

EVALUATION OF USE OF THE CEYLON COLLECTION, MAIN LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA FOR ACADEMIC RESEARCH ADVANCEMENT OF SRI LANKA

B. M. M. C. B. HINDAGOLLA

Assistant Librarian, Main Library, University of Peradeniya

Introduction

The Main Library of the University of Peradeniya was established in Peradeniya in 1952 to serve the triple interests of teaching, learning and research of the university community. Among the library resources in the Main Library, the 'Ceylon Room Collection' holds a significant place as it is a most valuable, comprehensive and prestigious reference collection. It consists of Sri Lankan publications covering a wide range of disciplines, has become a main knowledge base for academic research in the Social Sciences and Humanities. It is observed that there is a high demand for the Ceylon collection and that the resources are heavily used by undergraduates, postgraduate students, academic staff and scholars outside the university. After 50 years of the establishment of the Main Library, the Library Management has taken steps to reorganize the Ceylon collection with the main objective to improve its services. At this juncture a necessity has arisen to investigate on the effectiveness of the Ceylon Collection. Since no scientific study has been conducted during the past fifty years, the present study is a timely measure and will provide baseline information to measure the effectiveness of the resources and services of the Ceylon Room collection in terms of management, accessibility and use of resources in meeting the changing needs of the academic community. The users are in the best position to determine how the library is meeting their information needs. The results of this study would enable library management to find out users' perceptions, attitudes and also the strengths and weaknesses of the collection and services.

Objectives

The main objective of the study was to find out the effectiveness of the Ceylon Collection in meeting the information needs of library users.

The specific objectives were:

1. To find out the main categories of users, and for what purposes they use the Ceylon Collection.
2. To find out how the users become aware of the Ceylon collection and the types of information sources they use and the main subject areas in which they seek information.
3. To find out strengths and weaknesses of the collection.
4. To find out user satisfaction regarding the services and the collection.

Methodology

A survey methodology was used for the present study. The study sample was selected from different user groups who used the Ceylon Collection during a period of four (04) months in the First Semester of the 2007/2008 academic year. The sample consists of undergraduates of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th years, Postgraduate students, Permanent Academic staff, Temporary Academic staff, and outside scholars. 10% of the population of each category was taken for the study.

A questionnaire with structured and open ended questions constructed by the researcher was the main research instrument of the study. The data were analyzed by using frequency counts and simple percentages.

Results and discussions

A total of 382 questionnaires were administered among selected users of the Ceylon Collection, and 332 (87%) duly

perfected questionnaires were returned. The total response rate of the survey was 86.91%. The majority of the respondents 173 (52.10%) of the survey were females. The total number of male respondents of the survey was 159(47.89%). The data revealed that the majority (97.18%) users of the Ceylon Collection were Final Year (400 level) undergraduates. The main method of becoming aware of the Ceylon collection was the Library Tour conducted during first year Orientation Programmes, followed by recommendations of lecturers, and the Library Database. The main subject areas for which the users look for information in the Ceylon Collection was Sociology with a percentage of 66.55% of the total respondents, followed by 65.06% respondents for History and Culture, 63.23% respondents for Language and Literature and 62.65% for Economics. The subject areas sought after least, by respondents were Philosophy and Psychology. Another important finding was that 35.53% respondents did not use the collection for specific subject areas.

About thirty nine percent (38.55%) of respondents used the Ceylon Collection daily, while, 23.19% respondents use it weekly. The majority of the daily users were Final year (400 levels) undergraduates. For the purposes of the use of the collection, respondents were allowed to give multiple answers. The highest rate was for using the Ceylon Collection for research activities. The majority of the respondents (100%) use the government publications in the Ceylon Collection. The Special Items in the collection, namely masks, paintings, microfilms, and special resource collections, showed a low usage. Reasons for the low usage is mainly lack of awareness of those items, and lack of knowledge in how to access them. .

With regard to the services offered by the staff at the Ceylon Collection, 260 respondents (78.31%) out of 332 user group were not satisfied with the low number

manpower at the Ceylon collection. A low number of staff – two- is not sufficient to cater to user requirements. During the examination period, the Ceylon Counter is the most demanding place in the Library. About sixty three (63.25%) of respondents were not satisfied with the seating capacity available in the Ceylon collection area.

Ninety two (92.16 %) respondents commented that the collection is very important and that it has to be maintained for future generations with utmost care and security of materials. About forty one percent (40.96%) of the respondents pointed out some weaknesses of the collection and also the management of the resources. A further 95.78% of the respondents gave valuable suggestions for the improvement of the collection and also on the expectations from the users' point of view to further develop the services.

Conclusion

The survey revealed that the Ceylon collection is the most valuable collection in the Main Library. The majority of Library users in the University community use the Ceylon collection. Proper awareness about artifacts, microforms, special collections available in the Ceylon Collection has to be regularly carried out to maximize their use.

Recommendations

- Increase user awareness about resources in the Ceylon Collection
- Increase trilingual person/s serving at the Ceylon Room counter for cater to communities.
- Provide accessibility to outside researchers and scholars for their research purposes.
- Expand the seating capacity for more users in the Ceylon Room as it is not allowed to remove the material from the Ceylon Room.

Financial assistance provided Peradeniya University Research Grants (RG 2007/L/47) is acknowledged.