

Evaluating outreach activities of the library, University of Moratuwa: perspectives of beneficiaries

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Abstract

Promoting outreach activities by an academic library is something unique in Sri Lankan context. It's even special when such activities are consistently carried out by an academic library for a respectable period. Aiming to serve the underprivileged communities in the vicinity of University of Moratuwa, the Library launched a "Child Development Programme" at Sumudu Preschool located in the University and "Reading Camp" at Bodhiraja Vidyalaya - a primary school in Katubedda, Moratuwa. To review the outcome of these outreach activities, a survey was conducted with the teachers and parents of students in these institutions as the target population. Parents of first year students were omitted since these children did not participate in the programme. Data collection was done by semi structured questionnaire. Fifty four responses were received from parents and eight responses were received from teachers. Majority of the parents and all the teachers had positive attitude about the activities conducted by the Outreach Services Division. They felt the need of continuing such programmes as they had a positive effect on the learning environment of their children. The survey showed that school children expressed their preference towards language learning backed by modern technology while preschoolers preferred aesthetic activities. According to the views of the teachers, these extracurricular activities were able to develop the knowledge and skills of the students. By observing the behavior, the teachers found out that the students eagerly participated in these activities as were able to move away from the routine learning environment. The teachers and the parents of the pre-school have showed their enthusiasm towards the activities and feel that they contribute towards the progress of children. The results revealed the importance of continuing outreach activities targeting lower age groups of society by an academic library for their future endeavors.

Keywords: *Outreach Librarianship; Academic Libraries; Community and Libraries; Teaching and Learning*

1.0 Introduction

The University of Moratuwa Library is one of the leading technological libraries in the country. Its main subject specializations are Engineering, Architecture and Information Technology. University of Moratuwa Library (UML) has excelled in providing knowledge services within the university and among other institutions in Sri Lanka. Having recognized the social responsibility in reaching the community around the university premises, UML established an Outreach Services Division (OSD) in September 2013 under the patronage of the Library Committee with the approval of the University Senate (Kodikara, Seneviratne and Punchihewa, 2013). To address the changing nature of library services which are no longer limited to a particular space in a building with stacks of books, several objectives were laid down to share the resources of this knowledge hub, which had considerable physical and human resources, and technology that others may not have access to. Since these could be shared for a common good among schools, public libraries, research institutions, technical colleges etc., institutions in the vicinity of Piliyandala, Moratuwa and Ratmalana were considered as beneficiaries at first. This activity is expected to create awareness on the services of UML among neighborhood and build a rapport with the neighborhood. With the results of requirement analysis and skills survey, OSD came up with two projects in 2013:

- Child Development Programme for kids of Sumudu PreSchool, University of Moratuwa
- Reading Camp for students of Bodhiraja Vidyalaya, Katubedda, Moratuwa

Sumudu Preschool attached to the University of Moratuwa was established in 2001 in collaboration with the Open University of Sri Lanka and UNICEF. Since 2007, Sumudu Preschool has been under the umbrella of the Sports and Recreational Club of University of Moratuwa. In order to fulfill educational needs of preschool children using modern technology, to enhance skills and talents of preschool children and to entertain the preschool children the **Child Development Programme** was inaugurated in September, 2013. At that time 18 kids were receiving the preschool education with 2 preschool teachers guiding them. Library staff of University of Moratuwa add value to their learning through language development, aesthetic skills development etc. This included inculcating the reading habit among school children, teaching information literacy skills and supporting educational activities using modern technology.

The **Reading Camp** was inaugurated at Bodhiraja Vidyalaya, Katubedda, Moratuwa – a primary school located near the University of Moratuwa. Inception of Bodhiraja Vidyalaya was in 1910. This secondary school has been relocated near University of Moratuwa in 1992. However, Bodhiraja Vidyalaya was restructured as a primary school in 2011. At the initiation of the Reading Camp in October 2013, there were around 70 students who were receiving the primary education with 8 teachers in service. Language learning in Tamil as well as

English, information literacy skills development, facilitating environmental studies adding multi media are some of activities carried out. In order to fulfill stipulated objectives, weekly programmes were conducted at these institutions. Further, special programmes were conducted to educate the participants as well as their parents. For example:

- Universal Children's Day Celebrations 2013 at Sumudu Preschool
- "Let's Love our Environment' for Students of Bodhiraja Vidyalaya in collaboration with Young Zoologists Association of Sri Lanka
- Nature Tour at University of Moratuwa premises for Students of Bodhiraja Vidyalaya
- Parents' as Partners of Reading for parents to commemorate National Reading Month 2014
- Universal Children's Day Celebrations 2014 in collaboration with Arthur C. Clarke Centre for Modern Technologies
- Leadership Camp for newly appointed board of prefects of Bodhiraja Vidyalaya

As a result of these two projects, UML made a significant impact on children's education as well as promoting reading awareness. Such outreach activities have indirectly influenced new admissions to these two institutions as well. In June 2015, there were 113 and 35 students attached to Bodhiraja Vidyalaya and Sumudu Preschool respectively. In 2015 a landmark was reached when a special education unit was established for differently abled students. There are five such students enrolled currently.

Further, UML reformed the classroom learning in these two institutions. Traditional classroom learning is the currently used method of teaching and learning in Sri Lanka. However, information technology based education enhances the learning opportunity beyond the classroom (Gunathunga and Hewagamage, 2013). UML made blended learning (i.e. classroom learning and online learning) a reality in Bodhiraja Vidyalaya and Sumudu Preschool using multimedia and Internet information sources, videos etc.

To summarize, UML has had a significant impact in students' education as well as on reading awareness. Parallel to the "Reading Camp", the Library was able to motivate the Principal and Teachers of Bodhiraja Vidyalaya to re-open the "School Library" and to carry out information literacy activities. To involve parents as partners of reading, a special programme was organized for parents in parallel with National Reading Month. Role of parent in building a home library, art of story-telling and how story-telling could improve vocabulary as well as creativity of children and selecting books for children were the topics at the discussion. Majority of the participants rated this programme highly successful or successful in terms of relevancy of the topic, knowledge delivered and gained, the content, presentation as well as accompanying materials used etc. 90% of the participants were motivated in creating a 'a home library' for their children (UML, 2014).

2.0 Literature Review

At this juncture, evaluation of the outreach services is essential to provide effective and efficient services. Evaluation also enhances the quality as well as sustainability. To investigate the role of public libraries in providing health information to public, National Library of Medicine (NLM) conducted an evaluation in the District of Columbia, USA. "The results of the evaluation indicated that participating public librarians were enthusiastic about the training and information materials provided as part of the project and that many public libraries used the materials and conducted their own outreach to local communities and groups." The results also highlighted the importance of building an evaluation component into outreach activities to monitor the progress as well as to satisfy the laid down objectives (Wood et al., 2000).

The National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM) has also recognized 'evaluation' as key component of effective outreach programme. An exploratory study was conducted by the Pacific Northwest Regional Medical Library in collaboration with NLM to identify and document evaluation best practices. As a result of this study, a field manual for librarians, providing a step-by-step framework for integrating evaluation within a program, establishment of Outreach Evaluation Resource Center at the Pacific Northwest Regional Medical Library, funded by the NLM to enhance and facilitate skilled and effective use of evaluation in health information outreach (Burroughs, 2004).

Periodic meetings have been used to evaluate community services of three major libraries namely Hanover College, Ivy Tech-Madison, and the Jefferson County Public Library to find creative ways to serve diverse populations. This has resulted in several cooperative database subscriptions, creation of a Local Living Authors document, and shared outreach to local junior high and high school teachers, in addition to more traditional collaborations among our distinct libraries such as inter-library book sale contributions, reciprocal patron agreements, cross promotion of speaker events, etc. (Gibson, K. E., Renners, T., Stokesberry, B., 2014)

Hapugoda (2014) investigated the role of School Library Learning Resource Centre (SLLRC) in improving students' achievement level in the Subject 'English' of Grade 10 students of Siri Swarnajothi National School, Kiribathkumbura, Peradeniya. The study has been carried out successfully for three months using the SLLRC and computer assisted learning. Pre-test as well as post-test of the subject has been conducted and Hapugoda has found improvement of student achievement level; development of "learning to learn" competency as well increased motivation in learning, was the outcome.

Promoting outreach activities by an academic library is something unique in Sri Lankan context. It's even special when such activities are consistently carried out by an academic library for more than one and half years. Outreach activities

can be evaluated in various ways; obtaining the perspectives of beneficiaries is a method of such evaluation. In order to review the outcome of these two outreach activities carried out for more one and half years a survey was conducted attached to this unit currently.

3.0 Objectives

- To identify the perspectives of parents of students attached to Sumudu Preschool and Bodhiraja Vidyalaya
- To identify the types of activities which have most impact on beneficiaries
- To obtain an evaluation about the outreach activities from teachers attached to Sumudu Preschool and Bodhiraja Vidyalaya

4.0 Research Methodology

The targeted population was the teaching staff and parents of students of these two institutions. Parents of first year students and special needs students were omitted since these children did not participate in the programme at least for one year. While adopting the survey methodology, two semi-structured questionnaires were designed to obtain views from parents and teachers.

In Sumudu preschool, the two teachers employed have qualifications in preschool education. . There are 18 kids in the Lower Nursery and 17 Kids in the Uppers Nursery. In Bodhiraja Vidyalaya there are 4 graduate teachers and 4 trained teachers. Students attached to Grade 1 to 5 could be listed as 23, 31, 17, 22, and 15 respectively. Hence, the sample frame is 8 teachers and 108 parents attached to Bodhiraja Vidyalaya and 2 teachers and 17 parents attached to Sumudu Preschool. Due to unavoidable circumstances, only 90 parents could be approached.

5.0 Results and Discussion

Out of 90 questionnaires distributed, fifty four responses were received from parents; 40 from Bodhiraja Vidyalaya and 14 from Sumudu Pre-school. All ten questionnaires sent to teachers were received, out of them two responses were from the Preschool teachers.

5.1 Respondents profile

Most of the parents are unemployed in both pre-school and Bodhiraja School and majority of them are qualified in G.C.E. O/L examination. The employment categories of the parents of Bodhiraja School are shown in the Figure-1.

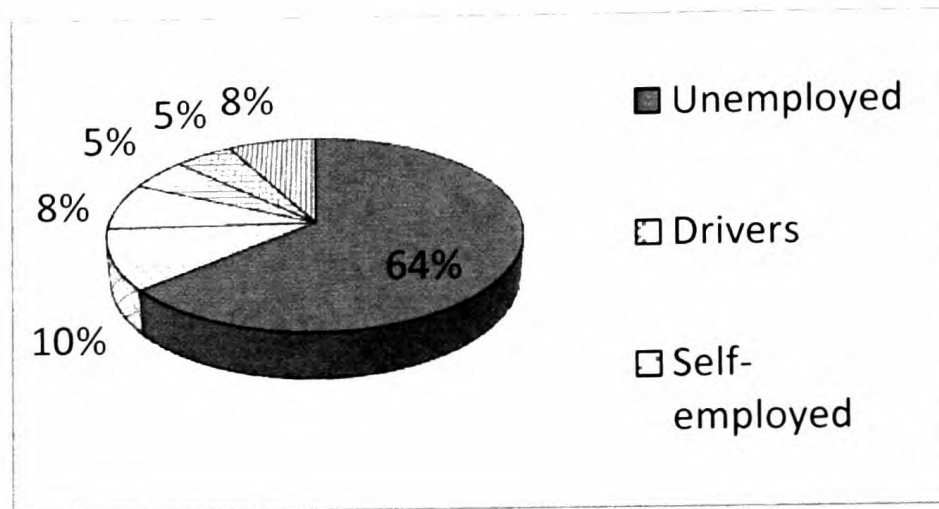


Figure-1: Employment categories of the parents of the Bodhiraja School

The employment categories of the parents of Sumudu Pre-school are shown in Figure-2.

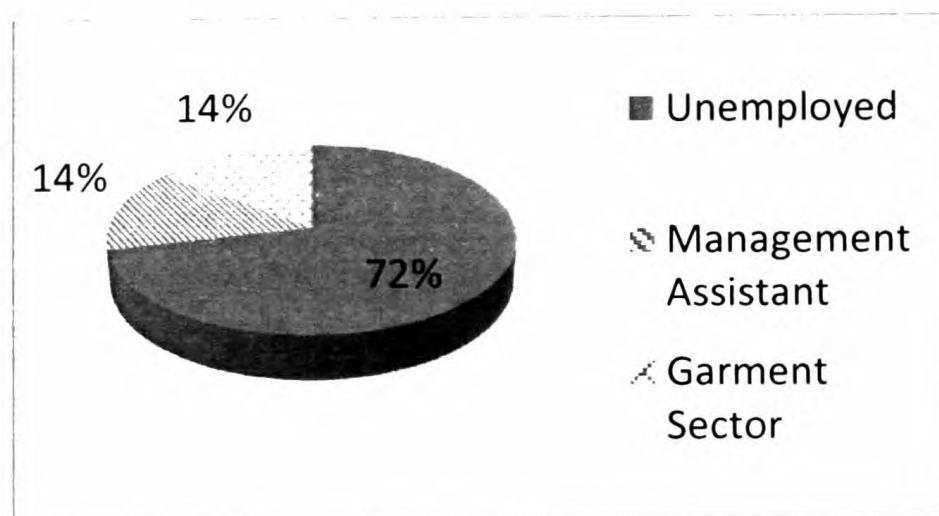


Figure-2: Employment categories of the parents of the Sumudu Pre-school

Educational qualifications of the parents are depicted in Figure-3.

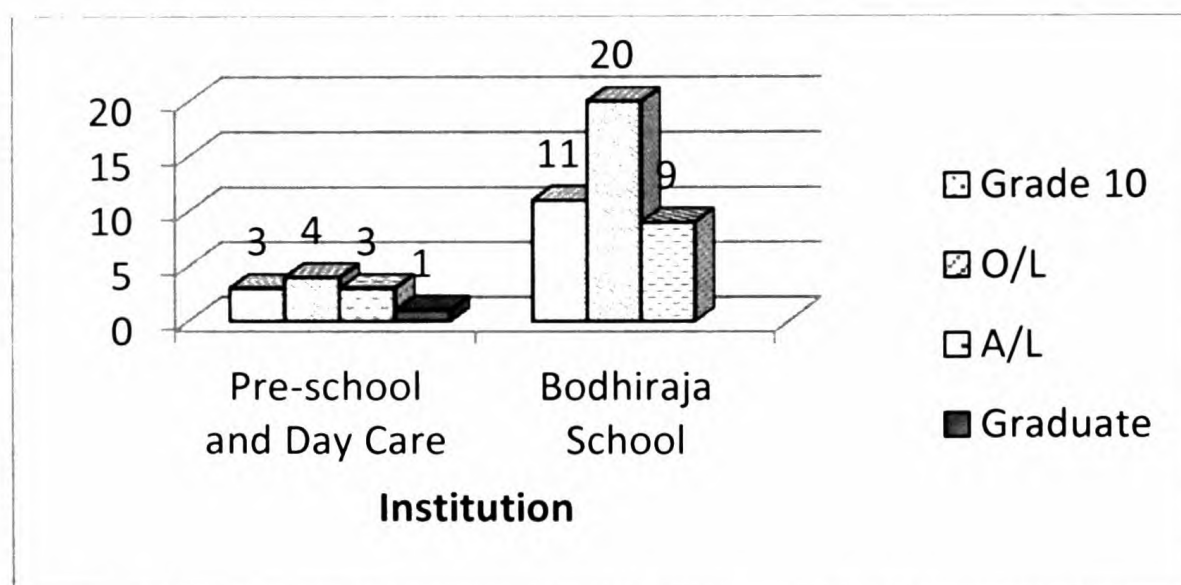


Figure-3: Educational qualifications of parents

The principal of the Bodhiraja School represents Grade III of the principal service and the teaching staff includes grade I, class 2 grade I, class 2 grade III and class 3 grade II.

5.2 Perspectives about the programmes

Regarding the two institutions, both students and parents show their approval of the programmes conducted by the OSD of the library. The responses for the programmes by parents and students of Bodhiraja School can be seen in Figure-4 and Sumudu Pre-school in Figure-5.

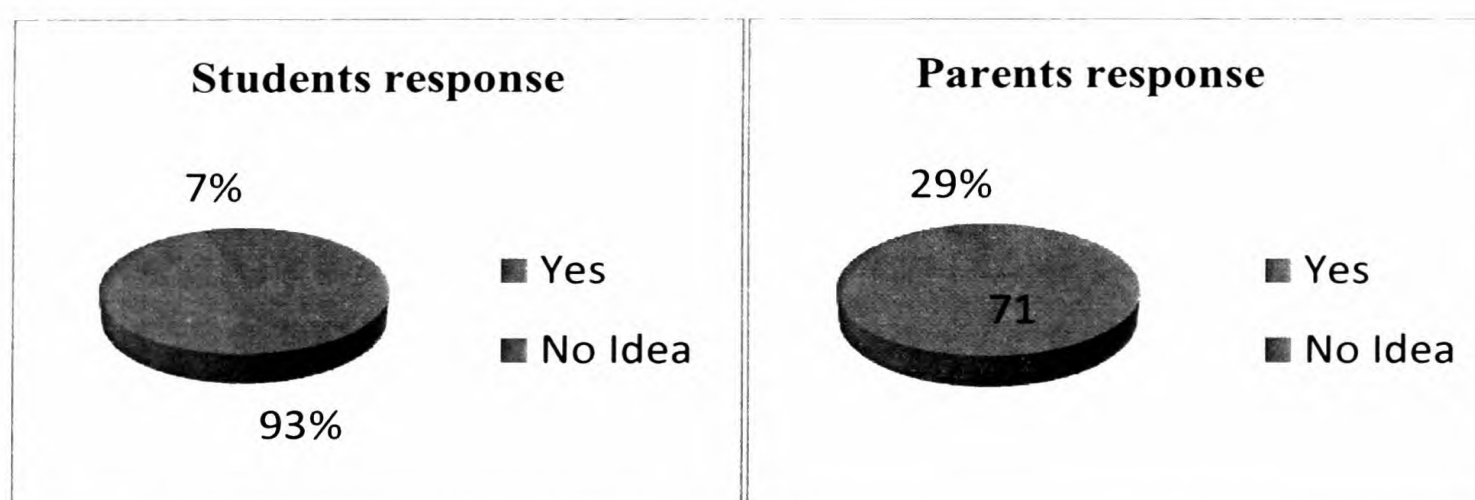


Figure-4: The responses about the programmes by parents and students of Bodhiraja School

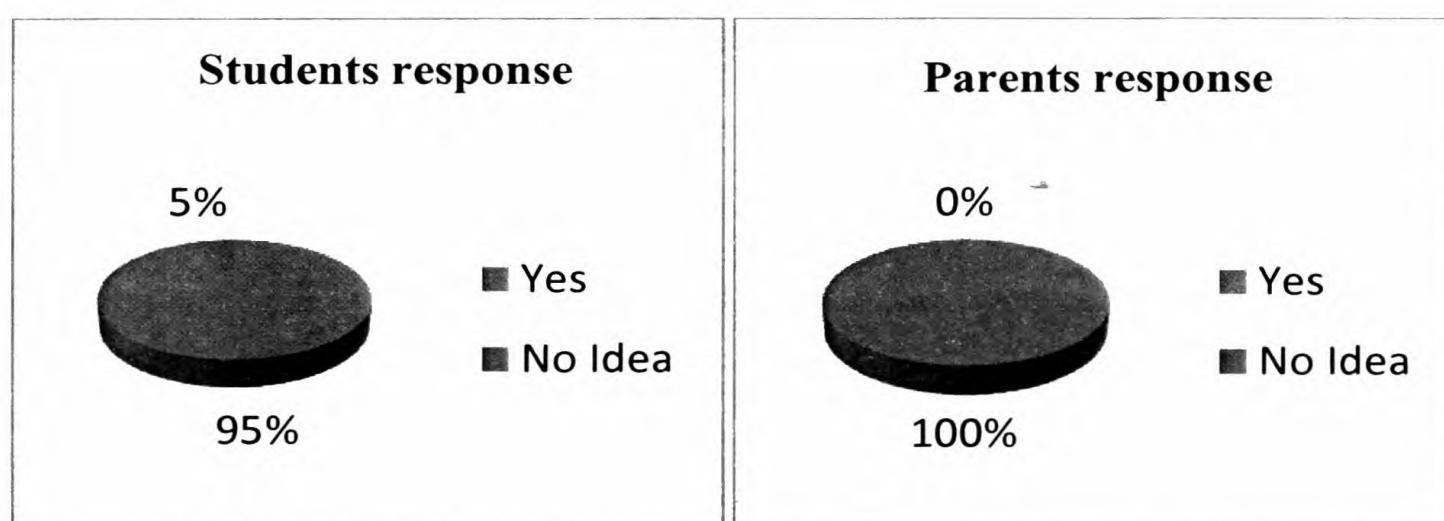


Figure-5: The responses about the programmes by parents and students of Sumudu Pre-school

5.3 Subject preference

From the results of survey, it was evident that the respondents regarded these programmes with much approbation. English language programmes was the preference shown by the majority of school children whereas pre-school children's' attention was focused on all the subjects they learnt. Subject preference of the students of two institutions is shown in Figure-6.

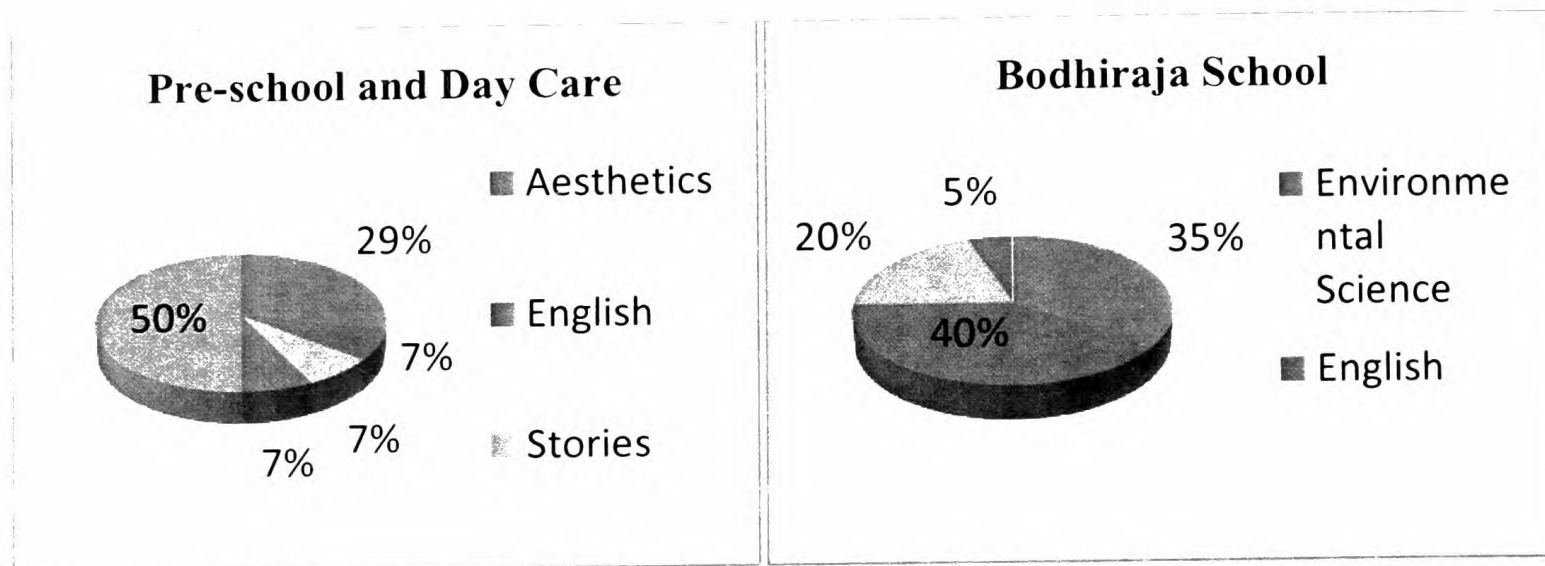


Figure-6: Subject preference of the students

5.4 Expectancy for future

The teachers and parents expected the programmes to be continued in future as their children benefited from the lessons and activities. The responses of the teachers and parents are given below in Figure-7.

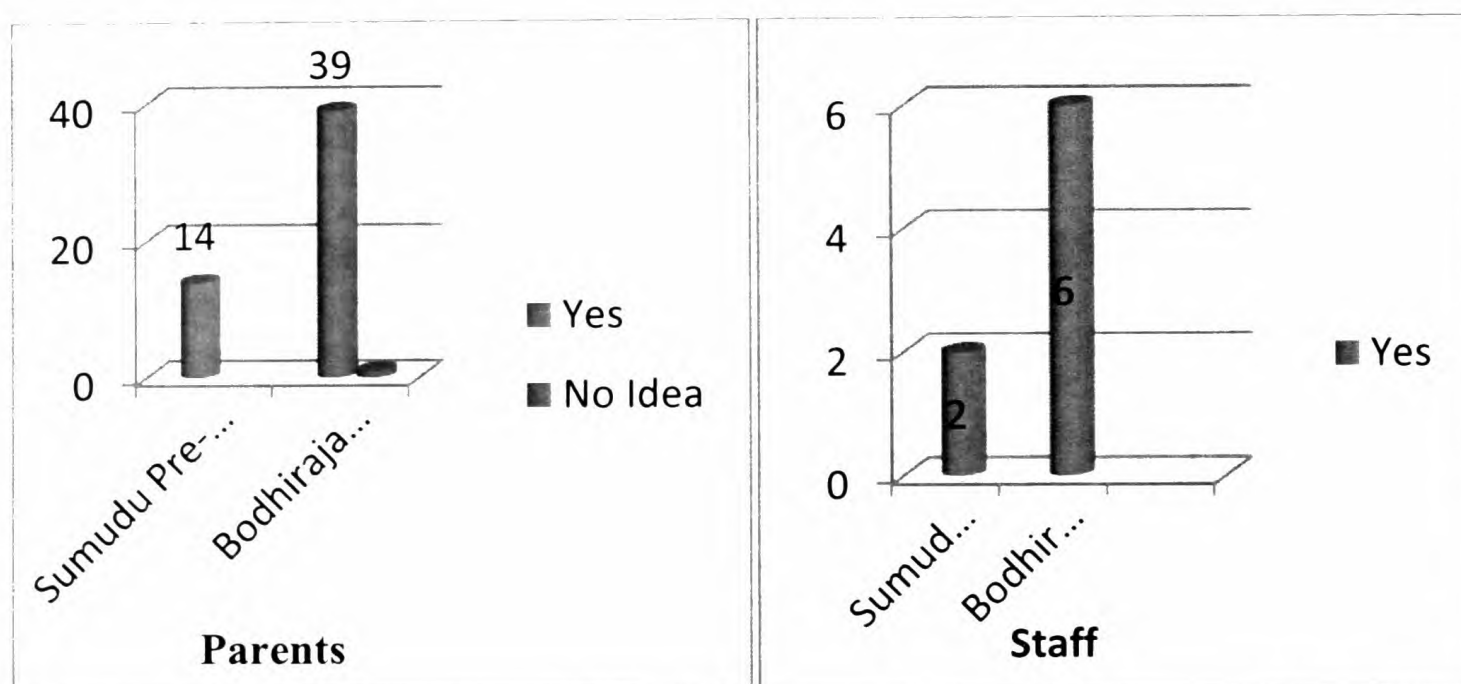


Figure-7: Expectancy of continuation of the programmes

5.5 Development of reading habit

The parents revealed that the students eagerly discuss the reading programmes while they are at home. They have noticed that the reading habits of the students are gradually increasing owing to the guidance given to them by the university library staff and the outcome is depicted in Figure-8.

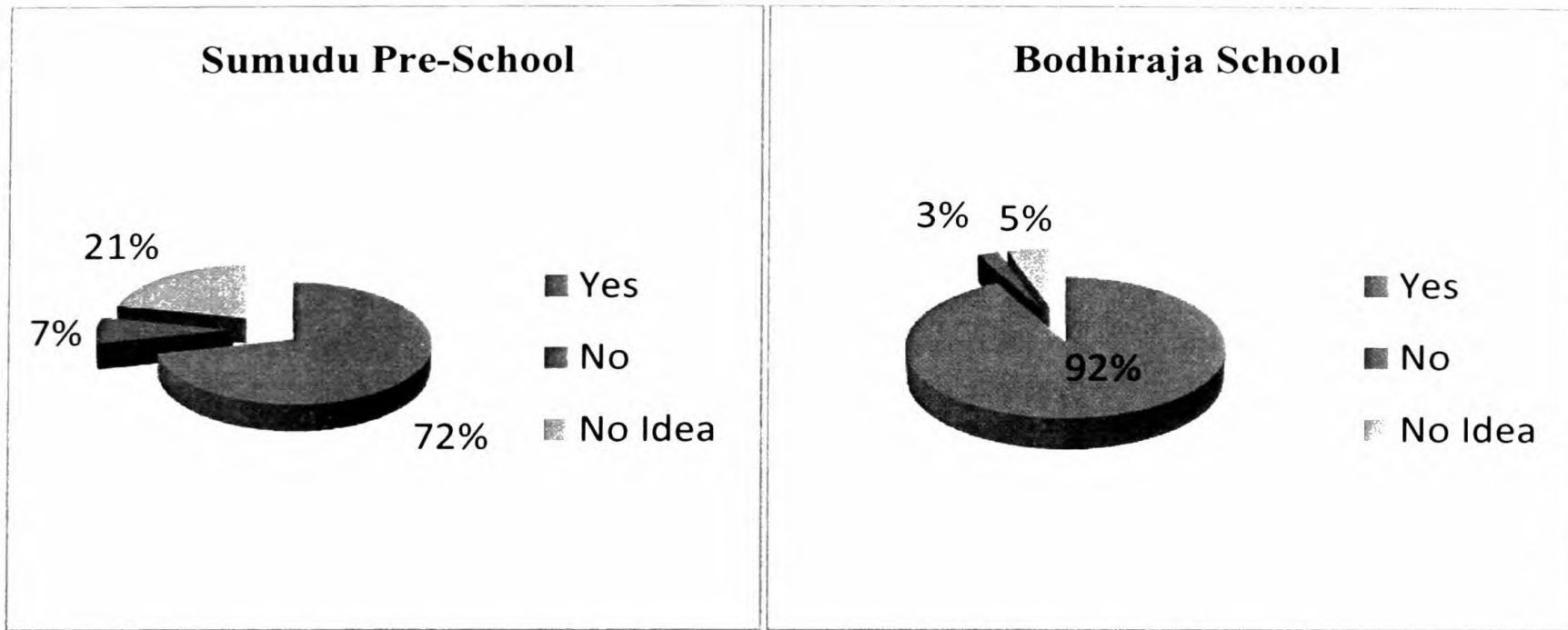


Figure- 8: Development of reading habit of students of two institutions

5.6 Encouraging reading by the parents

The parents state that they encourage their children in reading books and they gift books for the child as the birthday present. The rate of encouraging the children for reading by the parents can be seen in Figure-9.

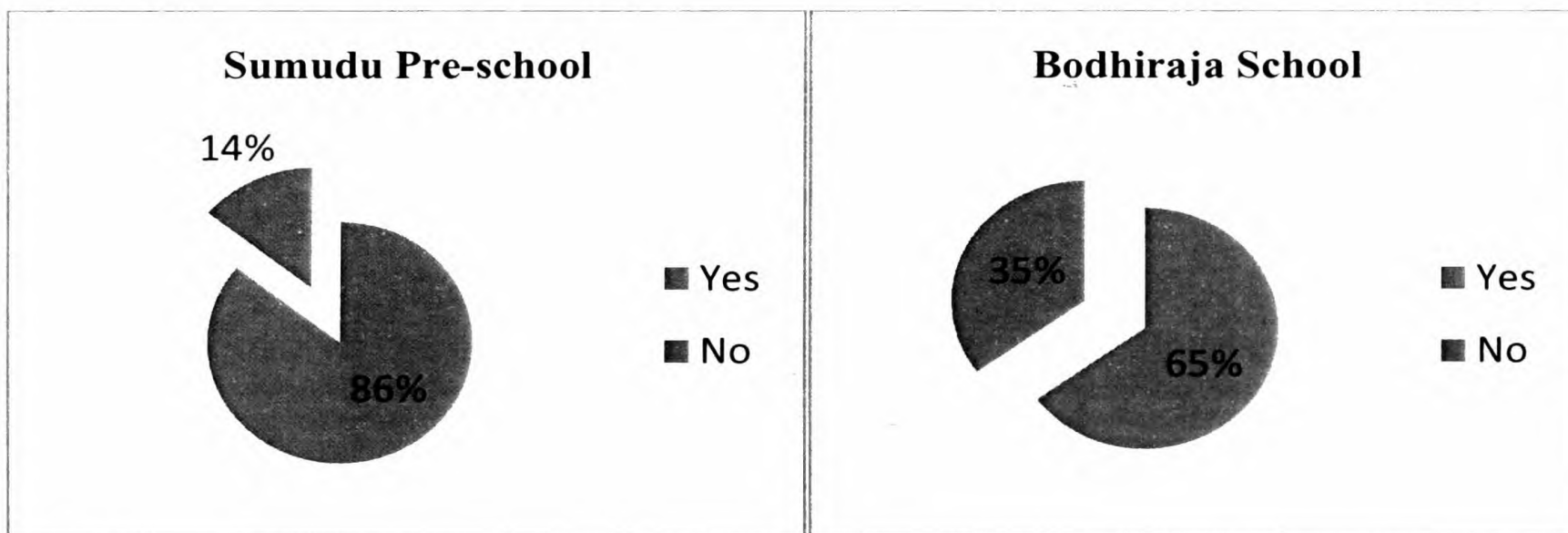


Figure- 9: Encouraging reading by the parents of two Institutions

5.7 Usage of school library

Regarding the usage of school libraries, only school children attached to Sumudu Day Care are able to use a school library as pre-school children do not have a library in their own. The number of students who do not use the school library facilities is 9 which shows that the reading habit and at the same time using the library should be promoted through the school children. Usage pattern of the school library by students attached to both institutions is given below in Figure-10.

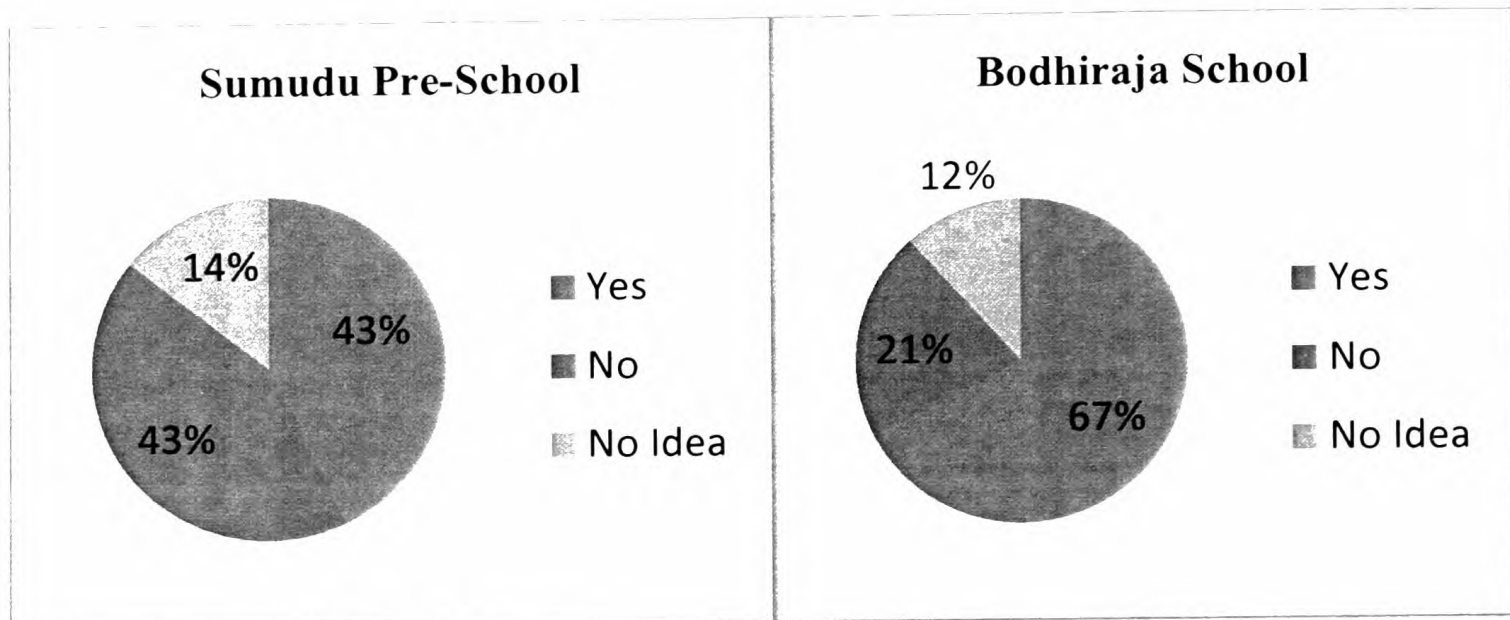


Figure-10: Usage of school library of the students of two institutions

5.8 Usage of other libraries

Majority of the pre-school, day care and school children do not use other libraries such as children's libraries and public libraries.

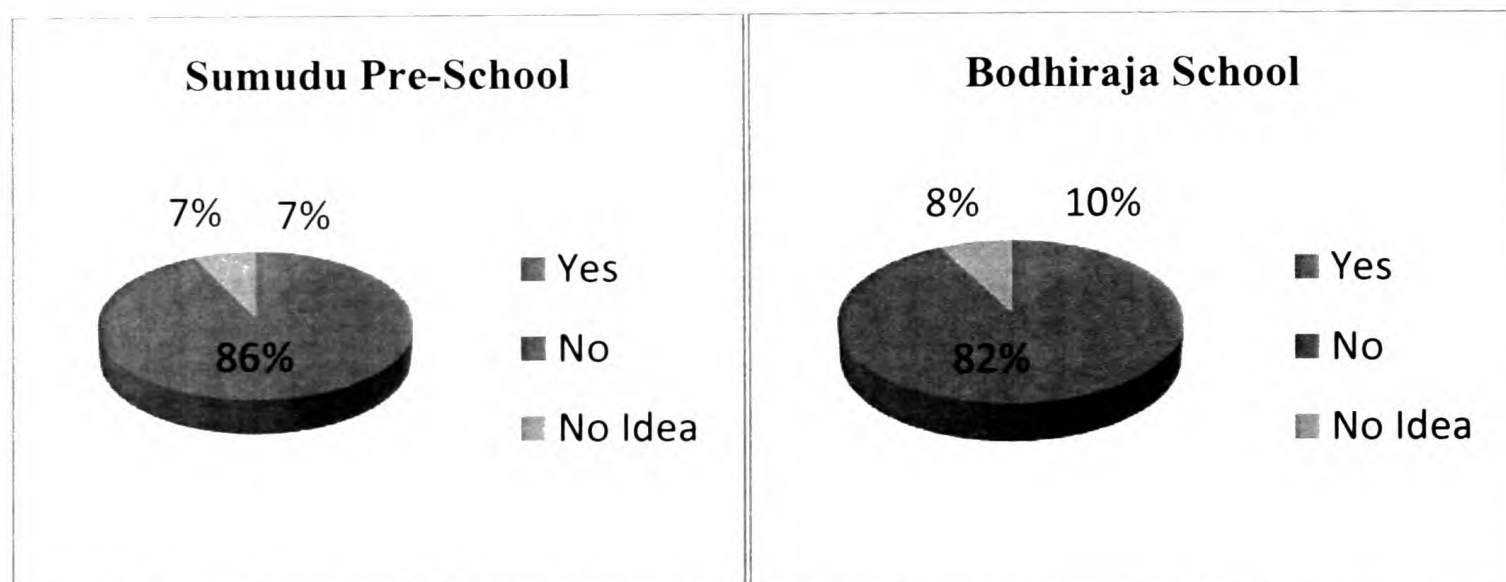


Figure-11: Usage of other libraries by the students of two institutions

5.9 Feedback of parents

Table-1 brings out the summary of the feedback of the fifty four parents who participated in the programmes conducted by the OSD and it implies that the majority show their awareness and positive preference for the activities.

Table-1: Feedback of parents

Response	Pre-school	School	Pre-school	School	Pre-school	School	TOTAL
	Yes		No		No idea		
Continuation of programmes is needed	14	39	-	-	-	1	54
Child is benefited from the programmes	14	37	-	1	-	2	54
Discussions about the programmes at home	13	38	1	1	-	1	54
Increasing of reading habit	10	37	1	1	3	2	54
Using school library	6	26	6	9	2	5	54
TOTAL	57	180	8	12	5	10	

5.10 Feedback of staff

The role of OSD is appreciated by the staff of Bodhiraja Vidyalaya and they pointed out reasons for it. Offering extra knowledge apart from the school syllabuses by the resource persons, providing assistance in both English and Tamil languages, developing skills of the students by giving full attention to them and spreading the message of the importance of using a library are among them. The continuation of programmes are expected by the staff members of the Bodhiraja Vidyalaya in order to develop English and Tamil language learning, getting assistance for Environmental Science by using audio visuals and to increase the aesthetic and literary skills of the students. According to the staff of the school, the programmes conducted by the OSD division have been supportive to the students by paving the way to increase the knowledge of English and Tamil languages. The students have informed that the new technological teaching aids, differentiation of programmes and practical sessions of the programmes are the reasons for the attraction. The parents also have positive attitude toward the programmes as this is a great opportunity for their children to attend programmes organized by a renowned university in the country.

The two staff members of the Sumudu pre-school expressed the view that through the programmes conducted by the OSD knowledge, attitudes and skills of the students are enriched and they paved the way to build a fulfilled personality of the student. The teachers are keen for the continuation of the programmes as they understood that children can acquire good habits through stories, studying country's history from stories about heroes with colourful pictures. The teachers

pointed out that the students like the programmes as they are accompanied by audio visual presentations. The parents have informed that the children often speak glowingly about the work of OSD which is a novel experience for the pre-school children.

6.0 Conclusion

It is our cooperate social responsibility to upgrade the status of a primary school which resides in the vicinity of University of Moratuwa. At the same time, Outreach Services Division of the University of Moratuwa Library is happy with the progress attained by the students of the Bodhiraja Vidyalaya and Sumudu pre-school after providing educational assistance to them. The increasing number of both school and pre-school admissions for year 2015 implies that positive effects of the qualitative programmes conducted by the Outreach Services Division have spread to society. But still OSD thinks that the road to success is many miles away. Therefore various new programmes in par with the syllabuses are been designed for the students to receive much more than they expect. The presentations with audio visual aids and outdoor, indoor activities have aroused students' enthusiasm to engage more in their daily studies. The OSD is looking forward to add more modern teaching aid equipments to grab the attention of the students to enhance their studying capabilities. Promoting the reading habit and introducing children's and public libraries to offer further reading should be given extra importance to build a knowledgeable generation for the future. The progress for a short span of time is immense and OSD hopes that an even more positive outcome will result in future after continuing more versatile programmes. Being an academic library, the OSD of University of Moratuwa Library will be a pioneer for other university libraries to open their doors to the outside community.

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