

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Outreach Activities and Social Engagement of the Library, University of Jaffna in the post- conflict community: A Study with a Five-Year Review (2019-2023)

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Abstract: Outreach activities refer to organized initiatives undertaken by an institution to extend its services beyond its immediate community to support social development. The term “Social engagement” mentions the active participation of individuals or institutions in collaborative community initiatives aimed to promote social development and well-being. This research examines the outreach and social engagement activities carried out by the University of Jaffna Library a five-year period from 2019 to 2023, reflecting role of an academic library in post-conflict community development. Despite academic libraries are recognized as significant agents of social inclusion and community engagement, there are limited empirical evidences on how University libraries contribute to social inclusion and post-conflict reconstruction. This study used a qualitative case study method. The data were collected from primary and secondary sources such as document analysis, site observations, and semi-structured interviews with purposively selected participants. The selected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, involving categorization, coding, and thematic analysis with the use of Microsoft Word and Excel. The analysis identified key themes such as outreach strategies, stakeholder collaboration, community impacts, and implementation challenges. Key outreach activities included capacity-building programmes for teacher-librarians, support for rural school library, establishment of a prison library, information literacy for school communities, and maternal health sessions for pregnant women. The findings show that these initiatives significantly contributed to advancement of social inclusion, health awareness, rehabilitation, and lifelong learning in the post – conflict society, as evidenced through participant feedback, and documentary analysis. The research also identified key challenges such as budget limitations, and limited technological resources. Based on the findings, the study recommends some suggestions to enhance outreach activities of library included strengthening stakeholder collaborations, and expanding community awareness programmes. This study highlights the transformative role of academic libraries in bridging educational and informational gaps and promoting social transformation beyond University boundaries in post-conflict societies.

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INTRODUCTION

Libraries have been considered as crucial organizations, it is providing support for education, promoting lifelong learning and equal access to information (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2008). Over the last few decades, the role of academic libraries has grown to incorporate not only service provision within the University but also active engagement with the community through outreach activities. In the context of the library, Outreach activities are intentional efforts to offer library services and resources to underprivileged and marginalized communities with the goal of bridging knowledge gaps and promoting social integration (Senarathna, 2024).

The concept of library outreach activities was originated in the public library movement in

Western countries in the early 20th century, where libraries begun to focus on rural populations and non-traditional users (Weigand, 2015). Eventually, academic and special libraries adapted this idea, as well as acknowledging their ability to offer community development, literacy enhancement, and social change, particularly in underdeveloped and post-conflict regions.

In Sri Lanka, particularly in the post-conflict Northern Province, outreach activities play a crucial role to rebuilding educational infrastructure, promoting social fairness, and encouraging national reconciliation (Senarathna, 2024). Years of civil conflict experienced many underprivileged communities having inadequate access to libraries, educational resources, and basic information services. Solving these kinds of differences, academic organizations including libraries need to require innovative and strategies approaches.

The Library, University of Jaffna, situated in the center of the war-affected Northern Province, has conducted a variety of outreach and social engagement activities over the last five years. At

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the University Library committee at its 445th senate committee of University of Jaffna formally approved these activities and expand their services beyond the University and into underprivileged communities around the region.

The major outreach activities included the establishment of prison libraries in partnership with correctional center to promote inmate education and rehabilitation, the organization of workshops for teacher-librarians to improve school-level library facilities, the establishment of functional libraries in rural schools, and the provide the information literacy workshops to enhance digital skills for students, and community. Furthermore, the library also provided health-related community engagement, such as an informational sessions for expectant mothers, which focused on how to obtain trustworthy health information related to pregnancy. These activities were significant in promoting health literacy among vulnerable communities (Library Newsletter, 2022).

The success of the previously mentioned outreach initiatives possible through strong collaborations. The Library, University of Jaffna closely worked with a number of stakeholders such as the Provincial Department of Education - Northern Province, which assisted with access to schools and educators, the Medical Officer of Health (MOH), Nallur, they supported the health information programs, the Nallur Pradeshiya Sabha, they coordinate community level arrangements, and several local public libraries, which provided additional resources and staffing facilities (Library Newsletter, 2019 & 2023). These diverse stakeholder initiatives became the outreach programs sustainable, community-driven, and contextually appropriate.

Despite the libraries' expanding role in community engagement and social development, there is limited empirical evidence on how academic libraries' outreach and social engagement initiatives support social inclusion and post-conflict community development in Sri Lanka. Specifically, nothing underexplored about the University of Jaffna library's contribution to post-conflict communities. Therefore, the aim of this study to solve this research issue.

This study provides an overview of University of Jaffna library's outreach activities with the goals of documenting their scope, examine their effectiveness, and highlighting implementation challenges. By doing this, this study highlights the vital role of academic libraries to promote community engagement, education equity, sustainable development, and post-war

reconstruction, while contributing empirical evidence to library and information science in Sri Lanka.

Objective of the Research

The major objective of the study is to examine the outreach activities and social engagement initiatives carried out by the Library of the University of Jaffna from 2019 to 2023.

Specifically, the aims of the study,

1. To record the scope of outreach initiatives carried out by the Library, University of Jaffna.
2. To examine how these activities influence marginalized and underprivileged societies, especially in Northern Sri Lanka's post-war rehabilitation.
3. To identify the key collaboration efforts that made the successful implementation of these outreach activities.
4. To investigate the difficulties and constraints encountered during the implementation of these programs.
5. To recommend suggestions for retaining, expanding, and enhancing library outreach programs to promote better social integration and community development.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study on library outreach has developed significantly in both global and regional contexts, but there are still a lot of significant gaps about how academic libraries design, implement, and maintain outreach programs in post-war (marginalized) environments. Despite several studies have evaluated outreach practices in universities around the world, scholarly attention on the University of Jaffna Library, located in the post-war Northern Province of Sri Lanka, remains absent. As a result, this literature review highlights previous research, identifies conceptual and contextual gaps, and place the current study within larger academic discourse.

Outreach and community engagement of academic libraries

Bangani (2023) investigated how university libraries in South Africa contribute to quality education through outreach and community engagement activities. He revealed that academic

libraries assist local communities through educational outreach, information literacy programs, and collaborative partnerships. Further, author emphasized that community engagement initiatives improve the educational and social responsibilities of academic libraries while improving access to knowledge resources.

Academic libraries, in addition to being information custodians, have expanded their services to community participation. According to Leong (2013) outreach activities is a strategic response to Universities' increasing duty to integrate with society rather than voluntary servicers. Further, Leong illustrated how libraries allow significant relationship between academia and the general public by classifying outreach into community access, collaborations, information literacy, and scholarly activities. Although this model offered a strong framework, its applicability is well developed and funded institutions with rich structured infrastructures. This study does not include difficultness such as limited resource, geographic isolation, and conflict effected unrest. Therefore, although Leong's model provided the philosophical understanding of outreach, it provides little information on how these models translate to limited resource, war affected institutions like the University of Jaffna. This difference mirrors the necessity of investigation on how outreach concepts are interpreted and adapted in difficult situations.

Outreach practices in Sri Lankan University libraries

Senarathna (2024) examined outreach community services offered by university libraries in the Sri Lankan context. The study revealed a number of outreach activities, including literacy development programs, public awareness workshops, and community education services. Despite financial and technological challenges faced by academic universities in Sri Lanka, the study identified that outreach activities improve the visibility and societal contribution of university libraries.

There is not much research on university library outreach in Sri Lanka. Kodikara et al. (2014) offered valuable information by documenting community- based activities at the University of Moratuwa, it explained, how significant outreach take place, even in the limited funding facilities. Further, their study illustrated that outreach relies more on dedication and creativity than just financial resources, demonstrating usefulness of utilizing current staff capacity and facilities.

However, these activities were conducted in the Western Province, which is well economically developed region, not in war affected areas like Jaffna, where social fragmentation and financial limits present different challenges. Furthermore, this study not assess at activities' long-term sustainability, instead, it merely describes them. This highlighted a methodological limitation and emphasized the need for systematic research, the current study attempts to provide it.

Strategic Planning for Library Outreach activities

Four key elements of strategic outreach planning are identified by Yuliana & Ritonga (2025), such as collaboration, resource allocation, needs assessment, and evaluation. Their claim that customized services and strengthen outreach collaborations is highly important for Sri Lankan Universities, which frequently depend on external collaborations due to inadequate financial resources.

Nevertheless, their approach anticipates the steady infrastructure and reliable funding. These presumptions might not true in post-conflict and resource-constrained environments like Northern Sri Lanka. The possibility of implementing such strategic plan into action is restricted by limited access to technology, poor institutional connections and fluctuating financial sources. Therefore, although Yuliana and Ritonga provide a solid conceptual structure, this need to be critically modified to local conditions, it is another gap, the current research aims to fill this by examining how the University of Jaffna Library used strategic planning from 2019 to 2023.

Challenges in implementing outreach services in communities

Numerous studies highlighted the practical challenges associated with outreach in developing and rural contexts. According to Pung and Krolak (2006). They mentioned that necessity for sustainable outreach strong community collaborations, sufficient funding, and well-developed community partnerships. Their findings pointed out continuous issues in many libraries is outreach, it is viewed as an "extra" service rather than an ordinary responsibility.

Reid and Howard (2016), they have done a study on rural libraries in Nova Scotia, found that though limited resources, dedicated library employee can provide significant community programs. Their findings emphasized that human

dedication can partly overcome financial limitation, it is key information applicable to University of Jaffna. However, a problem is existing, the commitment of employee is crucial role, but depending too much on individual motivation may make outreach unsustainable. This study aims to fill the gap, the literature does not clearly explain how libraries can make outreach activities sustainable in limited resource situations.

Libraries in Post-Conflict Community Rebuilding

Generally, Post-War societies face damaged social confidence, damaged education systems, limited information, and poor cultural organizations. Libraries are described in literature as knowledge infrastructures that help to recovery by information access, education, and public space (Johnson, 2012).

The Northern Province of Sri Lanka, which continues to navigate the social, educational, and psychological impacts of civil war. However, no published research has looked at how the University of Jaffna Library serves a region deeply affected by conflict, it has used outreach to rebuild confidence, support education, and promote community resilience. The largest research gap found in the literature is this shortage of study.

So far, no any study has critically examined the University of Jaffna Library's the outreach activities from 2019 to 2023, nor evaluated how these activities support to community development in a post-conflict context. This study fills this gap by offering a systematic, context-sensitive evaluation of the library's outreach activities, analyzing their goals, challenges, execution strategies, and community impacts.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative case study method. This method is particularly suitable for conducting an in-depth analysis of context-specific institutional initiatives and for understanding their processes, implementation, and potential contributions to community development, as it enables the exploration of contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2018).

The Data was collected all official documents related to outreach activities published from 2019 to 2023, including library reports, official

records, proposals, newsletters, feedback reports and minutes of library board and library committee, and internal communications. However, documents unrelated to outreach activities, incomplete and duplicate records, informal communications, personal correspondence, and documents produced outside the study period were excluded.

In addition to the document analysis, interviews were conducted among five purposely selected internal and external stakeholders involved in organizing and carrying out the outreach initiatives. Those stakeholders are as follows:

- Coordinator of outreach activities, University of Jaffna library
- Prison staff
- School teacher and two students at Pungudutivu Maha Vidyalayam
- Evaluation of Feedback reports of participants
- Feedback reports of School teacher's librarians at Nelliady Central College
- Pregnant women at MOH Division, Nallur
- Teachers at Kokuvil Hindu Primary School

Selected outreach activities areas, such as rural school and prison library were also visited. The main purpose of observation were infrastructure facilities, usage trends, accessibility, and interactions between communities.

Data collected from interviews, related documents, and site observations were analyzed by using thematic analysis. To facilitate data organization, coding, and comparison, Microsoft Word and Excel were used. Initially, all data were carefully examined in order to familiarize with the content and spot recurrent trends. Then, data were coded, categorized, and arranged systematically. Finally, the codes were grouped into broader themes based on their conceptual similarities. Significant segments of text were tagged with descriptive codes capturing important ideas, such as storytelling session, maternal health information, library facilities for inmates, digital literacy training, and stakeholder collaboration. These codes were divided into categories based on indicating common characteristics. Accordingly, the following four main themes and sub themes were identified,

1.Types of outreach activities

- ◆ Reading promotion activities
- ◆ Capacity-Building workshops
- ◆ Health information programs
- ◆ Establishing the library facilities for inmates

- ◆ Supporting for the rural schools libraries

2. Stakeholder Collaboration

- ◆ Collaboration with internal Stakeholders (Library staff, University of Jaffna).
- ◆ External stakeholders (Inmates, Teacher-Librarians, Students and Pregnant women)

3. Benefits to target Communities

- ◆ Increased in literacy and reading habits
- ◆ Enhancing the digital skills
- ◆ Rehabilitation and psychological support for inmates
- ◆ Increased the health information.

4. Barriers and Challenges in implementation

- ◆ Limited Budgetary
- ◆ Inadequate infrastructure facilities
- ◆ Staffing constraint
- ◆ Technological limitations

To increase trust and validity, themes were integrated over all sources, ensuring that patterns were consistently supported by many kind of evidence. Providing a thorough understanding of the outreach activities of Library University of Jaffna, this approach, enabled the identification of key themes based on the experiences of both staff and programme beneficiaries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of data collected from primary and secondary sources show that the University of Jaffna Library implemented outreach and social engagement activities from 2019 to 2023. The findings from these data were cross-checked to ensure consistency and credibility. The analysis

highlighted four major themes: (1) Types of outreach activities, (2) Stakeholder collaboration, (3) Benefits to target communities, and (4) Barriers and challenges in implementation.

Types of Outreach Activities

Documentary evidence gathered from library newsletters, committee reports, and institutional reports consistently categorized five major types of outreach activities carried out during the study period, such as prison library services, capacity-building programs for teacher-librarians, maternal health information programs, reading promotion programs, and outreach services for underserved communities.

Maternal Health Information Programme

Maternal Health Information Programme was held in October 2019, collaboration with the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) Office, Nallur, and the Kokuvil Public Library. Information recorded in the library newsletter was consistent with programme reports, confirming that the programme's goal to offer trustworthy health information for pregnant mothers. The activity covered, important topics included nutrition, stress management, and access to maternal health information resources. Additionally, participants were introduced to print and digital health information sources by library staff. The significant outcome of this activity was the establishment of a Maternal Health Information Corner at the MOH Office, Nallur (Library Newsletter, 2019). This activity highlights the extending public health role of academic libraries and shows how library's outreach can contribute to community wellbeing beyond their traditional services.

Table 1: Summary of Outreach Activities Implemented by University of Jaffna Library (2019 - 2023).

Activity	Year	Target Community	Evidence Sources	Major Outcome
Maternal Health Information Programme	2019	Expectant mothers	Newsletter, reports	Health information corner established
Reading Promotion Programme	2019	School students	Newsletter, reports	Reading awareness promoted
Outreach to underserved schools	2020	Rural students, Teachers	Reports, newsletters	Improved access to learning resources
Capacity-building for teacher-librarians	2021	School teacher-librarians	Newsletters, records	Professional skill development
Prison Library establishment	2023	Inmates	Committee minutes, newsletters	Prison library established

Reading Promotion Programme

The library organized a reading promotion programme for school students on November 2019 in the Kokuvil region, collaboration with the Kokuvil Public Library. The event involved students from several schools and included interactive reading activities, storytelling session, and motivational session arranged to enhance reading habits among the students. Cross-verification of newsletters and programme records confirmed the consistency of programme objectives and implementation (Library Newsletter, 2019). Compared with other outreach activities in 2019, this programme mainly focused on literacy development, reflecting the library's early emphasis on educational outreach.

Outreach to Underserved Communities

Documentary reports of library highlights that the library initiated outreach services for underserved rural communities in 2020. Once notable programme was conducted at Pungudutivu Maha Vidyalayam in the Jaffna Island Zone, a formal request from the school principal. In collaboration with the local public library and the school's Information Learning Resource Centre, the library offered information literacy orientation, learning materials, and training on effective utilization of resources (Library Newsletter 2020). When compared with other outreach activities of library, this programme highlights the library's long-term commitment to equitable access of information in geographically isolated communities.

Capacity-Building Programmes for Teacher-Librarians

In 2021, the library extended their outreach activities toward professional development by arranging capacity-building workshops for teacher-librarians in collaboration with the Provincial Education Department, Northern Province. These programmes were conducted in several educational zones, such as Nelliady, Kondavil, and Vadamarachchi. The workshops covered classification, cataloguing, reading promotion strategies, and ICT applications in school library management (Library Newsletter, 2021). A comparison with outreach activities in 2019 reveals a change from community-focused literacy programmes toward professional knowledge and institutional capacity development. This change highlights the library's growing awareness of school libraries as crucial partners in fostering lifelong learning.

Establishment of the Prison Library at Jaffna Remand Prison

Reports related to Outreach activities of library confirm that the establishment of a prison library at Jaffna Remand Prison was formally approved by the library committee meeting and successfully established in April 2023. The aim of this outreach to enhance rehabilitation, literacy skill, and personal development among inmates. Nearly 2,500 reading collections related to psychology, religion, counseling, and self-development were donated from philanthropists and well-wishers (Library Newsletter, 2023). Compared with previous activities, this initiative highlights a significant expansion of library services toward socially underprivileged communities. Further, it illustrates the library's evolving dedication to rehabilitation and social inclusion.

A comparison of outreach activities of library from 2019 to 2023 shows three important patterns. First, outreach activities gradually increased over time. Second, the outreach activities extended from traditional literacy promotion toward specialized services included health information, professional training, and rehabilitation. Third, stakeholder collaboration significantly increase in programme, involving public libraries, educational authorities, health institutions, and correctional institutions. These findings show that how academic library has evolved from a traditionally University-centered information provider to a socially engaged community institution.

Stakeholder Collaboration and contribution

The documentary analysis of library explained that stakeholder collaboration was essential factor in the successful implementation of outreach activities conducted by the University of Jaffna Library from 2019 to 2023. The analysis of several sources confirmed that both internal and external stakeholders actively participated to the implementation, planning, mobilization of resource, and sustainability of outreach activities of Library.

Internal Stakeholder Roles

Library staff of University is main internal stakeholder. However, their responsibilities evolved significantly from 2019 to 2023. During the early period (2019), the library mainly worked as an information provider and programme organizer, focusing on maternal health information services, literacy promotion, and supporting for underserved school.

According to documentary evidence, library staff primarily contributed to provide learning materials, organizing awareness workshops, and conducting information literacy seminars (Library newsletter, 2019). In later years, the library's contribution expanded from direct service provision to professional capacity development. The outreach documents highlight that library staff served as trainers and facilitators in capacity-building programmes for school teacher-librarians, providing expertise in classification, cataloguing, collection development, and ICT applications in library management system (Library newsletter, 2020 & 2021). This change reflects the library's growing recognition of knowledge transfer as part of the social responsibility.

By 2023, the library took a more strategic role, particularly in socially inclusive activities like the establishment of the prison library. Library committee minutes and project reports confirm that the library staff executed needs assessments, organizational structure of the prison library, developed technical systems for cataloguing and classification, and provided consultancy services (Library newsletter, 2023). This activity reflects the transformation of the University Library from a programme implementer to a community development partner.

The comparison shows that the internal contribution of the library became specialized and strategic over time. This transformation was influenced by extending outreach goals, stakeholder trust, and the growing recognition of the academic library's social role in post-conflict development.

External Stakeholder Roles

The evidences highlight that the participation of external stakeholders gradually increased throughout the period. In 2019, external

stakeholders such as public libraries, schools, and health institutions mainly provided venues, local access, and community participation support. For example, the Kokuvil Public Library and the MOH Office, Nallur, supported the implementation of reading promotion and maternal health information programmes by offering physical space, local support, and subject expertise (Library newsletter, 2019). In 2020, educational authorities, especially the Northern Provincial Educational Department, assumed a more active institutional role by monitoring programme quality, coordinating teacher participation, and facilitating professional development activities (Library newsletter, 2020). This highlights a change from logistical support toward institutional partnership. By 2023, stakeholder collaboration extended to prison authorities, philanthropists, and community donors (Library newsletter, 2023). Further, Library outreach documents confirm that these stakeholders contributed not only logistical support but also infrastructure development, financial assistance, resource donations, and long-term programme for sustainability. This collaboration suggests that stakeholder collaboration evolved from event-based support to strategic partnership.

An analysis of stakeholder collaboration from 2019 to 2023 highlights three major patterns. First, stakeholder collaboration increased over time, shifting from collaborations with schools and public libraries toward broader collaborations involving health institutions, government agencies, correctional institutions, and philanthropic. Second, University Library evolved from operational programme delivery to strategic planning, consultancy, and technical activities. Third, external stakeholders gradually changed from providing logistical support to actively participating in decision-making, and programme sustainability. This transformation significantly contributed to the effectiveness and

Table 2: Evolution of Internal Stakeholder contribution (2019-2023)

Period	Major Outreach	Role of University Library	Nature of Role
2019	Literacy promotion & Maternal health	Organizer, information provider	Operational
2020	Capacity-building programme	Trainer, facilitator, mentor	Professional
2021	Programme continuity and partnerships	Coordinator, resource mobilizer	Collaborative
2023	Prison library, specialized outreach	Consultant, planner, technical advisor	Strategic

sustainability of the library's outreach activities in post-war community.

Benefits to Target Communities

Documentary analysis of coordinator reports, participant feedback, personal communications and library newsletters revealed that the outreach activities conducted by university of Jaffna Library from 2019 to 2023 created significant educational, social, psychological, and health-related benefits for target communities (Library outreach documents, 2019 -2023).

Benefits of the Prison Library

Documentary evidence from project evaluation reports, and personal communication conducted with inmate on July 30, 2025, confirmed that the establishment of the prison library created significant educational and psychological benefits for inmates. Access of reading materials related to psychology, counseling, religion, and self-development supported personal reflection, emotional stability, and stress reduction. One prison officer stated: "After the library was established, inmates showed greater interest in reading and spent their free time more productively" (Prison staff communication, July 30, 2025). These findings suggest that the prison library contributed not only to literacy development but also to rehabilitation and psychosocial wellbeing.

Benefits of Capacity-Building Programmes for Teacher-Librarians

Training evaluation reports and participant feedback collected after the 2021 workshops revealed substantial professional benefits for

teacher-librarians. Participants reported improved competencies in cataloguing, classification, collection development, ICT integration, and reading promotion strategies. One participant noted in the feedback report "The workshop improved our practical knowledge in organizing school library collections and introducing reading activities for students" (Evaluation of Feedback Reports, July 20, 2021).

Benefits of the Maternal Health Information Programme

Programme reports and participant's feedback report confirmed that the Maternal Health Information Programme significantly improved health literacy among pregnant mothers. Participants reported gaining reliable knowledge regarding nutrition, prenatal care, physical exercise, and lifestyle management during pregnancy. Many participants stated that access to medically verified information reduced anxiety and improved confidence in making health-related decisions (Library committee report, 2019).

One participant stated in Feedback report: "The programme helped me understand what information is trustworthy during pregnancy and reduced my fear about possible health complications" (Pregnant mother, MOH Division, Nallur, December 20, 2019). Feedback report further confirms the establishment of a Maternal Health Information Corner at the MOH Office, Nallur, and ensuring continued access to health information beyond the programme period. These findings indicate that the programme contributed to long-term community health awareness.

Table 3: Summary of Benefits (2019–2023)

Outreach Activity	Target Group	Identified Benefits
Prison Library	Prison inmates	Improved literacy, emotional wellbeing, reduced stress, and rehabilitation support
Capacity-building workshops	Teacher-librarians	Improved cataloguing, classification, ICT skills, and professional networking
Maternal Health Information Programme	Pregnant mothers	Improved health literacy, reduced anxiety, and informed decision-making
Reading promotion programme	School students	Increased reading interest, library usage, and literacy motivation
Outreach to underserved schools	Students & teachers	Improved access to learning resources, strengthened information literacy

Benefits to Underserved Communities

Documentary evidence from teacher feedback reports indicates that outreach activities conducted in underserved communities significantly improved access to educational resources. Pungudutivu Maha Vidyalayam reported improved organization of learning resources, increased student participation in reading activities, and greater awareness of information literacy practices among teachers and students (Teacher, personal communication, January 10, 2020). One teacher stated “Students became more interested in using library resources, and teachers were able to organize learning materials more effectively after the programme”. It highlights that the outreach activities helped reduce educational inequalities and promoted equitable access to information in geographically isolated communities.

A comparative analysis of outreach activities from 2019 to 2023 indicates that early outreach activities in 2019 primarily benefited educational and health-related benefits among school students, pregnant mothers, and rural communities. In 2021, professional development benefits emerged through teacher-librarian training programmes. In 2023, outreach initiatives expanded to psychosocial and rehabilitative benefits for underprivileged populations.

Barriers and challenges faced during implementation

Even though outreach programs conducted by University of Jaffna library had many advantages, there were a number of barriers and challenges that arose during implementation, which affected the smooth execution of these activities (Kupeshan, Coordinator, Outreach Activities, personal communication, 25th July 2025).

Limited Material and Financial Resources: Obtaining sufficient fund and resources for the outreach programs was a significant difficulty. Activities such as establishment of prison library and rural school library activities needed furniture, donations of books, and ICT equipment. Long-term planning and project scaling were difficulties due to the heavy reliance on philanthropic and donor support, which delayed execution.

Inadequate Infrastructure: Rural schools and the Jaffna Remand Prison had lack of the infrastructure facilities to set up functional libraries including inadequate reading spaces,

limited storage facilities, lack of ICT access, and inadequate furniture.

Staffing and Capacity Limitations: A lack of skilled staff, it was difficult to maintain newly established libraries. Since Teacher-librarians and prison staff had lacked professional expertise in library management, capacity-building programs are necessary. However, time and resource limitations were prevented comprehensive training for all relevant staff.

Technological challenges: Poor internet connection, restricted access to digital devices, and low digital literacy among participants were limited outreach activities especially in rural communities. These barriers decreased access to online health information for pregnant mothers and digital learning resources for students.

Sustainability: Despite outreach initiatives generated initial engagement, it was challenging to ensure long-term impact and continuity due to staff shortages and limited funding. It was difficult to manage regular monitoring, updates, and support for initiatives like the prison library and Maternal Health Information Corner

Coordination with Stakeholders: It was difficulties to work with different stakeholders like public libraries, schools, MoH office, and prisons. The project implementation was difficulties due to irregular administrative procedures, obtaining clearances and communication failure.

Opposition to Change: Some administrative staff and teacher-librarians reluctance to implementing new procurers introduced in the workshops, especially related to technology integration and innovative library activities. This resistance affected the overall effectiveness of the outreach activities.

Outreach in COVID-19: several scheduled activities were affected by the COVID-19, which decreased in-person participation and resulted in delays and cancellations. These situations showed the necessity of hybrid outreach models that can function during medical emergencies in order to maintain service continuity.

Recommendations to Strengthen and Expand Library Outreach

1. Establish a dedicated outreach unit within the library: The findings showed that outreach initiatives were successfully implemented, however, interviews with library staff and documentary evidence mentioned that events planning, coordination, and follow-up activities

were regularly managed in addition to library routine works, creating workload challenges. Site observations and stakeholder feedback mentioned that further systematic arrangement needed. Therefore, it is recommended that a permanent Outreach and Community Engagement Unit be established within the library to systematically arrange of outreach activities.

2. Secure sustainable funding and resource mobilization: Theme 4 identified limitation of budget as one of the key challenges affecting programme continuity. Library committee records confirmed that several outreach activities, including the prison library and rural school support programmes, largely depended on donations from philanthropists and external contributors. Participants also emphasized the difficulty to maintain long-term services without stable financial support. Therefore, sustainable funding mechanisms should be established through university budget allocations.

3. Implement a monitoring and evaluation system: Document analysis revealed that although activities were documented through newsletters and reports, systematic impact assessment mechanisms were limited. Interviews with stakeholders also indicated the absence of structured follow-up evaluation in some outreach programmes. Therefore, a monitoring and evaluation system should be implemented using both qualitative and quantitative indicators, including participant feedback, number of beneficiaries, and long-term community outcomes.

4. Develop capacity-building programmes: Interviews with teacher-librarians and community partners revealed that participants highly valued training programmes and expressed the need for continuous learning opportunities, particularly in digital literacy, information management, and community service delivery. Therefore, regular professional development programmes should be developed.

5. Strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships: The findings under stakeholder collaboration demonstrated that partnerships with schools, health institutions, public libraries, prison authorities, and community organizations significantly contributed to programme success. The importance of formal institutional relationships for resource sharing and long-term sustainability. Therefore, formal partnerships through Memoranda of Understandings (MoUs) should be strengthened with stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the outreach programmes and social engagement activities implemented by the University of Jaffna Library from 2019 to 2023 and shows the transformative role of an academic libraries in promoting social inclusion, educational equity, and community development in post-war Northern Sri Lanka. Through thematic analysis of documentary records, institutional reports, newsletters, and stakeholder evidence, the study identified a diverse range of outreach initiatives, including the establishment of a prison library, capacity-building programmes for teacher-librarians, outreach services for underserved schools, maternal health information programmes, and reading promotion activities. These activities directly addressed the educational, informational, and health literacy needs of post war community of Sri Lanka. The findings reveal that these outreach activities functioned not merely as extensions of traditional library services, but as strategic community-based interventions that contributed to post-war recovery, social inclusion, rehabilitation, and lifelong learning. The study also demonstrates that the success of these activities was strongly supported by evolving stakeholder collaborations involving educational authorities, health institutions, local government bodies, community organizations, and philanthropic contributors.

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