THE EXTENT AND THE FEASIBILITY OF UTILIZING INFORMATION ECHNOLOGY IN ACADEMIC AND SPECIAL LIBRARIES IN SRI LANKA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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(MLS/96/10)

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of *Master of Library and Information Science*

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SRI LANKA
1997

ABSTRACT

Information can be regarded as the currency of the new age. The statement *'knowledge is power'* is becoming ever more significant backed up with the emerging Information Technology (IT) tools. The libraries are the main focal points to link information with IT. The application of IT in Sri Lankan libraries is less advanced when compared to libraries in the developed countries.

The present work initially identifies the extent of utilizing IT in academic and special libraries in Sri Lanka by the help of a survey. The total population taken as the sample for testing included 30 academic and 93 special libraries. The member libraries of APINESS (Asia-Pacific Information Network on Social Sciences) and SLSTINET (Sri Lanka Science and Technology Information Network) formed the total population. Questionnaires and follow up interviews were used as primary data collection instruments. The response rates were 87% and 66% respectively for academic and special libraries.

For the purpose of analysis, the library functions were categorised into *housekeeping functions* and *information retrieval functions*. The relationship of IT applications with the collection size of the library and the number of professional staff availability had been evaluated. To relate the application of IT in libraries and the collection size, the *degree of automation* was determined for each category of collection size in libraries. The relationship in the application of IT in libraries and the availability of professional staff was also determined in a similar manner. Results indicated that the application of IT is not depended upon the availability of professional staff.

The problems responsible for the slow progress of adaptation of new technologies in Sri Lankan academic and special libraries were also determined. The problems were categorized as human, technological, managerial, political & social and infrastructure. MATLAB™ was used in the analysis of finding out the most influential area out of five problem areas for academic and special libraries. It is shown that the technological factor is the most influential factor in determining application of IT in Sri Lankan academic and special libraries.

Finally the results of the two library systems: academic and special are summarized and compared. Suggestions are forwarded to overcome the difficulties in applying IT in libraries and future areas for studies had been identified.