The Social role and the responsibilities of Public Libraries and Librarians in Transforming Society

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Abstract

Transforming society essentially requires a change in social role and responsibilities of Public libraries and librarians. They need to deviate from their traditional roles, reach out to society with socially inclusive community programmes to address the issues related to education, literacy, culture, health and social wellbeing. These programmes will develop lifelong learning skills in the community making users confident and technically savvy to face the ever-increasing social challenges. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate and discuss the changing social role and the responsibilities of Sri Lankan Public librarians in transforming society in the context of rapid and ever-changing nature of Information Communication Technologies, unprecedented situations and the impact from social media. The automation of Public libraries has entrusted the librarian with additional responsibilities of updating the technological skills of the diverse community. Moreover, the librarian's reach out to the disadvantaged groups with appropriate Community Outreach Programmes, utilising social networking media. The changing social role of librarianship with new responsibilities are discussed through library websites, literature reviews, interviews, questionnaire methods and research studies completed by LIS professionals on relevant topics. The findings reveal that Public libraries make a valuable contribution to the user community by connecting users with ICT to pursue their educational and social goals. Finally, it suggests that libraries need to contribute with new Community programmes using the latest technology to build up the necessary resilience in the community against the increasing unprecedented threats such as the recent CoviD 19.It must be emphasized that the government and relevant information authorities need to support the libraries financially and professionally in achieving the intended goals during the transformation.

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Introduction

Transforming society essentially requires a change in social role and responsibilities of Public libraries and librarians. They need to deviate from their traditional roles, reach out to society with socially inclusive community programmes for education, literacy, culture and health related issues (Kleemola,2019). These programmes will develop lifelong learning skills in the community making users confident and technically savvy to face the current challenges and more in time to come.

Public Libraries and Librarians in Sri Lanka support the transformation of society by utilizing Digital Library resources and Services. Librarians in the Public library sector in Sri Lanka contribute enormously to the above objective in a variety of ways using their professional expertise and experience. The enhanced social role of the public librarian has given more responsibility as mentor; guide and instructor during the transformation in helping users access and use technology effectively. This is vital as all users are not in the same literacy level and equally technically savvy when accessing digital resources.

Libraries set the foundation for lifelong learning through its vital social role by providing digital resources and services. It is also the local center for free information on the basis of equality of access `for all users`. This principle is expressed and emphasized in the public library manifesto (IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 1994).

Developing lifelong learners is an important role of the Public libraries and librarians as it contributes to the necessary literacy changes required for the intended transformation of society. Librarians as mediators of information play an important role by educating and instructing users with access to digital resources in a variety of disciplines and formats enabling them to achieve higher levels of literacy.

Libraries connect communities with reading engagement programmes, author events, book box projects and reading competitions making libraries as popular community centers for educational, social and cultural engagement. Research by Kleemola reveals the impact of literary art activities on children's social wellbeing. (2019). Moreover, with the enhancement of digital resources and services, the functions and facilities for the users can be extended beyond the wall of the library premises. (kleemola,2019).

The outreach librarians role serves socially inclusive and diverse community programmes for low literate, illiterate and economically disadvantaged groups of people keeping in line with core values of libraries exhibiting equal, equitable and fair access to information for all. This has been stated in IFLA/UNESCO Public Manifesto 1994 (https://www.ifla.org). In addition to education, literacy and culture, another new aspect has surfaced now. That is to empower the community to face the challenges related to unprecedented health issues. Transformation of society is a continuous process and the roles of libraries and librarians are becoming more vital and complex due to the rapid and ever changing social and technological environment. This inevitable change in society brings about a lot of other repercussions and challenges such as the change in information seeking behaviour and the varying high demand from the users. Not only that, using the latest remote ICT technology, libraries and librarians need to contribute to build up the necessary resilience in the community against the increasing unprecedented threats. A classic example is the unprecedented CoviD-19 pandemic.

Apparently, It has been observed that the CoviD-19 Lockdown has brought in many challenges to the community. This along with the other unprecedented threats has opened-up many opportunities for librarians to showcase their skills and services by formulating new community programmes to support remote learning. Librarians as leaders in the information profession can bring in new and innovative ideas such as virtual book clubs for both children and young adults while building new programmes highlighting how to stop spreading the pandemic in the community in order to safeguard the elderly community who are the most vulnerable group in society.

Kleemola has emphasized the importance of social readiness for promoting health and welfare for the prevention of social health issues (2019). The librarian's contribution during the challenging times ahead is vital for the wellbeing of educational, social (including health) and cultural development of the community. This is what is expected from the librarians in transforming the society for the betterment.

Therefore, the libraries and professional librarians need to get ready to take up the said challenges and more in time to come.

Objectives of the study

The purpose of this paper is to discuss in detail the social role and the responsibilities of Sri Lankan Public librarians in transforming society in the context of rapid and ever-changing nature of ICT, unprecedented situations and changes in social media.

This is done by,

1. Identifying the present social role performed by Public Librarians.
2. Evaluating how well the librarian satisfies the user needs(outcome) utilizing the new digital resources in changing ICT environment along with the impact from social media.
3. Suggesting some necessary changes in the social role and responsibilities of Librarians with due focus on core values of libraries and the effects of unprecedented social issues and health issues.
4. Comments on how the librarian should fit-in to the social role in the context of transforming society.

In order to achieve the objectives, the following research methods were adopted which includes collecting information through websites, observations, literature reviews, interviews, survey questionnaire methods and through related studies on specific topics done by LIS professionals (Library and Information Science) and relevant administrators.

Methodology of the study

The following methods have been used to collect data, highlighting the techniques used for the analysis in each case.

Data collection method

This paper used the data collected from primary and secondary sources mainly using respective websites of each individual public library and related research articles by LIS professionals on specific topics.

In general, the methods used to examine / analyse the `changing social role` of the librarian comprise of evaluations done through observations of respective websites of Colombo Municipal Council (Colombo Public Library Department), Colombo Public library Catalog, Guwanpura Mobile Library, National Library and Documentation Services board, Gampaha

Public library, Balangoda Public library-e library managed by Balangoda Urban Council and Jaffna Municipal Council.

Moreover, the following paragraphs show how the analysis was simplified by breaking down specifically on each public library and on articles on specific topics by LIS professionals. `Findings` and a brief `analysis` of each library/on LIS articles were included together with the name of the related library as below.

Gampaha Public Library:

By examining the Gampaha Public Library website, accessed via Gampaha Municipal council.

Colombo Public Library:

Primarily, by examining the website of Colombo municipal council and Colombo public library catalogue. (OPAC)

Balangoda Public Library:

By examining public library, e-Library accessing through the Balangoda urban council.

Guwanpura mobile Library:

By accessing through the website of Colombo public library (as an extended service) or alternatively accessing Guwanpura mobile library.

Jaffna Public Library: By examining a comprehensive study of the current status of Jaffna Public libraries. This research study used semi-structured interviews as a research instrument, conducted with Library and Information professionals, and administrators of local authorities with observations and data collected from secondary sources. (Chandrasekar, 2013).

This research combination consists of face- to- face encounters with observations to assess the social role of the librarian.

National Library and Documentation Board(NLDSB): examined by accessing through website (https://www.natlib.lk)

Article on `Bibliotherapy`: By examining a research -study done on `Bibliotherapy` comprising library professionals and administrators from Jaffna Public libraries.
 (Arulanantham, Navaneethakrishnan,2014).

Article on `empowerment of women in society`

By examining a study based on a literature review, interviews and questionnaire methods. This research combination was used to further evaluate the `change` in social role (Ranaweera,2013).

Results, findings and Discussion

Public libraries in Colombo, Gampaha, Balangoda and Jaffna have been considered for the analysis using their respective websites along with other related research studies by LIS professionals. The Coordination, Collaboration and Training functions of National Library and Documentation services Board in supporting Public libraries have also been considered. During the discussion,

1. Attention will be given to the existing educational initiatives, cultural engagement and current outreach community programmes conducted by the above Public libraries and the difficulties when practically implementing them. Also, intended to review the long-term impact through these social & outreach community programmes in transforming society with due focus to the core values of libraries.
2. Methodologies mentioned above were used to examine, discuss and emphasise the new and important aspects of the study.
3. This study will further extend its focus to see how effectively the libraries and librarians can support the society to take care of unprecedented health issues like CoviD-19 and give necessary attitude changes & moral support for librarians to implement programmes such as Empowering women and concept of `Bibliotherapy`
4. Also, social role and responsibilities of libraries and librarians will be examined through how they reach out to the community with the respective community programmes to achieve their goals. In doing so, resources and services of the resource-rich libraries as well as resource-less libraries have been selected and cited with specific examples of typical community programmes.

The highlighted outreach programmes that are being conducted by public libraries and librarians in Sri lanka are still in early stages (meaning the outcomes are at various levels). Most of them have not been analyzed or /covered by research papers through LIS professionals. Hence, sufficient statistics are not available yet to conclude on the outcome. Therefore, at this point in time, relevant statistics would not be considered for each and every case.

Examining the Libraries and Librarians role in Gampaha Public Library

Gampaha Library which is functioning under Gampaha Municipal Council manages a considerably large collection in Sinhala and English languages. This Library has been recognized by the National Library as a first-grade library since 2011. (www.gampaha.mc.gov.lk)

The mission statement endorses the library's purpose which is to develop the skills, attitude and knowledge of the community through preserving the cultural heritage and knowledge through the library's digital collection. Library System comprises of an `automated lending system` that promotes on-line searching, e-learning facilities, services and resources while offering a range of curriculum related programs on-line for each grade in the school. The Library also, offers an attractive array of both national and international magazines in collaboration via digital App provided by Colombo public Library. The library website is the Libraries 'virtual space' connecting communities together to enhance social wellbeing aspects like education, literacy, culture and health related issues.

Findings from Gampaha Library:

These facilities enable member users to view and work from home leisurely. `Book a librarian service` has been built-in to the library system to respond to user queries during unprecedented situations (via email and telephone). Librarians also can get connected with new users when help is required in training and guiding `remote learning process`. Currently, access to this facility is limited and confined only to members in Gampaha library website through Face Book (FB).

Analysis

The above shows how the librarian`s role could support the users on remote learning programmes while the libraries provide the related digital resources as technological providers.

Also, it well-illustrates how the traditional role of the librarians shall be expanded to new social role and how they could contribute preparing the users and the community for current

global trends and challenges affecting the community worldwide. The assistance provided through social media FB should also be noticed.

Examining the role of the Colombo Public Library and the contribution of the librarian(s)

Colombo Public Library Department functions under the Colombo Municipal Council. This library manages the largest single collection of library resources in languages of Sinhala, Tamil and English. The library has been converted to a digital library in 2017.There are about almost 200,000 registered readers and 400-500 daily visitors to get these services. The main branch is centralized with 11 branches under the library department but located at various locations in the suburbs of Colombo. (https://www.colombo.mc.govt.lk)

The Public library website (https://www.colombo.mc.govt.lk) gives access to the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) for users. Free Wi-Fi with access to digital resources readily available to the library members with the support of the librarian if necessary.

Findings on Main section of Colombo Public Library

This library organizes activities which make the place as a `community center` for public including children and young learners.

OPAC (online Public Access Catalog) facility in the library opens up the opportunity for the users to fulfill their resource searching requirements. Also, through OPAC login, members can search the library catalogue to make requests, reserve and renew resources for all their information needs. Librarians support in guiding new users to access digital resources via OPAC.

Children's Section

This is well organized, represents a trilingual collection, displayed with attractive Disney characters and pictures to attract children to come and read. This `attractive` reading room is a catalyst to motivate children in reading engagement.

Small Public libraries located inside the Community centers in suburbs of Colombo

Small Public libraries operate in community centers and situated within a short distance to local municipal housing schemes. This is an advantage for the multicultural and multilingual

society, especially for those who cannot afford the transport cost while it provides easy access to the users in the near vicinity of the library.

Mobile Services to underserved settlements

The mobile library service and the `book box project` run by Colombo Public Library serves the underprivileged and underserved children in collaboration with UNICEF. (https://www.colombo.mc.gov.lk)

This is a classic example of deviating from traditional role and showcasing new role by the librarian.

Mobile Library unit serving Guwanpura community run by Colombo public library

A mobile library service is provided to Guwanpura married quarters Complex under the supervision of the Chief Librarian of the Colombo Public Library. The concept and the event coordination is initiated by a personnel from SLAF Station Colombo. The users are the residents that include children and families of the complex.(www.airforce.lk),

Guwanpura mobile unit

Observing the images of the website gives an attractive site of a lending library from an air-conditioned coach converted to a mobile library unit that fulfills the reading and recreational needs of both children and adults.

Outreach librarian(s) activities

Special library service operates to children in underserved settlements within Colombo city limits. (https://www.colombo.mc.govt.lk)

Analysis

Main library Section

This library is a classic example of deviating from traditional role. The valuable `change`in the social role utilizing the resources and services available at the library. This provides the opportunity to transfer the specialized skills, knowledge and attributes of the librarian to the user community. The librarian`s contribution in transferring skills to users help to improve their skills and attributes in their lifelong learning journey. Webb says, in the new library

concept, library has become a `space` for homework and offering an opportunity to learn informally motivating the younger learners to work hard (2010).

Children`s section

Children's programmes include literacy competitions, art and photography competitions and a children's book club to share the views/reviews about books and popular authors through interactive discussions and related activities to enhance their reading levels that support their curriculum and recreational needs. Librarians are the organizers of such events.

Cultivating reading habits among children reminds of the proverb `Reading makes a complete man` indicates how reading helps to connect prior knowledge which will be developed into new creations and innovative ideas with time. This is exactly the purpose of reading engagement programs with children. All these reading programmes and activities are a classic example to prove that the `library is an extension of the classroom`.

Mobile Services to underserved settlements

The mobile library offers services for children in underserved settlements who find it difficult to visit the library such as for those in prisons, Sunday schools and housing complexes.

Sri Lanka needs more Public Libraries and more mobile library units to reach out to the rural and underserved communities covering the entire population in Sri Lanka. This has been stated by former president of Sri Lanka Library Association. (Amarasiri,2010)

Guwanpura mobile unit

This is an example of a great community engagement project that truly benefit society while enhancing the literacy levels of all which is vital to make them independent in their lifelong learning.

The concept of using mobile library units is to reach out to people and kids (mostly who are not active users) has been a common practice as observed in different overseas communities.

This has been stated by Kleemola as an important social activity performed by out-reach librarians to promote social goals. (Kleemola,2019)

Comments

In general, the multifunctional community services provided by the Colombo public library are commendable and the library and the librarians contribute enormously for the transformation of society in a variety of ways.

Balangoda Public library and newly established e-library services

This is examined through the website of the Balangoda urban council.   .
(http://www.balangoda.uc.gov.lk) This is a classic `model` for e-library. It is the first of its kind in Sri Lanka, initiated and funded by Balangoda municipal council.

According to Balasuriya this is a useful digital service for the community. (n.d.)

Findings

The specialty with this library is, it is equipped with multimedia technology equipment for ultra-speed information searching and retrieving. It is a `paperless` environment where the requested information is presented to the user on the screen and the users are given the option to hear through audio speakers if the users wish to do so. Among the other facilities are digital encyclopedias, computer aided teaching programmes with audio visual techniques even with the corrected answers and explanation but not limited to the above.
(http://www.balangoda.uc.gov.lk)

Analysis

This kind of library facility could be utilized to provide new resources and services to the members. The new features are,e-books & e-audio books, Access to electronic encyclopedias, educational documentaries, literary art activities, drama & automated educational programs Additionally, conducting workshops via internet to introduce basic literacy skills is another activity.

This facility could be utilized and can be extended to relate to people with regard to social and health related programmes conducted by council like dengi-combatting, garbage disposal, CoviD19 control etc.
(Kleemola indicates public librarians has a key role to play in promoting health and welfare preventing social problems in the development of new operating practices)
According to Balasooriya, this e-library provides an outstanding service to the public in Balangoda region. (n.d.)

Comments

The services offered by the Balangoda library is setting a good example to the other provincial councils in the country and indicates the kind of impact a library can make in transforming the society using advanced digital technology.

Examining Public libraries and reading centers in Jaffna

It is done and compiled through a study by Chandrasekar. (2013)

It reflects basically a semi structured interview with LIS professionals and administrators of local authorities, with observation methods while using data available from secondary sources.

The following Public libraries are functioning in Jaffna district.

1. Jaffna Public library (managed by Municipal council)
2. Community center libraries managed by the local bodies and communities. (Chandrasekar, 2013)

Findings

It is Interesting to note that, in Jaffna Public Library, the member community has started using remote access via the internet to access the library collection. This has reduced the number of users visiting the library.

Analysis

Probably, the low number of visitors to the library would have been due to the increased level of digital literacy among the Jaffna user community. The cause would have been due to the rapid changes in information communication technology.

This has given access to library catalog on the internet 24/7. Also, the remote access has increased the accessibility to the digital resources while improving the quality of service. (Munchen Saur K.G., 2001).

Community center libraries in rural areas of Jaffna district

These community center libraries operate as reading centers serving the purposes of advancement of knowledge and to use as places to promote recreational reading and social wellbeing.(chandrasekar,2013). These libraries and reading centers were set up as part of the recovery programme in Jaffna (post war era).

Findings

It is encouraging to note about the setting up of children's sections to promote the reading habits among children and to create a reading culture in society. The libraries cater to a big reading population ranging from children to adults covering the entire population in Jaffna.

Apart from that, it expands their knowledge and experience to gain the skills to become independent and confident learners later in life.

The importance of encouraging children to become regular users of the library from an early age helps them to build up the reading habit. (Saur Munchen K.G.,2001).

Analysis

It is encouraging to note that even after a 30year war torn period, the community in Jaffna is recovering fast and has come back to normal in their day to day life due the dedication and commitment of the librarians and work by central government and local government bodies (Chandrasekar, 2013)

The study highlights how the community centers provide necessary facilities to fulfill the needs and interests of the rural community in spending their leisure time usefully. (Chandrasekar says as cited in Jaffna District Secretariat, 2012). This has an impact on the quality of life of rural population.

The positive attitude shown by the people in Jaffna through participation in reading activities is a good example to prove the impact of the contribution made by the Public libraries in transforming society. Apart from that, it expands their knowledge and experience making them culturally aware of the society around them while building harmonious relationships between diverse cultures. This is a good example for `awakening the nation 'through a program driven by the libraries and librarians. Most importantly, the positive attitude shown by the people is a favorable sign supporting the government's reconciliation process for the betterment of the entire nation.

The concept of library `consortia` seems to be working well in Jaffna district which was set up with minimum capital to share pooled library resources within a larger geographical area (Chandrasekar,2013). Consequently, people are becoming more literate, expanding their knowledge and experience through shared learning opportunities among diverse cultures. This has created a positive attitude among a larger community living over a wider geographical area supporting the reconciliation idea by the Sri Lankan government.

According to Saur, resource & expertise sharing through participation in a regional network greatly enhance the services to the community (2001).

Services by National Library and Documentation Services Board (NLDSB)

NLDSB functions under the ministry of education and cultural affairs.

NLDSB plays a major role in identifying the training needs of different kinds of libraries and information professionals in Sri Lanka by initiating training programmes, seminars, workshops and lectures for librarians in collaboration with national and provincial level institutions and organizations including Sri Lanka Library Association (SLLA). (https://www.natlib.lk)

Findings

Continuous renewing the expertise and skills is critical as the librarians need to perform a multidisciplinary role as guide, instructor and navigator when interacting with the user community. NLDSB supports with necessary skill updating, and experience which is vital for Public librarians in this `information age` with ever changing ICT.

Analysis

Therefore, the service by the NLDSB is important for continuous enhancement of librarian`s skills and to update the knowledge to face the challenges/pressures due to the high user demand and rapid changes in information communication technology.

Examining the possibilities of training Librarian as a Bibliotherapist

It is a timely need which has a great potential to bring solace and comfort for the war affected Jaffna community. (Arulanantham, Navaneethakrishnan, 2013).

This has been researched by two professional librarians from Jaffna University which is encouraging for the war affected community who needs the care and attention of kind people. The research suggests that the librarian is ideal for this task as librarians reach out to the community and could listen to people's queries with empathy.

Findings

Statistics reveal that more than 44,603(7% of the total population) seek help in solving personal problems or for psychiatric therapy. According to RDHS records there are 2629 diagnosed psychiatric patients and 304 affected by gender-based violence. (statistical Hand book of RDHS,2010, cited in Arulanantham & Navaneethakrishnan (2014).

The study suggests very impressive programmes as a means of therapy, which includes creative programmes, reading related interactive sessions including poetry, art, and drama and craft activities for users. It is a humanitarian and compassionate service which will help the mentally disturbed community while transforming the society back to normal.

Kleemola (2019) in a research study highlights the importance of `responding to current societal challenges and needs of people requiring special assistance using literacy art and creative activities`.

Analysis

Compassionate Librarians can reach out to the affected community through the community programmes, listen to the affected people with empathy to make this programme a reality.

Librarians know that Reading for pleasure has positive impacts on the wellbeing of all in the society.

Bibliotherapy, has been identified as an approach that could better address emotional, behavioural and social concerns while making the users confident in their decision making process. (Noordin et al.,2015)

According to Summerfield, there is strong evidence that reading for pleasure can increase empathy, improve relationships with others, reduce the symptoms of depression and improvewellbeing". (As cited in The Reading Agency, 2015).

Study on empowering women in society

Examining a study based on a research study which comprises of a literature review, interview and questionnaire by Ranaweera (2013) brings out the role of the Public librarian in achieving gender equity and equality in the society indicating the librarian`s dedicated role which helps to reduce gender disparity between men and women.

The study highlights the public librarian`s role in society in educating and empowering women through social and cultural programmes which is essential for the wellbeing of families and societies as women are directly involved in educating their own families.

Findings

Implementing more community programs of this nature for women would improve the social status of women and their families. (Ranaweera, 2013)

Analysis

This can further reduce gender-based violence in society.

The famous proverb "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." (Wallace,W.R.) conveys the message about the strong influence that women can have on the wellbeing of their families and thereby for the wellbeing of the future generations.

Other practical issues associated with the changes in role and responsibilities:

Challenges faced by Public Librarians

- These are due to the diversity of user community, the demands coming from different groups with a range of literacy levels and interests, usage of different social media networks.

- Libraries are becoming under-resourced due to the high demand in ICT based resources. Infrastructure development is happening at a slow pace than anticipated.

- Due to the varying demands, Librarians need skill updating to work well under pressure due to the above challenges.

Conclusion

The study above reveals the following:

- In general, the social role of the public librarian is beneficial to the society today. Currently, libraries are functioning satisfactorily, and services are delivered to the society satisfactorily but still there is room for improvement.

- Some of the Sri Lankan public libraries are still in their early stages of ICT deployment and associated digital resource development. As a result, some libraries are found not adequately staffed, not well-resourced or not able to provide digital resources and services to meet the increasing user demand.

- Despite the above difficulties, the public librarian's current social role/services have made it possible to maintain social participation of the users through the ICT related activities and services in various exciting ways. Effort made is appreciable.

  Sharing knowledge, connecting community together via Face Book, 'book a librarian service' etc. offered online as shown in the study are good examples.

  Children and young adults seem to have utilized the services of the libraries to enhance their Lifelong- Learning due to the librarian`s effective contribution.

  According to Table 6 of Computer Literacy Statistics 2019, Young youths (64.9%) aged 15-19 is highest among all age groups.

  (https://www.statistics.govt.lk)

  Exploring the "use of application of FB among Malaysian academic libraries has proven to provide better practices using social networking sites for education. This technique has been used for better communication purposes between students and librarians. This has been indicated in a research article by Kodikara, Seneviratna & Punchihewa as cited in Ayu et al.,(2011).

- Due to continuous changes in Social and digital environment, many new challenges and changes to library resources, services and functions have imerged. Global ICT changes, varying user-demand, unprecedented issues, the impact from Social media and diversity of user community with a range of literacy levels and interests are a few of them.

- The said complex situation has demanded a change in social role and responsibilities of the librarians to initiate more On-line and out-reach programmes to enhance social participation and community involvement with users. Libraries have leaned towards various activities and community engagement programmes to manage these changing situations.

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- Both Public libraries (provider) & Librarians (mediators/Navigators/instructors/guide) are responsible to transfer skills and knowledge to the users guiding them by connecting community via various On-line & out-reach programmes.

  Libraries play an increasingly important role as technology providers according to American Library Association. (2021).

  Majority of public libraries, 67% say that they are the only free places for providing free computer and internet access for the communities. (ALA 2021).

In order to make an effective contribution in transformation of society, it is required to deviate from the traditional role and formulate new roles and responsibilities for the librarians.

- Regarding the concept of `consortia' exercised well in Jaffna, People are becoming more literate, expanding their knowledge and experience through shared learning opportunities among diverse cultures. This has created a positive attitude among a larger community living over a wider geographical area supporting the reconciliation idea by the Sri Lankan government. This is a great concept which can be adopted by the other districts of Sri Lanka.

- Librarians are in a unique position to play a strong role as Bibliotherapists in the lives of people due to the resources and relationship with the community. (Noordin et al.,2015) Therefore, it is an effective tool for transforming society for health and wellbeing.

Suggestions to improve Role and Responsibilities (Justification is also highlighted)

1. Training courses on digital literacy needs to be conducted by the libraries free for both young girls and women in urban and rural suburbs.
   Immediate start is recommended in the areas where internet facility is currently available. This will ensure women and young girls will enable to get access to higher and tertiary education. This would support the intended transformation of society for a better future by empowering women and young girls.

   According to Census and Statistics Department issue (2019), computer literacy among females (28.9%) is lower than that of males (32.9%) which needs an improvement across all age levels and educational levels.(https://www.statistics.govt.lk)

2. New Programmes(on-line and in house)to be introduced by the library aiming at unlocking the potential of school dropouts. This can be achieved through introducing and developing digital resources and new services in exciting ways.

Necessary skills and training for the librarians could be arranged through NLSDB who has expertise staff to train librarians.

3. Publicity & promotion: It is understood that user community is not aware of the existing programmes conducted by the Public libraries. Continuous update of the User community is vital. Also, sufficient publicity to the existing /new out-reach programmes need to begiven through respective library websites, leaflets, and signs on the library buildings, Media networks, platforms & applications are ideal for this kind of propaganda.

4. Multidisciplinary role of Librarians need skill updating/training to work-well under pressure due to the above challenges. The necessary training support should be arranged through NLDSB considering it as a priority.

5. The government and all stakeholders of relevant information organizations need to understand the impact and the influence that Public libraries and librarians could make in their user communities through the mentioned educational and proposed community engagement programmes. At the same the above study reveals the impact that the suggested changes in the Role and responsibilities of librarians could make in transforming the society for a better future.

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