Inter library loan Services among the SLSTINET Members:
a Critical Evaluation in terms of Member Satisfaction,
ILL Processing Patterns and Delivery Speed.

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Abstract

This research paper examines the Inter-library loan customer satisfaction at "Sri-Lanka Scientific and Technical Information Network" (SLSTINET). This paper further describes the existing ILL system, factors causes in delaying the delivery speed of ILL and proposes to improve the system within the consortium. The researcher conclude that, the processing steps such as "time taken to initiate the process of ILL" (elapsed time), "time taken for searching the materials", "time taken for photocopying the materials", "time taken for packaging and mailing" and "time taken for delivering the documents" affect the response time of ILL request among the SLSTINET members.

It was found that average turnaround time of ILL was 6.12 weeks, the Individual institutions' means ranges from 6-8 weeks and majority of the SLSTINET member librarians (53%) are satisfied to some extent over their staff and are expecting much improvement. At last the study proposes a model structure for the improvement of the Inter Library Loan services.

Keywords: Library networks, Inter Library Loan, Document Delivery, Delivery Speed, SLSTINET, Sri-Lanka

Introduction

The aim of any library or information center is to satisfy the needs of its users. The information needs can be satisfied by providing accessibility to the information. It is a general fact that no library is self sufficient in providing information to the users, as the information needs of the patrons are unlimited, while resources are limited. Hence libraries and information centers through the practice of cooperation share the resources to satisfy the needs of the library patrons. For this purposes "Sri-Lanka Scientific and Technical Information Network" (SLSTINET) was established in 1997, as the national information network of Science and Technology in Sri-Lanka. (Yapa, N.U, 1998) briefed, the "Main idea of the SLSTINET as to integrate the resources of various libraries to provide more useful services to the scientific community"

The inter-library loan service is an important activity of SLSTINET as any consortium or library & information networks. The resource sharing and networking among the member of the network can not succeed without effective inter-library loan system.

Background of the study

The Scientific & Technical Information is scattered in several places or sources in Sri-Lanka. Information available in the country is not conveniently organized for easy access. Hence users find it difficult to obtain the needed and relevant information from a single source. The SLSTINET was established to solve this

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It was expected that the SLSTINET may lead the Scientific and Technical libraries and information centers to facilitate access to regional, national, international and foreign databases.

Since 1977 for over twenty years now, SLSTINET has been active and been involved in ILL services to satisfy the information needs of the Scientific Community in Sri Lanka. It has been found that periodical evaluation of the services is valuable to measure the performance with a view to improve the ILL system. (Lancaster, 1979) says "Effectiveness must be measured in terms of how well a service satisfies the demands placed upon it by its users".

A study of user satisfaction about existing ILL services and problem it encounters in the process of ILL are therefore important aspect, underlying the development and improvement of ILL services.

This study therefore investigated the ILL Processing Patterns. Turnaround time of ILL prevails in SLSTINET, satisfaction of the staff who involved in ILL operation, as they reflect on the satisfaction of the ILL services.

Statement of the Problem and Its Significance
Information provision is often inadequate and unable to provide scientific researches with the data and information they need. This difficulty hinders the activities of scientific researchers and educationists in Sri Lanka very much. Inter Library Loan is one of the most important and beneficial activities and services of SLSTINET, through which this problem can be minimized to some extent.

But the major bottleneck of the system of the ILL in the SLSTINET is that, the longer hours it takes to reach the users. Therefore, this study is to examine why requested ILL materials take so much of delay to be placed in patrons' hands. This study therefore examines the ILL processing patterns and satisfaction of the staff who involve in ILL operation. The study of these two components of the ILL will reveal why requested ILL item take such a long time to reach the requester and intends to provide suggestions for further improvement.

Objectives
1. To examine the factors that cause delaying the ILL activities among the member libraries.
2. To evaluate the existing staff members and their contribution in fulfilling the ILL requests to the level of satisfying the Librarians.
3. To find out the delivery speed of the ILL transaction among the SLSTINET Institutions.
4. To evaluate the ILL services, provided by the SLSTINET from the point of respondents.
5. To propose a range of activities that could significantly contribute to the overall success of the ILL services.

Research Questions
1. Are there any factors causing delay in ILL activities?
2. Are SLSTINET member librarians satisfy with the staff, involved in ILL operations?
3. Are the respondents satisfied with the ILL services, provided by the SLSTINET?
4. What is the delivery speed of the ILL transaction among the SLSTINET Institutions?
These questions were taken into consideration and answers were found in analytical way.

Selection of the Study Area and Population

The member institutions of the SLSTINET are purposively selected as the study area. This includes Science faculty libraries of the universities, libraries of the Scientific & Technical research institutions and other libraries having Scientific & Technical collection. All participating librarians of the SLSTINET were taken as the study population.

Review of Literature

Library Context of Resource Sharing

(De Silva, W.R.G, 1996) describes the goals of resource sharing in a nutshell as “the goals of resource sharing are varied and the net result is a positive effect on all participating libraries. The library user would have access to more materials and services. The participating libraries would be able to provide increased service at a reduced cost than if undertaken individually. These goals have to be achieved without any harm been caused to the missions of the participating libraries.”

(Ranasinghe, R.H.I.S, 1997) has done a research study on “The Possibilities of Resource Sharing among University Libraries in Sri-Lanka”.

“The study portrays the present resources in leading university libraries and the possible methods to improve the resources through resource sharing and networking among the University Libraries in Sri-Lanka. It also further discusses about the barriers that hinderes resource sharing and the ways and means through which the problems could be overcome. The researcher further put forward the preliminary proposal for resource sharing.

The study found out that the inadequate funds, lack of communication methods, inadequacy existing resources, no over all plan for resource sharing, lack of library services, distance among libraries, lack of properly trained staff, equipment failure and un co-operative attitudes & policies as the constraints the University libraries are facing in the resource sharing process”. (Rifaudeen, M.M, 2002) has done a research study on “A Critical Analysis of Resource Sharing and Networking of SLSTINET Activities”.

The study examined whether the SLSTINET stands to serve the member institutions to meet their expectations. The researcher has discovered that the inter-library lending, union list of periodicals, training programme and co-operate databases as the main resource sharing programme of the SLSTINET.

This research study has also build up an innovative model consisting of 03 major resourceful university libraries in Sri-Lanka as regional centres having connection with SLSTIC - the focal point of the network for better co-ordination and networking.

Status of the Inter Library Loan Services in Sri-Lankan Libraries

(Rajasegaram, K, 2001) describes that “the greatest handicap of the ILL services in Health science libraries in Sri-lanka is the delay involved in getting the copies from the resource libraries. Out of 14 libraries surveyed, only one library (7%) was highly satisfied with the I.L. services. Seven libraries (50%) were moderately satisfied, where as six (43%) were not satisfied with ILL services provided”.

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**Inter Library Loan Services and Customer Satisfaction**

(GEISER, C 1996) describes the “effects of the Federal express for expedited delivery of ILL materials in the Greater Research Libraries Consortium on shipping costs, delivery speed, staff time, policies, and procedures and found that delivery times are reduced and quality of services is increased”.

(WEAVER MEYERS, P. L and Stolt, W.A. 1996) investigated the satisfaction of members on ILL services provided by the Greater Midwest Research Libraries Consortium and found that “they were highly satisfied and the materials received within two weeks satisfy the average academic’s “window of usefulness” for loaned items. The mean delivery speed for all respondents is 15.46 days”.

(BUSH, E.T. and Palmquist, R.A. 1992) identified some determinants of ILL turnaround time within academic libraries and found that “physical elements—proximity and location, processing and staff time, and attitude affect the response time of an ILL request”.

**Research Methodology**

**Data-Gathering Activities**

The data for the research study generated using Survey Research Method, inclusive of questionnaires, Interview and Records available in the library. The study relies on quantitative and qualitative methods in-order to analyze the data to arrive at the conclusion on the research study.

**Research Design - Inter-Library Loan Services**

The specific questions were asked regarding ILL processing patterns, turnaround time of ILL and satisfaction of services and staff who involve in ILL operation to examine the bottleneck of the system of ILL.

**ILL Processing Patterns**

The questions are provided in the questionnaire to reflect the various steps involved in ILL process, such as time taken for searching the materials, retrieval of materials, photocopying of articles, checking out books, maintaining the paper records, packaging and mailing. Actually these elements of activities involved in ILL operation determine the delivery speed. Here the “elapse time” is actually refer to the “time taken before initiating process of ILL such as looking up call numbers, checking serial holding list” etc. after receiving the request for ILL from the member libraries.

**Turnaround Time**

Turnaround time was defined as “the time taken from the point the libraries’ request is received in lending library to the time the request is fulfilled. This is actually the delivery speed of ILL prevails in SLSTINET. It was determined by calculating the number of days falling between the day requested and the day received.

**Satisfaction of ILL Services**

The respondents of the SLSTINET members were also requested to denote their level of satisfaction over the ILL services as fully satisfied, not fully
satisfied & room for improvement, satisfied to some extent and dissatisfaction.

Satisfaction over ILL Staff
This study investigated the satisfaction over the staff who involved in ILL operation. The respondents denoted highly satisfied, satisfied to some extent & expect much improvement, satisfied with their staff, dissatisfied over their ILL operations and works.

Presentation, Analysis & Interpretation of Data Elements in ILL Activities - Elapsed Time
Survey data show the time span between receiving the ILL request from the member libraries and the initial action of retrieval such as looking up call numbers, checking serial holding list etc. This is actually the elapsed time before initiating process of ILL. 75% of the respondents reported it takes more than 02 working days to start the retrieval process for ILL, after ILL requests are received. Another 10% say that it take 02 days to start the ILL process, while only 05% mentioned that they start processing the ILL request between 5-8 hours. Another 10% of the respondents did not answer to this question. Table 1 illustrates elapsed time of ILL in SLSTINET libraries.

Table 1: Elapse TIME of ILL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period (elapsed time)</th>
<th>Libraries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within 4 Hours</td>
<td>00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8 Hours</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Days</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;</td>
<td>75%</td>
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</table>

Searching and Retrieving Documents
The next activity in the process of ILL is retrieving the documents. The respondents denoted time it takes to retrieve documents in their libraries. Table 2 portrays the results in details. The data shows that 46% of the respondents retrieve the requested items within 04 hours. Another 15% spend 5-8 hours to retrieve the documents. 16% of the respondents find out the requested item within 02 days. 13% of the respondents take more than 02 days to retrieve the documents. 10% of the respondents did not answer to this question.

Table 2: Time duration for searching and Retrieving Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Libraries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within 4 Hours</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8 Hours</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Days</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;</td>
<td>13%</td>
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</table>

Photocopying Documents
Table 3 portrays the time taken for the members for photocopying the materials. 66% of the respondents reported that they spend 02 days to get them photocopied. 13% of the respondents reported that more than 02 days is needed for them to get the documents photocopied. 8% of the respondents reported that 5-8 hours is needed to complete the photocopying process. Another 3% of the respondents are very efficient and they get them photocopied within 04 hours.

Table 3: Time for Photocopying Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Libraries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within 4 Hours</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8 Hours</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Days</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Packaging and Mailing
Table 4 shows time taken for Packaging and Mailing the Documents. The majority of the respondents (69%) spend more than
02 days to process it for mailing. 11% of the respondents said that they need 02 days to get it done this activity. Another 10% of the respondents get this done within 5-8 hours. 10% of the respondents did not answer this question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Libraries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within 4 Hours</td>
<td>00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8 Hours</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Days</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;2</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure I: Time involved for all four factors in ILL

Mode of Dispatch
The channel of sending requested materials to the destiny library is also the interest of the researcher. The majority of the respondents (63%) sends and receives the materials through mail and sending a laborer to collect them from the lending library. Some libraries (17%) use only mail services for ILL transactions. The small fraction of the libraries (9%) uses mail, fax and E-mail for ILL transactions. Another 11% of the respondents did not answer to the question.
Turnaround time
Table 5 shows the delivery speed of the ILL transaction in days among the SLSTINET Institutions. Only 16% ILL requests were supplied to the requested library within 2-4 weeks. But the majority of the ILL requests (66%) were supplied, taking more than 6 weeks. Another 08% of the requested libraries received the response to their ILL request within 4-6 weeks. 10% of the respondents did not answer to this question. Overall, ILL requests were supplied to libraries for an average turnaround time of 6.12 weeks. Individual institutions’ means ranges from 6-8 weeks.

Table 5: Delivery speed in days
All institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of days</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2 weeks</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4 weeks</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 weeks</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 -8 weeks</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>66%</td>
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Satisfaction of ILL Services
13% of the respondents indicated that they are being satisfied over the ILL service. The majority of the respondents (62%) reported that they are not fully satisfied and expect room for improvement for the ILL services and they are satisfied to some extent. Another 15% of the respondents denoted that they have dissatisfaction over the ILL services the SLSTINET provide. While 10% of the respondents did not answer to the question.

Satisfaction of ILL Staff
The study revealed that majority of the respondents (53%) of the SLSTINET member librarians felt that they are satisfied to some extent over their staff and expect much improvement. 13% of the respondents were satisfied with their staff who involved in ILL operation.

While, 17% of the respondents are dissatisfied over their ILL operations and works. 17% of the respondents did not answer this question. None of them reported that they are highly satisfied over their operation and works.

Conclusion
As determined from the data presented in this study, the processing steps such as “time taken to initiate the process of ILL” (elapsed time), “time taken for searching the materials”, “time taken for photocopying the materials”, “time taken for packaging and mailing” and “time taken for delivering the documents” affect the response time of ILL request. The study found that the SLSTINET Librarians do not attend to the requests promptly. The participants take much time in both elements of ILL process viz “elapsed Time” and “photocopying documents”. If the members process the request promptly, the delay in turnaround time will be avoided. While they don’t spend much time in retrieving the materials and sending them to the recipient libraries. The average turnaround time of ILL was 6.12 weeks. Individual institutions’ means ranges from 6-8 weeks.

The majority of the respondents (63%) sends and receives the materials through mail or sending a laborer to collect them from the lending library. If the materials were delivered through fast postal services, the delaying process of ILL would be improved.

The member libraries of the SLSTINET are not fully satisfied with the ILL services and expect improvement. Majority of the SLSTINET member librarians (53%) are satisfied to some extent over their staff and expect much improvement.
Recommendations

It is recommended that the large libraries should have willingness to provide their collection on loan basis to other small libraries through inter-library loan, which will be a service of a great value to the Scientific & Technological user community in Sri Lanka.

The study also recommends that the members must be encouraged to start immediate process activities to avoid delay in the ILL among the SLSTINET. It is therefore essential to establish a rapid and reliable delivery system of library materials to users, which is increasingly recognized as essentials to libraries as a part of resource sharing programme.

Avoiding delay is an important factor in any resource sharing arrangement, particularly in fulfilling inter-lending requests. Most library users want to have immediate response to their requests. It is therefore necessary for cooperating libraries to ensure that transactions are promptly handled. The promptness with which libraries act on requests for documents will minimize the turnaround time. Therefore, from the point of postal process, it is recommended that inter-library lending should be completed in five days at the most. To achieve this, libraries receiving requests for documents should endeavor to respond promptly, in any case not more than two days after the receipt of the request.

The traditional mail system, e-mail and fax would remain the mostly used method of sending request and documents. If the documents are in digital format, transmitting such documents is an easy and quickest way. If the materials were delivered through fast postal services, the delaying process of ILL would be improved.

It is also recommended that the library processes and Inter-library lending procedures need to be standardized. This would help developing an integrated communication environment for the sharing of documents among the network participants. The no. of ILL request of the researcher must have been much higher, if the services of the SLSTINET have been better known by its users.

Sharing of Expensive Periodicals among SLSTINET Libraries

The expensive foreign periodicals can be considered as one of the item for the purpose of sharing among the SLSTINET. This will cause reduction in investing capitals, because the several libraries of the SLSTINET subscribe most of the expensive same periodicals. This can be seen as a kind of duplication in subscription and not as an economical usage of the limited fund available in Sri Lanka for Periodicals. If these periodicals are acquired cooperatively on a mutual agreed terms, there will be a substantial saving of money. The SLSTINET libraries therefore could subscribe only the most heavily used titles, which are considered essential and obtain other articles of periodicals through ILL.

Universities and research institutions contain a lot of back volumes of foreign serials. It is recommended to create and develop the computerized article database (abstract) of the back volumes as well as current periodicals. The union article database can also be developed by merging these databases with the help of WINISIS library software. The SLSTIC and the universities and research libraries should corporate in creating this union catalogue of articles of serials. The availability of national bibliographies and union catalogue of serial would have a great benefit on this project.
Inter Library Loan Services

The union article database will definitely be helpful to all the researchers, academic staff and scientists tremendously for their research and development activities. These article databases of periodicals will facilitate the users for utilizing them fully through ILL system.

A Model of Proposed ILL Process

If and when the arrangement of ILL can be made like this. A user asks for a document not owned by his/her library. The Librarian of that library verifies the bibliographic citation for the document with the bibliographic tools like Union List of Periodicals and Abstract of Periodical holdings provided by the SLSTINET. Thereafter Librarian identifies other library, preferably in close proximity and in their regional setting that owns the documents concerned. The Librarian makes requests for the required document on a duly filled 03 copies of standard application form, the Librarian mail the request to the identified Library and a copy to the respective regional centre. This requested library mails the document directly imposing condition on chargers to be settled and due date etc to the respective regional Centre. If the item is not available, the Librarian has to return with endorsement to the request Library and a copy to the regional centre. Then the regional centre will look for it in another library in the sister regional centre and send it to the particular library and copy to the SLSTIC.

References


