



Eastern Journal of Library and Information Science

2026
Volume 2
Issue 1

eISSN: 3121-3375
Library Network
Eastern University, Sri Lanka

*Bi-annual,
Peer-Reviewed,
Open Access Journal*



Eastern Journal of Library and Information Science (EJLIS)

Bi-annual, Peer Reviewed, Open Access Journal eISSN: 3121-3375

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eISSN: 3121-3375

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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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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received

17 February 2026

Accepted

25 May 2026

KEYWORDS

Outreach Activities,
University of Jaffna,
Social Engagement, Post
-Conflict
Community, Rural
Education, Community
Development.

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

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65714/ejlis262101>



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Publisher: Eastern University, Sri Lanka

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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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Impact of Rural Libraries on Self-Learning and Academic Performance: A Case Study in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Rural libraries are often under studied as learning environments for secondary school students in peripheral regions. This qualitative study explores how rural public libraries motivate self-learning and shape learning performance among rural students preparing for the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (G.C.E. O/L) examination in Batticaloa District, Sri Lanka with special reference to Kaluwanchikudy DS Division. Using ten focus group discussions (FGDs) with O/L students (n=90) who sit for the G.C.E O/L Examinations in year 2026 the study examines the perceived motivational mechanisms, self-learning practices enabled by libraries, barriers limiting the effective learning and service features the library provides to students believe would enhance their performance outcomes. Thematic analysis identifies five dominant library driven mechanisms which are provision of a quiet disciplined study environment, access to learning materials and exam-oriented resources, motivational social ecology such as peer influence, role modeling and supportive staff, structured self-learning routines and goal-setting and confidence-building through practice and the feedback and informational support. However, the motivational potential is constrained by resource shortages, limited opening hours, weak digital facilities, language barriers and uneven staff capacity. The findings contribute to learning motivation and informal learning literature by showing how rural libraries operate as “capability-enabling spaces” that convert limited household resources into learning opportunities. Policy recommendations include strengthening exam-focused collections, extending hours during peak periods, creating guided self-learning programs, improving ICT support and implementing student-centered outreach with schools.

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received
27 March 2026

Accepted
22 June 2026

KEYWORDS

Rural libraries, Self-learning, Learning motivation, Rural education, Batticaloa District.

INTRODUCTION

Educational performance in rural settings is shaped not only by schools, teachers and households but also by the broader learning ecosystem that surrounds students. Rural students preparing for high-stakes examinations such as the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (G.C.E. O/L) often face constrained learning resources, limited private tuition affordability, lower access to digital tools and fewer quiet study spaces at home due to household crowding or economic pressures. These constraints are particularly visible in peripheral regions where socioeconomic vulnerabilities and infrastructural gaps intersect with educational inequalities.

Within this context the rural public libraries can operate as important community institutions that supplement formal schooling. Libraries are traditionally framed as access points for books and information but contemporary research increasingly recognizes libraries as learning spaces that enable informal and self-directed learning (Aabo & Audunson, 2012; Lloyd, 2010).

For students, libraries can provide a disciplined environment for focused study, facilitate access to learning materials and offer social and emotional support that strengthens motivation and self-confidence. While urban libraries tend to have greater resources and visibility the rural libraries despite constraints may function as crucial “learning support infrastructures” for students who lack alternative study facilities.

Self-learning (or self-directed learning) refers to learners’ proactive engagement in diagnosing learning needs, setting goals, identifying learning resources, selecting strategies and evaluating learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975). Self-learning aligns with contemporary educational thinking that learners should develop autonomy, metacognitive skills and lifelong learning orientation (Zimmerman, 2002). Motivation is central to self-learning because students must sustain effort over time without constant external supervision. From a motivational perspective, students engage more deeply when learning environments support autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and when learners perceive that effort yields improvement (Dweck, 2006).

In rural Sri Lanka, especially in districts like Batticaloa, students’ educational trajectories are

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65714/ejlis262102>



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Publisher: Eastern University, Sri Lanka

influenced by resource limitations and social context. Many students rely on school teachers and tuition classes for exam preparation, but these supports vary widely in quality and affordability. When students have limited access to textbooks, revision guides, past papers and practice opportunities the learning outcomes may suffer. Rural libraries may be one of the few public spaces where students can access materials, focus on learning and cultivate a habit of independent study. However, the mechanisms through which rural libraries motivate self-learning and influence “learning performance” (e.g., perceived improvements in understanding, exam readiness, confidence and study discipline) remain under-explored in this setting.

Research problem

The students who are in secondary level use the rural libraries (mostly grade III libraries) for their learning activities and obviously there is very limited empirical evidence explaining how rural libraries motivate learning activities of secondary level students in these rural areas of Batticaloa District. And also, these rural libraries are working as community service centers for these areas.

Therefore, it is essential to find out how the rural libraries motivate self-learning and learning performance of students in secondary level in the areas. The Grade eleven (11) students who sit for the GCE O/L examination in 20206 were taken as purposive sample for the study. This study filled the literature gap in finding out the role of rural low graded libraries in self-motivation and learning performances of secondary level students which would be significant to the enhancement of collection development and overall performance of these type public libraries in future would finally better improvement in academic performance of the areas.

Objectives of the study

This study aims to:

1. To explore how the rural-libraries motivate self-learning among rural G.C.E. (O/L) students in Kaluwanchikudy D.S Division in Batticaloa District.
2. To examine perceived contributions of rural low graded libraries to students' learning performance and exam readiness in the study area.
3. To identify key barriers limiting libraries' ability to motivate self-learning of secondary

level students and their academic performances.

4. To propose practical, context-sensitive strategies to strengthen rural libraries as self-learning support spaces for O/L students.

Significance of the study

The current research provides insights regarding the rural education prevailing in these areas. It is crucial to understand the role of rural libraries (grade III & grade II public libraries) in the academic performances of secondary level students which enable the policy makers and local authorities to the necessity of improvements of public libraries in lower grades (grade III and grade II) for the sake of overall academic performances of the areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Libraries are increasingly viewed as “third places” that provide inclusive public spaces for learning, social interaction and community development (Aabo & Audunson, 2012). Beyond the lending books the libraries facilitate informal learning by providing access to resources, supportive environments and opportunities to develop information and learning skills (Lloyd, 2010). The role of libraries is especially significant in contexts where schools and households cannot fully meet learners' needs.

Libraries are indispensable institutions within lifelong learning ecosystems which support continuous knowledge acquisition, experiential learning, and skill development for diverse populations across the lifespan. Therefore, dynamic transformation of libraries into inclusive learning hubs fortifies the community in societal learning needs. Strengthening library contributions requires strategic investments, policy support, and innovative collaboration. With such measures, libraries will continue to empower individuals to learn, adapt, and thrive throughout life (Aboobacker & Sanjeevi, 2026).

Now, the libraries and librarians are no longer passive keepers and preservers of books and they have progressed to become facilitators of information and lifelong learning opportunities with an emphasis on service, identifying user needs and communicating solutions. Furthermore, the positive impact of books and access to secondary reading materials on reading achievement, creativity, developing language skills and sustaining literacy has been widely

acknowledged. But it is difficult to find concrete impact among the academic literature as the positive examples of successful reading programmes or library provisions have to be mirrored by control students or communities that do not have access to the same reading programmes or library services (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2006).

The traditional mission of the public library—supporting the self-education of the citizenry in order that they may become fully participating members in a democratic society—has been devalued of late in favour of popularizing the library to attract more users. This shift has led to an emphasis on entertainment and marketing, and an abandonment of what many feel is the true purpose of a library. Loss of democratic tradition has simultaneously occurred on another front: civic space which allows for public assembly and discourse has disappeared or been downgraded into places for leisure and recreation rather than politics, with a concomitant decline in the quality of public discourse as citizens increasingly depend on profit-driven mass media for their “opinions.” By supporting public discourse, the public library can begin to reinvigorate both the quality of public discourse and its traditional commitment to democratic ideals (Colleen, A. and Ann, C. 2003).

Knowles (1975) conceptualized self-directed learning as a process in which individuals take initiative in diagnosing learning needs, formulating goals, identifying resources, choosing strategies and evaluating outcomes. For school students, self-learning is linked to study skills, reading habits, practice behaviors and time management. Zimmerman (2002) highlighted self-regulated learning as a cycle of forethought (goal-setting), performance (strategy use) and self-reflection (evaluation). Libraries may support these processes by offering resources, routines and environmental cues that strengthen study discipline.

Self-learning is not only a personal trait it is shaped by context. Learners with fewer resources need supportive environments to build autonomy and competence. Libraries can become as scaffolding spaces where students practice self-learning under light guidance gradually developing confidence and independence.

Motivation influences the quality and persistence of learning. Self-Determination Theory argues that motivation strengthens when environments support autonomy (choice and agency), competence (sense of mastery) and relatedness (social support) (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Libraries may foster autonomy by allowing students to select resources and manage their study time and competence by enabling practice and feedback and relatedness through supportive staff and peer learning.

Goal orientation and growth mindset perspectives also suggest that learners persist more when they believe effort leads to improvement and when they adopt mastery goals rather than only performance goals (Dweck, 2006). Exam preparation contexts are often performance focused but libraries can help shift students toward mastery through consistent practice and self-monitoring.

Learning performance in qualitative studies is commonly captured through perceived improvements such as better understanding of subjects, improved reading and writing, stronger exam readiness, increased confidence and more disciplined study habits. While these perceptions do not replace objective marks but they provide meaningful evidence of learning outcomes in students' lived experiences.

A useful lens is the capability approach which distinguishes between resources and actual opportunities to achieve valued outcomes (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). A book or computer alone is not enough the students must have the ability and supportive conditions to use them effectively. In rural contexts libraries may expand capabilities by providing resources (books and past papers), conversion factors (quiet space, guidance) and supportive social norms that make learning possible. Thus, rural libraries may function as “capability enablers” which helps in improving education equity.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research design using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to explore and share experiences and perceptions among rural O/L students regarding rural libraries in their self-learning motivation. FGDs are suitable for understanding collective norms and how students influence each other's study behaviors especially in community settings (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

The research was conducted in Kaluwanchikudy DS Division in Batticaloa District, Sri Lanka focusing on rural library services in the study area. The Manmunai South and Eruvil Pattu DS Division is known as Kaluwanchikudy DS Division comprises the seven (07) public libraries and those are managed

by the Pradeshiya Sabha. The public libraries are Kaluwanchikudy Public Library, Kaluthavalai Public Library, Koddakallar Public Library, Kurumanvely Public Library, Palugamam Public Library, Periyakallar Public Library and Thettativu Public Library. The National Library and Documentation Services Board graded the public libraries managed by Pradeshiya Sabha as grade three to supra grade according to size of library collections, human resources and facilities available in the Library. The Kaluwanchikudy Library is a grade II library with larger collection size and e-resources facilities and the other Libraries are graded as grade III libraries. Grade III libraries comprises library collection fewer than 5000 books. Grade II libraries include 5000 to 15,000 books as collection size.

The Manmunai South and Eruvil Pattu DS Division stands as a performing rural division as the Pradeshiya Sabha actively maintains a strong network of libraries while other rural areas like Koralai Pattu North (Vaharai), Koralai Pattu South (Kiran) and Manmunai South West (Paddipalia) have lack of study spaces such as libraries. Therefore, the study focuses on The Manmunai South and Eruvil Pattu DS Division as study area representing rural areas of Batticaloa District.

The study area includes diverse rural communities where students face various levels of educational access, tuition availability and household learning resources. Rural public libraries in these areas generally provide reading spaces and printed materials and some have limited ICT facilities.

A purposive sample was used to recruit students who were preparing for G.C.E. (O/L) examinations in 2026, resided in rural areas of Kaluwanchikudy DS Division (Manmunai South and Eruvil Pattu DS Division) and who had experience using rural public libraries (regular and occasional users). As the students who sit for the G.C.E O/L examination 2026 was taken as sample for this study, the students from ten schools were selected and ten focus group discussions were conducted and each group includes nine (09) participants (estimated total $n = 90$). The total participants were enrolled in ten (10) schools and the focus groups were designed to include diversity in gender, school type and subject stream needs while maintaining comfortable peer dynamics. FGDs were held in neutral community locations such as library meeting rooms and school halls to ensure participants felt safe and could speak freely.

A semi-structured focus group discussion guide explored the following are, patterns of library use

(frequency, time of day, purpose), motivational experiences available in the library which encourages learning, self-learning practices developed in libraries (goal setting, revision, reading and practices to do past papers), perceived learning performances (understanding, confidence and discipline), barriers (resources, hours, language, staff and ICT), students' study challenges and learning environment at home and school and suggested improvements (services, programs, resources and outreach).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected through ten focus group discussions were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The analysis followed the six-phase thematic analysis procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) which are familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final analytical narrative. A simple descriptive analysis was also used to assess the pattern of library use among the participants. This descriptive summary supported the qualitative findings by indicating that many students visited libraries regularly, especially two or three days per week and during weekends. Therefore, the descriptive evidence and thematic findings together provided a clearer understanding of the role of rural libraries in supporting self-learning among rural G.C.E. (O/L) students.

Since the study was qualitative in nature, learning performance was understood in terms of students' perceived improvement in subject understanding, study discipline, reading and writing ability, exam readiness and self-confidence rather than direct measurement of examination marks.

The students use the library after school hours to until 8.00 pm according to the facilities provided by the specific libraries in rural areas to facilitate the studies of school students during the weekdays. In the weekends, during office hours the library could be used by the students. The students are encouraged to study their own school notes and after office hours the library reading area is only used by the students while other sections are closed in the library. The analysis produced five major themes explaining how rural libraries motivate self-learning and influence learning performance alongside two cross-cutting barrier themes.

The library as a disciplined and quiet learning environment

Among the focus groups the students declared that the home environments were with distractions from family members and visitors and not facilitated with calm or peaceful environment. But, the library enhanced the study mode and strengthening efficient use of time for studying. The routine library rules such as keeping silence and limited access to mobile devices are very supportive for the students to continuous consistent learning process in these rural libraries. The organized seating seems as supportive rather than restrictive. Many of the students stated that the presence of other students who actively reading and learning in the library created a social norm that encourage the learning.

The library functions as a well-organized environment for the students which increase the self-control and reducing distraction while studying in the library. Therefore, it supports the self-regulated learning by empower the sustained study sessions.

Access to learning materials and exam-oriented resources

The students emphasized that the libraries motivate the self-learning primarily even though the library provides prime resources such as textbooks, subject wise exam guides and past papers of G.C.E O/L examinations held previously. Even these rural public libraries have small collections were valued the most for the students because of the high user demand of library resources.

Students described the motivational effect of “resource prominence” as the accessibility of books and exam materials in the shelves. It also empowers their awareness of what they should study which enable to focus on their enhanced learning among the students. However, many focus groups reported scarcities of updated learning materials and limited copies of new editions creates competition among the users. Therefore, the students relied on peer sharing or tuition materials instead as most of the materials are outdated.

Hence, if the libraries encourage and motivate self-learning by the students to manage the scarcity of library resources which facilitate the own learning processes. The local authorities which control and manage the libraries should take responsibility to expand the library collections with relevance and currency of materials in the rural libraries.

The resource and services are major constraints mentioned by the users of these rural low graded libraries. They highlighted the lack of updated exam guides, subject wise study materials, insufficient seating facilities during peak seasons and poor lighting or ventilation in some libraries. Since these reasons resulted in reduced motivation and less attractive libraries for other non-users of the libraries. And also it was noted that the reading spaces are not enough and seating availability is not enough for the students and often returned back home as filled with students. The non-availability of IT facilities was result in non-use of online learning materials in the library.

Another restriction in these rural public libraries are the digital gaps, relevant collections in Tamil medium and uneven human resources in these libraries. The students desired basic ICT support (computers and internet for educational contents) should be made available in the libraries but many were lack of ICT facilities. Students mentioned the language barriers where resources were not sufficiently available in Tamil medium especially relevant study materials which very much needed for their studies.

Motivational social ecology - peer influence, role models and supportive staff

A social learning atmosphere inside the libraries act as a motivational learning common. The students described it as a motivational and instructional approach. While students observe other who study long hours and use effective strategies created informal role models for the students. The library staff was supportive and guided to find suitable books and encouraged us to study in the library. This attitude enhanced motivation for students to learn and maintained a respectful study environment in the library.

Some students also mentioned the staff who are impatient or unapproachable in few libraries who reduce motivation in learning in the library especially for gentle students. Therefore, the motivation is not only internal but also it is socially produced. Libraries create relatedness and belonging strengthening intrinsic and identified motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The human resources such as skilled and qualified staff were varied in rural libraries. The supportive staff increased motivation but the rigid or unhelpful attitudes of staff decreased the motivation.

Formation of self-learning routines, goal-setting and time management

Students explained that library use helped them to build consistent study routines after school, weekends and closer to exam months. Many described that they were efforts in setting small goals (e.g., completing a past paper and revising one unit) during each library visit. Students used the library as a commitment device which is the place where everyone felt obligated to study. This reduced the procrastination of learning by the students.

However, students noted that limited opening hours in some libraries (closing early) reduced the ability to maintain routines especially for those traveling far or having tuition classes. Libraries support the forethought and performance phases of self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2002) by enabling planning, routine formation and effort persistence.

Confidence-building through practice, feedback and informational support

Students linked library based self-learning to build up their confidence which results improved reading speed, writing practice, understanding difficult subjects and reduced exam anxiety. Practice with past papers and reading reference materials strengthened perceived competence. While using the library the students build confidence in their studies. Students also described informal feedback mechanisms such as peer discussions, comparing answers and occasionally receiving guidance from older students or staff. Even without formal teaching these interactions improved confidence to students. The use of library also helped the students in discussion with the other students and correct their mistakes. Therefore, the competence pathway is central and the libraries motivate self-learning when they enable visible progress and mastery experiences which sustain motivation over time (Dweck, 2006).

This study demonstrates that rural libraries motivate self-learning and contribute to learning performance through interconnected environmental, resource, social, behavioral and psychological mechanisms. First, the library's disciplined environment operates as a self-regulation scaffold. When study environment at homes are disrupted and a quiet and rule-based space such as library spaces for studies reduce distractions and create an immediate learning

center. This aligns with research that learning spaces shape behavior through norms and cues (Aabo & Audunson, 2012).

Furthermore, the access to relevancy of library resources for the exams motivate the learning processes of students by reducing scarcity of materials and increasing perceived opportunities to learn. Students' emphasis on past papers and guides suggests that rural libraries must be strategically exam-oriented. From a capability approach perspective, resources expand students' opportunity sets but only if they are relevant and usable (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). Likewise, where materials are outdated, the conversion from resources to learning outcomes weakens.

Moreover, the motivation is socially constructed. Peer influence, role modeling and supportive staff foster relatedness and belonging key drivers of self-determined motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Libraries serve as micro-communities of learners where students normalize effort and share strategies. This is significant because rural students may lack academically supportive peer networks at home or in the neighborhood.

Similarly, the libraries help students to build routines, setting the goals and time management are the core elements of self-directed and self-regulated learning (Knowles, 1975; Zimmerman, 2002). Students used the library as a commitment tool to reduce procrastination. However, short opening hours and travel time constraints limit routine formation. Policy designs should therefore treat "hours and accessibility" as motivational infrastructure rather than only operational details in these libraries specifically.

Further, the confidence building is the link between self-learning and perceived performance improvement. Students described mastery experiences through practice and progress, consistent with competence, motivation and growth mindset concepts (Dweck, 2006). When students repeatedly practice the exam papers and correct the mistakes would result in increase in their self-efficacy and sustaining their motivation.

At the same time, structural barriers weaken motivation of students such as resource shortages, limited seating, lack of ICT and uneven staff attitudes. These findings suggest that rural library development must be combined with upgrading the collection development with redesigning the services especially oriented with guided self-learning supports.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study examined how rural public libraries motivate self-learning and contribute to learning performances among rural G.C.E. (O/L) students in Kaluwanchikudy D.S. Division (Manmunai South and Eruvil Pattu DS Division) in Batticaloa District through ten focus group discussions. Aligned with the research questions, the findings demonstrate that rural libraries function not merely as repositories of books but also represent as capability enabling learning environments that embrace motivation, positive learning behaviors and perceived academic performance.

The study found that rural libraries motivate self-learning primarily by providing a disciplined and distraction-free study environment, access to examination-oriented learning resources and a socially supportive learning atmosphere. Consistent with self-determination theory, these environments support students' autonomy, competence and relatedness, thereby strengthening intrinsic and identified motivation for learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For the students who are facing noisy atmosphere at homes and limited parental support for academic activities, the library becomes a psychologically significant space that legitimizes focused study and sustained effort for the students.

The findings revealed that regular library use facilitates the development of self-learning routines including move towards the goals, time management, independent revision and systematic practice of using past examination papers. These behaviors reflect key dimensions of self-directed and self-regulated learning where students actively plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning processes (Knowles, 1975; Zimmerman, 2002). The library environment acts as a commitment mechanism that reduces procrastination and encourages consistent engagement with learning tasks.

The students perceived clear improvements in learning performance associated with library-supported self-learning. These improvements were expressed in terms of better subject understanding, increased reading and writing competence, enhanced exam preparedness and greater confidence in facing the O/L examination. Such confidence-building aligns with growth mindset and mastery learning perspectives where repeated practice and visible progress strengthen learners' self-efficacy and persistence (Dweck, 2006). Although performance was assessed subjectively these perceived gains are

educationally significant as they influence sustained motivation and learning engagement.

The study identifies several structural and service-level barriers that limit the motivational effectiveness of rural libraries. These include shortages of updated O/L-relevant materials, limited seating and study space during peak periods, restricted opening hours, inadequate ICT facilities, language constraints in learning resources and uneven staff capacity. From a capability perspective, these barriers weaken the conversion of available resources into effective learning opportunities, particularly for students from socio-economically constrained households (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011).

Finally, the study concludes that rural libraries in Batticaloa District can significantly enhance students' self-learning motivation and learning performance if they are strategically repositioned as student-centered learning support hubs. Policy-relevant interventions include strengthening examination focused collections, extending library hours during critical academic periods, introducing guided self-learning and study skills programs, improving basic digital learning support and fostering stronger school library partnerships. Such interventions would allow rural libraries to function as inclusive educational institutions that reduce learning inequalities and complement formal schooling.

Overall, this study contributes to rural education and library science literature by empirically demonstrating how rural libraries operate as motivational and behavioral infrastructures for self-learning among secondary school students. By situating rural libraries within motivation theory, self-directed learning frameworks and the capability approach, the research highlights their underutilized potential in improving educational outcomes in peripheral regions. Strengthening rural libraries is therefore not only a cultural or informational investment but a strategic intervention in human capital development and educational equity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening staff capacity and student-friendly culture: Student-centered service trainings such as short trainings for rural library staff on adolescent learning needs, supportive communication and guidance on locating materials is essentially needed for the staff of these type libraries to upgrade the standard of the libraries. Furthermore, the display of motivational messages such as displaying simple motivational

posters and exam preparation schedules could enable users to promote reading and practice study habits.

ICT and digital learning support: Basic ICT corner with even 2–3 computers with safe educational access could assist the student to enhance their educational needs. Offline digital resources could be very useful if internet access is limited in the libraries. The offline digital resources such as offline contents of downloaded videos, e-books, past paper archives ...etc. via library computers is more effective for the learning process of students in the libraries. Further, digital literacy micro-support could simply assist on searching educational resources, typing and using learning apps especially valuable for rural students with limited digital confidence.

School library partnership: School referral system would be beneficial for the students in these rural areas. The schools could encourage students who use these rural public libraries by issuing certificates or letters of appreciation could be an encouragement for the O/L students to learn in these rural libraries. Similarly, teacher collaboration such as teachers can recommend reading lists and past paper sets to the rural public libraries which embrace the relevant library collections for the O/L students. Further, the mobile or outreach services by the rural libraries to the schools in surrounding areas would help to improve learning by the students. Small boxes of books or weekend library outreach programmes for villages far from the libraries would enhance the utilization of useful library resources for students.

Suggestions for Library service improvements for O/L self-learning

- O/L Exam Resource Corner: Create a dedicated section with updated O/L textbooks, short notes, model papers and subject-wise past papers. Prioritize high-demand subjects (Mathematics, Science, English, Tamil).
- Peak-season extended hours: Extend library hours during the 3–4 months before O/L examinations including weekend sessions.
- Quiet study zones and seating plan: Ensure silent zones, adequate seating, lighting and ventilation. Use simple desk allocation methods during peak times.
- Guided self-learning support: Weekly “study skills mini-sessions” (30–45 minutes) on goal-setting, time planning and past-paper strategy. This can be led by librarians or volunteer teachers.
- Peer learning circles: Facilitate student-led revision circles with basic rules to avoid noise. Encourage seniors/alumni mentoring

Limitations and Future Research

This qualitative study relies on student perceptions and does not directly measure exam marks. Future research could use mixed methods by combining qualitative mechanisms with quantitative tracking of attendance, study hours and pre/post performance indicators. Further studies could also compare libraries with and without ICT services, examine gendered differences in library use and explore parents’ and librarians’ perspectives to triangulate findings.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Bibliometric Analysis of Library and Information Science Theses in the National Library of Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Bibliometric analysis is crucial to grasp scholarly communication trends, thematic changes and knowledge organization within a field. The present study aims to examine the research trends in Library and Information Science (LIS) by analyzing the post-graduate theses stored in the National Library of Sri Lanka (NLSL). The main objectives are to explore trends in the subject, development of themes, distribution of languages, institutional involvement and time-based patterns in LIS research production. This study differs from the previous ones which followed descriptive statistical approach, as it studies the salient research themes in Sri Lankan LIS scholarship using keyword frequency analysis, title-word analysis, sub-topic categorization and keyword co-occurrence analysis. The methodology that was followed was quantitative bibliometric. A total of 73 doctoral theses, gathered from the NLSL collection between 1985 and March 2025, were analyzed. Institutional records and Koha library management system were used to get data. Analytical tools which were used were descriptive statistics, thematic categorization, title-word analysis, keyword co-occurrence mapping and trend analysis. The results indicate that English is the main language of research – almost four fifths of the theses are in English and Sinhala comes after that with a small share, while Tamil is not used in the theses at all. Thematic analysis reveals that the traditional LIS areas of university libraries, library services and collection management have been well represented, while emerging areas like digital libraries, research data management, artificial intelligence applications, information systems and knowledge management are poorly represented. The results of the analysis of the co-occurrence of keywords show that there is a strong thematic relationship between the conventional library service themes and the integration of technological themes and interdisciplinary themes is not high. It is concluded that, the research in LIS in Sri Lanka has not been evenly developed thematically, hasn't diversified much and doesn't pay enough attention to new research directions in the global arena. The research has added value to LIS field by offering a national level thematic bibliographical mapping of the LIS theses and the identification of the main research gaps from which the future academic and policy directions will arise.

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received
23 April 2026

Accepted
09 June 2026

KEYWORDS

Bibliometric study;
Library and Information
Science; research trends;
theses analysis; Sri
Lanka

INTRODUCTION

It has become increasingly important to assess scholarly output when it comes to understanding disciplinary developments. Bibliometrics is a quantitative research method which studies scientific papers and analyzes publication behavior and scientific research trends and overall scientific communication. The findings of such research can be helpful in assessing the development of research in a specific field and identify the problems of scholarly communication. As far as Library and Information Science (LIS) is concerned, bibliometrics has been a boon to them which can provide a clear picture of the state of the scholarly world. In Sri Lanka, the National Library of Sri Lanka (NLSL) holds the theses and dissertations done by the researchers in the various higher educational institutions of the country. This collection therefore provides a good snapshot of the research activity of different areas including

LIS. In the past few decades, LIS has grown significantly due to the new technologies and ever-increasing information needs. Therefore, the analysis of the research conducted in this field becomes interesting in order to identify the problems and achievements of the research in this field.

Although there is a lot of data on LIS in the form of theses stored at the NLSL, no comprehensive study of LIS research trends has been performed so far. Most of the existing research papers deal either with a particular institution or one specific aspect of LIS. The aim of this study is to make a bridge of the above and to provide a general bibliometric analysis of all the theses on LIS stored at the NLSL.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are quite a lot of bibliometric studies in the sphere of Library and Information Science that are aimed at evaluating various aspects of research carried out in this discipline. In previous investigations, a lot of emphasis was placed on citation analysis, assumed to be an indicator of the value of research. Then, other parameters

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65714/ejlis262103>



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Publisher: Eastern University, Sri Lanka

were taken into account including research subjects, scientist research productivity etc.

There have been several attempts conducted in bibliometric studies in LIS in Sri Lanka. On a broader regional level Jeyaraj (2012) mapped the output of LIS research in the Asian countries and observed that there is unequal productivity in different countries; this reflects differences in research development and in the contribution of scholarship in the region. Bibliometric studies have been crucial in comprehending the trends of LIS research in the Sri Lankan context. This aligns with the results of the study by Jabeen et al. (2015) which revealed that the bibliometric methods are well adopted for measuring research productivity and scholarly output in the LIS field.

A pioneering bibliometric survey of Sri Lankan LIS literature by Gunasekera (2008) found that the study field was still in its infancy with lesser diversity in the research topics and fewer publications. Gunasekera (2026) later revised this analysis and noted that although the volume of LIS research in Sri Lanka has increased both in volume and thematic scope, some facets of this research are still under-researched, suggesting that there are still imbalances in the research focus and development. Post-graduate and dissertation research have been the focus of attention. The bibliometric study by Angammana and Jayatissa (2016) of the postgraduate LIS theses of the University of Kelaniya and the University of Colombo revealed a heavy dependence on the journal articles as the most important sources of information. They suggested the need to improve the engagement of students with more wide-ranging academic resources.

A similar study on M.Phil dissertation in LIS field at the University of Calcutta revealed different patterns of research themes and the need for a bibliometric analysis at the dissertation level to gain insight into the academic trends and institutional contributions (Nishat et al., 2019). Furthermore, Sajeewani and Desariya (2023) observed as part of their bibliometric study on postgraduate thesis collections, the continuity of the research topics used in classical research and no diversification towards new directions. Their study reveals that post-graduate LIS research is primarily representative of existing academic areas and does not pave the way towards new or interdisciplinary avenues. As a general rule, literature evidence indicates that bibliometric studies of research productivity in LIS regularly reveal unequal research productivity, concentration on traditional research fields and regional/institutional inequalities in research

activities. While global and regional studies are very useful, there have been very few examples of studies in Sri Lanka that have covered a range of institutions or selected groups of theses and research products. The number of published works has been growing, but there is lack of bibliometric analysis at the national level of LIS theses in Sri Lanka. Previous studies have examined a limited number of postgraduate students, a single institution or a journal literature.

It is therefore still apparent that a more systematic and methodical research study on the “bibliometric research” aspect of the theses involving LIS can be done on a larger scale covering trends of research, thematic changes and institutional contribution in Sri Lanka.

Also, there is no study done on national level that could analyse the title-word frequency, thematic clusters, sub-topic relations, or keyword networks of the title of the LIS theses in the National Library of Sri Lanka. Current research topics like digital transformation, artificial intelligence, research data management, institutional repositories and knowledge organization systems are not sufficiently covered in previous research.

Thus, the present study fills an important gap in the literature by combining the descriptive bibliometric method with the thematic and keyword co-occurrence methodology which gives a holistic picture of the LIS research development in the country of Sri Lanka.

Research Problem

Although there is a vast collection of Theses in the National Library of Sri Lanka, there has been little systematic study of thematic research trends in this collection. Studies so far conducted are mostly descriptive statistical and lack knowledge about the intellectual structure, theme relations and new lines of research in Sri Lankan LIS scholarship.

Thesis collection review indicates that there is not a strong thematic concentration, proper topic coverage and absence of strong interest in the recent global trends related to LIS. Moreover, there is a lack of awareness of both mature and less-explored areas in the national landscape of LIS research.

Comprehensive thematic and bibliometric mapping is important because researchers, educators, and policymakers struggle to properly identify research priorities, curriculum

development needs, and future research directions without such mapping. Thus, a detailed bibliometric and thematic analysis is required to gain insightful knowledge regarding the research trends in LIS in Sri Lanka.

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to conduct a bibliometric analysis of Library and Information Science theses available in the National Library of Sri Lanka in order to identify thematic development, research trends, subject coverage, language distribution, institutional contribution, and publication productivity. Accordingly the followings are the specific objectives of this study:

1. To identify the major research themes and subject areas in LIS theses.
2. To determine highly researched and under-researched areas in LIS.
3. To analyze the language distribution of LIS theses.
4. To examine annual trends in thesis production.
5. To identify institutional contributions to LIS research in Sri Lanka.
6. To conduct title-word and keyword frequency analysis of LIS theses
7. To examine keyword co-occurrence patterns and thematic relationships among research topics

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative bibliometric design to systematically evaluate publication statistics and identify evolving research trends within Library and Information Science (LIS) theses in Sri Lanka. Data were sourced from the National Library of Sri Lanka (NLSL) thesis repository and the Koha Library Management System, spanning a 40-year period from 1985 to March 2025.

An initial pool of 696 thesis records was subjected to a rigorous, multi-stage screening process consisting of identification, keyword filtering, and structural relevance assessments of titles, abstracts, and metadata. Based on predefined inclusion criteria (direct relevance to LIS topics and complete bibliographic details) and exclusion criteria (duplicate entries, incomplete records, or tangential references), the sample was narrowed down to a final dataset of 73 LIS theses, representing 10.49% of the original repository yield.

Bibliometric indicators and variables extracted from the final sample included the year of submission, language, awarding institution, degree type, title words, and content area descriptors. The analysis combined descriptive statistics with advanced bibliometric techniques, specifically title and subject categorization across nine core LIS sub-topics to uncover prominent research themes. To map conceptual relationships, a keyword co-occurrence analysis was executed by first unifying synonymous terms across titles, abstracts, and author-assigned keywords.

Given the compact sample size ($n = 73$), frequency-based co-occurrence matrices and descriptive mapping techniques were utilized via spreadsheet software rather than automated bibliometric software. Ultimately, thematic mapping was applied to classify these research streams into well-developed, emerging, declining, or underexplored areas, with the final trends synthesized through frequency counts, percentages, and tabular summaries.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Language Distribution

From the obtained results, it can be observed that English is the leading language in LIS theses (Table 1). The creation of many works in English, and few in Sinhala. There are no Tamil theses.

Table 1: Language Distribution of Theses

Language	N	Percentage
English	58	79.45%
Sinhala	15	20.55%
Tamil	0	0%

The numbers of English language LIS theses and Sinhala language LIS theses were 58 (79.45%) and 15 (20.55%) respectively, out of the 73 theses analyzed. There was no writer of theses in Tamil (0%). This is a high degree of English predominance in LIS scholarly communication.

Subject Distribution and Research Trends

The Peculiarities of Distribution of Subject and Trends of Scientific Research. Analysis of subjects distributed reveals that traditional subjects are targeted in the field (Table 2). The

most typical areas of theses that are studied include university libraries, library services, national libraries, and collection management.

Table 2: Major Subject Areas

Subject Area	N
University Libraries	17
Library Services	11
National Library	10
Collection Management	10
Public Libraries	9

The university libraries had the greatest number of theses, 17 (23.29%), followed by library services, 11 (15.07%). The number of theses in each of the different types of libraries was distributed as follows: public libraries had 9 theses (12.33%), national libraries had 10 (13.70%) and others comprised 25 (30.2%). The total LIS theses are concentrated in traditional library areas, the number of which makes up 82.19% of the total. Total output is also significantly underrepresented for emerging areas like digital libraries and automation, and library marketing, which together account for less than 5% of all output.

Meanwhile, a variety of contemporary and specific topics were scarcely addressed. Minimal attention focus to disaster management, marketing of library services, classification and digital libraries. There was underrepresentation of these fields: Several themes were discussed in only one work each. As one may see, researchers prefer studying the subjects that have been widely researched previously. There can be several reasons; first, there has to be sufficient sources available for students to write about these topics and get relevant information; second, there has to be a supervisor who can guide the students on these directions. There are some issues that one should explore in spite of these preferences.

Temporal Trends in Research Output

The distribution of theses by time shows a considerable change in annual production throughout four decades (Table 3). The duration of 2001-2010 proved to be the most productive period, with nearly half of the total number of jobs. Before the peak, the trend has a consistent increase.

The years 2001-10 were the most productive for LIS research, accounting for almost half of the total.

There are several explanations to this phenomenon. The first step is to talk about reducing enrollments in LIS studies. In addition, funding constraints, institutional issues, and shifting academic priorities could have a negative impact on productivity.

Table 3: Time Distribution

Period	N	%
1985–1990	8	10.96%
1991–2000	13	17.81%
2001–2010	36	49.32%
2011–2020	15	20.55%
2021–2024	1	1.37%

Institutional Contribution

When analyzing the distribution by institutions, one will find out that the largest part of these was produced by two universities – the University of Colombo and the University of Kelaniya (Table 4). Other universities create much less employment opportunities and a fraction of the theses come from other countries.

Table 4: Institutional Contribution

Institution	Number	%
University of Colombo	34	46.58%
University of Kelaniya	21	28.77%
Others	18	24.66%

The University of Colombo had the highest number of theses (34, 46.58%) followed by University of Kelaniya (21, 28.77%). The other institutions made 18 theses (24.66%). The institutional concentration was captured with a total of 75.35% research output being done by these two main universities. Obviously, there are significant differences among these three sets of universities: the contributions from each group are distinctly different. It proves that there is a considerable disparity between institutions in this aspect, as well. The diversity of institutions producing research works will be better if they are encouraged in order to promote equality.

Degree-wise Distribution of Theses

It will be evident from the result displayed above that the academic degree most common to research products of LIS is Master's of Library and Information Science (MLS). Indeed, the great majority of theses studied were written within the framework of this program (Table 5).

The other degree programs (e.g., MA, MSSC, PhD) seem to be less likely to award theses than the MLS program. What has to be pointed out here is the fact that few doctoral theses have been prepared in the field of LIS. MLS accounted for 42 theses (57.53%), followed by MSSC (12.33%), MA (10.96%), and PhD (6.85%). This indicates that the research in the field of LIS is mainly at the master's level. Such a distribution implies that even though postgraduate education is dynamic, there is a need to enhance research at a higher level. Supporting Ph.D. degree programs will help to improve LIS scholarship programs.

Table 5: Degree Distribution

Degree	Number	%
MLS	42	57.53%
MSSC	9	12.33%
MA	8	10.96%
PhD	5	6.85%

Title Analysis

Table 6 shows that the most common terms in the titles were library services, university libraries, information needs, and collection management, each occurring 14 times, 12 times, 8 times, and 7 times, respectively, representing 19.18%, 16.44%, 10.96% and 9.59% of the total, respectively. The results suggest a high focus on operational and service aspects of librarianship. Technology-oriented phrases like "digital libraries" (2 occurrences; 2.74%), "information

technology" (3 occurrences; 4.11%) or "knowledge management" (1 occurrence; 1.37%) were used less often, indicating less involvement with new research areas related to digital technologies and interdisciplinary research.

Other concepts, such as "digital libraries", "knowledge management" or "information systems", are only superficially mentioned in the context of digital transformation and emerging technologies. This indicates that LIS research still mainly has traditional and limited innovative and interdisciplinary research directions.

Sub-topic Analysis

The sub-topic analysis offers a better understanding of thematic concentration in the LIS research. Analysis of the thesis collection shows that traditional research fields like university libraries, library services and collection management are predominant. These can thus be regarded as considered research fields in LIS scholarship that have become well established and developed in Sri Lanka.

But there are a few areas of the modern era which are still relatively untouched. Digital librarianship, metadata management, automation, and marketing are other subjects that have only a few studies in their representation. The results show that research in LIS in Sri Lanka has not yet caught up properly with the developments in the world in the field of digital information environment and technological innovation.

Quantitatively, the university libraries comprised 17 theses (23.29%), library services 11

Table 6: Frequently Occurring Terms in Thesis Titles

Title Term	N	%	Interpretation
Library Services	14	19.18	Strong focus on operational library functions
University Libraries	12	16.44	Dominant institutional research area
Information Needs	8	10.96	User-centered studies are common
Collection Management	7	9.59	Traditional management themes are emphasized
Information Technology	3	4.11	Emerging but weakly represented
Digital Libraries	2	2.74	Underexplored technological area
Knowledge Management	1	1.37	Minimal research attention

theses (15.07%) and 10 theses (13.70%) in the field of collection management. Digital libraries, in comparison, only came in at 2.74% (2 theses); followed by automation at 1.37% (1 thesis); and then, studies of metadata and library marketing at 1.37% (1 thesis) each. The numbers again show the significant thematic disparity in the LIS research in Sri Lanka.

Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

Based on the keyword co-occurrence analysis, the relationships among the traditional concepts of LIS (library services, university libraries, users and collection development) are shown to be strong. These words often occur in compound forms and make up the main thematic group of words in the data set.

Themes of other concepts, like digital libraries, information systems, knowledge

management, automation and electronic resources, however, demonstrate very limited connectivity with other themes. It implies that information technologies and digital transformation have yet to be the focus of LIS research in Sri Lanka.

The list of major key-word co-occurent clusters is provided in Table 8. These results also reveal that information literacy and information-seeking behavior, as areas of user-centered research, are slowly gaining attention but need more research in the scholarly community.

Thematic Mapping

The thematic analysis resulted in the four thematic categories in the thesis collection (Table 9). Thematic mapping analysis shows that

Table 7: Distribution of LIS Research Sub-topics

Major Subject Area	Sub-topic	Number of Theses	Status
Academic Libraries	University Libraries	17	Highly represented
Library Operations	Library Services	11	Highly represented
Resource Management	Collection Development	10	Highly represented
Public Library Studies	Public Libraries	9	Moderately represented
User Studies	Information Needs	6	Moderately represented
Information Literacy	User Education	5	Moderately represented
Digital Librarianship	Digital Libraries	2	Underexplored
Information Systems	Library Automation	1	Underexplored
Knowledge Organization	Metadata Studies	1	Underexplored
Management Studies	Library Marketing	1	Underexplored

Table 8: Major Keyword Co-occurent Clusters

Keyword Cluster	Frequently Associated Keywords	Interpretation
Library Services Cluster	Users, University Libraries, Information Needs	Strong traditional service-oriented research focus
Collection Management Cluster	Resources, Preservation, Access	Emphasis on resource organization
Digital Information Cluster	Digital Libraries, Automation, ICT	Weakly developed emerging area
User Education Cluster	Information Literacy, Information Seeking	Developing user-centered research
Management Cluster	Marketing, Administration	Limited managerial research

there is a great variation in the maturity and development of the research themes of LIS in Sri Lanka. University libraries, library services, and user studies are two themes that have a high research frequency and strong thematic development, and are identified as core themes. The above themes constitute the intellectual focus of LIS research in the national framework.

Themes of collection management and public library studies seem to be basic and indispensable aspects of the discipline which still need diversification and modernization. On the other hand, the theme of digital libraries, knowledge management and automation are present, but not well developed, even though their relevance is increasing in other countries around the world.

The analysis also shows that niche areas like metadata research and library marketing are not given much scholarly focus. This imbalance points towards the need of broadening the research focus to technologically advanced and interdisciplinary research areas to build the future direction of the LIS scholarship in Sri Lanka.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study give valuable information about the intellectual structure and

thematic development of Library and Information Science (LIS) research in Sri Lanka. The addition of title analysis, sub-topic categorization, keyword co-occurrence analysis, and thematic mapping facilitates a wider overview of research patterns and scholarly trends across the discipline, as compared to earlier descriptive analyses.

One of the most important results obtained is that the research is very focused in traditional LIS areas. Research in public library studies, collection management, library services, and the university library remains the most prominent. Themes are the main research clusters that emerged from the keyword co-occurrence analysis and thematic mapping. The high incidence rate shows that Sri Lankan LIS research is still firmly rooted in the normal library activities and service-oriented activities.

The analysis also shows that there is a lot of thematic imbalance at the same time. New fields, like digital libraries, knowledge management, metadata researches, information systems and library automation, are poorly represented. The results of the keyword co-occurrence analysis indicate that technological and innovation-related research is not yet fully integrated into the national LIS research agenda, as these themes are scarcely present and the connections with each

Table 9: Thematic Classification of LIS Research Areas

Theme Category	Research Areas	Level of Development
Core Themes	University Libraries, Library Services, User Studies	Highly developed
Basic Themes	Collection Management, Public Libraries	Moderately developed
Emerging Themes	Digital Libraries, Knowledge Management	Weakly developed
Specialized Themes	Metadata, Automation, Library Marketing	Very limited
Declining Themes	Traditional administrative studies	Low recent growth

Table 10: Conceptual Thematic Map of LIS Research Areas in Sri Lanka

Highly Developed Themes	Research Areas
University Libraries	Digital Libraries
Library Services	Knowledge Management
User Studies	Library Automation
Collection Management	Metadata Studies
Public Libraries	Library Marketing

other are weak. The thematic mapping also shows that many technology related themes are underdeveloped, or even stand alone, while traditional service-oriented studies are very well-developed “motor themes.”

A second significant comment on diversification of research topic is also made, this one pointing to the narrow range of topics. Interdisciplinary themes that combine artificial intelligence, research data management, digital preservation and semantic technologies hardly exist in the thesis collection, although they are present in a few user studies and information literacy research works. This highlights a huge disparity between the current research trends in LIS and the current developments in the field of LIS in the world.

The distribution of the theses by language also reveals significant issues of inclusiveness and accessibility. English is the main language for academic communication, but Sinhala representation is lagging behind and Tamil-language research is completely lacking. This imbalance could limit wider knowledge production and limit access to knowledge in multilingual communities in Sri Lanka.

The analysis by the chronological method shows that the productivity of LIS research peaked in the early 2000s, but has significantly reduced since 2010. The bibliometric data showed a drop in thesis production following 2010, but this was not examined in the present study. The information provided, therefore, can provide no causal explanation. To investigate the factors affecting the productivity of LIS research in Sri Lanka, further study either by survey and/or interviews/institutional analyses would be required.

Likewise, the themes identified in the thesis collection that are related to technology (information systems, knowledge management, digital libraries, and automation) are not seen very often, and this bibliometric analysis does not make it possible to establish any reasons for their limited presence. The results merely suggest that the topics are a relatively small share of the total research production over the observation period.

The institutional analysis also reveals that there is an unequal participation in research by universities. The University of Colombo contributed 46.58% of the total number of theses, followed by the University of Kelaniya with 28.77% of theses. These institutions together had 75.35% of the total LIS research output. The results show a clear focus on research production

in certain institutions. The present study, however, did not examine the underlying factors of this distribution. Further study is needed to determine the impact of institutional features, research capability and academic programs on LIS research productivity. The training of LIS teachers from other universities and building the capacity of research would help to balance out the national research environment.

Overall, the results indicated that the research conducted under LIS in Sri Lanka has strengths and also considerable weaknesses. Although there are well developed themes in the library, there are considerable research gaps in the digital, technological and interdisciplinary. In this regard, future research policies and academic programs should promote innovation, thematic diversification, multilingualism and increased embedding of emerging information technologies into LIS scholarship.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of bibliometric analysis of the theses on LIS-related topics deposited in the National library of Sri Lanka are presented in this paper. Overall, it would be possible to make some conclusions regarding the evolution of the research landscape in the field of LIS and what structural characteristics are found in the scholarly production.

First, it is clear that LIS research in Sri Lanka is highly focused and has a narrow range of research activities. These range from library services to the management of collections, through to university libraries. The latter are of course significant areas of research to be explored, however, the fact that relatively small amounts of research have been conducted in emerging areas (digital libraries, information technology applications in LIS, knowledge management, library marketing, etc.) indicates that LIS research has not kept pace with modern developments in the information environment.

On the other side, linguistic imbalance in research activity is observed in the number of English theses. Use of English is widespread in the international scholarly communication and is a common practice in the academic world.

However, the marginalization of Sinhalese language and the lack of any writing in Tamils pose problems for integration of multilingual researchers into the scholarly community as well as equal opportunities to participate in research activities of LIS.

The third interesting observation is that thesis production has decreased since 2010. The bibliometric data clearly indicate a decrease in research production in the last few years of the study period, but the reasons for this decrease were not studied in the present research. Thus, from the available evidence there are no causal explanations to be drawn. Surveys, interviews or institutional analyses could be used to gain deeper insight into the factors which influence LIS research productivity in Sri Lanka in the future.

Furthermore, there is a high level of concentration of research activity in a few universities (mainly University of Colombo and University of Kelaniya), which indicates that there is a significant variation in the research capacities, availability of academic programs and resources among the universities. This trend also reduces the diversity of views and the possibilities of academic participation in LIS research. The sub-topic analysis, keyword co-occurrence analysis, and thematic mapping greatly enhanced the bibliometric aspect of the study as it identified the intellectual structure, thematic connections, and research gaps in the scholarship of LIS in Sri Lanka. The analytical methods provide a better picture of the development and future trajectory of LIS in the country.

Based on the identified trends, a few recommendations can be made to enhance the research in LIS in Sri Lanka. However, digital libraries are little represented (2 theses, 2.74%) and automation is even less represented (1 thesis, 1.37%) and these could be considered focus areas for future research. However, there is a clear call for stimulating research on underrepresented topics such as digital transformation aspects, information systems aspects, and services from the user's perspective.

Academic institutions must respond to the changes in the world and new technologies by adapting their curricula and research agenda.

The publication of multilingual LIS research can be fostered to enhance inclusiveness, as there are no Tamil-language theses. There is a need to encourage research in several languages as a special consideration. The inclusion of Sinhala and Tamil language in academic writings along with English would help to get inclusivity and ensure that the results of scientific activities are made available to a wider audience. This could be done by adopting certain policies and incentives.

Furthermore, there is a need to further enhance research capability beyond the present limit and to enhance the number of universities in LIS academic program. It would make a contribution to the diversity of research work and stimulate dynamics in research in the field.

As 75.35% of the output of the LIS is provided by 2 universities, expansion of research capacity of LIS in other institutions is suggested. There is a need to give greater attention to promoting cooperation among researchers and institutions. A national LIS research network would help to improve knowledge sharing, interdisciplinary research and interdisciplinary research.

In Sri Lanka, further research could be carried out to explore how funding possibilities, research infrastructure, digital resources and institutional support influence research development in LIS. The present bibliometric analysis did not analyse these factors.

In summary, although LIS research in Sri Lanka has already achieved a lot, significant improvements can be made with regards to diversity, inclusiveness and sustainability. Achieving these aims will need to be done systematically, with the cooperation of all parties

This analysis could be expanded in future by adding citation and impact factor data information on the research. Comparative research with other countries would also be beneficial.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are thankful to the National Library of Sri Lanka for allowing them access to the thesis collection.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Library Resource Utilization and User Challenges Among Undergraduates: A Study at the University of Vavuniya

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Abstract: University libraries play a vital role in supporting teaching, learning, and research by providing access to both print and electronic information resources. However, limited evidence exists regarding the utilization of library resources among undergraduate students at the University of Vavuniya and the challenges they encounter. This study aimed to examine the purposes and benefits of library use, identify problems faced by students when using library services and resources, and determine factors that could improve the effectiveness of the university library. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The target population consisted of 2,400 undergraduate students from the Faculty of Business Studies, Faculty of Applied Sciences, and Faculty of Technology. Using stratified random sampling method, a sample of 331 students was selected. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that students primarily use the library to improve critical thinking and analytical skills (28.2%), enhance academic achievement (21.7%), and prepare for examinations and assignments (20.4%). The major challenges affecting library utilization were insufficient library materials (37.3%), difficulties in using OPAC and online databases (20.5%), and poor infrastructure (20.2%). Respondents identified enhancement of library resources (43.4%) and improvement of library infrastructure and facilities (23.5%) as the most important measures for improving library effectiveness. The study concludes that undergraduate students perceive the university library as an important academic support service. Strengthening library collections, technological facilities, internet connectivity, and user education programs would further improve library utilization and support students' learning experiences.

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received
03 March 2026

Accepted
03 June 2026

KEYWORDS

Library Utilization,
Undergraduate Students,
Information Resources,
Academic Libraries,
User Satisfaction,
Library Services.

INTRODUCTION

Universities have long placed a high value on their libraries. They provide study areas, books, journals, and digital resources to support students' learning, research, and academic development. University libraries provide both electronic and physical materials to meet contemporary learning needs in the digital age. These days, students have access to computer laboratories, e-books, online journals, quiet study spaces, and printed textbooks. Even with these advancements, students still utilize library resources in various ways. While some students visit the library infrequently, others use it frequently. The gap in the questions of how much students are aware of library services, how simple it is for them to access materials, and whether using the library affects their academic achievement.

A library is more than just a structure that preserves books. It is a facility that makes knowledge and information necessary for education and self-improvement accessible. Academic libraries provide well-organized collections of information resources to assist a

university's teaching, learning, and research endeavors. Onye (2016) supports that the value of a university library cannot be emphasized since even the most talented students require library resources to succeed. Students can establish autonomous learning habits, enhance their research abilities, and gain a deeper understanding of their subjects with the use of library resources.

Students' academic progress is significantly influenced by how they use library resources. According to Ogundiran et al. (2025) using libraries can boost academic achievement, promote lifelong learning, and increase research output.

Students use the library in various ways, based on their study level and academic discipline. Aina et al. (2019) observed that undergraduate students mostly utilize the library to read and access textbooks, but postgraduate students rely more on digital databases for research work. Humanities and social sciences students make more use of library materials, but technology students typically rely on laboratory work and practical sessions (Khan & Bhatti, 2020). Digital libraries have also altered the way students access information. Students can conduct research at any time, even without visiting the actual library, because of online databases, e-books, and

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65714/ejlis262104>



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Publisher: Eastern University, Sri Lanka

electronic journals that are available 24 hours a day. However, many students are unaware of all the facilities provided by university libraries, limiting their use (Ekpenyong & Edem, 2021).

Because academic success is directly related to how students use library resources, assessing library utilization is critical. Some students have difficulties such as not understanding where to get information, a lack of orientation programs, outdated collections, and inadequate infrastructure. These difficulties limit their capacity to fully utilize the library. As a result, researching how students use library resources and how it affects their academic performance can help colleges enhance their library services. This study looks at how university library resources are used and how they affect undergraduate academic attainment in University of Vavuniya.

Research problem

The university library is an essential part of the learning process, helping students find information, improve their knowledge, and succeed in their studies. Undergraduate students depend on library materials both physical and digital to complete assignments, prepare for exams, and support their learning. However, it is not clear how often students at the University of Vavuniya use the library or how this usage affects their academic performance. Although many studies have examined library use of undergraduate in other universities, there is little or no research focused on the University of Vavuniya. This creates a gap in understanding whether the library is being used effectively and whether it contributes to academic outcomes such as higher grades or improved learning. Therefore, this study aims to examine the level of library utilization by undergraduates at the University of Vavuniya.

Objectives of the study

1. To determine the purposes of library use and the advantages offered by the University of Vavuniya library.
2. To determine the problems that users have when using University of Vavuniya library services and resources.
3. To identify variables that can increase and improve the University of Vavuniya library's effectiveness

Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide evidence-based insights that can guide improvements in library services at the University

of Vavuniya. By identifying the patterns of resource use, the challenges encountered by students, and the impact of utilize library, the study can help university administrators enhance service delivery, strengthen library instruction programs, update collections, and invest in needed infrastructure. Understanding how library use influences academic achievement can also encourage students to adopt effective study habits and make better use of available learning resources.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the research objectives. The target population consisted of 2,400 undergraduate students from three faculties: Faculty of Technology (600 students), Faculty of Business Studies (1,110 students), and Faculty of Applied Sciences (690 students). Since the population was heterogeneous and consisted of distinct academic groups, the stratified random sampling technique was considered most appropriate to ensure that each faculty was adequately represented in the study.

The sample size was determined using the Krejcie & Morgan sampling approach, which recommended a sample of 331 respondents for a population of 2,400. However, to minimize the effect of non-response, 350 questionnaires were distributed to the selected respondents. Out of these, 331 questionnaires were properly completed and returned, while 19 were discarded due to incomplete responses, resulting in a response rate of 94.6% and a non-response rate of 5.4%. The sample was proportionately allocated across the three faculties based on their population size, ensuring fair representation. Accordingly, 95 respondents were selected from the Faculty of Technology, 153 from the Faculty of Business Studies, and 83 from the Faculty of Applied Sciences.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27.0, where descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were employed to interpret the findings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Academic libraries are expected to provide a wide range of materials, including books, journals, visual aids, and multimedia resources. Effective use of these materials requires strong collaboration between librarians and the institution. Lance (1994) found that trained library staff improve student achievement, especially when supported by teachers and

administrators. Research also shows that students who use library resources more often generally have higher GPAs and better retention rates, although some studies note limits in proving direct cause (Sterner, 2021). Overall, academic libraries play an important role in supporting learning, improving performance, and creating a better educational environment.

This review also examined online library services and their impact on student success. Studies show that students who access more online resources tend to perform better academically. Nurse et al. (2018) found that successful students use library resources more frequently, which enhances their interest in studies and supports the timely completion of assignments. Nazir (2019) reported that e-resources positively affect performance in academic and competitive examinations. Similarly, online library use has been shown to predict GPA, one-term retention, and overall academic standing (LeMaistre et al., 2018). Carvalhoe Rodrigues & Mandrekar (2020) noted that students satisfied with library resources demonstrate higher academic achievement, highlighting libraries as reliable sources of information. Cherry et al. (2013) and Stemmer & Mahan (2016) consistently found positive correlations between library use and student success, especially when resources are used for research.

Regular use of both physical and digital library materials also improves academic performance. Mezick (2007) reported that academic library services contribute positively to student success and institutional retention. Students who frequently use school libraries perform better than those who do not and recommended regular library use to achieve high academic standards. Ojedokun (2007) emphasized that the usefulness of a library depends on how its materials are utilized. Agboola & Bamigboye (2011) further highlighted that the quality of education in higher institutions relies on the effective use of library resources rather than the library building itself. They stressed the importance of offering a broad collection of books and essential materials to meet the needs of academic communities.

University libraries provide essential resources, including textbooks, journals, maps, diagrams, multimedia tools, and computers. Onye (2016) found that all students had access to textbooks, while fewer had access to computers, internet, or audio-visual materials. Olajide & Adio (2017) noted that some key resources, like abstracts and indexes, were often inadequate or

inaccessible. Despite these challenges, students use libraries to supplement class notes, complete assignments, and prepare for exams (Agyekumaner & Filson, 2012). Research shows a strong link between library use and academic performance. Popoola & Haliso (2009) and Oji & Abana (2012) highlighted that schools with quality library services have better student outcomes. The advent of digital resources and online databases further supports learning and research, improving GPA, retention, and exam performance (Nurse et al., 2018; Nazir, 2019). However, with internet access via smartphones, many students prefer studying outside the library (Matthews, 2014), highlighting the need for improved facilities to encourage library use (Wallace, 2019).

Several studies have identified challenges that limit effective use of library resources. Soria et al. (2013) found that students who used library resources and services were more likely to achieve higher academic performance and retention than those who did not. Mamo & Amidu (2016) highlighted that outdated materials and improper shelving further hinder library use. Despite these challenges, academic success remains a primary goal for students and instructors. Farooq et al. (2011) emphasized that student achievement is central to teaching, while Narad & Abdullah (2016) defined academic achievement as the knowledge and skills gained, measured through grades, learning objectives, and ongoing assessments. Efficient use of library resources is therefore essential to achieving these academic goals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Out of the 331 respondents, 64.4% (213) were female and 35.6% (118) were male, indicating that women constituted the majority of the study participants and had a higher participation rate than men. Among the respondents, the Faculty of Business Studies had the highest representation with 153 participants (46.2%), followed by the Faculty of Information Technology with 95 participants (28.7%) and the Faculty of Applied Science with 83 participants (25.1%). Together, the Faculty of Business Studies and the Faculty of Applied Science accounted for 71.3% of the total sample, demonstrating a substantial representation from the Faculty of Business Studies. Regarding academic year, third-year students formed the largest group of respondents, accounting for 36.0% of the sample, followed by first-year students at 27.8%. Fourth-year students comprised 71 respondents (21.5%), while second-

year students represented the smallest group with 49 respondents (14.8%). The distribution indicates a strong representation of mid-level students, particularly those in the third year, with 42.6% of respondents coming from the first two years and 78.5% from the first three years, which may have influenced the survey findings.

Benefits and purpose of using library

The table 1 shows how respondents perceived related benefits and purpose of using library. Improvement in analytical and critical thinking skills (28.2%) is the main result, followed by academic achievement (21.7%) and exam preparation (20.4%). 11.8% demonstrate the development of information literacy, while 12.4% recognize the enhance research skills. The benefits of independent learning, on the other hand, are the least acknowledged (1.8%), while assistance for research initiatives is mentioned by 3.8%. In general, respondents prioritise academic achievement and critical thinking over self-directed study and dissertation assistance.

Table 1: Benefits and purpose of using library

Variables	N	Percentage
Academic Achievement	98	21.7%
Enhance research skills	56	12.4%
Development of information literacy	53	11.8%
Preparation for exams and assignments	92	20.4%
Improve critical thinking and analytical ability	127	28.2%
Improved independent and self-directed learning	8	1.8%
Support for research projects and final year projects (dissertations)	17	3.8%

Challenges of using the library

Table 2 shows that there is a notable disparity in the availability of resources, as evidenced by the distribution of respondents' judgements of the difficulties encountered, which shows that 37.3% identify a lack of library materials as the main problem. Infrastructure problems and OPAC/online database access challenges are also noteworthy, 20.5% and 20.2% of respondents, respectively, acknowledged these. While just 7.6% of respondents say they are unaware of library services, connectivity issues affect 14.4%

of respondents, indicating increased awareness despite persistent resource and technology limitations. Overall, the primary issues noted are inadequate information resources and technological limitations.

Table 2: Challenges faced by students while using the library

Variables	N	Percentage
Poor infrastructures	53	20.2%
Insufficient library materials	98	37.3%
Difficulties using OPAC/online databases	54	20.5%
Lack of awareness of library services	20	7.6%
Poor Internet Connection	38	14.4%

According to the results, 43.4% of respondents indicated that improving library resources was their top concern. There is a high demand for current academic materials. Following that Improvement of Library Infrastructure, with 23.5% identifying the need for improved physical spaces. The significance of digital tools and dependable connectivity is demonstrated by the 13.3% of participants who mentioned the adoption of technology and efficient systems as well as the improvement of internet facilities. Finally, orientation on library usage received the lowest priority at 6.6%. While acknowledging the increasing importance of technology in library services, respondents generally place a higher priority on infrastructure improvement and resource augmentation.

Table 3: Factors Improving the use of the library

Variables	N	Percentage
Poor infrastructures	53	20.2%
Insufficient library materials	98	37.3%
Difficulties using OPAC/online databases	54	20.5%
Lack of awareness of library services	20	7.6%
Poor Internet Connection	38	14.4%

CONCLUSION

This study examined library usage among undergraduate students at the University of Vavuniya and its contribution to academic performance. The findings revealed that the library plays a significant role in supporting students' academic activities and intellectual development. Evidence from the study showed that 28.2% of respondents identified improvement in critical thinking and analytical ability as the major benefit of library use, while

21.7% stated that the library contributes to academic achievement. In addition, 20.4% of students reported that the library helps them in preparation for examinations and assignments. These findings demonstrate that undergraduate students recognize the importance of library resources in enhancing their learning and academic success. The study also identified several challenges that limit effective utilization of library services. The majority of respondents (37.3%) indicated that insufficient library materials were the main problem affecting library use. Furthermore, 20.5% experienced difficulties in using OPAC and online databases, while 20.2% highlighted poor infrastructure as a major issue. Poor internet connectivity was identified by 14.4% of respondents. These findings suggest that although students actively use the library, inadequate resources and technological limitations reduce the effectiveness of library services. The results further revealed that students strongly believe improvements are necessary to enhance library utilization. A large proportion of respondents (43.4%) emphasized the need for enhancement of library resources, while 23.5% suggested improvements in library infrastructure and facilities. Additionally, 13.3% recommended better technological systems and internet facilities. This indicates that students expect modern, resource-rich, and technology-supported library services to meet their academic needs effectively. Overall, the study concludes that effective library usage positively contributes to undergraduate academic performance at the University of Vavuniya. The evidence gathered from the respondents confirms that the library supports learning, research, examination preparation, and development of critical thinking skills. Therefore, improving library collections, infrastructure, internet connectivity, and digital services would further strengthen the role of the university library in enhancing students' academic achievement.

Instead of focusing only on prints and non-prints, the library should expand its entire collection (information resources) to incorporate a variety of forms. In particular, the library should embrace technology as a key information resource so that it can benefit from online resources like open access (OPAC) and online databases. The library should implement strategic planning in its acquisition policy to meet the information needs of all library patrons since digital communication is essential to the successful hosting of information in many channels. In order to acquaint students with the resources and services that are accessible,

universities ought to implement thorough orientation programs. Students can use e-resources efficiently if digital platforms are improved and digital literacy training is given.

To reduce the technological difficulties that students encounter, efforts should also be made to enhance internet connectivity and improve access to OPAC and online databases. To assist students in making the most of the resources and services given by libraries, regular orientation programs and information literacy training sessions should be held. Additionally, by providing help and guidance for academic initiatives, the library could enhance its support for independent study and research activities. Lastly, in order to determine students' requirements and continuously enhance library services, it is important to carry out regular user feedback and assessments to make sure they have a beneficial impact on academic performance and overall learning outcomes.

Acknowledgement

We sincerely thank the University of Vavuniya for providing the opportunity to complete this work. We are grateful to the library staff for their valuable support and assistance. We also thank the students of the University of Vavuniya for their cooperation. Finally, we appreciate everyone who contributed to the successful completion of this work.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

User Satisfaction with Academic Library Services: A Cross-Sectional Study at Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University, Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Academic libraries require regular user assessments to ensure that their services remain responsive to changing academic and information needs. However, no recent user satisfaction assessment had been conducted at the Library, Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University, Sri Lanka, leaving current service effectiveness, digital access, and emerging user expectations insufficiently documented. This study evaluates user satisfaction with library services at the Library, Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University, Sri Lanka. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 101 students across three faculties. Satisfaction was assessed across five service domains: environment and facilities, policies and procedures, information resources, service accessibility, and overall user experience. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation analysis were used, complemented by thematic analysis of open-ended responses. Findings indicate high satisfaction with staff support and library cleanliness, while lower ratings were observed for availability of updated resources and website usability. Strong correlations were found between overall satisfaction and borrowing policies, document delivery services, and resource relevance. Users emphasized the need for enhanced digital access, flexible policies, expanded collections, and improved study spaces. The study highlights the importance of continuous user-centered evaluation for evidence-based library management and service improvement. The findings provide practical evidence for collection development, digital-service improvement, policy revision, and user oriented library planning. The study also demonstrates the importance of regular user satisfaction assessments for evidence-based decision-making and continuous service improvement in academic libraries.

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received

01 February 2026

Accepted

25 June 2026

KEYWORDS

Library user satisfaction,
Academic libraries,
Service quality, Digital
access, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

University libraries are integral to higher education institutions, providing essential academic, research, and information support to students, faculty, and scholars. In contemporary learning environments, libraries have evolved beyond traditional roles as repositories of printed materials to become dynamic knowledge hubs that foster innovation, collaboration, and digital scholarship. Consequently, regular assessment of library services has become vital to ensure that user needs are effectively met and that services remain relevant in rapidly changing educational contexts. (Jayasundara et al., 2009; Wanigasooriya, 2018; Velnamby & Sivesan, 2013)

Globally, academic libraries are increasingly adopting user-centered approaches to evaluate their performance and to inform evidence-based decision making in areas such as resource allocation, collection development, and technological integration. Understanding user satisfaction levels provides meaningful insights

into how effectively a library fulfills its mission and contributes to institutional quality assurance frameworks. Moreover, user feedback plays a crucial role in identifying service gaps, prioritizing improvements, and shaping policies that enhance the overall learning experience. (Jayasundara et al., 2009; Hossain, 2016)

In Sri Lanka, university libraries have undergone significant transformations over the past decade, particularly with the integration of digital platforms, online databases, and open-access repositories (Jayasundara et al., 2009). However, systematic evaluations of library user satisfaction remain limited, especially within regional campuses. Most existing studies focus on main university libraries, leaving a research gap in understanding how peripheral campuses often operating with fewer resources meet the information needs of their users. Addressing this gap is critical, given that these campuses play a vital role in ensuring equitable access to education and knowledge across diverse geographical and socio-economic contexts.

The Library, Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University, Sri Lanka, supports three distinct faculties, namely the Faculty of Applied Science (FAS), the Faculty of Business and Communication Studies (FCBS), and the Faculty

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65714/ejlis262105>



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Publisher: Eastern University, Sri Lanka

of Siddha Medicine (FSM). As a growing academic library serving a multidisciplinary community, it faces challenges in balancing physical and digital resource provision while maintaining high-quality services under resource constraints. In recent years, the library has introduced new initiatives such as research support services, online resource access, and user-centered feedback mechanisms. However, with increasing student enrollment and evolving academic needs, assessing user satisfaction has become essential to guide further service enhancement and policy development.

Despite ongoing developments, no user satisfaction assessment has been conducted at the Library, Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University, Sri Lanka in nearly a decade, leaving current service effectiveness, digital access, and emerging user needs undocumented.

Hence, this study evaluates user satisfaction across key dimensions of library services, including environment, facilities, policies, resources, accessibility, and staff support. The research identifies both strengths and areas requiring improvement, providing a holistic understanding of how users perceive the library's effectiveness in supporting academic and research activities.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To examine user perceptions of the library environment, facilities, and resources.
2. To assess satisfaction levels across key service dimensions.
3. To determine correlations between service components and overall user satisfaction.
4. To analyze user feedback to identify actionable strategies for continuous improvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic libraries increasingly use standardized instruments to evaluate service quality and user satisfaction for evidence-based improvement. Two models dominate globally, LibQUAL+ and SERVQUAL. LibQUAL+, developed by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), measures perceived, minimum, and desired service levels across dimensions such as effect of service, information control, and library as place. It enables longitudinal benchmarking and global comparison and has been adapted to Sri Lankan university contexts (Wanigasooriya, 2018).

The SERVQUAL framework, originally introduced by Parasuraman et al. (1988),

evaluates service quality across tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. It has been widely applied in library settings, including Sri Lankan university libraries, where it helped identify predictors such as responsiveness, supportiveness, building environment, and web services as key drivers of satisfaction (Jayasundara et al., 2009; Velnamby & Sivesan, 2013).

Sri Lankan evidence on user satisfaction

Within Sri Lanka, several studies provide a useful baseline. At the Open University of Sri Lanka, Amarasekara and Marasinghe (2020) reported that satisfaction varies by service dimension. Facilities and staff support tending to rate higher than website and digital services, underscoring the need to align collections and interfaces with evolving user expectations. Kaushamalika and Weerakoon (2020) compared three regional centers and likewise highlighted differentiated satisfaction levels across facilities, services, and e-resources.

Earlier, Seneviratne (2006) and Chandrasekar and Murugathas (2013) demonstrated how structured user surveys guide targeted collection development and service adjustments in Peradeniya and Jaffna respectively. Collectively, these studies affirm the value of periodic user assessments in Sri Lankan university libraries and identify persistent pressure points around e-resource access, website usability, and space.

Website usability and digital access as satisfaction drivers

Studies across Asia emphasize that website usability, system reliability, and access pathways are strong predictors of user satisfaction. In Sri Lankan libraries, "Web services" and "technology" emerged as significant satisfaction dimensions (Jayasundara et al., 2009). Global literature echoes this, finding that user perceptions of navigation, search efficiency, and responsiveness affect continued library use (Hossain, 2016).

Collections, access policies, and staffing

Relevance and currency of collections are consistently linked to satisfaction and perceived library value. In Sri Lankan libraries, inadequate collection development policies have been found to result in unbalanced holdings and lower satisfaction (Fernando, 2007). At the same time, staff responsiveness and guidance remain among the most influential satisfaction factors (Ranaweera et al., 2018). This highlights the role of positive staff interactions in shaping users'

experiences with library systems and spaces.

Document delivery and interlibrary access

Where local holdings are limited, interlibrary loan and document delivery services enhance access and satisfaction. Empirical findings from university library networks show that efficient request handling and collaboration improve perceived service quality (Somaratna & Peiris, 2011).

The reviewed literature highlights several critical levers for improving user satisfaction in Sri Lankan academic libraries. Ensuring relevant and up-to-date collections through clearly defined collection development policies and transparent acquisition processes enhances perceived academic value. Improving digital usability and infrastructure, including effective discovery tools, reliable Wi-Fi, and seamless remote access, strengthens access and ease of use. Additionally, greater staff responsiveness and flexible policies aligned with academic workflows positively shape user experiences. Together, these insights guide the present study's emphasis on the library environment and facilities, policy operations, materials availability, service access, and overall user experience.

RESEARCH METHODS

A cross-sectional descriptive survey was employed to evaluate user satisfaction with library services at the Library, Trincomalee Campus, Sri Lanka. The design captured self-reported perceptions at a single point in time and enabled quantitative comparison across major service dimensions, supplemented by qualitative insights from an open-ended item. The study was conducted at the Library, Trincomalee Campus which serves three faculties: the Faculty of Siddha Medicine (FSM), the Faculty of Business and Communication Studies (FCBS), and the Faculty of Applied Science (FAS). During the study period, the total student population across these faculties was 2548 students (FAS = 536, FCBS = 1710, FSM = 302). However, the survey targeted active library users rather than the entire student population. Based on average daily library attendance records, approximately 200–230 students used the library regularly during the data collection period. Accordingly, 230 questionnaires were distributed among students who visited the library and were willing to participate in the survey. Out of these, 101 valid responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 43.9%.

The study examined perceptions of library services among registered students from the three faculties using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative analysis was used to evaluate satisfaction levels across key service dimensions, while qualitative feedback from open-ended responses provided additional insights into user experiences and suggestions for improvement. This mixed analytical approach enabled a comprehensive assessment of library service performance and provided evidence to support service enhancement and user-centered management practices within Sri Lankan academic libraries.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of demographic questions and closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very poor to 5 = excellent). The instrument covered five service domains: library environment and facilities; library policies and operational procedures; availability and diversity of information materials; accessibility of services and materials; and overall user experience, including staff effectiveness. An additional open-ended question invited suggestions for improvement, which were analyzed thematically. The questionnaire domains were developed to reflect the local service context and align with commonly used evaluation dimensions in library and information science research.

The survey was administered from March to December 2024. Participation was voluntary, and each respondent was allowed to submit the survey only once. To interpret the mean scores obtained from the five-point Likert scale, satisfaction levels were categorized into three ranges following commonly used approaches in survey-based evaluation studies (Boone & Boone, 2012). Mean values between 1.00–2.33 were interpreted as low satisfaction, 2.34–3.67 as moderate satisfaction, and 3.68–5.00 as high satisfaction.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize satisfaction levels, graphical visualizations to illustrate rating distributions, and Pearson's correlation analysis to examine relationships between selected service factors and overall user satisfaction. The statistical analyses were conducted using Microsoft Excel. Qualitative responses obtained from the open-ended question were analyzed using an inductive thematic approach, which involved open coding and grouping responses into recurrent themes. The findings are presented at the aggregate level to ensure clarity and protect respondent confidentiality.

The survey did not collect sensitive personal identifiers beyond optional contact details. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were recorded and analyzed in de-identified form to ensure respondent confidentiality. As participation was based on voluntary self-selection, the sample may over-represent or under-represent certain faculties or student groups. Furthermore, the findings reflect user perceptions during the specific period of data collection and may not capture changes in user needs or service conditions over time. Since the study focuses exclusively on student users at a single campus, the generalization of results to other user groups or institutions should be approached with caution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic analysis of survey respondents provides insights into the composition of library users at Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University, Sri Lanka, and evaluates whether it accurately represents the total student population.

The responses were collected from students across the Faculty of Siddha Medicine (FSM), Faculty of Business and Communication Studies (FCBS) and Faculty of Applied Science (FAS) with 47.0% of survey respondents from FSM, 42.0% from FCBS, and 11.0% from FAS. A comparison with the total student population shows that FSM accounts for only 11.9% of the total university composition, FCBS represents 67.1%, and FAS constitutes 21.0%, indicating an overrepresentation of FSM respondents and an underrepresentation of FCBS students in the survey.

User perceptions of the library environment, facilities, and resources

User responses collected through the survey indicate varying levels of satisfaction across these service components. Overall, users expressed positive perceptions regarding the cleanliness of

the library environment and the support provided by library staff. However, moderate satisfaction was observed in relation to physical facilities such as seating space, furniture quality, and library size.

In contrast, the availability and currency of information materials received comparatively lower ratings. Respondents particularly indicated dissatisfaction with the availability of the latest academic materials and the diversity of the collection. These findings suggest that while the physical environment and staff services are generally perceived positively, improvements are needed in collection development and resource availability to better support the academic needs of users.

User satisfaction analysis

User satisfaction was analyzed across various service categories, including “library environment and facilities”, “library policies and operational procedures”, “information materials availability and diversity”, “accessibility of library services and materials”, and “overall experience”. The average satisfaction rating received for each category are shown in the figure 1 presents average user satisfaction ratings (1–5 scale) across five library service categories. “Overall library experience” and “library environment and facilities” achieved high satisfaction levels (above 3.5), while “accessibility of library services and materials,” “information materials availability and diversity,” and “library policies and operational procedures” were rated at moderate satisfaction levels (around 3.0). The average user satisfaction received from the analysis for each criterion under each library services are expressed in the figure 2.

Library environment and facilities

The study assessed user satisfaction with various environmental aspects of the library, including cleanliness, ambiance, size, and furniture quality. Among these, cleanliness received the highest

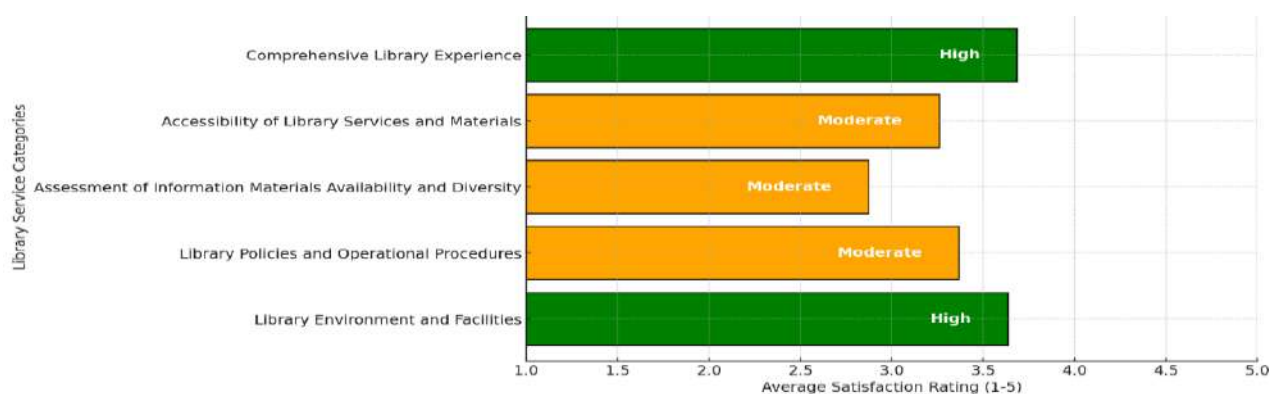


Figure 1: User satisfaction ratings across library services

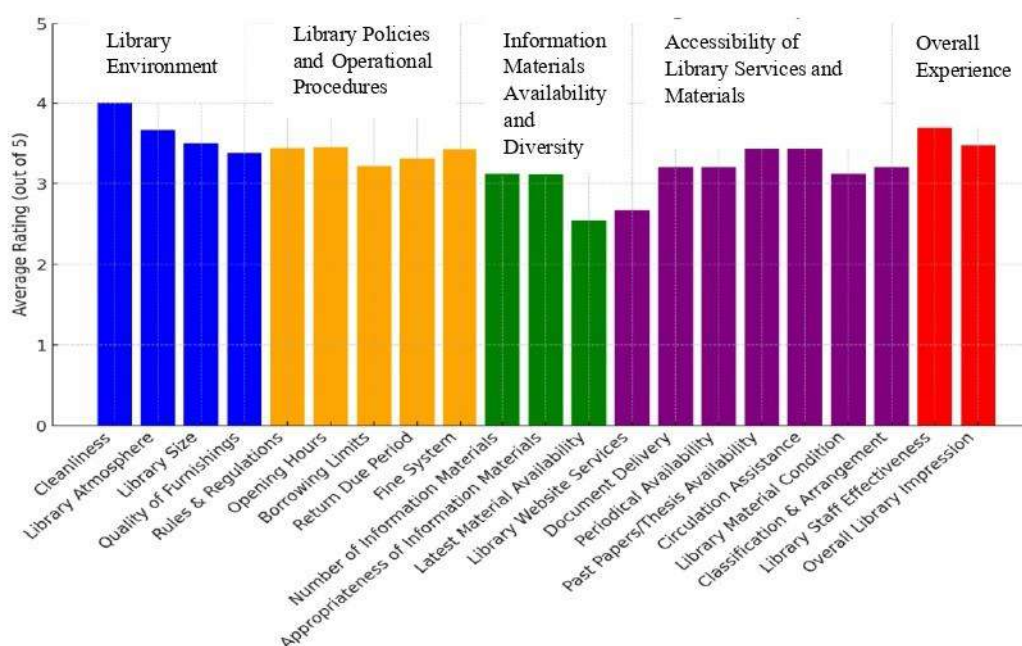


Figure 2: User satisfaction ratings across criteria mentioned under the li-

rating (4.24 ± 0.78), indicating a high level of user satisfaction with hygiene and maintenance, with relatively low variation among responses. The library atmosphere (3.66 ± 0.93) showed slightly more variability, suggesting differing opinions on comfort and ambiance. However, furnishings (3.38 ± 0.99) and library size (3.50 ± 1.21) received lower ratings, with a larger SD, indicating polarized opinions—some users were satisfied, while others found them inadequate. The results highlight that improving furniture and optimizing space utilization can enhance the overall library experience.

Library policies and operational procedures

User perceptions of library policies and regulations showed moderate satisfaction with some variation. Rules and regulations (3.44 ± 0.94), borrowing limits (3.22 ± 1.15), and the fine system (3.43 ± 1.00) had slightly higher SD values, indicating divergent opinions, some users found these policies reasonable, while others felt they were restrictive. Similarly, opening hours (3.45 ± 1.21) and return due periods (3.31 ± 0.95) showed moderate satisfaction with a range of responses. More flexible borrowing policies and extended hours correlate with higher user engagement (Demekaa et al., 2021). Future policy adjustments, such as extended borrowing privileges, fine waivers for special cases, or flexible operating hours during exam seasons, could enhance overall user satisfaction.

Information materials availability and diversity

The most significant concern in this study was the availability and relevance of information materials. Latest material availability (2.54 ± 1.16) had the lowest mean rating, with a high SD, confirming significant dissatisfaction and diverse expectations. Similarly, the number of available materials (3.12 ± 1.01) and their appropriateness (3.11 ± 1.01) were rated slightly above average but showed moderate variation, implying that while some users found resources sufficient, others struggled to find. These findings reinforce the need for regular collection updates, enhanced digital resources, and improved access to contemporary academic materials.

Library services and materials

Ratings for library services and accessibility varied notably. Website services received lower ratings (2.67 ± 1.15), highlighting usability issues and varying awareness levels. Conversely, past papers/theses availability (3.53 ± 0.94) and circulation assistance (3.50 ± 0.91) showed higher and more consistent satisfaction. The classification and arrangement of materials (3.20 ± 1.12) revealed mixed experiences. These findings align with studies indicating poor digital interfaces reduce user engagement (Meesad & Mingkhwan, 2024). Improving website navigation, search functionality, mobile responsiveness, and promoting digital resources could enhance user satisfaction and accessibility.

User experience

The overall library impression (3.48 ± 0.99) was above average but not outstanding, reflecting a mix of positive and neutral perceptions. Library staff effectiveness (3.89 ± 0.79) received the highest rating among service aspects, with low SD, indicating that most users consistently value staff support and assistance. However, since overall satisfaction is shaped by multiple factors, improvements in furniture, digital services, and resource availability could further elevate the user experience.

Correlation analysis in library satisfaction

Correlation analysis revealed strong relationships between library services and user satisfaction, highlighting key areas of strength and improvement. Notably, significant positive correlations were observed between overall satisfaction and document delivery services (0.74), library staff effectiveness (0.71), periodical services (0.72), and borrowing policies (0.82).

The strongest correlation (0.88) was found between the sufficiency and appropriateness of information materials, underscoring the importance of relevant resources over mere quantity. Additionally, a moderate correlation (0.80) between fine system satisfaction and overall satisfaction indicated that user-friendly fine structures positively influence user perceptions, whereas strict fine policies might negatively impact satisfaction.

Although primarily positive correlations were examined, potential negative influences, such as

overly restrictive borrowing policies should also be acknowledged, as these may discourage library use despite being necessary for effective resource management. These insights suggest that enhancing digital document delivery, improving staff responsiveness, maintaining relevant material collections, and adopting flexible borrowing and fine policies can significantly boost library user satisfaction.

Thematic analysis of open-ended user feedback

The thematic analysis was conducted based on qualitative feedback from open-ended survey responses. Several recurring themes emerged from user comments, offering deeper insights into user perceptions and suggestions for service enhancement.

Theme 1: Collection sufficiency and relevance

A dominant theme concerned the adequacy and currency of the library collection. Although some users noted improvements in acquiring new books and journals, many highlighted outdated materials and limited core textbooks.

Students requested recent research literature, specialized texts, and databases. Feedback indicates a need for continuous updates and user-driven acquisition to better match academic scope and timeliness.

Theme 2: Digital access and website Usability

Digital infrastructure was a major concern. Users reported difficulty navigating the website, slow search functions, and limited awareness of available e-resources. Many were unsure how to access past papers, theses, or databases. Students

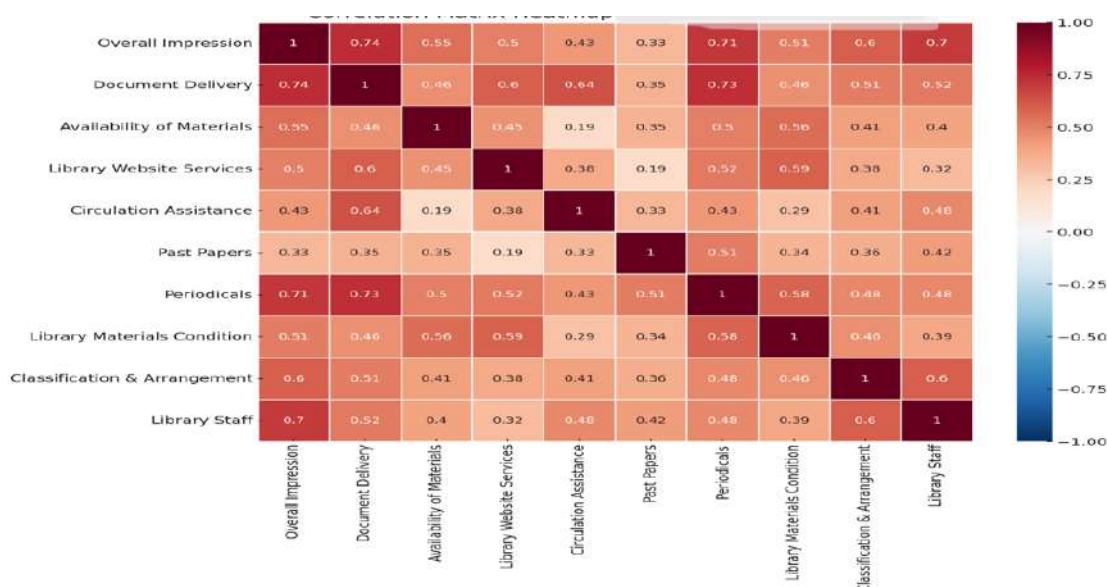


Figure 3: Correlation matrix heat map

requested easier online access, improved orientation, and website redesign, including better search tools, guides, training, and expanded remote database access.

Theme 3: Borrowing policies and fines

Borrowing policies were a concern. Students found loan periods too short, especially during exams and assignments, and viewed fines as overly strict, discouraging borrowing. Users requested flexible rules, grace periods, reduced penalties, alternative fine options, and longer loans for high-demand materials. Findings show borrowing policies significantly influence overall satisfaction and user experience.

Theme 4: Library environment and study space

Feedback on the physical environment was mixed. Users valued cleanliness and quiet study conditions but cited insufficient seating, poor ventilation, limited power outlets, and occasional noise. Suggestions included expanding seating, adding group and quiet study zones, improving accessibility and ergonomics, and upgrading infrastructure to better support comfort and academic work.

Theme 5: Staff support and service satisfaction

Users highly praised staff helpfulness, politeness, professionalism, and research support, marking staff service as a key strength. However, some reported limited staff availability during peak hours. Respondents recommended improved staffing schedules and ongoing professional training to maintain service quality, ensure consistent support, and enhance overall

Suggestions for future enhancements

Beyond feedback on existing services, users provided forward-looking suggestions to strengthen library operations.

Table 1 summarizes key user recommendations extracted from qualitative responses, alongside the library's current status and proposed actions. The findings indicate that while users appreciate existing services, they have articulated clear expectations for improvement. The strongest calls centered on updating and expanding both print and digital collections, improving online accessibility, and ensuring reliable connectivity. Enhancing environmental comfort, increasing study spaces, and maintaining consistent staff support were also emphasized as priorities for an improved user experience.

CONCLUSION

User satisfaction with library services at the Library, Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University, Sri Lanka was evaluated by this study, with a focus on key service dimensions including the library environment and facilities, policies and operational procedures, availability of information materials, accessibility of services, and overall user experience. By integrating quantitative survey results with qualitative user feedback, the study provides a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of how effectively the library supports academic and research activities.

Overall, the findings indicate that majority of the respondents stated positive perception of the

Table 1. Summary of user suggestions and proposed actions

User Suggestion	Current Status	Proposed Action
Extend borrowing duration	Limited loan period	Increase loan duration during examination periods
Improve digital access	Website offers limited e-resources	Upgrade digital collections and enhance online navigation
Adopt flexible fine policies	Strict fines on late returns	Introduce grace periods and alternative penalty options
Increase study spaces	Limited seating capacity	Expand seating areas and create study-friendly zones
Enhance website usability	Navigation issues and slow search function	Redesign website and strengthen search functionality
Expand access to periodicals and journals	Limited journal subscriptions	Secure access to high-impact journals and databases
Introduce a book request system	No formal mechanism for user requests	Implement a formal book recommendation/request system
Improve Wi-Fi connectivity	Unstable connection in some areas	Strengthen internet connectivity across the library premises
Increase staff availability during peak hours	Staff shortages during busy periods	Deploy additional staff during high-demand times

library, particularly with regard to staff effectiveness, cleanliness, and the overall learning environment. Library staff support emerged as a major strength, consistently receiving high satisfaction ratings and demonstrating its critical role in shaping positive user experiences. This reinforces existing literature that highlights staff responsiveness and professionalism as central determinants of user satisfaction in academic libraries.

However, the study also identified several areas requiring targeted improvement. Satisfaction with the availability, currency, and diversity of information materials, especially recent academic resources was comparatively low, underscoring a pressing need for systematic collection development and enhanced access to digital resources. Similarly, library policies related to borrowing limits, loan periods, fines, and opening hours received only moderate satisfaction ratings. Both the statistical correlations and qualitative feedback clearly indicate that flexible borrowing policies and user-friendly operational procedures significantly influence overall satisfaction and engagement.

Digital access and website usability emerged as another critical concern. Users reported challenges in navigating the library website, accessing electronic resources, and locating academic content efficiently. These findings suggest that improvements in digital infrastructure, user orientation, and online service design are essential to meet evolving user expectations in increasingly technology-driven academic environments.

Correlation analysis further revealed strong positive relationships between overall satisfaction and factors such as borrowing policies, document delivery services, staff effectiveness, and the relevance of information materials. Notably, the strongest association was observed between the appropriateness of available materials and overall satisfaction, highlighting that quality and relevance of resources matter more than quantity alone. These results emphasize the interconnected nature of library services and the need for holistic, user-centered service enhancement strategies.

The qualitative thematic analysis complemented the quantitative findings by providing deeper insights into user priorities and expectations. Users consistently called for updated collections, improved digital access, flexible policies, expanded study spaces, and continued staff support. Together, these themes point to the importance of aligning library

services with academic workflows, examination demands, and diverse learning styles.

Hence, while the Library, Trincomalee Campus, Sri Lanka demonstrates strong performance in staff services and physical maintenance, sustained improvements in collection development, digital services, policy flexibility, and space optimization are necessary to further enhance user satisfaction. The study underscores the value of regular user satisfaction assessments as a strategic tool for evidence-based decision-making and continuous quality improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, several strategic measures can enhance user satisfaction and service effectiveness at the Library, Trincomalee Campus.

1. Strengthen collection development and resource relevance: The availability and currency of information materials significantly influence user satisfaction. The library should prioritize updated core textbooks, subject-specific resources, and expanded electronic collections, while incorporating user-driven acquisition mechanisms.

2. Enhance digital access and website usability: Given the moderate satisfaction with digital services, improving website navigation, search functionality, and access to e-resources is essential. User orientation programmes and online guides can further improve awareness and effective utilization of digital services.

3. Introduce flexible library policies: Moderate satisfaction with borrowing limits, loan periods, and fines suggests the need for policy adjustments. Flexible borrowing arrangements, extended loan periods during examinations, and reasonable fine structures could enhance user engagement.

4. Improve physical environment and study spaces: Although cleanliness and ambiance were positively rated, improvements in seating capacity, furniture quality, ventilation, and power outlets are necessary. Expanding study spaces and creating designated quiet and collaborative areas would support diverse learning needs.

5. Sustain and strengthen staff support services: Library staff support emerged as a key strength. Ensuring adequate staff availability during peak hours and continuing professional development programmes will help maintain high service standards.

6. *Expand document delivery and interlibrary collaboration*: Enhancing document delivery services and strengthening collaboration with other university libraries can improve access to specialized resources not available locally.

7. *Institutionalize regular user satisfaction assessments*: Regular user surveys and feedback mechanisms should be institutionalized to monitor evolving user needs and support evidence-based service improvements.

Studies could extend this research by including all users such as academic and non-academic staff to provide a holistic evaluation of library services. Longitudinal studies may assess the impact of service improvements over time. Comparative studies across Sri Lankan regional campuses would also help identify structural disparities and inform national-level library development strategies.

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Eastern Journal of Library and Information Science (EJLIS)

eISSN: 3121-3375

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