OUTREACH COMMUNITY SERVICES OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN SRI LANKA: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Senarathna K.I.D.

Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

University libraries in Sri Lanka have increasingly recognized their role in extending beyond academic institutions to engage with the broader community. Outreach services have emerged as a critical component in bridging gaps between higher education resources and societal needs. This review examines the existing body of literature on the outreach services provided by university libraries in Sri Lanka, with the aim of identifying trends, challenges, and best practices. The review highlights the growing significance of these services in promoting literacy, lifelong learning, and social empowerment, particularly in imperfectly developed regions. The literature search was carried out across the following databases EBSCO host, Emerald Insight, JSTOR, and Research Gate. Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and published in 2000-2024. The findings suggest that while significant progress has been made, there is a need for more structured programs and sustainable models to enhance the efficacy of outreach initiatives.

KEYWORDS: University libraries, outreach services, community engagement, Sri Lanka, lifelong learning, literacy, social empowerment.

Introduction

University libraries traditionally serve the academic needs of their institutions. However, the role of libraries in fostering community engagement is becoming increasingly relevant, particularly in developing nations like Sri Lanka. Outreach services enable libraries to extend their resources, knowledge, and expertise beyond the academic community and contribute to societal development. This paper aims to review the literature on outreach services provided by university libraries in Sri Lanka, focusing on their evolution, objectives, and challenges. University libraries are pivotal not only in supporting the academic community but also in extending their resources and expertise beyond campus borders through outreach services. In the context of Sri Lanka, where educational disparities and access to information are key challenges, university libraries play a critical role in bridging these gaps. Outreach services, such as mobile libraries, digital literacy programs, and community-based workshops, allow these institutions to serve broader societal needs, fostering inclusivity and educational equity.

By analyzing both local and international research, this paper seeks to highlight the unique contributions of Sri Lankan university libraries in supporting imperfectly developed communities. In the socio-economic diversity of Sri Lanka, University Libraries should pay the critical attention of education and should understand the impact and scope of outreach services in Libraries. This paper, therefore, provides a comprehensive review of relevant literature, offering insights into how these institutions are adapting to the changing needs of society and contributing to the broader goals of information access and community engagement.

Objectives

Main objective of this article is to analyze the outreach community services and activities related to University Libraries in Sri Lanka. Specific objectives have been carefully formulated to achieve the main objective. They are to identify about the concept of Outreach community services, Outreach Community Activities, to study about the current situation of outreach community services of University Libraries in Sri Lanka, to identify the strategies of outreach community services by using other countries to the sustainable library services.

Methodology

This study is based on data from secondary sources; the data were collected using the qualitative research method. The qualitative research method was used to gain a better understanding of and provide reliable and descriptive analysis related to the research objectives. A systematic search was conducted across several databases to identify relevant peer-reviewed articles and other scholarly resources published from 2000 until 2024. The primary database searched was EBSCO host, Emerald Insight, JSTOR, and Research Gate. The search strategy employed a combination of relevant keywords and Boolean operators to retrieve articles related to the subject of

university library outreach services in Sri Lanka. Search terms were adjusted based on database-specific features, such as truncation (e.g., "outreach*" for outreach, outreach programs, etc.) and synonyms (e.g., "community engagement" as an alternative to "outreach"). The data were critically analyzed according to the Sri Lankan University Libraries research objectives. The quantity of the search results has been mentioned as follows.

Table No.01 – Quantity of the Articles search in the Databases

Database	Quantity
EBSCO host-LISTA	3
Emerald	102
Research Gate	220
JSTOR	165
Total	490

Chart No.01- Quantity of the Articles search in the Databases
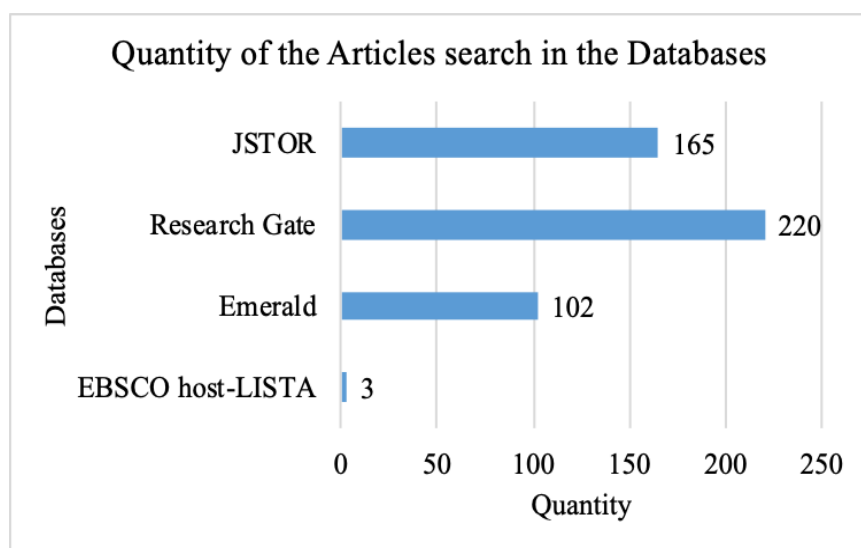
Among the above articles 20 articles were selected based on the research objectives.

Definitions of Outreach Community Services and its importance

Generally, Outreach encompasses the processes like advertising, publicity, extension work, promotion, public relations, marketing, community relations, as depicted in the figure above and activities which include organization exhibits, and book talks and mobile libraries (Kumar, 2017). According to the Oxford English Dictionary Outreach community service is the activity of an organization in making contact and fostering relations with people unconnected with it, especially for the purpose of support or education and for increasing awareness of the organization's aims or

message, the fact or extent of this activity. Dennis (2012) defined outreach as reaching out to non-traditional library users, extending beyond borders of a physical library and promoting new library resources.

Thus, Outreach is a process. There are main concepts including Marketing and Public Relations. Also, Outreach Services directly connect remote users of the library. Specially, those who are not using library. Its mean that in the modern era, most of the library users are not concerning on reading books in house. They are willing to read books in their own ways. According to Dennis (2012) Outreach is extending library resources beyond the borders.

Figure 01: Outreach Community Services Provided by a Library

The above figure (Figure 01) represents Outreach Community Services Provided by a

Library as a whole. The figure was created by the author adapting the information from an article by Kumar based on Library Outreach and Information Services A Study of Foreign Mission Libraries and Information Centers in Delhi (Kumar, 2017). According to Liu (2018) an outreach service is usually a unique service – it may not be needed by all library users; it may not be accepted or utilized by all library

patrons. When promoting these new services, if one begins with those who have an expressed need, the success of the service is simpler to achieve. It is often easier for patrons to accept new services when they hear about them and their efficacy from other patrons, rather than through direct marketing by the library staff. According to that Library Outreach Community Services involve initiatives by libraries to extend their resources, programs, and services beyond the physical space of the library, reaching out to underserved or remote communities and ensuring broader access to information, learning, and cultural resources. In the context of university libraries, outreach services are designed to connect students, faculty, and the wider community to the academic and research resources available, often beyond the traditional boundaries of the campus.

Liu (2018) mentioned that Outreach is a vague term that can be defined in a variety of ways; it's meaning changes depending on the mindset and limitations of the academic library using it…, Outreach services as defined in this way are not daily services, and they are determined by the availability of the resources, librarians, facilities, and space of the library. It indicates if the libraries are going to function as Outreach Services there must be five elements such as resources etc., and also, he mentioned that Outreach Services are not continuous activities rather than library essential services. The word outreach is not commonly used by academic libraries in China; the term "creative service" is more generally accepted (Liu, 2018). Accordingly, Library outreach services is not continuous activities as much as library key works. But that outreach concept is important to attract users and build public image of the library.

Figure no.02 - Five major areas that encompassed in the outreach services

Source- (Liu, 2018; Compiled by Author)

Above major areas linked with one by one. Content should expand the conventional services as outreach activities. According to the technology, library staff must aware about how to adapt outreach activities according to the new technology and user needs. As well as the Content, physical space has been allocated to the implement these activities. The physical space changed as the format of the activities. Ex: - Building branch libraries, Mobile Libraries and Community Libraries. Next area is

network. Its mean based on the activity library staff should think of the network technology and the internet. And how to launch outreach activities using the network. Culture is also the major area of this. Within the culture described how to expand cultural literature include the library collection to the user. Finally, build up the concept how to capture remote users using non-traditional outreach activities are importance things when implementing the Outreach activities for University libraries.

You are explaining Liu's publication extensively. Dennis (2012) and Kumar (2017) were not given much attention compared to Liu's article.

Importance of the Outreach Community Services

Library outreach services in university libraries are crucial for fostering an inclusive, informed and engaged academic community. These services go beyond traditional library roles, promoting access to resources, enhancing digital literacy and connecting users to essential academic tools. Outreach initiatives Helps Bridge the gap between the library users who may not be aware of the full range of resources and support available, such as workshops, research consultations and technology assistance.

Kraemer, Keyse and Lombardo (2003) mentioned in the book of outreach services in Academic and Special libraries that in 2001 librarian Lombardo volunteered to serve as liaison to the office of New Student Programs (ONSP), within the university's student affairs division and worked to include the library in a variety of ONSP events to welcome and orient new students to the university. Designed handouts for students' orientation packets highlighting the library's timesaving and convenient services including remote access to resources, full - text databases, electronic reserves and email references services.

Improving library access and awareness is the key benefit of the library outreach service. Outreach programs help students, faculty and staff discover valuable library resources, such as databases, e-books and research tools which may otherwise go underutilized. Ashcroft (2002) as cited by Benard (2018) mentioned the promotion and evaluation of electronic journals in academic library collection and found that the methods of promoting e-journals included seminars for students, A-Z list of e-journals titles shown on the library web-pages are affecting to enhancing research and academic success of the university. By offering tailored workshops, research skills sessions, and personal consultations, library outreach directly supports academic success, helping users develop critical research skills and navigate complex information systems.

With a focus on digital literacy, outreach services equip users with skills in information retrieval, evaluation and ethical use which are essentials in todays' digital landscape and valuable for lifelong learning. To keep pace with evolving

information technologies, librarians use a group of software applications including blogs, wikis, and podcasting, media-sharing tools such as You Tube and Flickr, and Social Networking Services such as Twitter and Facebook (Hinchliffe and Leon, 2011). Hence, when pay attention to the digital literacy, library outreach service led down to the students to use digital tools and activities. And then users of university libraries are engaging with library continuously in a remote way. With the rise of online learning, university library outreach is critical for students who are studying remotely, ensuring they can still access materials, reference support and other key academic services. Adeyemon (2009) as cited by Dennis (2012) mentioned form Case Western Reserve University used outreach services to bridge technology and training for underserved youth populations where access to digital literacy training skills is limited to academic and public libraries.

Outreach helps build partnership between the library, university departments and external organizations, creating opportunities for interdisciplinary research, public lecturers and community engagement projects. Strothmann and Antell (2010) as cited by Dennis (2012) explored having spent two years as a faculty In-Residence at the University of Oklahoma, implementing library outreach initiatives with students during that time. Mendelsohn (2012) as cited by Dennis (2012) explained the collaborative campus effort of the University of Central Froldida's campus connections program. These outreach activities are important to collaborate with communities. Partnering with local organizations, Schools or Public libraries to support community development through access to scholarly resources and educational programs.

In a university setting, the role of library outreach is more than just extending services; it is about integrating the library's academic mission with the wider needs of students, researchers, faculty, and the local community. Universities often engage in cutting-edge research, and library outreach can help disseminate this knowledge, offering resources not only for academic purposes but for public benefit. This is particularly important in engaging with diverse student populations, supporting faculty research, and ensuring that the community has access to the intellectual wealth housed within the university.

Outreach community services of the University Libraries in Sri Lanka

University libraries in Sri Lanka play a critical role in outreach community services, extending their resources, expertise, and facilities to foster knowledge sharing and learning opportunities for diverse groups. Given the geographical and economic diversity across the country, these libraries work to bridge gaps in access to academic resources, providing educational support to both students and the broader community. Here are some core areas of library outreach services in Sri Lanka's university libraries.

Kanchana (2021) examines on "Extending Library Services to the defense university initiated their outreach services program" through the three main projects. The main aim of this study was, described the experiences of launching outreach services in the past few years and to make new suggestions. They focused new three schools. Named Ratmalana, Ahangama, Bulathsinghala. These projects were the library development program, book donation program, the art competition and the library renovation program. Those were executed in 2015, 2016 and 2017 at different stages. If focused about results of this study, the school community interact with the Kotelawala Defense University (KDU) library staff. And KDU staff had been got awareness on issues faced by school librarians. It should be noted, as this study, these projects were not continuous programs. KDU had identified negative issues during these projects. For an example if based on the criteria in this study, lack of sufficient assistance form end users. Kanchana (2021) examines the outreach services program initiated by the library of the Kotelawala Defense University (KDU) to extend its resources to schools in Sri Lanka. The study highlights three main projects targeting schools in Ratmalana, Ahangama, and Bulathsinghala: a library development program, a book donation program, and an art competition, alongside a library renovation project conducted in stages across 2015, 2016, and 2017. The main objectives were to share the experiences from these initiatives and offer suggestions for future outreach. Findings indicate positive interactions between the school communities and KDU library staff, with KDU gaining insight into challenges faced by school librarians. However, the study also identifies challenges, such as the projects' discontinuity and limited engagement from end users. The research emphasizes the need for ongoing support and active involvement from participants to maximize the impact of such outreach initiatives.

Kodikara et al. (2013) conducted a research "Beyond the walls: outreach initiatives in library, university of Moratuwa". In a study of introducing Outreach Programs by launching two main programs consider two institutes.

1. Child development program for kids of Sumudu preschool, University of Moratuwa.
2. Reading Camp for students of Bodhiraja Vidyalaya, Katubedda, Moratuwa.

First, it should be noted, as a government institute, University of Moratuwa established an Outreach Services Division to reach the community around the university premises. As a result, they initiated below mentioned programs to fulfill the objectives of above division. Those are,

1. To create awareness on the services of UML beyond its physical boundaries.
2. To build a rapport with neighborhood so that the library becomes a central institution.
3. To provide expertise and human resources to improve the knowledge culture of the community.

4. To provide reference facilities to the community concerned.

That paper explores outreach initiatives by the University of Moratuwa Library (UML) aimed at engaging the surrounding community. The study highlights two primary programs: A Child Development Program for children at Sumudu Preschool (University of Moratuwa) and a Reading Camp for students at Bodhiraja Vidyalaya, Katubedda. To facilitate these initiatives, the university established an Outreach Services Division focused on extending UML's impact beyond its physical space. The objectives of these outreach efforts included raising awareness of UML's services, fostering strong relationships with the local community, leveraging library expertise to enhance community knowledge, and providing reference access to nearby residents. These programs demonstrate UML's commitment to becoming a central knowledge hub and resource for its neighbors.

Especially UOM's library staff participated to this program series. The basic thing in this study indicated the UOM's library staff was actively participated for this Outreach Programs. As well as, if distinguished some sort of information in concluding remarks the main goal of the UOM's regarding below Outreach Program was making a child walking through the gates of the university would be the goal of the outreach activity. Further it should be mentioned, the outreach activities must be integrated with common vision, mission of the library as well as the institution.

University libraries in Sri Lanka play an essential role in outreach community services, offering resources, expertise, and programs that extend academic support beyond their immediate users to benefit local communities. Studies by Kanchana (2021) and Kodikara et al. (2014) highlight such initiatives. Kanchana (2021) describes outreach efforts by the Kotelawala Defense University (KDU) Library through projects with three schools, including library development, book donations, art competitions, and library renovation from 2015 to 2017. These initiatives fostered positive interactions between school communities and KDU staff and provided insights into challenges faced by school librarians, although challenges such as limited engagement persisted. Kodikara et al. (2014) examine the University of Moratuwa Library (UML) outreach initiatives, which established an Outreach Services Division to serve surrounding communities. Programs included a child development program for Sumudu Preschool and a reading camp for students at Bodhiraja Vidyalaya, aiming to build awareness of UML's services, strengthen community relationships, and enrich local knowledge culture. Both studies underscore the impact of outreach in bridging gaps in resource access and fostering educational engagement, while also emphasizing the need for continuity and alignment with each library's mission to optimize long-term success. Furthermore, the outreach community services of university libraries in Sri Lanka have evolved significantly, driven by the need to enhance user engagement and accessibility to information resources. This literature review synthesizes various studies that explore the strategies, challenges, and impacts of outreach initiatives in Sri Lankan university libraries.

Outreach librarianship, a concept that has been practiced globally for over four decades, aims to extend library services beyond traditional boundaries to reach underserved populations. Kodikara et al. highlight the establishment of the Outreach Services Division at the University of Moratuwa, which addresses the needs of the local community, thereby fulfilling a critical gap in service provision (Kodikara et al., 2014). This initiative reflects a broader trend in Sri Lankan libraries to embrace outreach as a means of fostering community engagement and enhancing the visibility of library services. The integration of digital tools and social media into outreach efforts has been particularly noteworthy.

Punchihewa discusses how Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs, can be effectively utilized to promote library resources, facilitate training for patrons, and provide online reference services (Punchihewa, 2018). Similarly, Athukorala emphasizes the potential of social media platforms to market library services, suggesting that these tools can enhance user collaboration and engagement (Athukorala, 2021). These findings underscore the importance of adopting modern communication strategies to reach diverse user groups and promote library services effectively. User satisfaction is a critical determinant of the success of outreach initiatives. Research by Jayasundara et al. indicates that understanding service quality determinants through focus groups can significantly enhance customer satisfaction in university libraries (Jayasundara et al., 2010). This approach allows libraries to tailor their outreach services to meet the specific needs and expectations of their users. Furthermore, studies on user education and information literacy programs reveal that effective outreach is closely linked to the quality of instructional services provided by librarians (Wickramanayake, 2016; Ranaweera, 2010). By equipping users with the necessary skills to navigate information resources, libraries can enhance user satisfaction and engagement. The role of academic librarians in marketing library services is also pivotal. Nishath's survey of university librarians in Sri Lanka reveals a growing awareness of the need for effective marketing strategies to improve service delivery (Nishath, 2023). This aligns with findings from Wickramanayake, who discusses the importance of user education in adapting to the rapid changes in information technology and user expectations (Wickramanayake, 2016). The emphasis on marketing and user education reflects a shift towards a more proactive approach in library service provision, where outreach is not merely about extending services but also about enhancing the overall user experience. In conclusion, the outreach community services of university libraries in Sri Lanka are characterized by a proactive approach that integrates modern technology, user education, and community engagement. The literature indicates that successful outreach initiatives are contingent upon understanding user needs, leveraging digital tools, and fostering a culture of collaboration among library staff and patrons. As university libraries continue to adapt to the changing landscape of information access, these outreach efforts will be crucial in ensuring that they remain relevant and responsive to the needs of their communities.

Outreach community services practices in the World University Libraries

Outreach community services in university libraries worldwide are key to expanding educational resources and support to diverse communities, extending beyond the university to benefit both local and global populations. These outreach practices help bridge access gaps, promote information literacy, support lifelong learning, and foster inclusive environments that make academic resources available to all.

Malanchuk and Ocha (2005) in their article on "Academic Librarians and outreach beyond the college campus" define the involvement of the Academic Librarian in University outreach efforts. As the Academic Librarians they have big responsibilities to support research and technological goals of the relevant universities. As well as they must contribute to other university goals also. In this study they indicated the Academic Librarians must involve in outreach to young people beyond their campus. Furthermore, not only young people but also Academic Librarians have to build relationships with the other faculty and department on campus. They mentioned relevant outreach programs to build for interpersonal identification relationships, such as literacy programs for children and youth, Lifelong learning programs. They mentioned for an example, ALOUD, the Academic Library outreach discussion group met at the American Library Association's 2004 Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida. This group aimed "the creation, planning, implementation and assessment of outreach services and initiatives in Academic Libraries." This article is very useful to recognize importance of the involvement of the academic librarians for outreach programs and how to build outreach programs as a process. Hence, they mentioned a strategic plan for Outreach Programs.

Dennis (2012) provides information for "Outreach initiatives in academic libraries, 2009-2011." This was the survey research. By this survey, American Academic Librarians with duties regarding outreach were targeted. A total of 21 academic librarians described successful outreach initiatives. In this study, it revealed some important information about facing Academic Librarians when launching outreach services. Because of the major barrier is funds for the outreach programs. The relevant universities are not concerning, and they are not giving funds for the outreach programs specially. Therefore, Academic Librarians and his staff have been isolated. When focused on this survey three universities have been given funds to do outreach programs. And this should be noted the major identification was technology advancements and low budget have put pressure on outreach librarians to provide successful programs with less funding. Many institutes and universities across the nation have inserted outreach into public services positions. However, those are eternal challenges facing by the Academic Libraries when launching Outreach Services.

Kumar (2017) discussed on the thesis, of the "Library outreach and information services: a study of foreign mission libraries and information centers (FMLIC) in Delhi". He described about the relationship of outreach services and information services. And further mentioned, outreach is a concept, and it gained more significance for libraries. This is an analytical study of outreach and information service provided by the foreign mission libraries and information centers in Delhi. The main problem of this study was there having no study done on Library outreach and information services of FMLIC. Based on this problem he had declared few objectives. Those are,

1. To create awareness about the role, functioning, services and outreach programs and techniques employed by the FMLIC.
2. To suggest the best outreach practices by the library and information centers.

Therefore, with the help of this study the effective and productive outreach programs can be initiated to the Academic Libraries in Sri Lanka.

Globally, university libraries are moving beyond traditional roles to actively engage and uplift communities, showing that libraries are not only knowledge centers but also essential contributors to social equity and community well-being.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Many university libraries offer workshops and online courses to improve digital literacy, research skills, and information literacy among students, faculty, and community members. This includes training in database navigation, evaluating online resources, and using digital tools for academic and professional growth. Some libraries open their facilities to local community members, granting access to research databases, e-books, and other digital collections. Public access allows communities to benefit from the university's resources, fostering a culture of learning and research beyond campus borders. Mobile libraries bring resources directly to underserved areas, providing books, internet access, and digital resources to people with limited access to educational materials. This is especially popular in universities serving rural areas, like mobile outreach programs in African and South Asian universities. Libraries frequently partner with local schools, community centers, and NGOs to support educational initiatives, host events, and improve library services in surrounding communities. In the U.S., for example, university libraries often host "Big Read" events, where the community engages with a selected book to promote literacy and dialogue. Many libraries focus on outreach to underserved groups, such as minorities, immigrants, or individuals with disabilities. Programs include providing accessible resources, holding cultural events, and organizing workshops that address specific needs, such as language support for non-native speakers. University libraries often organize public lectures, art exhibitions, and heritage events to foster community engagement and cultural appreciation. This helps communities engage with academic content in an accessible way, as seen in universities like the University of Toronto, which hosts annual events open to the public. Libraries

run programs aimed at children and teens, providing story hours, summer reading programs, and science camps. The University of California, Berkeley, for example, holds summer camps focused on STEM, helping to engage youth in science from an early age. Some university libraries serve as community resource centers, offering workshops in areas like resume building, job search strategies, and financial literacy. These efforts help prepare local community members for employment opportunities and are popular among libraries in universities with strong social impact missions.

From this study can be conclude the outreach community services practice must be increased in the University Libraries in Sri Lanka. There are few community outreach services are offering by the university libraries in Sri Lanka. Bu these are not continuous one. Because of this issue, must be aware of library staff about the community outreach services. Using University library facilities and identifying the issues suitable outreach community programs must implement by University Libraries in Sri Lanka.

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