

## Journal based information services in Sri Lankan University libraries: a study

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Evaluates the information services based on social science journals in university libraries of Sri Lanka. Questionnaire and interview techniques were used as research instruments. Results show that university library staff are prompt and helpful in delivering most of the services to their users. However, some services such as document delivery, SDI service, abstracting, indexing services and literature search service are either poorly carried out or not performed effectively.

### Introduction

Journals are an indispensable feature of the most of the library programmes by virtue of their informational and research value. Among all the services provided by a university library, the periodicals based information services are one of the most influencing services of a library. As researchers often find current information in journal articles, effective flow of journal based information is essential for the development of teaching, learning and research activities in universities. Therefore, evaluation of the journal based information services and the level of user satisfaction are important components to do a research study.

Previous studies carried out in Sri Lanka on periodicals have revealed some problems in procurement of periodicals and related services. Wijayatunga<sup>1</sup> has carried out a research on "Procurement and use of periodicals on Science and Technology libraries in Sri Lanka with special reference to University of Morotuwa". The study based on special and university libraries and on printed periodicals published in English found that periodicals were not received to the satisfaction and aspiration of libraries and their usage was also poor. The researcher has recommended some better ways to procure and facilitate optimum use of periodicals and emphasized guidance to readers on indexing, abstracting, current content page, SDI service, online accessing, CD-ROM databases, networks and publishing union list of periodicals.

Rajasegaram<sup>2</sup> found that Sri Lankan Health Science libraries did not have adequate periodical titles in order

to satisfy the user demand. The study concluded that they were unable to provide even minimum level of services due to inadequate funds, lack of trained staff and shortage of infrastructure facilities.

Another study carried out on University library services in Sri Lanka by Padmasiri<sup>3</sup> revealed that most of the library services were not satisfactory. Kulatunga<sup>4</sup> has evaluated periodical collection in the University of Sri Jayewardenepura library and reported that evaluation criteria for one set of collection cannot be a standard for another collection.

This literature survey concludes that different scholars have used different evaluation criteria to evaluate the quality service of libraries and perspectives of users and the librarians were considered for evaluation purposes. It is found that no study has been carried out in Sri Lanka specifically on periodicals based information services.

With the above in view, the present study was carried out. The study evaluates information services based on social science journals in university libraries of Sri Lanka.

### Objectives of the study

1. To comparatively evaluate the status of delivering information services related to social science journal literature of the selected university libraries; and
2. To study the satisfaction level of the users of selected university libraries.

### Methodology

Table 1 — Extent of help of library staff in accessing periodicals

Description	University of Colombo		University of Peradeniya of Sri Lanka		South-Eastern University		Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka	
	Academic staff	Students	Academic staff	Students	Academic staff	Students	Academic staff	Students
Never	1(6.3)	0(0)	0(0)	1(3.4)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Occasionally	1(6.3)	5(10)	1(4.5)	3(4.3)	0(0)	3(13)	0(0)	0(0)
Sometimes	5(31.3)	15(30)	6(27.9)	19(27.5)	1(9.1)	8(34.8)	5(45.5)	10(45.5)
Always	9(56.3)	29(58)	14(63.6)	43(62.3)	10(90.9)	12(52.1)	6(54.6)	10(45.5)
Total	16(100)	49(98)	21(95.5)	66(95.7)	11(100)	23(100)	11(100)	20(90.9)

Figures in parenthesis give percentage

There are fifteen universities in Sri Lanka of which four were selected based on the common subjects in the special degree programmes in social sciences. Two are well established universities that have been in existence for more than 50 years and two are younger universities that have been in existence for less than 15 years. The universities are:

Well Established universities:

1. University of Peradeniya (UOP)
2. University of Colombo (UOC)

Newly established universities:

1. Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka(SUSL)
2. South-Eastern University of Sri Lanka(SEUSL)

A questionnaire survey was conducted in the year 2008. Academic staff members who teach the same subjects and 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year special degree students from the same disciplines were selected for the study. The total population comprises 220 academic staff and 957 undergraduate students. Seventy eight staff members and 192 special degree students were considered as sample following the stratified random sampling technique. Eighty six percent responses from undergraduate students (165) and 77 percent from the staff (60) were received. The library professional in-charge of periodical sections of each selected university was also interviewed. The information obtained from the survey and interviews were analyzed for results.

## Analysis

### Help of library staff

Current periodicals are usually displayed and the back volumes are bound and stacked in libraries. Users many times require the assistance of library staff to locate a periodical or an article from a periodical. The users were requested to state the extent of the help extended by library staff in accessing journals.

Table 1 indicates that the library staff of all universities help the academic staff and undergraduate students in accessing periodicals. Considering the level of help extended; the South- Eastern University of Sri Lanka staffs are better in assisting the academic users than the others. Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka library staffs are better in helping the undergraduate users than the others.

### Promptness in delivering journal based information services

Promptness here means the willingness or alacrity of employees in providing quick services. It is very important attitude which is required for any service organization especially, a library. In order to identify the promptness of library staff in delivering service, a scaled question was asked.

Table 2 shows that in University of Colombo and University of Peradeniya, majority of responses have been positive. In South-Eastern University of Sri Lanka and Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, even though very few people have given response like never and not sure, the higher positive responses indicate that South-Eastern University of Sri Lanka library staff also deliver

Table 2— Promptness of library staff in delivering journal based services

Description	University of Colombo		University of Peradeniya		South- Eastern University of Sri Lanka		Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka	
	Academic staff	Students	Academic staff	Students	Academic staff	Students	Academic staff	Students
Never	0(0)	3(6)	1(4.5)	0(0)	1(9.1)	1(4.3)	0(0)	1(4.55)
Occasionally	2(12.6)	5(10)	2(9)	4(7.7)	0(0)	2(8.6)	2(18.2)	1(4.55)
Not sure	3(18.8)	10(20)	5(22.5)	15(21.72)	1(18.2)	5(21.5)	2(18.2)	2(9.1)
Sometimes	6(37.5)	17(34)	6(27)	29(41.9)	6(54.6)	8(34.7)	5(45.5)	8(36.4)
Always	5(31.3)	15(30)	7(31.5)	18(26.06)	2(18.2)	7(30.4)	2(18.2)	10(45)
Total	16(100)	50(100)	21(94.5)	66(97.38)	11(100)	23(100)	11(100)	22(99.6)

Figures in parenthesis give percentage

Table 3 — Responses to empathy

Description	University of Colombo		University of Peradeniya		South- Eastern University of Sri Lanka		Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka	
	Academic	Undergrad.	Academic	Undergrad.	Academic	Undergrad.	Academic	Undergrad.
Yes	13(80.6)	37(74)	17(76.5)	47(67.96)	8(72.8)	15(65.1)	7(63.7)	17(72.3)
No	3(19.4)	13(26)	5(23.5)	22(32.04)	3(27.2)	8(34.9)	4(36.3)	6(27.7)
Total	16(100)	50(100)	22(100)	69(100)	11(100)	23(100)	11(100)	23(100)

Figures in parenthesis give percentage

services promptly. However this result expresses that University of Colombo and South-Eastern University of Sri Lanka staff serve the users better.

### Empathy

Empathy is a very essential trait that library staff should have for their users. Users should feel that the library staff will give individualized attention in solving their information needs. Library staff should be caring to their users' individual information needs. In order to identify this attitude of library staff, a 'yes'/no' question was asked. Table 3 shows that even though the majority of users have responded positively across the four university libraries, while a small percentage of negative response indicates that some of the library staff are less empathetic. Library staff have to improve their attitude in this regard. This result indicates that individualized attention and caring of library staff on undergraduate students is comparatively lower as compared to the perception of academic staff.

### Information services

The periodical librarians of the four universities revealed that abstracting and indexing are not carried out in the libraries owing to lack of staff. South-Eastern University of Sri Lanka reported that though the library commenced the exercise, the same was given up due to shortage of human resources and also because an article index for Sri Lankan journals is published by National Library and Documentation Services Board. South-Eastern University of Sri Lanka and Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka bring out a current awareness bulletin monthly and quarterly respectively.

University of Colombo, University of Peradeniya and Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka provide selective dissemination of information (SDI) service manually only to academic staff members. Some postgraduate students are also provided with this service in University of Colombo and University of Peradeniya. Librarians mentioned that manually delivering SDI service is a very difficult task. An integrated software is needed for this

Table 4 — Types of user education programmes and the periodicity

Library	Type of user education programme	Periodicity of holding programmes
University of Colombo	Training on e- journal packages, workshops, lectures etc.	Quarterly
University of Peradeniya	Library tours and introduce the collection presentations. when new comers arrive and academics' request,	Not specified, but several times per year.
South- Eastern University of Sri Lanka	Orientation programme for new comers. Presentation about e- journals and lecture series.	When and where needs arise.
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka	Orientation programme	Once a year

purpose to match the user profile and the information profile and then to automatically notify the user about current information. All the four university libraries provide the photocopy service to the users which have been outsourced. Majority of the responses of the users were positive as regards to the service. Document delivery service is based on the periodicals and it is found that the University of Colombo, University of Peradeniya and South-Eastern University of Sri Lanka render document delivery service in both physical and electronic mode whilst Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka performs document delivery only through the physical mode. Since the response rate is very less from the four universities it is difficult to reach a conclusion on the performance of the services. However, it is assumed that low response could be owing to rather low quality of the service.

#### User education programmes (UEP)

All four libraries were asked whether they provide user education programme for the periodical based services. Table 4 shows that the four universities have user education programmes through trainings, library tours, orientation programmes etc.

#### Access to e-journals

The PERI (Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information) has provided access to e-journals with the funding arrangement of SIDA (Swedish International Development Authority) grant to all Sri Lankan universities and higher educational institutions for some major publishers of the world including American Society for Agricultural and Biological Engineers, Beech Tree Publishing, Blackwell Publishing, CABI, Global Health, John Wiley and Sons, Ebsco Host, World Bank resources and Cochrane Library.

University of Colombo and University of Peradeniya have provided access to some more databases such as JSTOR. For literature search, academic staff especially social scientists are much more benefited by JSTOR. In addition, these libraries subscribe Emerald database in the consortia mode. Considering the usage of e-journals; 93.75 percent from University of Colombo and 72.7 percent from University of Peradeniya, 63.63 percent South-Eastern University of Sri Lanka as well as in Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka academic staff use e-journals. Comparing with well established universities, the rate is low in the two newly established universities. Among the undergraduate students 72 percent of University of Peradeniya and 91.3 percent of University of Colombo responded 'yes' to this question while this is 60.86 percent in South-Eastern University of Sri Lanka and 45.45 percent in Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. Among the academic staff and undergraduate students of all four universities higher rate of usage of e-journals is in University of Colombo.

#### Satisfactory level of the services provided by libraries

The level of satisfaction of the overall services provided by these four university libraries were measured using a scaled question from academic staff and undergraduate users.

Table 5 shows that majority of the academic users are satisfied with the services provided by their respective libraries. The responses to 'Not Satisfied' are also considerable in the case of South- Eastern University of Sri Lanka students.

#### Recommendations

- The university libraries should provide customized user-oriented services to assist the users to get

Table 5 — Satisfaction levels of academic and undergraduate users' regarding services

Description	University of Colombo		University of Peradeniya		South- Eastern University of Sri Lanka		Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka	
	Academic	Undergrad.	Academic	Undergrad.	Academic	Undergrad.	Academic	Undergrad.
Highly satisfied	2 (10)	2(4)	0 (0)	3 (4.3)	1(9.1)	0 (0)	1(9.1)	1(4.5)
Moderately satisfied	4(20)	5(10)	9(40.9)	0(0)	3(27.3)	0(0)	1(9.1)	11(50.1)
Satisfied	9(45)	30(60)	7(31.8)	56(81.2)	6(54.5)	14(60.9)	7(63.6)	7(31.8)
Not satisfied	4(20)	12(24)	5(22.7)	10(14.5)	1(9.1)	9(39.1)	2(18.2)	2 (9)
Total	19(95)	49(50)	21(95.5)	69(100)	11(100)	23(100)	11(100)	21(95.5)

Figures in parenthesis give percentage

their information quickly, accurately and comprehensively through profile matching.

- An electronic catalogue of the library journals, computerized document delivery system, cooperative acquisition of periodicals, photocopying and document delivery service are essential in the libraries. ILL services should be upgraded by replacing transmission of requests and supplies from ordinary post/telex to e-mail. Literature search service should be developed well in order to support research activities of the users.
- The universities have to offer electronic current awareness service to their patrons.
- The libraries should strive to create an article repository or institutional repository of all its research and scholarly publications.
- Provide training to the users to learn new technologies, resources and services to access scholarly information effectively on regular basis.
- As SIDA funding might expire in the future, university librarians should seek for alternative funding sources to subscribe to e-journals. Though consortium subscription for 'Emerald' is appreciated, the librarians should take into consideration to subscribe for other e-journals especially titles related to Social Sciences.
- Periodical librarians have to collect and maintain statistics for number of titles recommended by faculty members each year, number of titles subscribed for each year, number of titles cut down due to shrinking budget or any other reason, usage of e-journal, usage of print journals, number of requests made by users for articles, number of articles delivered to users and the mode of

delivery, number of documents downloaded and the most running titles and less or rarely used titles. These statistics will be helpful to the librarians to investigate and undertake survey/research regarding periodical related topics. It will be helpful in allocating budgets, subscribing for new titles, renewing titles and cutting off some titles.

- All libraries should take initiatives to link with various useful networks available in Sri Lanka as well as world over. Linkage or collaboration with other university libraries and Commercial Document Delivery Services is also very much important.

### Conclusion

Variations in service levels are seen in the periodicals based information service rendered by the four university libraries. It is also noticed from the responses of the staff and students that the service levels are apparently different for the two groups of users. The present study has considered selective parameters for studying the satisfaction levels. Future studies should consider tools like SERVQUAL for an elaborate study on service quality of Sri Lankan university libraries.

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