

Analysis of outreach engagement activities conducted by the officers in-charge of the public libraries in the Kalutara District, Sri Lanka and their alignment with SDGs

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This study addresses the lack of evidence on outreach activities conducted by officers belonging to various designations, in charge of Public Libraries (PLs) in the Kalutara District of Sri Lanka. The specific objectives of the study were: (a) to examine the relationship between designations of officers in-charge of PLs and outreach activities, (b) to investigate the relationship between educational qualifications of such officers and outreach activities (c) to thematically analyse outreach activities (d) to identify those themes' alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study targeted the entire population of officers in the district (N = 64), and received 43 responses (response rate = 67%). These personnel acted as chief responsible officers across PLs having various resource levels. They (N=43) represented five designations: Library Assistants (N=19, 44.2%), Librarians - Grade III (N=15, 34.9%), Librarian Grade-II (N=4, 9.3%), Librarians Grade-I (N=3, 7.0%), and Field Labourers (N=2, 4.6%). A mixed-methods approach was employed for data analysis, using inferential statistics and thematic analysis. The results were: (01) No significant associations between designations and outreach activities ($\chi^2 = 3.77$, $p = 0.58$, $p > 0.05$) (02) No significant association between educational qualifications and outreach activities (χ^2 , $p = 0.927$, $p > 0.05$) (03) Thematic analysis identified six (06) outreach themes: *Reading & Literacy Promotion/ Health & Well-being/ Education, ICT & Skills Development/ Community & Cultural Engagement/ Environmental & Social Responsibility/ Recognition & Motivation*. (04) These themes are directly aligned with SDGs 4, 3, 11, 13, and 15, and indirectly with SDGs 8, 10, 11, and 12. Accordingly, outreach activities are not influenced by formal positions or educational qualifications of officers, suggesting a possible involvement of individual and institutional factors. The themes underscore the multifaceted role of outreach activities aligning with multiple SDGs. Policy makers should provide more resources and training opportunities for officers in charge of PLs to enhance SGD-oriented outreach activities, irrespective of their designations and educational qualifications.

Keywords: *Public librarians, Outreach engagement, SDG, Kalutara District, Sri Lanka*