

Children's Services in the Public Libraries in North Kerala

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Introduction

The public libraries have a vital role in providing services to the children. All children in a community have a right to access to information through the public libraries. UNESCO (1998)¹ states one of the key mission of public library which should be at the core of the public library services is "creating and strengthening reading habits in children from an early age." IFLA/UNESCO (2001)² highlight the role of public libraries in the development of children's personality as "by providing a wide range of materials and activities, the public libraries provide an opportunity for children to experience the enjoyment of reading and excitement of discovering knowledge and works of imagination. Public libraries have a special responsibility to support the process of learning to read and to promote books and other media for children."

Objectives of the Study

- 2.1 To assess the existing facilities and services extended to children in the public libraries in north Kerala.
- 2.2 To measure the individual characteristics and use behaviour of child-members.

Scope of the Study

Kerala is the southern most State in India. North Kerala is comprised of six revenue districts of Kasaragod, Kannur, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Malappuram, and Palakkad. The present study is confined to the public libraries in north Kerala.

Methodology

In the present study, a survey was conducted for the collection of data regarding the resources, services, and facilities offered by the public libraries for children. This method was also employed to collect data regarding the individual

characteristics and use pattern of child-members. In addition, personal interview with librarians, field observation, and examination of library records were also used to collect the data and to examine the problems in their real and correct perspective. For collecting the data, two separately designed questionnaires in the regional language Malayalam were distributed one to the librarians of the 187 selected libraries and other to a sample of child-members of these libraries.

Analysis

5.1 Public Libraries Offering Children's Services

The number of libraries which provide children's service, district-wise and location-wise is shown in tables 1 and 2 respectively.

Table 1

Public Libraries Offering Children's Service
(District-wise)

District	Total Libraries	No.	Percentage
Kasaragod	21	16	76.2
Kannur	57	42	73.7
Kozhikode	40	35	87.5
Wayanad	18	17	94.4
Malappuram	28	18	64.3
Palakkad	23	19	82.6
Total	187	147	78.6

District-wise analysis reveals that number of libraries which provide children's service is very high in Wayanad (94.4%), followed by Kozhikode (87.5%). Malappuram district comes last, where only 64.3% of public libraries offer this service. Despite Wayanad has the highest concentration of tribal population and it is socio-economic backward, most of the library

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authorities pay attention to provide various programmes and services to the children. Malappuram is the Muslim dominated district.

The most of the public as well as the library authorities of this district are not giving due importance in encouraging the children in utilizing the library facilities and services.

Table 2
Public Libraries Offering Children's Services (Location-wise)

Location	Total Libraries	No.	Percentage
Rural	150	116	77.3
Urban	37	31	83.8
Total	187	147	78.6

The data in table above (Table 2) show that the number of libraries which offer children's service is more in the urban area (83.8%) than

in the rural area (77.3%).

5.2 Children's Collection

5.2.1 Subject-wise Collection

Table 3

Public Libraries (Collection-wise)

Subject	Rural	Urban	Total
	No. of Libraries	No. of Libraries	No. of Libraries
Social Sciences	94 (66.7%)	23 (67.6%)	117(66.9%)
Science	65 (46.1%)	15 (44.1%)	80 (45.7%)
History	105(74.5%)	24 (70.6%)	129(73.7%)
Biography	104(73.8%)	23 (67.6%)	127(72.6%)
Cartoon, picture stories	109(76.8%)	24 (70.6%)	133(75.6%)
Children's magazines	78 (54.9%)	18 (52.9%)	96 (54.5%)
Other subjects	4(2.8%)	3(8.8%)	7(4.0%)

The survey reveals the finding that the library collection includes a mean of 586 children's books ranging from 20 volumes to 3,473 volumes. The data in table 3 show that a majority of the libraries which provide children's services (66.9%) report that the children's collection include books on Social Sciences, History (73.7%), Biography (72.6%), and cartoon books and picture stories (75.6%), whereas only less

than half of the libraries (45.7%) have science books and a little more than half of the libraries (54.5%) have children's magazines in the library collection. The study reveals that the public libraries do not include more Science books in the children's collection to develop science consciousness in the children at an early age.

5.2.2 Language-wise Collection

Table 4
Children's Collection in the Public Libraries
(Language-wise)

Language	Rural		Urban		Total No. of Books		Minimum	Maximum
	No. of Books		No. of Books		Mean	SD		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Malayalam	599	632.13	475	473.60	577	606.46	16	3000
English	96	142.91	218	488.13	118	244.23	2	1710
Others	64	105.23	78	101.82	65	103.12	4	487
Total	642	723.85	648	647.63	643	708.16	20	3473

The data in table above (Table 4) reveal that the children's book section has the highest average collection of Malayalam books both in rural and in urban areas, whereas the books in English and in other languages such as Hindi, Tamil and Kannada occupy a small portion. The children's collection has a stock of (Mean 577

with SD 606.46) Malayalam books ranging from 16 to 3000, English books (Mean 118 with SD 244.23) ranging from 2 to 1710, and books in other languages such as Hindi, Tamil and Kannada (Mean 65 with SD 103.12) ranging from 4 Hindi books to 487 Kannada books.

5.2.3 Special Collection

Table 5
Public Libraries Having Special Collection

Special Collection	Rural	Urban	Total
	No. of Libraries	No. of Libraries	
Charts	23 (19.82%)	2 (6.45%)	25 (17.01%)
Toys	26 (17.69%)	2(6.45%)	28(19.05%)
Atlases	31(21.02%)	3(9.68%)	34(23.13%)
Audio Visual Materials	10 (6.8%)	0(.0%)	10(6.8%)

Analysis of the table 5 shows that only a few libraries which are offering children's services have special collections such as charts, toys, and atlases. A small percentage of them (17.01%) have charts for educational purposes, 19.05% have toys for nursery kids, 23.13% have atlases

and 6.8% have modern formats such as audio-video cassettes and CDs which include jokes and cartoons. The survey also shows that the libraries which provide special collection for the children are not in sufficient quality and quantity.

5.3 Programmes Conducted for the Children

Table 6
Public Libraries Conducting
Various Programmes for the Children

Programmes	Rural	Urban	Total
	No. of Libraries	No. of Libraries	No. of Libraries
Story Hours	54(46.55%)	4(12.90%)	58(39.46%)
Film Shows	21(18.10%)	3(9.68%)	24(16.33%)
Computer Club	10(8.62%)	3(9.68%)	13(8.84%)
Contest	91(78.45%)	12(38.71%)	103(70.07%)
Reading Club	51(43.97%)	7(22.58%)	58(39.46%)
Picture Shows	36(31.03%)	2(6.45%)	38(25.85%)
Other Programmes	12(10.34%)	1(3.23%)	13(8.84%)

The table 6 provides a list of various programmes conducted by the libraries under the children's service. A majority of the libraries which provide children's service (70.07%) have conducted different contests in cultural programmes and sports for the children, 39.46% of them have started reading clubs, 39.46% have provided story hours, 25.85% have conducted picture shows, 16.33% have organised film shows, a small percentage (8.84%) have started computer club, and the same percentage (8.84%) also conducted other programmes such as puppetry for the children.

5.4 Utilization of Children's Services

5.4.1 Membership to the Children

The data obtained in the survey show that a great majority of the public libraries (90%) issue membership to the children. In 50.31% of the libraries, the service is free; in 39.26% of the libraries, the fee collected from the children is between Re. 1 and Rs.10/-, whereas in 10.43%, more than Rs. 10/- is collected as the membership fee from the children.

In a majority of the libraries (81%), the periodicity of the library membership for the children is up to they attain adult stage; in 17%, it is for one year; whereas in negligible

percentage of the libraries (2%) it is for below one year only.

5.4.2 Utilization of Services

The survey reveals that an average of below 10 children utilize the children's services per day in 38% libraries, 10 to 15 children (23.5%), 16-20 (11.8%), 21-25 (5.3%) and above 25 children in 4.8% libraries. From the analysis, it is found that the number of children using the public library is very small. It can also be read that the public libraries do not pay proper attention to provide effective children's service and no serious efforts are taken to encourage the children to make use of the libraries.

5.5 Measurement of Individual Characteristics

5.5.1 Age and Gender of Children

The data collected in the survey indicate that children around 13 years of age are the common users of the public libraries. It also reveals that children of both genders represent almost equal percentages, male (51.6%) and female (48.4%) were registered as members of the public libraries.

5.5.2 Reading Interests of Children

The children's reading interests in different subjects were analyzed and the results are presented in table 7.

Table 7
Children's Reading Interests in Different Subjects

Sl. No.	Subjects	No. of Responses	Percentage
1.	Social Science	87	55.8
2.	Science	104	66.5
3.	History	97	62.2
4.	Biographies	100	64.1
5.	Cartoon and comics	98	62.8
6.	Children's magazines	98	62.8

Table 7 reveals that most of the children are interested in reading books in

Social Science, Science, History, Biographies, cartoons and comics, and magazines for the children. The highest percentages of them (66.5%) prefer to read Science books. But the survey shows that only less than half of the libraries (45.7%) have a small number of Science books in the children's collections. This finding

shows that the children's collections are not based on the needs of the members.

5.7 Measurement of Library Use

5.7.1 Children's Motivation to Visit the Public Libraries

The children's motivation to visit the public libraries is analyzed and it is presented in table 8.

Table 8
Children's Motivation to Visit the Public Libraries and their Ranking

Sl.no.	Motivation	Male	Female	Rank
1.	To borrow and return books and magazines	56(72.7%)	59(80.8%)	1
2.	For the purpose of class project work	4(18.2%)	12(16.4%)	2
3.	To spend leisure time	5(6.5%)	1(1.4%)	3
4.	To attend the library programmes	1(1.3%)	1(1.4%)	4
5.	Other purposes	1(1.3%)	0(.0%)	5
	Total Members	77(100%)	73(100%)	

Table 8 shows that the children visit the libraries more "to borrow and return books and magazines." This secured the highest percentage in both genders, the respective percentages are: boys (72.7%) and girls (80.8%). "For the purpose

of class project work" was ranked second by 18.2% boys and 16.4% girls. It is also seen that "to spend leisure time", "to attend the library programmes," and "other purposes" were ranked third, fourth, and fifth respectively by both genders.

Since the p-value is .434 (>.05), among the children of both genders there is no significant difference in the motivation to visit the public libraries. Children of both genders visit public libraries more to borrow and return books and magazines.

5.7.1 Frequency of Library Visits

The frequency of visits to the library is an important parameter to measure the quality of resources, services, and facilities provided by the library to its members. The frequency of visits to the library by the children are analyzed and presented in table 9.

Table 9

Frequency of Visits to the Public Libraries by the Children

Gender	Daily	More than Once a Week	Once a Week	Fortnightly	Rarely	Total
Male	20(24.4%)	40(48.7%)	16(19.5 %)	3(3.7 %)	3(3.7 %)	82(100 %)
Female	10(13.3%)	31(41.3%)	26(34.7 %)	6(8 %)	2(2.7 %)	75(100 %)
Total	30(19.1%)	71(45.2%)	42(26.8%)	9(5.7%)	5(3.2%)	157(100%)
Chi-square value 7.758, df = 4, P-value = .101						

The data in Table 9 show that nearly half of the children of both genders, boys (48.7%) and girls (41.3%) visit the library "more than once a week", whereas only 24.4% of boys and 13.3% of girls visit the library "daily"; 19.5% of boys and 34.7% of girls visit the library "once a week"; a very small percentages of them, boys (3.7%) and girls (8%) visit the library "fortnightly"; and 3.7% of boys and 2.7% of girls visit the library "rarely".

Since the p-value is .101 (>.05) no significant difference is observed in the frequency of visits to the public library by the children of both genders. Most of the children of both genders visit the library frequently.

Conclusions

The study shows that only a small percentage of the children are utilizing the library facilities and services. No serious efforts are made by the libraries to inculcate reading habits among them at an early stage. The sufficient standard reading materials in different subjects are not provided for children in a majority of the libraries. The

different programmes are not conducted at a satisfactory level for the children to develop their capacities and creativity. The facilities such as book shelves, chairs, tables, and cabinets for children are not suitably designed and also in poor condition. The modern facilities such as computers and related services such as CD browsing and internet services are not at all provided by the public libraries to the children.

As part of children's service, a special service to schools should be provided which include talks in schools and in parent-teacher association meetings, instruction in library use, the loan of materials for school projects, book mobiles to the schools, provision of a public library corner at schools under a student in charge.

References

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