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## School Libraries in Sri Lanka: A State-of-the-Art Report

*Geetha Yapa*

*Faculty of Medicine Library, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka*

*School libraries in Sri Lanka are moving toward a period of rapid growth and development due to an ambitious program developed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Although librarianship is not new to Sri Lankans, the development of school libraries has been slow due to lack of funds and trained personnel. The government has taken the initiative of reorganizing the system of education to meet the challenges of the 21st century, and as part of this the school libraries will also be improved to provide better learning environments to the students. This article highlights the changes that are currently being implemented toward reaching this goal.*

### Introduction

Sri Lanka is a beautiful tropical island located in the Indian Ocean, off the southern tip of India. It is fondly called the "Pearl of the Indian Ocean." The island was called Ceylon before it became a republic in 1972. The coastline circles along about 1,585 kilometers of beautiful sandy beaches. From the beaches the land rises to form the central highlands where the climate is much cooler.

The history of Sri Lanka dates back over 2,500 years. Following the advent of Buddhism in the 3rd century BC, a civilization rich in Indo-Aryan culture took root. The island's location on the sea routes between Europe, Africa, and Asia led to contact with many great civilizations. Traders and colonizers of the west arrived during the 16th century, and the impact of many cultures over the centuries has resulted in the country's culture being endowed with a rich diversity.

The people of Sri Lanka are of diverse races and faiths. The majority are Sinhalese, and among the minorities are Tamils, Muslims, and Burghers (descended from the Portuguese and Dutch). Sri Lanka is well known for its world famous Ceylon tea. The country was the first in South Asia to move toward the open economy. The new trust in the economy is on export-led industry, although agriculture is also being revived. Although well on the road to modernization, the country and its people still cherish most of their traditional values, an aspect that continues to attract visitors from abroad, as much as the beauty and diversity of scenery and the warmth and friendliness of the people.

## General Education

The foundations of the modern education system in Sri Lanka were laid during the latter part of the 19th century when the country was under British rule. Before the British came to Sri Lanka, church schools were established, first by the Portuguese (1505-1658) and later by the Dutch (1658-1796), in addition to Buddhist temple schools. British missionaries also established church schools, and the rulers were instrumental in setting up state schools. The British education policy during this period led to the establishment of few institutions that imparted English education to a socioeconomically favored minority and promoted elementary education in Sinhala and Tamil for the majority. The sociological implications of this class separation constitutes a problem to this day. When the country gained independence in 1948, there was a centralized system of education with a complex mix of private and government schools. The present system is the cumulative outcome of reforms introduced from time to time. However, the greatest changes were made during the 30-year period between 1931 and 1961.

Among the milestones in the path toward a national system of education was the establishment of the Department of Public Instruction in 1869, after which the education system in Sri Lanka came under the supervision of the state. This later became the Department of Education under Education Ordinance No. 1 of 1920. The schools established by religious denominations remained as assisted schools until 1961, when most of them were taken over by the government, thus establishing an almost total national education system. The persistent efforts of Dr. C.W.W. Kannangara, the first Minister of Education, were instrumental in introducing remarkable changes in the education system. He was mainly concerned with providing quality education for all. A series of positive policies were established as a result of the Kannangara Special Committee reforms of 1943. The introduction of free education, adoption of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in all institutions of education, and the taking over of a larger role in secondary education through central schools were major steps in providing equal opportunities in education.

Almost the entire cost of education has been borne by the government since the introduction of free education. Since then, the government has introduced welfare programs from time to time such as providing free text books, uniforms, midday meals, and medical facilities. The education system grew rapidly due to the emphasis given to education and welfare. These policies have contributed to the nearly universal primary and secondary enrollment, indicating the country's achievement in providing educational opportunity for all. Today Sri Lanka has a literacy rate of 90%, one of the highest in South East Asia.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education is responsible for planning and implementing education policy. The National Institute of Education, a coordinating body established in the early 1990s, is charged with the

responsibility of conducting research into all aspects of education, curriculum development, and planning and organizing teacher education, including postgraduate teacher education. With the establishment of provincial councils in 1989 and devolution of power to the provinces, the provision of facilities for all state schools, other than national schools and specified schools, is carried out by provincial authorities. This includes opening and upgrading schools in accordance with the policies and standards specified by the national Ministry, construction and maintenance of school buildings, and procurement and distribution of furniture, teaching aids, science equipment, and so forth.

The democratization of schooling, together with welfare programs, has led to rapid enrollment at all levels in the school system: 98% of primary schoolchildren reach grade 5, and 75% reach the secondary school level. There are more than 10,000 educational institutions in the country, including private schools and *Pirivenas* (institutions of higher learning). The total number of students enrolled is approximately 4.3 million. There are 10 universities and two affiliated university colleges, and the total number of undergraduates exceeds 32,000. In addition, there are institutes of technology and vocational training that provide courses leading to higher diplomas, professional diplomas, and certificates. The general education system open to all consists of:

1. Five years of primary schooling from year 1 to year 5 (ages 5 to 10 years);
2. Three years of junior secondary schooling from year 6 to year 8 (ages 11 to 13 years);
3. Five years of senior secondary schooling from year 9 to year 13 (ages 14 to 18 years).

The school curriculum was originally based on the British model. Throughout the years since independence (1948), much effort has been made to change the curriculum on the basis of student needs. At the primary level, the curriculum is based on basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics. English is taught as a second language from grade 3 upward, but in most urban schools teaching of English starts from year 1. The curriculum at the junior secondary level is based on consolidating the basic knowledge and skills acquired by the students at the primary level and laying the foundation for further education. Steps have been taken to introduce them to the world of work by providing for the acquisition of certain simple skills relevant to a range of vocations. The first three years in the senior secondary school leads to the General Certificate of Education ("O" Levels) and the second part, of two years, leads to the General Certificate of Education ("A" Levels). Selection to universities is based on the performance at the General Certificate of Education ("A" Level) examination.

Evaluation of student performance is carried out through monthly assessments and end-of-term examinations. At the end of year 5, students sit for a scholarship examination. Students who perform well in this examination get

the opportunity to attend popular schools in urban areas, and about 1,500 talented children from lower-income groups are awarded bursaries as well. Students from lower-income groups who enter universities are also provided with bursaries through the Mahapola Scholarship scheme. These scholarship programs have led to increased educational opportunities for rural students. Schooling is not compulsory in Sri Lanka, although there is provision for such legislation under the Educational Ordinance No. 31 of 1939. The Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Education, which has been active since 1991 as a forum of discussion on topical themes and making representations to relevant bodies on important educational issues, has strongly urged that regulations for enforcing compulsory education for the 5-16 age group be introduced under the above Act.

There has been no significant expansion of government schools over the last two decades. However, there has been progress organizationally and qualitatively. This is reflected in the establishment of a few president's schools, the elevation of ordinary schools to *Maha Vidyalayas* (central schools), and the upgrading of selected schools in each district into national schools.

With the socioeconomic changes that took place with the growth of the open economy in Sri Lanka, a new category of schools has emerged over the last 10-15 years. These are called international schools, and the medium of instruction is English. Their curriculum is based on foreign models, and they prepare students for London "O" Level and "A" Level examinations. These schools do not come under the purview of the Ministry of Education and Higher education. They are managed by registered companies as business undertakings, and they charge high fees. These schools have become a privileged group catering to the affluent elite, and it is likely that they will override the concept of equity and equality in education, which was a fundamental premise of Sri Lanka's policy on education. The rate of growth of employment opportunities did not match the rapid increase in the supply of educated manpower. The resulting socioeconomic and political problems led to the establishment of the National Education Commission by the Act No. 19 of 1991. The main objective was to develop a national education policy to reorient education programs to suit present-day needs. As a result of their recommendations, a series of reforms are now being implemented and are expected to be completed by the year 2001.

### History of School Library Development

The history of school libraries is closely related to the history of the country and the education system. The history of civilization in Sri Lanka dates back to the 5th century BC when Indo-Aryans came, bringing with them their rich culture and traditions. Their descendants are the Sinhalese and the Sinhala language developed from the Aryan language. In the Aryan system of education, the teacher was a Brahmin, and pupils from royal families and the

elite lived with the teacher from whom they learned political theory and the arts of war. Although the art of writing was in existence, these early Aryans maintained an oral tradition.

The arrival of Buddhism in the 3rd century BC resulted in dramatic changes in the religious, cultural, and educational systems. Education became the responsibility of the Buddhist monks, and this led to the establishment of temple schools and institutions of higher learning called *Pirivenas*. Education was free, and the oral tradition continued until the 1st century BC when the Buddhist texts were committed to writing. Copies of these texts were deposited in all the leading temples. These ola-leaf manuscripts were collected and preserved by Buddhist monks and were arranged according to a convenient system. Even today, almost every temple has a separate room or a building called *potgula* set apart to keep ola-leaf manuscripts and books. The Buddhist temple collections were the first form of school libraries in Sri Lanka, and the Buddhist monks played the role of custodian or librarian. These centers of Buddhist learning were well known for scholarly activities, and scholar-monks from other Asian countries also visited these halls of higher learning.

However, with the invasion of the country by the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the English respectively, these institutions of learning and the well established system of learning started to decline. Foreign missionaries took over the educational role of the Buddhist monks and started establishing church schools in the coastal areas of the island. The language of instruction in these schools was the language of the people, and education was provided free of charge. With the spread of Christianity, the number of Buddhists and temple schools also declined, but during the latter part of the 19th century, a religious and cultural revival took place. Buddhist English schools were opened in increasing numbers after the formation of the Buddhist Theosophical Society in 1883. Under the British system, some schools were managed by the state, others by religious denominations, and yet others by religious denominations with state assistance. By the end of the 19th century, there were three types of schools: the vernacular, Anglo-vernacular, and English schools. Nearly 90% of the students attended the vernacular and Anglo-vernacular schools, and a minority of students from the upper classes attended the fee-levying English schools. These English schools were based on the Western model of education, particularly the public (in fact, private) schools in the United Kingdom. They paved the way to higher education and the best vocational opportunities, whereas the vernacular schools had poor facilities and teacher resources and did not lead to higher education or good occupations. The missionaries realized the need for books in Sinhala and Tamil for religious and educational purposes. Therefore, they established their own printing presses and started printing books and periodicals. The first printing press with Sinhala characters was established in 1734, and this resulted in the improvement of literary activities in the country.

Although it is difficult to trace the beginning of school libraries in the modern sense, it is clear that the early private schools had their own libraries. They were developed mostly on the initiative of the principals and managing authorities. These libraries have now become the nucleus of some of the best school library collections available in this country. Because private schools were fee-levying, they were able to acquire their own collections. They also received additional support through trusts and endowments. In addition, government-assisted private schools received a library grant. School libraries set up at this initial stage provided supplementary material and encouraged the reading habits of students. Records indicate that government schools also received library grants from the government with the introduction of free education. The change of medium of instruction resulted in the rapid increase in Sinhala and Tamil reading material, and this supported the development of libraries in government schools. Awareness of the need for library facilities became apparent during the early 1960s. In 1960 the Department of Education sent a circular letter to all principals of government, central, and senior schools regarding the school library. This was in the form of a guide to running a school library and was later incorporated as a separate chapter in the department's manual of instructions. In addition, the National Education Commission, established in 1961, also recommended setting up school libraries. UNESCO played an important role during the 1960s by providing assistance in the form of experts who were able to foster awareness of the importance of libraries and the value of having trained personnel to manage them. A UNESCO expert who visited the island in 1960 recommended the establishment of a central library organization within the Ministry of Education that would concentrate initially on providing libraries for teacher training colleges and central schools and on the training of teacher-librarians. However, little activity followed these recommendations due to financial difficulties. Another expert in library organization from UNESCO was sent to Sri Lanka in 1967. Her task was to draw up a detailed plan of operation for the establishment of a system of public and school libraries in the country and to assist the government in the implementation of the plan. In addition, a UNESCO meeting on the National Planning of Library Services was held in Sri Lanka the same year. As a result of this event, a plan for setting up an independent body called the National Library Services Board was discussed and approved. The Sri Lanka National Library Services Board (SLNLSB), a semiautonomous body in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, was established by Act No. 17 of 1970. The Board was given the power to plan and assist in the organization and development of library services in the country; to advise and assist in the promotion of public and school libraries; to advise and assist in the coordination and development of university and all types of government and special libraries; and to promote library services generally. Rapid developments in school library services were anticipated through these developments.

In 1969, 100 school libraries were established, and 200 school librarians were trained in connection with the centenary celebrations of education in Sri Lanka. However, libraries were still considered an auxiliary service, and the emphasis was on quantity rather than quality. The collections were not related to the school curriculum and did not reflect the information needs of students. The 1970s began with many activities aimed at providing better school library services. The Ministry of Education established a cadre of school librarians in the early 1970s, in recognition that trained personnel should be in charge of school libraries. Although university librarians are accorded academic status and receive the same salary as university teachers, school librarians were not given the same recognition as teachers. This factor, coupled with lack of training, has been one of the reasons for the slow development of school libraries in Sri Lanka.

By 1970, only about 300 schools had what could normally be called a library. Some of the better equipped schools had reasonably good collections, but they required proper organizing. Since then, there has been a gradual improvement in the collections and facilities in the existing libraries. The SLNLSB implemented a pilot project for developing school and public libraries in the Kandy district. This involved selecting one library from each education circuit for organization and development. By 1975, 500 schools were providing the minimum basic facilities for a school library. The Ministry of Education has been able to develop school libraries with the assistance of the SLNLSB, which has contributed to the development of school libraries through distribution of books, training of library staff, and formulating of standards. By 1997, approximately 3,000 of the 10,200 schools in Sri Lanka had a permanent library. However, there is wide variation in the resources available in these libraries. Although a few schools in urban areas with colonial public school backgrounds have well-stocked libraries, the rest of the school libraries in the country have few resources. Rural schools suffer more than urban schools on account of shortage of funds, and most of them lack adequate resources and library staff. Some of these libraries have only a few cupboards or shelves of books.

The 1990s have brought back some enthusiasm and new hopes to the school library sector. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education has been instrumental in setting new goals for the improvement of school libraries. An ambitious program has been developed with the help of national and international experts, and, as a first step toward achieving the desired goals, a Draft Policy for School Libraries has been drawn up. Plans are under way to improve the present situation through establishment of new libraries and provision of resources, facilities, and trained librarians.

Education in government schools is still dominated by the colonial pattern of a teacher-entered method of instruction and emphasis on examinations. The national curriculum leaves little room for innovation, and students have little time to read anything beyond the textbooks provided by the

government. Students in urban schools with good library facilities are given the opportunity to visit the library during free time. Some schools have a specified library period in the timetable that enables students to visit the library and borrow books once a week or once every two weeks. Other than that, few library related activities are available for students and, as a result, libraries play a minor role in the educational process.

### School Library Administration and Management

School libraries have generally been managed by school librarians with little supervision from principals. This has led to wide variations in the way libraries operate in different schools. In schools where there are good libraries and where paraprofessionals have been appointed by the Ministry of Education, libraries do function well, provided the librarian is active and enthusiastic. In such instances, the collections have been organized according to the Dewey Decimal classification scheme, and lending and reference services are carried out as in any library. However, in most schools, libraries have been set up just for the sake of having one, and the way they are organized and the services provided by them are entirely dependent on the person who looks after the collection-this person could be a teacher, member of the clerical staff, or a volunteer.

The school library standards formulated by the SLNLSB are used to grade school libraries according to the facilities and resources available in them. Although staffing formulas and the services that should be provided by each grade are specified in the standards, none of the school libraries adheres to them due to lack of awareness on the part of those concerned. Steps are being taken by the SLNLSB to exert pressure at the provincial council level to increase the cadre of full-time school librarians.

Recognizing the need for better management and central coordination, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education appointed a Director, School Library Services, in 1997. This Director is responsible for school libraries and school library policy. He is also responsible for effective and regular liaison with the SLNLSB and other agencies that provide teacher librarian training. It has been recommended that, in order to ensure adequate liaison at the provincial level, each province assign, at least on a part-time basis, one officer to be in charge of school library facilities in that province. The Draft Policy Statement of School Libraries formulated by the SLNLSB subcommittee in 1997 recommends that it be the responsibility of the school principal to ensure effective management of the school library for the best advantage of students and teachers, in association with the relevant educational authorities in the area. The Draft Policy Statement also recommends that relevant staff from the ministry, provincial educational authorities, teachers, and principals be trained in library management.

At present, there is no coordination between school librarians, even within a particular region. As a result, there are no resource-sharing and coopera-

tive activities between libraries. There are good public libraries in many areas, but there is no connection between school and public libraries, although such a connection is stipulated by school library standards.

School libraries have yet to begin automation. Although many schools have computer facilities and separate computer centers, the teaching staff fail to see the importance of having computers in libraries, as they themselves are not familiar with new technology. However, a few International schools have started automating their collections, and one or two schools even have good collections of CD-ROM databases. Plans are now being made to provide IT-based services to reflect the needs of the school and its surrounding local community. Since the 1980s, television has been used for educational purposes. Many schools were provided with sets by the government, but none were placed in libraries. Educational programs are broadcast on weekdays after school hours, but the extent to which this medium is used is not known.

### School Library Programs

Until recently, school libraries were regarded as peripheral services by the Ministry of Education. In 1989, an Asian Development Bank-sponsored project made the recommendation that to improve the reading skills, students needed to give more time and attention to reading under the guidance of trained teachers. Another recommendation was to strengthen school libraries, emphasizing the need to enrich them from the point of view of both teacher requirements and pupil requirements. Although many others have also highlighted the need for similar programs, there has been little response.

Although the subject of information has been introduced into the primary school curriculum through social sciences, the context in which it is taught in the classroom does not help the students to relate it to information-seeking skills. The teachers find it difficult to understand the relevance of the school library in the process, as they themselves were not taught library and information skills during their schooldays or during their teacher training. The Ministry now recognizes the importance and value of school libraries as essential components, central to the fulfillment of learning goals and instructional objectives of school education. The entire school curriculum is being revised at present to introduce more student-based learning, and steps have been taken to introduce information literacy into the new school curriculum, as well as into the teacher training curriculum. These changes, together with the program for developing school libraries, will lead to more meaningful ways of helping students learn to learn.

### School Librarians/Teacher-Librarians

In Sri Lanka, the term *school librarian* has been normally 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. According to the

scheme of recruitment in the government sector, those who are recruited as school librarians should at least have completed the First Year Course in Library and Information Science conducted by the Sri Lanka Library Association or have completed the Certificate Course in Library and Information Science conducted by the University of Kelaniya.

Because school librarians are not teachers, they do not have the same status as teachers. Their salaries are lower than those of teachers. Those who have been recruited by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education are paid according to their qualifications and experience. Teachers who look after the library are not paid extra for their services. Others who work in libraries are paid by the individual schools with the help of school development funds or parents and past students. Their working hours are longer than those of teachers, as they often keep the library open after school hours. School library standards require them to work from 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. (school hours and teachers' working hours are generally from 8.00 a.m. to 2.00p.m.).

At present, 3,420 school librarians are working in 2,460 schools. There are no professional librarians and, among those who are presently working as school librarians, 80 are paraprofessionals. The others have received minimal training of about one week (through workshops conducted by the SLNLSB or NIE). Apart from the 80 full-time school librarians, the rest could be teachers who look after the library in addition to their normal teaching, clerical staff, or volunteers.

The Draft Policy formulated by the Sri Lanka National Library Services Board under the direction of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education identifies three types of school librarians: professional librarians, paraprofessionals, and teacher-librarians. The policy recommends that professional librarians be appointed for all large schools and that trained teacher-librarians and paraprofessionals be appointed to other schools according to their requirements.

In 1994 the Library and Information Sector study carried out by a team of national and international experts recommended the training of 7,000 teachers to become teacher-librarians. They recommended that two teacher training colleges introduce Library and Information Science courses as specialization courses for teachers who intend to be teacher-librarians. They also proposed the establishment of a National Institute of Library and Information Studies to ensure that instruction in library programs is conducted at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It is hoped that, when this institution is established, it will play an important role in training teacher librarians in this country. Steps are currently being taken to study the training needs of school librarians. Information thus gathered will be used to develop training courses. The competences required by teacher-librarians have not been specified yet, but they will also be considered when designing training courses in the near future.

## Professional Standards and Legislation

Although much emphasis has been placed on education, there was no provision for library services in educational reforms and national developmental plans. As a result, there is no legislation directly concerned with school libraries. One of the first instances where school libraries were mentioned was Act No. 5 of 1951, which indicates that the government is responsible for giving library grants to school libraries.

The two most important pieces of legislation that have made a great impact on libraries in Sri Lanka are Ceylon (Sri Lanka) National Library Services Board Act No. 17 of 1970 and the Sri Lanka Library Association (Incorporation) Law No. 20 of 1974 of the State Assembly. The main objective of the Library Board was library development, whereas the objective of the Library Association was professional development. However, both have much in common. Both organizations have been involved in the formulation of standards for libraries; the establishment and encouragement of cooperation between libraries and librarians; and the training of librarians through professional courses, seminars, and workshops. In addition, the Library Association has formulated a Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics to ensure that all librarians observe the highest standards of conduct and integrity.

The Public Administration Circular No. 47 of 1989 serves as the scheme of recruitment for government librarians, including school librarians. This specifies the qualifications required and the salary structure of different grades of librarians. This circular has entrusted new powers and responsibilities to the Sri Lanka National Library Services Board (SLNLSB) by empowering the board to grade school, public, and departmental libraries. This has led to demand for grading of libraries, which in turn made it necessary to formulate library standards. The public and school library standards formulated by the SLNLSB are not mandated. They are used by the Library Board as guidelines in advising provincial council authorities on how to organize library services in their respective provinces.

Lack of defined policy on educational institutions has contributed to the lack of emphasis on providing and using library resources in schools. A Draft Policy Statement on School Libraries was formulated in 1997 and, once it is approved by the Education Ministry, it will be used as a guideline in future library development activities.

Steps are being taken by the Ministry of Education to prepare the necessary regulations to establish an Education Librarians' Service and to prepare drafts of appropriate recruitment procedures. It is hoped that this will help to give school librarians more recognition, as well as promotions and incentives needed to attract and retain personnel.

## Professional Support

School librarians in Sri Lanka do not have their own library association. Records indicate that there were school library associations in the northern part of the country, but at present the only library association in the country is the Sri Lanka Library Association (SLLA). The Ceylon Library Association, which was founded in 1960, became the Sri Lanka Library Association in 1974. Only librarians who have completed the Final Year Course conducted by the Sri Lanka Library Association are eligible to join, so most school librarians are not members. The Council of the SLLA comprises members from different types of libraries, and a Council member represents school librarians. The responsibility for coordinating professional activities and maintaining relationships with other groups of librarians lies with this member.

The Library Association has played a leading role in encouraging and uniting all who are engaged in the profession. It has provided the environment for all those interested in library work and books to cooperate, and since 1964 the National Library Week has been celebrated annually. The Association provides the opportunity for school librarians to meet others and exchange ideas and experiences. One of the main objectives of the SLLA is to safeguard and promote the interest, welfare, rights, and privileges of members of the profession. Apart from conducting training courses, the Association also promotes research and publications. The highest qualification awarded by the Association is the Fellowship, which is honored and respected by the profession, and great emphasis is placed on maintaining the highest standards. Those who have contributed to the profession through professional activities, innovation, service to SLLA, and involvement in continuous progress are awarded fellowships. The Association has opened new ways of encouraging the members to achieve a higher level of professionalism through greater involvement in national and international librarianship. Through the coordinated efforts of the SLLA and SLNLSB, librarians have been able to advise and assist the government in matters such as preferred qualifications for recruitment and promotion, as well as their salary structure.

Because school librarians are a large group and, because they are scattered throughout the country, it is difficult for them to get together as a group and exchange ideas and experiences. No attempts have been made in the recent past to organize regional groups, as few librarians among them are capable of providing the required leadership. This is mainly due to the lack of professional librarians who have the initiative for professional activities. With the changes that are now being planned to train them and to establish provincial library boards, it is hoped that there will be a move toward more active cooperation and participation in professional work. The SLNLSB has, from time to time, organized workshops, seminars, and training sessions for school librarians. The Board also provides help and guidance to those who

require it. The establishment of provincial library boards under the new program will provide the environment for greater collaboration between librarians in a region. The National Institute of Education (NIB) is another organization that has provided support in the form of organizing seminars and workshops for teacher-librarians.

### Current Developments

For school libraries and librarians in Sri Lanka, the time has come for change. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education has finally come to recognize the importance of school libraries in developing a high standard of education that helps to extend the learning environment beyond classrooms and textbooks. In 1994, a team of national and international experts carried out a Library and Information Sector Study (which forms part of the Sri Lanka Books and Information Sector Study) at the request of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. This study was funded by the World Bank. As a result of the recommendations made by the experts, a plan for a General Education Project has been developed. One major component of this new plan is the development of school libraries. The objectives of the proposed development plan are: To establish school libraries according to school size and provide adequate books, furniture, and trained librarians; to strengthen the management of the library sector; and to establish a National Institute of Library and Information Science (NILIS). One of the first activities carried out under the project was the formulation of a policy on school libraries. A Director has already been appointed to look after the interests of the school library sector, and steps are being taken to establish provincial library boards to coordinate activities at the provincial level. By the year 2002, 3,000 new school libraries will be established, and existing school libraries will also be renovated to increase the number of libraries, so that 60% of all schools (approx. 7,000) will have functional libraries by that time. Books, furniture, and equipment will be provided under the project. School librarians already in service will be trained, and more librarians will be employed to a total of 7,000 professional librarians, and 3,000 paraprofessionals will also be employed to assist the teacher-librarians.

A National Institute of Library and Information Science, an autonomous institute affiliated with the University of Colombo, is currently being established. This will cater to the large number of teachers who require training, retraining, and upgrading in school libraries, as well as those who need training to work in the public sector libraries. Courses will be offered at certificate, degree, and postgraduate levels by amalgamating the current training offered by University of Colombo and other institutions. If school libraries are to play a central role in education, they must change with the times and provide services and facilities to meet the changing needs. It is hoped that the current educational reforms, together with new developments in the school library sector, will bring about a major change in the

school library sector in Sri Lanka and enable librarians to play a more active role in helping students to learn.

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- Further enquiries may be made to: Sri Lanka Library Association, 275/75, Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka National Library Services Board, 14, Independence Av., Colombo 7, Sri Lanka.

### *Author Note*

Geetha Yapa, MLS, is the Librarian of the Faculty of Medicine Library, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. In her work, she finds that most under graduates do not make the best use of resources available to them as they do not have information skills. She says, "This is due to the sad fact that they are not encouraged to use libraries during their schooldays. Looking back at my own schooldays I realize how much we have missed because there was no one to show us the way. Therefore, I feel that my mission in life is to change the way things are and make some difference in the way school libraries operate in Sri Lanka. Therefore, I am currently working on my PhD research, which involves trying to find ways of introducing information skills to the school curriculum, and this is how I became knowledgeable on the subject of school libraries."