

2.42 The impact of new information technology on public libraries in the n on - metropolitan area (Kurunegala district) in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Technology plays an increasing role in accelerating information growth and promoting development. Information Technology (IT) refers to anything related to computing technology, such as networking, hardware, software and the internet. Since we live in the “information age” information technology has become a part of our everyday lives.

To fulfill information and knowledge needs of users as well as to keep pace with modern public library systems, the public libraries of Sri Lanka have to move towards a technological based service environment. Especially the public library is the local center of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. According to UNESCO public library manifesto, the services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status.

The major objectives of the research are to identify the services and functions of suburb public library and to identify the computer and internet usage of library personnel in public libraries in Sri Lanka in order to provide a better service.

A qualitative and quantitative survey was done to gather data in the Kurunegala district in the Wayamba province in Sri Lanka. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of three sections. Background information of the public library was collected from section 1. Section 2 was designed to collect data on services of public libraries. Data on computer and internet usage by library personnel was collected using section 3 of the questionnaire.

Out of 62 respondents, responses were obtained from 52 library personnel.

The data analysis revealed that a large number of public libraries have some common features such as reference section, lending section, children section and periodical section. Most of libraries do not have a multimedia section. Few of the public libraries do have news paper cutting files, a project division and inter library loan division. Public libraries also rendered services such as reference service, lending service, user awareness, community service, entertainment activities and special user group service. About 60% public libraries possess mobile library services. Further 4% of public libraries have IT facilities. It was also revealed that most of the public librarians' encountered problems related to providing new services, mainly due to the non availability of

computer and internet facilities and lack of knowledge of handling new technologies. The major suggestions of the study are implementing well organized non-metropolitan public library systems with new technologies and facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills among public library users. Further, the study suggested that the new services for the welfare of the user community.

Keywords: Information Technology, Public Library, Non – Metropolitan, Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka.