

**Usefulness of library orientation programs to newcomers:
University of Sri Jayewardenepura**

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Abstract

There are various types of libraries in Sri Lanka. School students mostly use school libraries, public libraries, special libraries and libraries maintained by local authorities for their information needs. After completing schooling, most students seek for higher education opportunities. Generally, libraries in higher education institutions are considered as academic libraries. An academic library is a library associated with a college or university which supports the mission of the institution and the research needs of its academic staff, students and other staff. Academic libraries work together with other units in the university or the parent organization and members of their institutional communities to participate in, support, and achieve the educational mission of their institutions by transferring the core competencies of information literacy; the abilities involved in identifying information needs, accessing information, evaluating, managing, and applying information, and understanding the legal, social, and ethical aspects of information use.

Students who enroll in higher education institutions are referred to as newcomers or freshers of that particular institution. There are various definitions for the word newcomer: 'a person who has recently arrived in a place', and 'a novice in a particular activity or situation'. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, it defines as 'someone who has recently arrived in a place or recently become involved in an activity'. At present a large number, nearly 29, 000 of newcomers join public universities in Sri Lanka. The main objective of this study is to find out whether the orientation programs conducted by the library are absorbed by the newcomers of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. This will be achieved by examining the awareness of the library among the new students after the orientation program which also depends on how they focus and give attention to the program.

In order to achieve the objectives, the following research questions are formulated.

- *Whether the students have prior knowledge about any kind of libraries?*

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- *Whether they acquire an understanding of the university library through the orientation programme conducted by the library staff and their perceptions about our library?*

Survey method was used in this research. Primary data was collected by distributing a very simple questionnaire to newcomers of the Faculty of Applied Sciences. Being the largest university in Sri Lanka in terms of student number, University Sri Jayewardenepura consists of 8 faculties. They are Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Faculty of Technology, Faculty of Engineering and recently established Faculty of Allied Health Sciences.

More than four thousand newcomers enroll the university during one academic year. Therefore it is vital to find out the outcome of the orientation programmes conducted by the library. In order to streamline the present existing orientation programs, the results of this study are utmost importance. The results of this survey are expected to generalize to all the faculties as the mode of delivery, prop usage, staff involved in the orientation program for all the faculties are almost similar.

Data analysis showed that all 100% of newcomers of the Faculty of Applied Science had a basic knowledge about libraries. Further analysis showed that they have gained a more understanding about academic libraries, their structure of organization and facilities and services provided. Further, it reveals that they have an idea about the different sections and common places in the library. Twenty four percent(24%) have identified that their most favourite place in the library as the interactive study area (multimedia unit). This interactive study area is having 40 numbers of computers for students use and covered by Wi-Fi facility. It has a conducive environment with air conditioning and has provided with attractive and multi-use furniture. Some students have marked that the lending section (20%) and Ceylon Room (16%) as their most favourite place in the library. These results reveal that newcomers have acquired an understanding about the university library through orientation programme and have expressed their perceptions on certain services and facilities by marking their preferences.

It is important that libraries need to adopt changes happening due to ever-changing technologies, various types of demands of users, different lifestyles of users and demands made by the accrediting bodies. Further, the library gives instructions to newcomers on how to find information related to their study programmes.

Results of this study show that the orientation program is important to newcomers though they have some prior knowledge of libraries. It helps them to identify the

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different places in the library, various collections and facilities and services provided by the library.

As methods to improve the perceptions of students towards library, it is suggested to give more emphasis on introducing modern facilities and services to newcomers and also to make more attractive programs for them. Further, introducing pre-recorded video programmes and virtual tours on special sections of the library, introducing fun game competitions for searching library materials, giving practical experiences when introducing electronic resources for newcomers (e-databases, e-books, e-journals) and highlighting attractive and sometimes unique features and services in our library during the library tour as part of the library orientation for example Laptop lending service, Letter formation 'Read' rack as Just-Returned-Books store, Touch screen kiosk for OPAC searching, Bill payment kiosk for utility bill payments and Cafe machine for refreshment facilities etc. are some other suggestions to improve library orientation programs holistically.

Key words: *Academic libraries, Newcomers, Novices, Freshers, Orientation programmes, University of Sri Jayewardenepura*