

A Study on the Mobile Library Services in the Public Libraries: With reference to the Public Libraries in Matara District, Sri Lanka.

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Abstract

The Public library is an institution that provides equal access to all. It stands in societies with diverse development stages and cultures. Hence, the manner of service as well as the way of providing the service differs from context to context. Extension service is one of the many services which should be provided by the public libraries, as it offers service for a diversity of readers and also it benefits in giving a clear idea about library services to those that currently do not use it. The main purpose of this concept is to take the library to readers who have difficulties visiting the library. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to investigate the application, practice and challenges of providing mobile library services by the public libraries. The Survey method was utilized as the data collection method. The study involved public libraries in Matara district, Sri Lanka as the study sample. The survey revealed that the libraries do not possess a separate collection of books for the mobile library service, the books in the mobile library collection is less (below 750), the mobile libraries identify the school children as their target reader group (54.54%), the majority use a vehicle (a cab) of the governing institutions to transport the books and offer the service (54.54%). The study also revealed that none of the libraries offers this service to people in hospitals and prisons and the vehicles allotted for the mobile libraries lack the necessary facilities. Increasing the financial support, number of books collection, awareness program, improving the facilities in the mode of transportation, etc. can be pointed out as recommendations.

Keywords: Public library, Library extension services, Mobile library services, Public library service

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1. Introduction

1.1. Public Library

The public library is unique as an institute that provides services to public for those who need library services. The public library provides a number of library services in an extended range such as information services, education, fun and entertainment.

“The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision- making and cultural development of the individual and social groups”(IFLA/UNESCO public library manifesto,1994, para.2).This Manifesto proclaims UNESCO's belief in “the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and understanding between people and between nations”(UNESCO public library manifesto, 1972, para.2).

A public library can be considered a democratic institute of education, culture and communication. On the other hand, the public library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. It is a responsible center of providing unceasing, lifelong education and also a symbol appreciating the social education process and improvements in the cultural approaches. As well as, the public library is a practical demonstration of democracy's faith in universal education as a continuing and lifelong process, in the appreciation of the achievement of humanity in knowledge and culture.

The public library is the main mechanism that provides information sources needed for education and research freely and independently & for common utilization. The public library provides services by supplying books for fun & entertainment, helping for lifelong learning, supplying necessary knowledge for those who are studying and making approaches for novel knowledge in public technological, scientific & social knowledge.

According to IFLA/UNESCO public library manifesto, the services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status.

Specific services and materials must be provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison (IFLA/UNESCO public library manifesto, 1994, para. 6).

The public library should be definitely maintained as an institute, which is beyond the discrimination of nation, religion, cast, language, sex, education, living status and also professional and social discrimination in performing the said functions. Service necessities of all citizens; children, youngsters and adults should be taken in to consideration. The public library is unique as an institute that provides services to the public in fulfilling a diverse set of information services without any discrimination.

However, a public library is a local, regional or national administration center that acts as an association for civil service. It includes a broad range of resources and provides equal service to all the members in engaging in information and memory processes. As a whole, a public library is a center of wisdom for the public and its people.

One of the main functions of a public library is to provide services to those who cannot access the library. If the user is not approaching the library, the library should approach the user. Library services should be brought for those who are unable to approach the library, but enthusiastic to read books. Thus, there are so many library extension services to be implemented for the above said endeavor.

1.2. Extension Services in Library

Mc Colvin (1942) report mentions that “the main purpose of a library is to provide equal service with no biasness and the service has to be free and independent in every other way”. According to the above, a public library provides service for a larger population of readers. In other word, the library is open with its service for anybody who uses it.

“Public Libraries are always regarded as the mirror of society. Library extension services have been successful to create a positive impact on society” (Borgohain&Nath, 2020).Gupta sees a library as a social institution that keeps relations with its users whom it gives services and other libraries

whose resources are used by it. “All the extension services must be to encourage the people to use the library and to make the maximum utilization of library resources for the development of the society” (Gupta, n. d.). He mentioned that, library extension services involve an attempt to interact with the people by informing about the resources and services of library as well its importance to them.

The first Law of Ranganathana’s “Books are for use” is firmly established if the libraries realize that their existence is justified only by the extent to which their books are used by the readers. Again, the third law of Ranganathan’s “Every book of its reader” also gives emphasis on the same concept. But here books cannot move to their users. Therefore, all the efforts should be on the part of the library itself to bring the books at the door step of users. The most suitable method is public relations and extension services of the library to reach all people of the community (Rao & Sharda, n.d.). Gupta concludes that the extension service is an effort of a library to increase the number of its users to make the maximum use of its resources. This is effectively achieved by informing the community of users about its resources, services and utility (Gupta, n.d.).

Extension service is one of the many services which should be provided by the public libraries, as it offers service for a diversity of readers and also it benefits in giving a clear idea about library services to those that currently do not use it. Extension services are defined by several people and institutes in different ways. They are as follows.

ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science (1983) defines it as “the provision by a library of materials and services (including advisory services) to individuals and organizations outside its regular service area, especially to an area in which library service is not otherwise available”.

Dr. S. R. Ranganathan (2006) considers it as “Apart from such methods of pure publicity, libraries are now a day’s developing certain new types of work which, in addition to their being directly educative or recreational, lead also to publicity as an important secondary product.” These activities are named as the extension services of libraries.

According to Mc Colvin (1950) “to increase the number of readers and the volumes of work and later to make the library more useful to more people”.

Krishan Kumar (1987) defines it as “An extension service aims at converting non-readers in to readers. It creates and stimulates the desire for good reading. This is done by bringing books and readers together. This results in exploitation and promotion of collections.”

The aim of library extension services are;

- To make users of non users
- To make illiterates literate
- To create and stimulate the desire for good reading
- To provide needed information and reference service
- To provide effective service for the children and young people
- To participate in adult education/ distance education programs
- To support civic and cultural activities of groups and organizations
- To provide library services to schools not having their own libraries (Shukla,2010)

The Library extension services may be of the internal or external type. The following techniques or programmes can be used to provide library extension services;

- Library Orientation/ Library Tour
- Intellectual Centre
- Book fair and Exhibitions
- Story Hours/Story telling
- Public Lecturers and Talk
- Festivals and Fairs
- Reading circle/ Study circle
- Display of New and Topical Books
- Cultural Program
- Organizing competitions /Quiz Programmes
- Celebration of Books Week

- Branch Library
- Book Box & Book Boat Service
- Mobile Library Services

1.3. Mobile Library Services

The main purpose of this concept is to take the library to readers who have difficulties visiting the library. A lot of individuals are there who find difficulties in visiting the library although they have an enthusiasm to read books and reading materials. Especially, the people who are disabled and domesticated, housewives, senior citizens and also the people who are hospitalized or imprisoned have no proper way to access the libraries. Thus, projects should be implemented in every library in order to take the library experience to such individuals and groups. Therefore, the most appropriate method is the mobile library services.

The people in a particular local context are advised to gather at a specific place on a given date, the mobile library will be taken to that place and the readers will be given the opportunity to borrow books from the mobile library. Buses, Lorries, vans, cabs, motorbikes and such means of transportation are used in taking the service to the readers. Books piled inside boxes are taken to the areas where vehicle transportation is difficult. To reach the readers dwelling in islands, the boat services are being used.

A mobile library is a stock of books kept in a vehicle with a limited staff to provide in some cases, a house to house service in remote areas such as villages and hamlets. The mobile library also provides issue and return services for a certain period (Shukla, 2010). The open library can acquaint mobile library administrations with natives of remotely found spots who do not approach open libraries. The open library can convey books to them through different strategies. For offering this administration, the ideal opportunity for every territory is to be settled and informed before (Kumari & Singh, 2017).

The first ever mobile library service in Sri Lanka was started by Rev. Ganegama Saranankara Thero in 1965 in Baddegama, Galle. A cart was used to transport the books and the main purpose was to improve the reading habits of both the children and the adults (Gamage, 2020). In 1975, Colombo

public library of Sri Lanka has established the mobile library service to take the library experience to the readers without waiting for them to visit the library. The root idea behind this was knowledge must be common for all. This service currently benefits the readers in 40 places in Colombo district (Senevirathna, 2018).

Although some of the libraries in the public library arena of Sri Lanka provides this particular mobile library service, its efficiency and effectiveness is rather doubtful. The influential factors are lack of financial support, lack of transportation facilities and such. This study therefore focuses on exploring the mobile library services implemented in the public libraries.

2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are,

- To identify the target reader population of this service
- To identify the nature of the reading materials offered by the mobile library service
- To survey on the number of readers who utilize the mobile library service
- To identify how often does the service vehicle visit the place
- To study the problems faced while offering the mobile library service
- To investigate the application, practice and challenges of providing mobile library services by the public libraries

3. Methodology

A survey method was used for the study. Out of the public libraries in Matara district, all the public libraries which are currently involved in mobile library service are considered under the sample of this study. Accordingly, there are 41 public libraries in Matara and 11 public libraries which have implemented the mobile library services (Statistical handbook on libraries in Sri Lanka, 2018). All the 11 public libraries were involved and the data were collected by distributing a study based questionnaire among the librarians of the relevant libraries. The questionnaire was used as

the main research instrument, which consists of both structured and open-ended questions. The percentage of the respondents is 100%. The data were analyzed by using frequency counts and simple percentages.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Authorized Institute of the public libraries

The study examined the authorized institute under which the libraries offering mobile library services are being controlled. Accordingly, 81.80% of the respondents revealed that the libraries are under Pradeshiyasabha while 9.10% are under the Municipal councils and 9.10% are under the Urban council. Thus the majority of public libraries which involve mobile library services are governed by the Pradeshiyasabha. The graph (Fig.1) below demonstrates the data.

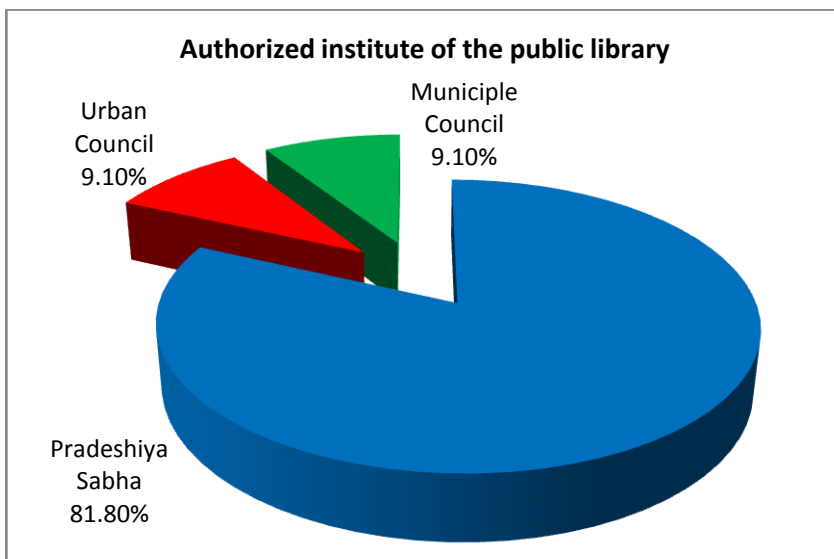


Figure 1: Authorized institute of the public library

4.2. Year of implementing the mobile library services

The following graph (Fig.2) shows the years in which the mobile library service was started in particular public libraries. Accordingly, the majority of the libraries have started implementing this service during the period of 2016 -2020. It is 54.54% as a percentage.

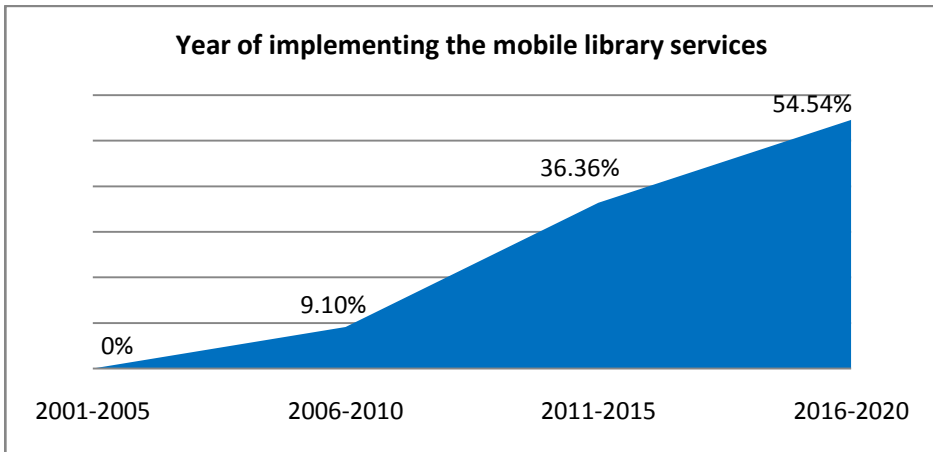


Figure 2: Year of implementing the mobile library services

4.3. The nature of the books and reading materials offered by the mobile library service

Table 1 shows that the study examined the nature of books and reading materials allotted for the mobile library service. It was studied whether the books in the mobile library service are a part of the main collection of the public library or is it a collection specially prepared for the mobile library service. The majority of the libraries marked that the collection is a part of the main collection. The percentage is 54.55%. Moreover, 45.45% said that the collection is specially prepared.

Table 1: Nature of the books and reading materials offered by the mobile library service

S.No.	Nature of the book collection	No. of Respondent	Percentage (%)
1	A Part of the Main Collection	6	54.55%
2	A Separate Collection for Mobile Library	5	45.45%
Total		11	100%

4.4. Amount of the book collection of the mobile library service

Figure 3 reveals the study investigated the number of books that each library has in order to continue offering the mobile library service. The data analysis revealed that most of the libraries either are in the range of having 500-750 books and 250-500 books. Both ranges have a similar percentage of 27.27%. 9.09% of libraries possess 1250-1500 books while another 9.09% have 750-1000 books. The libraries which have 1-250 books are 9.09%. None of the libraries has 1000-1250 range of books and the libraries which have more than 1500 books are 18.19%.

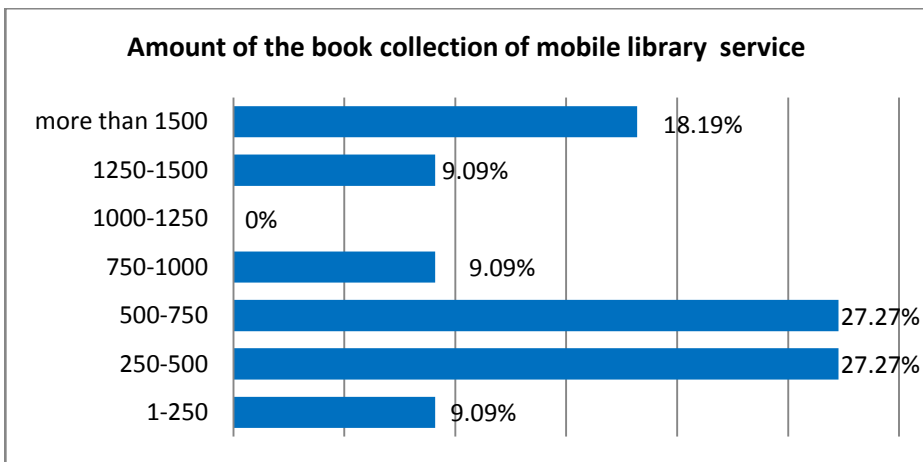


Figure 3: Amount of the book collection of the mobile library service

4.5. Acquisition of the book collection in the mobile library service

It was also examined whether the collection of books offered for the mobile library service in public libraries is being registered in a separate acquisition register or in the common library register. According to the graph (Fig.4) below, 54.55% mentioned that they use the common library acquisition register while 45.45% said that they utilize a separate registry for that.

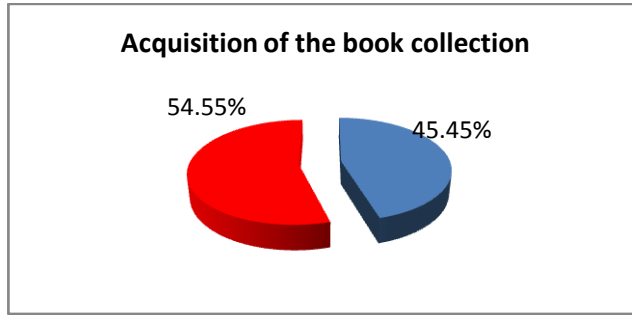


Figure 4: Acquisition of the book collection in the mobile library service

4.6. Target reader population

The study focused on examining the type of reader population targeted by the mobile library service of the selected public libraries. Accordingly, it was examined whether the target population involves domestic people, hospitalized patients, people imprisoned, disabled, pupils, Government officers, preschoolers or similar groups. The majority (54.54%) mentioned that the service is given to the school students. 45.45% mentioned that the service is offered for domestic people while 36.36% for Government officers and 27.27% for preschoolers. Results showed that 9.09% offers the service for the disabled. The remnant 9.09% mentioned that the service is offered for other groups such as Dhamma school students. None of the libraries offers the service for hospitalized or imprisoned people. The graph (Fig.5) below shows the results and analysis.

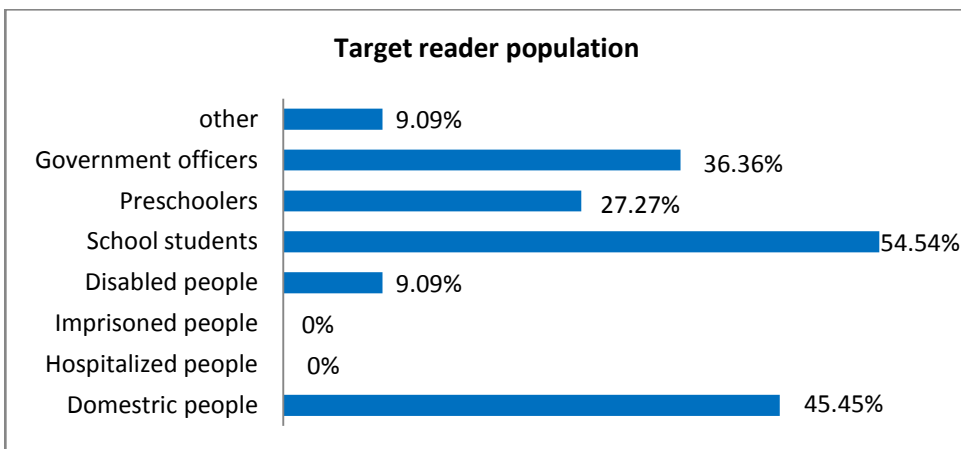


Figure 5: Target reader population

4.7. The places covered by the mobile library service

The study examined the number of places covered by the mobile library service. Majority mentioned that its only one place that they cover (36.37%). 18.18% said that they cover four places and more than five places. The table 2 below depicts the relevant data.

Table 2: Places covered by the mobile library services

S. No.	Places covered	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	One Place	4	36.37%
2	Two Places	1	09.09%
3	Three Places	1	09.09%
4	Four Places	2	18.18%
5	Five Places	1	09.09%
6	Other	2	18.18%
Total		11	100%

4.8. The mode of transportation used for the mobile library service

Figure 6 shows that the study on finding the type of vehicle used for the mobile library service. A majority of 54.54% use a cab while 27.28% use a lorry (Demo Batta). 18.18% use a trishaw for this activity. Some of these vehicles are rented and the majorities are provided by the parent institute.

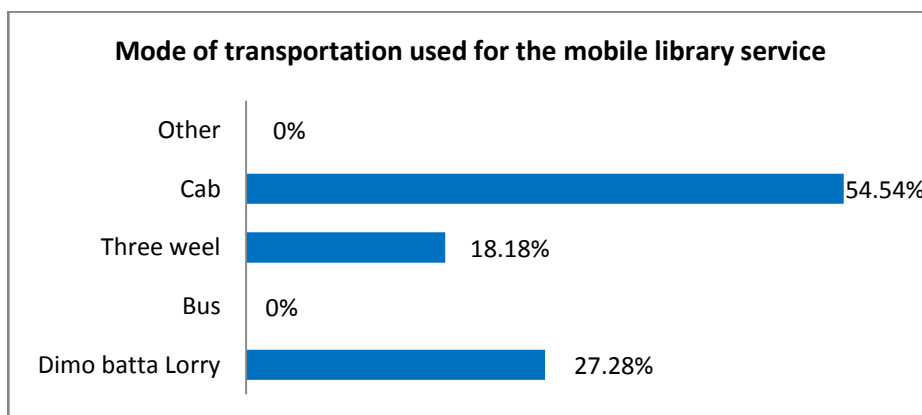


Figure 6: Mode of transportation used for the mobile library service

4.9. The frequency of the visits to the service offering centers/places

The figure 7 below shows how often the mobile library service visits the relevant places for giving the service to the readers. A majority of 72.73% mentioned that they visit the place once every two weeks.

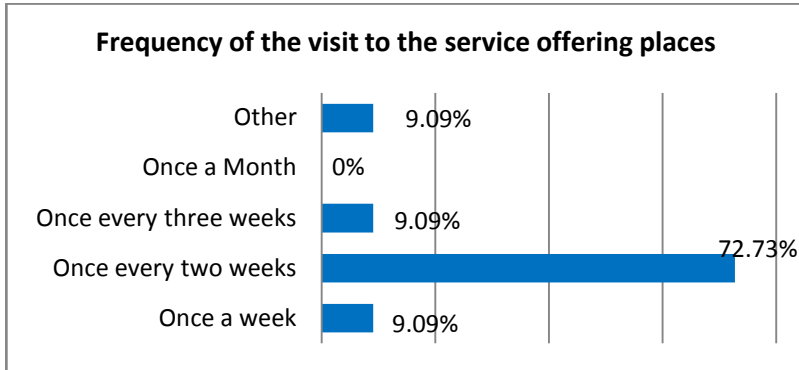


Figure 7: Frequency of the visit to the service offering places

4.10. The number of staff members employed in the mobile library service

The libraries which involve three staff members in this activity as a percentage is 45.46% while 36.36% mentioned that they employ two staff members. The figure 8 below depicts the relevant data.

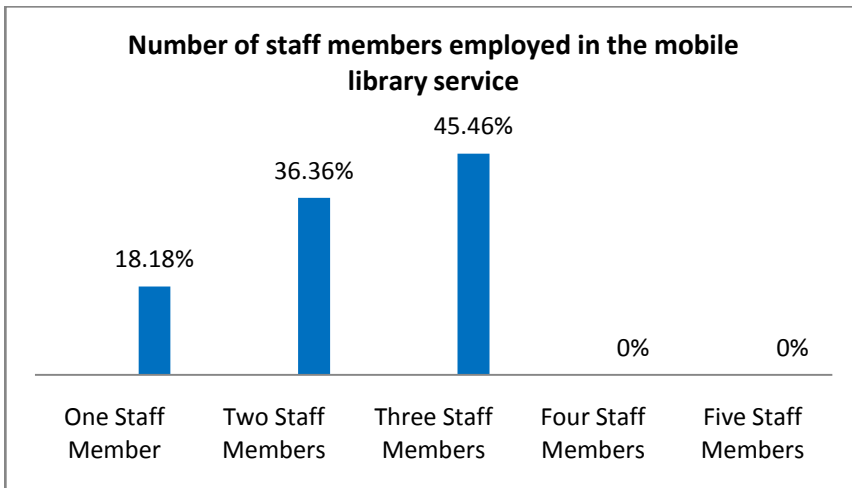


Figure 8: Number of staff members employed in the mobile library service

4.11. The number of books lent at a time by the mobile library service

It was found that the maximum amount of book lent at a time is two. The percentage is 90.90%. A minority of 9.10% mentioned that the minimum amount of book lent at a time is one.

4.12. The number of readers who benefit from the mobile library service

The graph (Fig.9) below reveals the results on the number of readers who benefit from the mobile library service offered by the public libraries. A majority of 54.54% mentioned that the number of readers is more than 100 while the number of readers ranging between 26-50 and 51-75 received a similar percentage of 18.18%. A minority of 9.10% mentioned that the reader count is between 0-25.

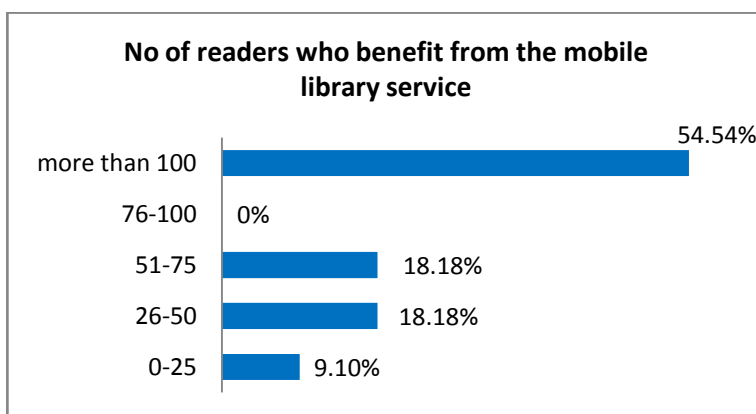


Figure 9: Number of Readers

4.13. Challenges faced while offering the mobile library service

Following is a list of challenges and issues faced by the librarians in continuing the mobile library service.

- Issues in reaching difficult areas
- The readers' reluctance to hand over the borrowed books
- No separate vehicle for the mobile library service or lack of facilities in the current vehicle
- Lack of staff members

- Not having a separate book collection for the mobile library service
- The library staff has to bear the cost on the occasions that the readers lose the borrowed books.
- Difficulties in transporting books (Damages that happen to the books when piling them inside the boxes and while getting them out)
- Insufficient annual allocation to buy new books.

4.14. Proposals given by the librarians to uplift the mobile library service

Following are the proposals given by the public librarians to improve the mobile library service.

- Organizing programs to encourage readers to read books
- Appointing a special officer to manage the mobile library service
- Maintaining a separate collection of books for the mobile library service
- Having a separate vehicle allotted for the mobile library service
- Arranging a system to lend books for the hospitals and prisons as well
- Having books that are relevant to the different target groups
- Organizing awareness programs to inform the importance of mobile library service to the locals

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The study revealed that the public libraries do not have sufficient facilities to function the mobile library service in a more efficient and effective manner. It was found that the libraries do not possess a separate collection of books for the mobile library service and a number of libraries that have such a collection are lesser. The books in the mobile library collection are less and numerically, it is an amount below 750. The majority of the mobile libraries identify the school children as their target reader group. It is 54.54% as a percentage. Moreover, most of the libraries involve only one place to offer the mobile library service while the majority uses a vehicle (a cab) of the governing institutions to transport the books and offer the service.

The mobile library is taken to the relevant place once every two weeks. It is 72.73% as a percentage. As well as, most libraries responded that the mobile library provides two books at a time. The percentage is 90.90%. Moreover, the majority of the libraries mentioned that more than 100 readers benefit out of the service offered by each library. None of the libraries offers this service to people in hospitals and prisons. The study also revealed that the vehicles allotted for the mobile libraries lack the necessary facilities.

Also, the lack of staff members, issues in reaching difficult areas, insufficient annual allocation, difficulties in transporting books, and payment of fines for lost books by the library staff, failure to return books on time by readers, etc. can be pointed out as the challenges they face.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations can be made based on the results of the current study in order to uplift the mobile library service process.

- Increasing the number of books in the mobile library collection.
- Extending the service to the people in hospitals and prisons.
- Improving the facilities in the mode of transportation allotted for mobile library service.
- Increasing the financial support.
- Increasing the number of books lent at a time.
- Increasing the number of places where the mobile library service is provided.
- Increasing the awareness of the locals on the importance of mobile library service.
- Introducing the mobile library concept to the libraries which currently do not have such a system and giving financial support.

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