

South Eastern Regional Library & Information Network (SERLIN) of Sri Lanka

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Introduction

South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL) is located in the Ampara district in which the public, school, and college libraries function with poor infrastructure, human resources, and information sources. The libraries of SEUSL are fully fledged libraries with enriched collections of print and electronic resources, modern information services, space, professionally qualified library academics/ professionals, paraprofessionals, a digital library, an Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), and automated Library Management System. As a community outreach, SEUSL libraries extended their services to the libraries across the Ampara district by establishing a Library & Information Network under the umbrella of SEUSL libraries. This network has been named as “South Eastern Regional Library & Information Network (SERLIN) of Sri Lanka”. According to Chatterjee (2016), “Information /Library Networks refer to collaborative systems developed by the cooperation of multiple libraries or information centers. These networks can be local (LAN) or wide area (WAN), connecting institutions within a small or large geographical area respectively, to pool resources and provide access to a wider range of information sources”.

The main objective of this project is to bring all the libraries in Ampara district to a common platform to share the available resources, expertise and services among members of the network.

Project plan and Methods

The special senior staff meeting of SEUSL libraries held on 29th September 2022 and decided to formulate this network. Formal approval was obtained from the University, before implementing the project.

Librarians of schools, colleges, public, and administrators such as Zonal Directors of Education, Secretaries of Predeshya Saba and Municipal Councils, and Principals of Colleges of the coastal belt of Ampara have been invited for a brainstorming session through which all stakeholders were given a clear picture about the network. Name of the network, objectives of the network, future activities were discussed and executive committee of the network was formed as the result of the brainstorming session.

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The web page for SERLIN was created and linked; Financial, economic, environmental, and social sustainability were discussed; Included strategies and activities in the SEUSL Libraries' strategic plan; Membership applications were circulated and recruited member libraries to SERLIN; SERLIN was officially launched at the 27th Founders Day celebration of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, held on 25th October 2022.

Findings and Discussion

On the establishment of the SERLIN network, the following activities were accomplished:

Two capacity-building programs were conducted by the SEUSL Library for the SERLIN member libraries; with the support of YM Trust Australia, 2,399 books were donated to 29 member libraries of this network; SERLIN members were invited to 'Book Talks' and an exhibition conducted by SEUSL Library.

Another book donation will be conducted in November 2024 and all necessary arrangements have been made. All member libraries are requested to collect materials to preserve the cultural heritage of the Ampara district. Consequently, preservation and conservation techniques will be implemented. Individual digital libraries will be established in the interested member libraries to preserve the rare materials.

SERLIN has proposed to promote the Oluvil Public Library and develop it as a 'Model Public Library' for the region as one of the activities for the year 2025/2026. Furthermore, initiatives have been taken to train staff of the member libraries on KOHA open-source library management system.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Libraries of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka have a responsibility in developing the regional libraries across Ampara as the libraries located in this area are poorly equipped, with less facilities, poor infrastructure, and managed without qualified staff. Implementing a network among the libraries of Ampara district is well underway, at present. Considering the status of these libraries, SERLIN network has planned its activities and proceeding with great success.

Ampara district still has several rural villages that have less opportunity to enjoy and utilize the state-of-the-art facilities which exist in urban areas. So far, libraries in the coastal belt (Tamil-speaking area) have not been included in the project, and as the next step, this network should be extended to other areas, too.

Keywords: SERLIN network, SEUSL, Information services.

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