



**PROCEEDINGS OF  
11<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF  
UNIVERSITY LIBRARIANS ASSOCIATION  
OF SRI LANKA - 2021**

**“Scholarly Publishing & Open Access  
for the Enhancement of Research Visibility”**



**Virtual Conference  
22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021**

**UNIVERSITY LIBRARIANS ASSOCIATION OF SRI LANKA**

# PROCEEDINGS



**11<sup>th</sup> International Conference of  
University Librarians Association of  
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**(Virtual Conference)**

**University Librarians Association of Sri Lanka**

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## **CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM FOR TEACHER LIBRARIANS IN AKURESSA ZONAL EDUCATIONAL AREA, SRI LANKA: EXPERIENCE RECAP**

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### **Abstract**

School libraries should be properly monitored and enriched with well-trained teacher librarians. It would be an immense strength to achieve the development goals of the country. However, previous literature highlighted that there is a lacuna towards the attention of school libraries and training needs of teacher librarians. Present study is aimed to present the outcome of a capacity building program conducted for teacher librarians of the Akuressa educational zone of Sri Lanka. Present study summarises new concepts that 51 teacher librarians learnt, and aspects that they are confident in implementing as prospective activities in their schools. It can recommend conducting capacity building programs frequently with proper monitoring and disseminate the outcomes to the librarian's community. Depending on the feedback of the participants and results, it can suggest that conducting capacity building programs in a cyclic manner is better than conducting instructor-led trainings occasionally. Similarly, the outcome of the present study can be monitored, and the next outreach activity can get insights from the experience learnt from the present capacity building program. At the same time, policy makers and educational authorities must pay enough attention towards the wellbeing of school libraries and the quality of teacher librarians in the country.

**Keywords:** *capacity building, teacher librarians, school librarians, library outreach programs*

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## Introduction

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions defines the school library as “school’s physical and digital learning space where reading, inquiry, research, thinking, imagination, and creativity are central to students’ information-to-knowledge journey and to their personal, social, and cultural growth” (IFLA, 2015, p. 16). The definition covers most of the key aspects of a school library and it highlights the value of the school library service to the development of a country. It is questionable that how far the Sri Lankan schools have identified the value of a school library. However, it has led towards granting a huge responsibility to a teacher librarian to full fill the information needs and quality of the students’ education. IFLA defines the teacher librarian “is responsible for the school’s physical and digital learning space where reading, inquiry, research, thinking, imagination, and creativity are central to teaching and learning” (IFLA, 2015, p. 25). According to the Australian School Library Association (ASLA), a teacher librarian is “a person who holds recognized teaching qualifications and qualifications in librarianship [...]” (Australian School Library Association, 2021, p. 1) and highlighted three main roles of a teacher librarian as a curriculum leader, information specialist, and information service manager. Thus, the role of a teacher librarian serves an enormous responsibility in the school and the life-long learning process of students and staff. On the other hand, Herring (2007) explains the teacher librarian as a multi-faceted role player with 11 main roles. However, the term teacher librarian/ school librarian in Sri Lanka is used to denote a “person who is in charge of a school library, irrespective of whether he or she is a qualified librarian, a teacher, a clerk, or a volunteer” (Yapa, 1998, p.9). Thus, there is a possibility that any teacher can become a librarian rather than a teacher becoming a librarian after completing the required level of professional training.

Ministry of Education has declared four main types of schools in Sri Lanka to maintain easy management (Ministry of education, 2020). Those are 1AB, 1C, type2, and type 3. The classification of government schools is summarised in the Table 1.

Table 3: Classification of government schools in Sri Lanka

Type of school	Structure
1AB	Schools facilitating Science, Arts, and Commerce for G.C.E. Advanced level subject stream. (Some schools provide technology subject stream also)
1C	Schools facilitating Arts, and Commerce or one of those subjects for G.C.E. Advanced level subject stream. / Schools do not teach Science subject stream (Some schools provide technology subject stream also)
Type 2	Schools that teach for grade 1-11 or grade 1-9 or grade 6-11
Type 3	Schools only with the primary grades (grade 1-5) and teach only for grade 1-8.

Source: Ministry of higher education

Kuruppaurachchi (2009) identified two types of School libraries in Sri Lanka, Permanent libraries, and non-permanent libraries. A permanent library is a “separate place with adequate space according to the standard criteria of the Ministry of Education” and a non-permanent library is a “room with some book cupboards, bookshelves or a small collection of books” (p.26). Different studies in the country have highlighted the current situation and the significance of the teacher librarian’s role and the situation of school libraries in the country while highlighting the volume of research conducted in the county is not satisfied (Jayasekara, 2019). Similarly, most of the previous studies have highlighted the scarcity of resources, lack of training, and poor attention to school librarians in the country (Ayeshmantha & Yapa, 2020; P. K. Jayasekara & Senevirathna, 2017a, 2017b, 2017a; Pathirana & Yapa, 2020; Wickramanayake, 2016). Among them, as highlighted by Ayeshmantha & Yapa (2020) lack of trained teacher librarians is a major issue that affects in reaching the educational goals of the country. Thus, capacity building programs are very important in the development of nations’ future generations. On the other hand, conducting capacity building programs is the best way that a librarian can use to promote and disseminate knowledge (Alahakoon, 2017).

### Study area

The Zonal educational area of the Akuressa zone is depicted in Figure 1. It includes, 1. Akuressa, 2. Malimbada, and 3. Welipitiya sub areas. Number of schools of all grades and types are 47 for the Akuressa zone, 14 for the Malimbada zone, and 24 for the Welipitiya zone. All the teacher librarians in these three areas were invited to take part in the capacity building program. The study area is selected for the study because the University of Ruhuna is conducting such outreach programs as a regular practice and there are previous such programs conducted in the Akuressa Educational zone (Jayasekara, 2019). The key areas to design the capacity building program was decided according to the experience gained from such previous outreach programs. The mutual understanding and relationship with the Akuressa zonal educational administrators were

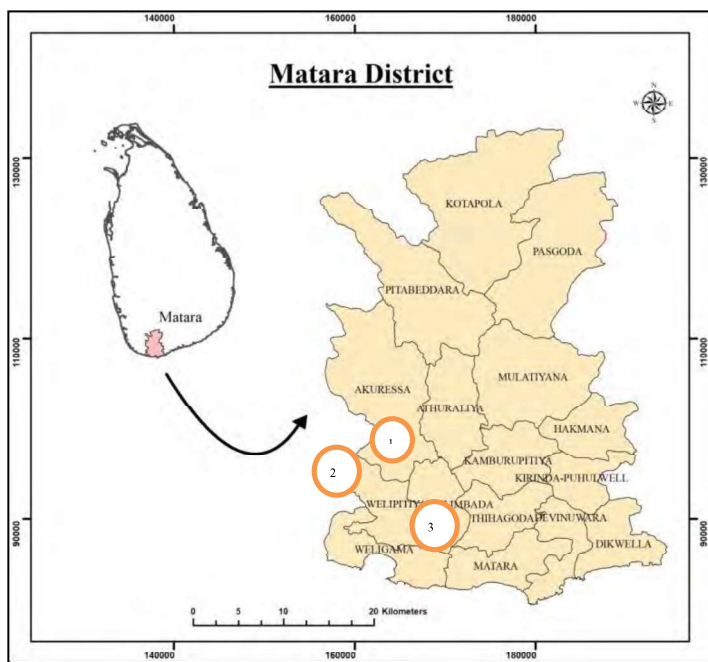


Figure 5: Divisions in Akuressa education zone, Mataru

(Source: Geological surveys and mines bureau)



a strength to conduct this capacity building program. This educational zone also consists of different types of schools, including Kanishta Vidyalaya (type 2 and 3), Maha Vidyalaya (1C), Madya Maha Vidyalaya (1AB), and 01 National Schools among these schools, some of them are Navodya Schools, light house schools, Rural schools, Model/ Adarsha schools, and Piriven schools (Zonal Education office, 2021).

### **Problem statement**

University of Ruhuna is the prime higher educational center of the southern part of the country. Community outreach is one of the main expectations of such institutions, to promote the teaching and learning of the country. Capacity building of teacher librarians in the southern region is a part of these outreach campaigns. However, the process of capacity building has been identified as a cyclic process, which includes, identification of training needs, awareness and training, monitoring, steps. So far, the library conducted the training component of this life cycle. Current capacity building program is the first such attempt of the capacity building life cycle, started in the usual way from the training component.

### **Objectives**

Present study aimed to share the outcomes, lessons learnt, feedback of a capacity building program conducted for teacher librarians of the Akuressa Educational Zone.

### **Methodology**

All the types of schools operate under the Akuressa Zonal office (85 schools) were informed and invited to take part in the capacity building program. A homogenous purposive sampling was practiced since the respondents are sharing some common types of characteristics. There were 51 teacher librarians participated in the capacity building program representing 34 schools. These 34 schools include 17 Kanishta Vidyalaya, 14 Maha Vidyalaya, 02 Madyamaha Vidyalaya and 01 National School. The capacity building program was arranged into two sessions, 1. Cataloguing, Classification, and Library Management session and the Modern teacher library practices with the introduction and implementation of new online services in school libraries. Each session extends up to four hours and a question-and-answer session was conducted at the end of the two sessions. A paper and pencil-based questionnaire were distributed among the participants to evaluate the capacity building program, to understand the lessons they learn and new aspects that are expected to be initiated at their schools once they are back.

### **Results**

Results can be summaries into two main categories, 1. Things learnt from the capacity building program and 2. Things that are going to be implemented at their school libraries.

Participants of the capacity building program highlighted the lessons that they learnt from session one and two as depicted in Table 2.

Table 4: lessons learnt by the participants from the capacity building program

<b>Lesson learned from the training</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Concept, foundation, and techniques of library classification	26
Adopting technology to the school library	21
Concept and technique of library cataloguing	20
Identified basic activities of a school librarian	12
Library management	11
Techniques to promote reading	5
Maintain the library accordingly	5
Promote creativity	3
Update knowledge	3
Promote self-learning	2
Explore knowledge	2
Update the library	2
Relationship with the students	2
Reading camps	1
Library monitor	1
Future challenges	1
Introduce new educational concepts	1

Source: Author compiled, 2021

Most (26) of the participants learnt the concept, foundation, and the techniques of library classification. 21 participants learnt about adoption of new technology to school libraries. 20 participants have newly learnt the concept of library Cataloguing while 12 have identified the role of the school librarians

Most of the participants has learnt the methods to promote reading, ways to adopt technology to school libraries, identified the objectives of a school librarian, basic concepts of library management. Attention to primary grade students was a new concept for the participants and 5 members who were assigned primary grades in their school has learnt what sort of attention could be given to the primary grades.

Table 5: Things to be implemented when the participants are back at their schools

<b>Aspects to be implement when they back</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Methods to promote reading	27
Identify the objectives of the school librarians	24
Adopting technology to the library	21
Adopting basic concepts of library management	10
Special attention to primary grades	5

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Schedule activities to done inside the library	5
Classification	5
Maintain library accordingly	4
Make the library an attractive place	4
Launch a library newsletter	4
Getting a computer	3
Reading competitions	3
Deploy a webpage to the library	3
Orientation programs to students	2
Attitude development towards school librarianship	2
Maintain staff-students relationship	2
Library representative form each class	2
Awarding to promote reading	1
Promote book writing	1
Try to renovate library	1
Promote softcopies	1
Promote creativity	1
Get more space to the library	1
Establishment of an outside library	1
Adopting social media to the library	1

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Source: Author compiled, 2021

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Attention given to the school libraries by the authorities are poor in Sri Lanka (Ayeshmantha & Yapa, 2020; Jayasekara, 2019; Kuruppaurachchi, 2009; Wickramanayake, 2016). Kuruppaurachchi, (2009) highlighted that school libraries in some schools are limited to a small room in the school premises or to a few bookshelves kept in the corner of a school building. Therefore, most of the aspects that may be new to the participants and impractical for them to implement.

Dewey Decimal Classification system (DDC), its history, techniques were revealed at the capacity building program, since the DDC has been identified as the most popular classification system among school librarians of the country (Jayasekara & Senevirathna, 2017b). Even then, some of the librarians lack classification knowledge and they have adopted using their own method to classify the small number of books they have. Adopting a simple classification system is also being a practice among school librarians as reported by (Jayasekara & Senevirathna, 2017). Nearly half of the participants (26) learned new things in classification through the program and 05 of them were willing to implement DDC in their libraries. Also cataloguing was a new concept to 39% of the participants. There is evidence that most of the school libraries are not maintaining a library catalogue (Jayasekara et al., 2018).

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Other key skills that were learnt by the respondents were adopting technology to the school library (41%), basic activities of a school librarian (23.5%), and concepts of school library management (19.6%). All the other concepts that are depicted in the Figure 2, were identified by equal or less than 5 members from the participants.

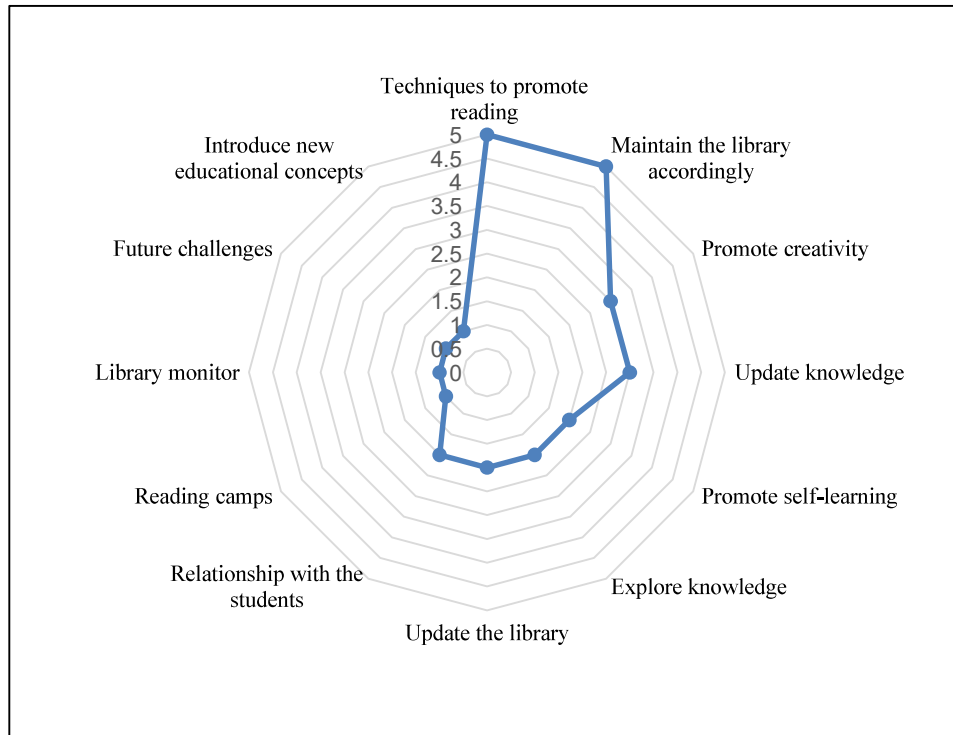


Figure 6: Learning aspects: 5 or less responses to each aspect

The closest reason for a smaller number of participants identified the concepts mentioned in the Figure 2 is that those are primarily school teachers and they have been appointed by the school administration or volunteers as teacher librarians. In some schools there were permanent teacher librarians but had been on leave due to other reasons. In such situations, a regular teacher is appointed as the librarian and these librarians are new to most of the concepts in library science.

While investigating the aspects that the participants willing to implement back at their schools, Methods to promote reading (27), Adopting technology to the library (21), Identify the objectives of the school librarians (24), and adopting basic concepts of library management (10) were reported by more than 5 respondents. It interprets that these librarians have developed the confidence through the capacity building program to accept the challenge of school library development. All the other aspects, the respondents obtained confidence, yet the majority who were not willing to implement these concepts may have

been due to other factors such as resources, school management commitment and infrastructure.

Five members out of 51 were related to junior schools who maintain a library for primary grades. Attention to the primary grade libraries is poor as reported by Pathirana & Yapa (2020). Present capacity building program may shed light on these participants from primary grades to implement a better junior library in future. Pathirana & Yapa (2020) also highlighted that lack of trained teacher librarians for the primary grades is evident as a major deficiency that affects the quality of school library services for juniors.

All the things learnt and willing to implement parameters that are depicted in Tables 2 and 3 can be utilized as inputs or training needs of school librarians of the region. If the same educational zone is benefited with a new capacity building program, it is better to monitor the progress of the aspects mentioned in Table 3. The lessons learnt, what went wrong, or success stories can be used as inputs to future such training programs in the country when the experience is communicated within the librarian's community. It is also a responsibility of the zonal educational officers in Sri Lanka to develop school libraries by providing supervision, guidance, evaluation, and awareness (Kuruppaurachchi, 2009). Relevant officials can promote library and information science training for the teacher librarians in their educational zones and there are number of universities and institutions comprising of trainings. These sort of top to bottom or bottom to top approaches of capacity building can be enriched through the mutual relationship between academic librarians and school librarians in the desired parts of the country.

### **Recommendations**

It is pivotal that capacity building programs should be conducted with adequate monitoring and in a cyclic manner. Outcomes of such capacity building programs should be communicated within the librarian's community that shall be benefited to the other teacher librarians in the country through similar activities. School administration should take policy level decisions to create dedicated carder for school librarians and provide them with necessary professional training as teacher librarians.

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