facilities among different settings: urban, semi-urban, and rural. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations to inform decision-making processes, leading to a more equitable educational system for all students, regardless of their school's location.

Materials and Methods

This study utilized a survey method to collect data from the librarians regarding library resources and services available in school libraries. The research was conducted in the Kandy district, focusing on schools that have dedicated school libraries. To gather the necessary data, a questionnaire was developed as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire was administered to all 267 schools in the Kandy district

that were reported to have formal school libraries, as obtained from the Zonal office of the Education Department of Kandy. The survey was conducted in January 2023, and the questionnaires were distributed to all identified schools. Following the data collection phase, a total of 186 completed responses were received from the participating schools by a 64.8% response rate. For data analysis, the SPSS (17.0) was utilized.

Results and Discussion

Background information of the respondents

Firstly, background information about the librarians who responded to the survey such as gender, designation, work experience and location of school where they work are presented in Table 1. Regarding the demographics of the respondents, the majority were female, comprising 92.5% of the sample while males accounted only for 7.5%. The study indicates a significant gender disparity within the school librarian profession. With regards the current positions, the most common position among respondents was "Teacher librarian," representing 50% of the sample. Other positions included "Library in charge" (10.8%), "Teacher" (18.3%), "Librarian" (11.8%), and "Library assistant" (9.1%). These diverse roles highlight the range of responsibilities within the school library profession.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Biographical Characteristics

1	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1)	Male	14	7.5
2)	Female	172	92.5
2	Current position at school		
1)	Librarian	22	11.8
2)	Teacher librarian	93	50.0

3)	Library in charge	20	10.8
4)	Teacher	34	18.3
5)	Library assistant	17	9.1
3	Work experience		
1)	less than 1 year	21	11.3
2)	1-5	47	25.3
3)	6-10	28	15.1
4)	More than 10	90	48.4
4	Location of school		
1)	Central city	65	34.9
2)	Suburb	80	43.0
3)	Rural	39	21.0
4)	No response	02	1.1
	Total	186	100.0

When considering the number of years in the profession, respondents' service periods varied with the largest group (48.4%) having served for more than 10 years. A significant portion (25.3%) had a service period of 1-5 years, while 15.1% had served for 6-10 years. The smallest group (11.3%) had less than 1 year of service. With regards to the school location, most of the respondents, 80 (43%) indicated that their schools were situated in a suburb area followed by nearly 35% in urban areas and 21% in a rural area. The schools where the respondents' works were located were thus fairly representative of town areas as well as rural areas.

Services Offered by School Libraries

Information Resources

School libraries should offer a variety of services in order to cater to the diverse needs of their users. The study examined available information

resources for users and then it was investigated whether such resources varied depending on school location i.e. urban, suburbs and rural.

Table 2: Available Information Resources for Library Users

	Resources	Urban No. (%)	Semi-Urban No. (%)	Rural No. (%)	Total
1	Books	65 (100%)	80(100%)	39(100%)	186
2	Periodicals	60(92.3%)	77(96.3%)	35(89.8%)	175
3	Newspaper	62(95.4%)	74(92.5%)	33(84.6%)	175
4	Maps	57(87.7%)	64(80%)	21(53.8%)	142
5	Audio Visual Media	11(16.9%)	26(32.5%)	04(10.3%)	41
Note: Urban=65: Suburbs=80: Rural=39: No response=02 ; Total=186					

Table 2 presents information about the availability of different resources in school libraries across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. For instance, it shows that books, periodicals, and newspapers are the most widely available resources in all areas of libraries, with higher percentages in semi-urban areas. Maps, on the other hand, have a higher percentage of availability in urban areas compared to semi-urban and rural areas. Interestingly, audio-visual materials are not much available while 32.5% of suburban schools were having access but only 17% and 10% having access in urban and rural schools respectively. Interesting finding was that only 32.5% of suburban schools have audio visual materials but 83% of urban schools and 90% of rural schools are not available. The results allow researchers and policymakers to understand the distribution of library resources across different types of locations

and identify potential gaps or areas for improvement in library services.

Library Services and Facilities

The library services and facilities provided by the school library were examined and, then it was investigated whether the services and facilities being provided varied depending on school location. The Table 3 shows that all schools irrespective of the location provide lending services while 95% of all schools provide reference services.

Table 3: Library Services and Facilities for Library Users according School Location

	Services	Urban No. (%)	Semi- Urban No. (%)	Rural No. (%)
1	Lending service	60(100%)	80(100%)	39(100%)
2	Provision of reference services/ access to reference books (eg. dictionaries, encyclopedias etc...)	62(95.4%)	77(96.3%)	37(94.9%)
3	Facilitating studies in the library	59(90.8%)	65(81.2%)	32(82%)
4	Facilitating reading of newspapers and magazines	57(87.7%)	76(95%)	35(89.7%)
5	Maintaining a library catalog to facilitate book searching	34(52.3%)	42(52.5%)	27(69.2%)
6	Informing readers about library resources and facilities through educational programs (Library orientation)	15(23.0%)	27(33.8%)	04(10.2%)
7	Provision of photocopying services	24(36.9%)	45(56.3%)	12(30.8%)
8	Provision of internet facilities	02(3%)	03(3.9%)	00(00)
Note: Urban=65: Suburbs=80: Rural=39: No response=02 ; Total=186				

It can be seen that most of urban schools (90%) while 82% of rural and 81% of suburbs schools provide facilities for studying in the library. Majority of suburban schools (95%) facilitate reading of magazines and newspapers while 90% rural and 88% of urban schools provide such

facilities for the library users.

Interestingly, higher percentages of rural schools (69%) have library catalogs and lesser percentage of urban and semi-urban schools (52%) maintain catalogs for searching books in the library. Although 34% of suburban schools conduct user education programs to educate users about available library resources and facilities, only 23% and 10% urban and rural schools respectively provide that facility. More than 56% of semi-urban schools provide photocopying services while nearly 37% of urban and 31% of rural schools provide such facilities for the users.

A remarkable finding is that only 3% and 4% of urban and suburban schools respectively provide internet searching facilities from the library but none of rural schools provide the facility. The disparities in library services among different school locations, particularly in rural areas, create unequal access to resources, hinder information literacy development and have long-term impacts on academic performance. Addressing these issues is essential to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students in the country.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the study highlights disparities in the availability of library resources, especially in audio-visual materials, across urban, semi-urban, and rural school libraries, underscoring the need for targeted efforts to enhance resource access and equity in educational settings. The study further reveals disparities in library services and facilities across urban, semi-urban, and rural schools, highlighting varying levels of access to resources such as study spaces, reading materials, and technology, emphasizing the need for targeted improvements and equal opportunities in educational settings. Based on

these findings, the study recommends that school administrators and librarians promote the diverse services and resources available in the library to enhance its effectiveness.

References:

Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). (2004). Information literacy: definition. Retrieved form: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/news/421972/What-is-information-literacy.htm>

Sullivan, K., McConney, A., & Perry, L. B. (2018). A Comparison of Rural Educational Disadvantage in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand Using OECD's PISA. *SAGE Open*, 8(4).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018805791>