

# Perspectives of Library Staff on Outreach Activities of Library, University of Moratuwa

<sup>1</sup>Upeksha Kodithuwakku and <sup>2</sup>Thushari M. Seneviratne

<sup>1,2</sup> Library, University of Moratuwa

<sup>1</sup>*upekshak@uom.lk*

<sup>2</sup>*thushari@lib.mrt.ac.lk*

## Abstract

Introducing outreach activities to an academic library is a novel experience to the university library staff. It's even considerable when the resource persons for such activities are managed by the library staff of the university. Aiming to serve the communities in the vicinity of University of Moratuwa, the Library launched several outreach activities. To review the outcome of these outreach activities, a survey was conducted with the library staff of University of Moratuwa as the target population. All the library staff members including academic, administrative and non-academic staff participated as the population. Data collection was done by using a semi-structured questionnaire. Forty-nine responses were received from the library staff members. Majority of the staff members had positive attitudes about the activities conducted by the Outreach Services Division. They felt the need of continuing such programmes as they had a positive effect on the helpful services offered for the learning environment of the children. The results revealed the positive commitment of library staff towards continuing outreach activities targeting lower age groups of the society for their future endeavors.

**Keywords:** Outreach Librarianship, Academic Libraries, Community and Libraries, Teaching and Learning, Community Services, Future Librarianship

## 1. Introduction

Outreach services division (OSD) of the library was established in the Library, University of Moratuwa in September 2013 to serve the

community, going an extra mile beyond the traditional role of libraries. The programme initiated two projects namely Child Development Programme-Sumudu Preshool, University of Moratuwa and Reading Camp for WP/PIL/Bodhiraja Vidyalaya. Later the OSD is looking forward to design more programmes to expand their services. Mathematical Skills Development Programme for WP/PIL/ Sri Rahula Maha Vidyalaya, Information Literacy Skills Development Programme for trainees attached to German Technical Institute (Kodithuwakku, Seneviratne & Kiriella, 2015) and Guest Lectures were also added if and necessary. A reading camp was organized to develop the reading habits among the younger generation. OSD expanded their services to enhance mathematical skills of upper school children as a further step forward. To facilitate the very own community within the university, information literacy programmes were conducted for the undergraduates and diploma holders.

Reviewing the literature on outreach, Dennis (2012) defined outreach as “reaching out to non-traditional library users, extending beyond borders of a physical library and promoting under-utilized or new library resources”. Focusing on the vision of the outreach division it was presented that,

Outreach activities of University of Moratuwa library are still at the inception and have to travel many more miles to reach its goals. Dedication and enthusiasm of staff and integration of staff with village inhabitants and community is essential in achieving the goals. Making a child walking through the gates of the university would be the ultimate goal of the outreach activity (Kodikara, Seneviratne and Punchihewa, 2013, p.21).

With the inception of the project it was revealed that all the staff members at the library were on sole expectation to offer their helpful hands to children in need where they were successful in building relationships with the community as well. Basler (2005) describes the community outreach projects at Medical University of South Carolina, which targeted largely on rural and minority populations. For example, Enterprise Community Programme was developed to address community problems in environmental health, and information was

provided via computers in community centers, schools, churches and public libraries. Also, Healthy Southern Carolina Gateway programme served to provide access to electronic health information for public libraries.

The literature on outreach activities around the globe reflects that the academic libraries have designed programmes for the various information seekers disregarding the age, location and educational backgrounds to disseminate new knowledge to them. To add up, University of Moratuwa recognizes the importance of being a premier university in providing education responsive to the national needs and expectations of industry and society in its strategic plan (University of Moratuwa, 2013). Developing the reading habits of school children as well enhancing information literacy skills of youth has been recognized as a national need. Therefore, it is worthwhile conducting outreach services as teaching skills.

However, nature and role of library workers is challenging in the age of internet era. To survive as library professionals in their own institutions, library staff has to equip themselves with new skills. Hence new learning, research and training abilities should be developed. The need has arisen to identify between national contribution as well as the institutional contribution. Most important thing is to survive as a library professional in this context. University of Moratuwa outreach services has a short history of three and a half years. At this juncture it is essential to highlight, review of activities carried out so far. Though perspectives of beneficiaries of outreach programmes have been surveyed by Kodithuwakku and Senevirathne (2016), a survey has not been conducted to measure the perspectives of library staff members. Success of these programmes entirely lay on the hands of the dedicated library staff where there participation is much needed in community activities.

## **2. Objectives**

- To identify the perspectives of library staff members about outreach activities
- To identify the types of activities which have most impact on resource persons
- To obtain an evaluation about the outreach activities of library staff members about outreach activities

## **3. Research Methodology**

The targeted population was the library staff members of University of Moratuwa. Present library staff members including academic, administrative, non-academic and contract staff categories were regarded as the population. While adopting the survey methodology, a semi-structured questionnaire was designed to obtain views from the staff of the library. Likert method of summated ratings was used to identify the perspectives of the library staff on outreach programmes. To measure the perspectives, strongly agree, agree, moderate, disagree and strongly disagree were the attitudes used for the twelve statements. Positive statements regarding outreach activities were assigned 5,4,3,2,1 and negative statements were assigned 1,2,3,4,5 respectively for the attitudes. Total score for each statement was calculated and then the average score value for each statement was calculated. The average score value per statement was 3.3.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

Out of 50 questionnaires distributed, forty-nine responses were received from the library staff members.

### **4.1 Respondents Profile**

Responses were received from six academic staff members, an administrative staff member and forty-two non-academic staff members belonging to various professional levels. The respondents'

categories of the library staff of the University of Moratuwa are shown in the Figure 1.

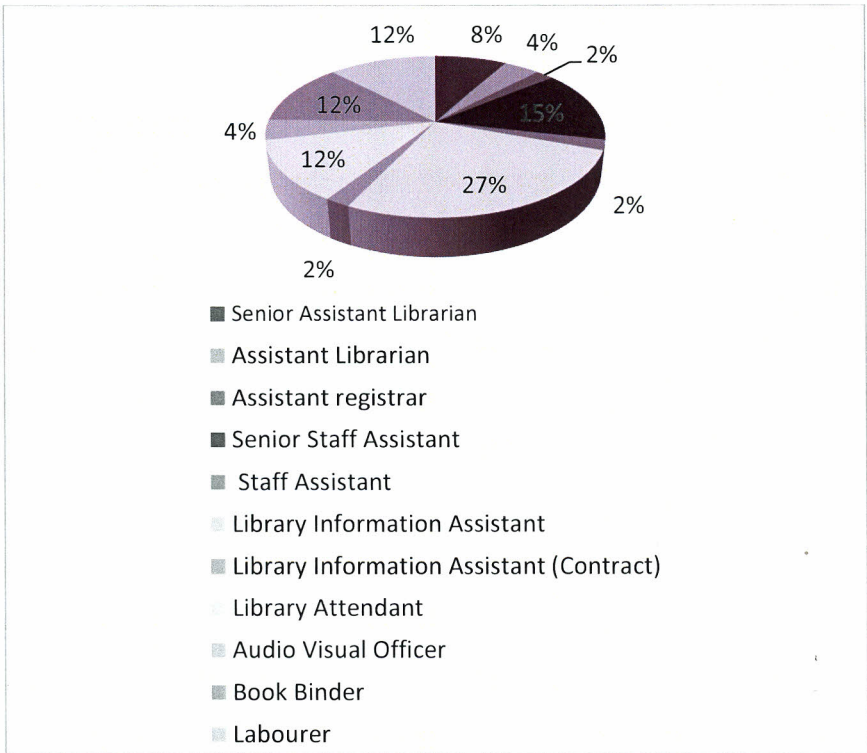


Figure 1: Respondents profile of the library staff of the University of Moratuwa

#### 4.2 Participation for outreach programmes

Majority (84%) of the library staff members have participated in the various programmes conducted by the outreach services division of the library of University of Moratuwa. Majority (70%) of the library staff had participated as resource persons for the outreach programmes. Twenty three percent of staff had been involved in the outreach activities of photocopy, binding. Those who supported in organizing outreach activities remain 7%.

### **4.3 Perspectives about the Outreach Activities**

Personal response of each library staff member depicts that majority (65%) of them prefer the programmes conducted by outreach services division of the library.

Library staff perceived that 49% agree and 45% having moderate views about the activities as a whole. Further 46% of the respondents think that the university staff agrees with activities.

### **4.4 Participation for the Programmes**

Majority (42%) of the library staff had participated in the child development programme conducted for the Sumudu pre-school of the University of Moratuwa. Participation for the reading camp (29%) conducted for Bodhiraja Vidyalaya, Katubedda was the second highest. The participation for the Mathematical skills development programme which was newly initiated received 11%.

### **4.5 Preference of Programmes**

Out of the activities conducted by the outreach services division, Mathematical skills development programme received the most attention and the staff preferred Child development programme conducted for Sumudu pre-school as well. The preferences of staff members are figured out in Figure 2.

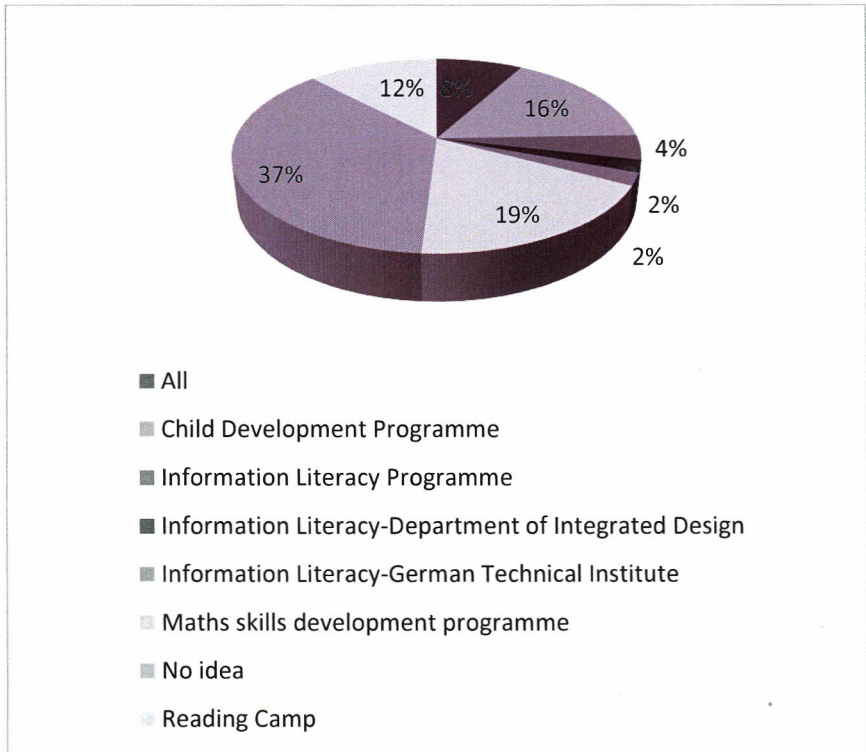


Figure 2: Preference of programmes by the library staff

#### 4.6 Feedback about outreach programmes

Table 1 brings out the summary of the feedback about perspectives of programmes by library staff members who participated or viewed these programmes and their remarks implied that the majority showed their awareness and positive preference for the activities. As positive responses, most members stated that they agree on them and they showed their disagreement towards negative responses. The comments received by the library from the university were highly appreciative (47.7%) by the library staff. At the same time they were very content about providing their service voluntarily towards the national contribution (47.6%). Staff members showed their opponent views (60.9%) on the statement on regarding that the being an academic library it should not design community projects. They were not of the view that the university resources were wasted on these projects (60%). Total agreement was shown (34.8%) for the exemplary nature of the

library for other academic libraries to create new programmes for the community. They showed their total disagreement (24.3%) on the response, which indicated that people, could be neglecting their office work by participating in these sessions.

Table 1: Feedback of Staff members

No.	Response	Totally Agree	Agree	Moderate	Disagree	Totally Disagree	Total
1	A platform for explicit my hidden talents	23.5	35.2	32.3	5.88	2.94	34
2	An opportunity to build relationships with the community	16.2	45.9	35.1	2.7	16.2	37
3	Targeted objectives couldn't be achieved	4.8	7.3	29.2	39	19.5	41
4	Attention received by the library from University is commended	29.5	47.7	18.1	4.54	-	44
5	Extra Burden amidst library work	2.3	2.3	28.5	47.6	19	42
6	Made mind free from routine library work	15	35	35	12.5	2.5	40
7	Wastage of University resources	-	5	20	60	15	40
8	Time that could be spared for the development of library got wasted	-	5.4	27	48.6	18.9	37
9	An example for all libraries	34.8	46.5	16.2	2.32	-	43
10	These programmes are not suitable for an academic library	-	4.8	17	60.9	17	41
11	An opportunity for work neglecters	-	4.8	19.5	51.2	24.3	41
12	Lucky to render service for a national purpose	23.8	47.6	23.8	4.76	-	42



#### **4.7 Continuation of Programmes**

From the results of survey, it was evident that the majority (80%) of respondents expected these programmes to be continued. None of the staff member felt that these kinds of programmes should be put to an end.

The library staff members were of the view that the programmes conducted by the library should be notified to the public through facebook, University of Moratuwa newsletter etc.

#### **4.8 Expectations for future**

The library staff members stated their expectations for future of the outreach service programmes in a very positive manner. Their valuable comments are highly appreciated by the outreach services division to design the programme structure for the years ahead. By highlighting the importance of such activities to the University and University Grants Commission, one believes that this division will be able to create more fruitful programmes. At the same time, requesting services from the other divisions of the university, they think that library will get helpful hands. According to their views, by connecting the institutions around the University premises the community services can be widely spread to the society and collaborations with other academic libraries will benefit the person in need. The staff members mentioned that they eagerly participated in these programmes and they have gained strength to engage in more programmes in future. The library staff members believe that the authorities should identify their capability on designing such programmes. They feel that a training should be given to the library staff before they conduct the sessions and all library staff should be requested to participate in any programme as the intention of such programme is to provide knowledge, virtues and habits to the community. The respondents feel that the university staff and undergraduates should also be the beneficiaries where quarterly a programme should be designed for the students by the library. They wish that a programme will be designed with entertainment to facilitate school children in a rural area in future.

Some pointed out that it is difficult to participate in such community activities when there is a heavy workload in the library.

Some believe that certain institutions which receive guidance from OSD do not positively consider the services rendered by the outreach services division and their collaboration is lesser to initiate programmes in their vicinities. Respondents are in a mind that the community services are a complicated process than these programmes and it is better if they can provide drinking water facility to a village or a school.

## **5. Conclusion**

As a family, irrespective of their worker categories and divisions University of Moratuwa library staff members participated in outreach programmes without hesitation. Amidst the daily routine work they got an opportunity to serve both inner and outer communities to show their hidden talents and skills. OSD designed a platform for the silent multi-talented persons where they were able to explicit their skills as resource persons or technical providers. At the same time, staff member was the programme designer and they were keenly preparing for the activity even two or three before. Not only the staff members of the library but other academic and non-academic members of university have also participated in special activities conducted by the OSD.

One can feel that the OSD explode the walls of traditional academic library and paved their way forward to rural community with the support of energetic staff to volunteer these multi tasks. The University of Moratuwa library has become an exemplary to the other academic libraries to initiate outreach activities to serve their vicinities. A mutual relationship has been growing up day by day between the staff members by sharing their knowledge and skills to others. To avoid burden of workload, to stage hidden talents, to build relationships with various communities the outreach services conducted by the University of Moratuwa has been highly praised by the staff members of the library and they are looking forward to participate in more

programmes in future to render their supportive services to a national career.

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