

The Impingement Factors of the Rural Library Services Usage among Rural Youth in Malaysia

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Abstract

Developing the rural community is one of the main government agendas. One of the methods used by the government to develop the rural community is by ensuring continuous delivery of information. In tandem with this, many high impact projects for the rural community have been introduced particularly on ICT. Nonetheless, besides ICT, the government also has rural library to rely on. In a number of local and international studies, rural library has been proven to benefit the rural community. The main query of this study is to identify the impingement factors of the rural library usage among rural youth and the findings obtained are expected to contribute to the existing literatures. Using a qualitative method, focus group discussions (FGDs) have been carried out among two groups, one of the FGDs was conducted with six librarians and another FGD was conducted among six rural library users. The FGDs were conducted in Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia. Data gained were later transcribed verbatim and analysed. Based on the analysis done, a total of eight main factors that can impinge their usage of rural library services have been identified. In order to further enhance the usage of rural library services among youth, this study suggests that issues such as relevant sources and activities, youth involvement in the planning process, a better way of promotion and roles of librarians should be highly considered.

Keywords: rural library, rural youth, rural development

1. Introduction

1.1 Rural Library in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the rural library is placed under the authority of the National Library of Malaysia (NLM) and the state government. The rural library was first introduced in the year 2000 where a total of 25 rural libraries were established in seven selected states (Selangor, Sarawak, Johor, Kedah, Pulau Pinang, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan). The cost of construction for all these libraries involved more than 1.2 million Ringgit (equivalent to USD400, 000).

Table 1. Number of rural libraries in Malaysia

State	Number of Rural Libraries
Johor	92
Kedah	92
Kelantan	37
Melaka	57
Negeri Sembilan	73
Pahang	64
Perak	78
Perlis	38
Pulau Pinang	82
Selangor	70
Terengganu	88
Sabah	198
Sarawak	207
Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan	3

Currently, Malaysia has quite a big number of rural libraries. As been depicted in Table 1, there are a total of 1,179 rural libraries all over Malaysia (NLM, 2011). Sarawak and Sabah are the leading states with the highest number of rural libraries due to its larger land size and consist of many rural areas.

Terengganu has 88 rural libraries in which these rural libraries are administered either by the federal or state government. Under the federal government, the administration of the rural library is placed under the National Library of Malaysia (NLM). Typically, under each rural library, one assistant librarian will be placed and he/she will be supervised by the librarian. In Terengganu, each librarian will supervise and monitor 3 or more assistant librarians and rural libraries. Terengganu; a state located in the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia, is well known with its tremendous achievement in education, holding a record of the most successful state in UPSR (the main exam for primary schools in Malaysia) for eleven years in a row. To have rural library in place such as Kuala Terengganu is seen as a wise step taken by the government. Kuala Terengganu can be considered as the centre of education in Terengganu. Up to this date, there are two public universities located in Kuala Terengganu which are Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA) and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT). Apart from this, Dato Razali Ismail Institute for Teachers Education is also located in Kuala Terengganu while an elite school of MARA (Maktab Rendah Sains Mara) is also placed nearby.

1.2 Services Provided in the Rural Libraries

Typically, reading sources are the main services offered by the rural libraries. Many reading materials and resources can be found. Novels, books, magazines and newspapers are the common sources can be read by the readers. Apart from this, certain rural libraries are accommodated with internet and computer services and available for users. Users can use these facilities either for seeking information or completing their assignments. Apart from using the rural library to access information, rural library also can be a place for community to conduct their social activities. Currently, the rural libraries are obliged to conduct community activities on a monthly basis. Rural library also provide place for students and professionals to conduct their group discussion where it offers information sources that might help in their discussion.

1.3 Professional Literatures on the Factors That 'Pull' and 'Push' the Youth to Use the Rural Library Services

1.3.1 ICT Factors

Certainly, youth and ICT are seen as an ideal combination. To have ICT services in the rural library is seen as a good strategy as it can attract more rural youth to use the services provided. In order to be considered as germane to the rural youth, having ICT in the rural library is essential (Zabed Ahmed, 2010). The combination of rural library and ICT can be seen as a catalyst to overcome the digital gap between rural and urban communities (Abu Hassan & Omar, 2009; Shariful Islam, 2009 & Mohamed Shaffril et. al., 2012). ICT enables the rural library users to use it either for seeking information, or accomplishing their assignments or tasks. Tenopir et al. (2009) concluded that information seeking and reading habits among youth have drastically changed in the past three decades where youth prefer to read electronic journals compared to paper journals. Probably, the most important fact to be considered here is that youth prefer to seek information through other channels such as the internet rather than using the rural library in the traditional way (Norshila, 2011). Based on the importance of ICT to the rural library, it can be concluded that the problems of ICT deficiencies and inadequacy have to be overcome immediately.

1.3.2 Relevant Content and Activities

Sources provided and activities conducted must be relevant to the rural youth needs and these hold the main key in increasing the attendance statistic of the rural library. According to Silvio (2005), information related to education, health, employment and political are in the top list of youth information seeking. Apart from this, referring to Momodu (2002), information related to agriculture, health, political and education are preferred by the rural youth.

Problems of irrelevant content and activities are among the main factors on why youth hesitate to come to the rural library and use the services provided (Corradini, 2003; Norshila et al. 2011 & Raseroka, 1986). In a study carried out by Raseroka (1986) for example, has identified that overload of foreign publications and sources in the local library have outnumbered the local publications and this can create problem of irrelevant sources. Additionally, old, not updated sources and absences of relevant materials, sources and activities could demotivate youth from using the services provided (Corradini, 2003).

According to the European Youth Information Charter (ERYICA) (2004), to confirm sources provided in the library are related to youth, those information offered should be based on the demand, needs of youth and their perceived information needs. Additionally, they also stressed on such criteria to attract more youth to be part of the library community namely 1) open to all youth; 2) offer the equality access to information; 3) easily accessible; 4) free of charge; 5) expose youth to different stages of youth information work; 6) involve in other youth services and structures and 7) aid youth to gain information available through the advanced technologies such as ICT and improve their skills in using them

1.3.3 Negative Perceptions of Youth on Rural Library

To invite or attract youth to come to rural library and utilize the services provided can be so challenging. In a study done by Corradini (2003), found that the attendance of this group to the rural library is very discouraging and factors such as migrating to town and lack of interest can be the main causes. Apart from this, rural library is always considered as boring, cold and uninteresting place to go to. Further, they consider rural library is not related to them and as a place that merely suitable to children and readers.

1.3.4 Time/Duration Opened to the Public

The problem of unsuitable time/duration opened to the public still exists and can be the main impingement factor. Study done by Norshila (2011) has identified that lacking of time is the main cause that push youth from coming to the rural library. During weekdays, youth who are still studying are restricted to their schooling time, denotes that they have limited time to go to the rural library on the weekdays while for youth who are working, certainly they only can go to the rural library during weekend.

1.3.5 Language Barriers

Language may also be a barrier to the rural library's user. To certain areas, sources of information available in English may be a problem to the local user with low level of English competency. Much of the information and resources in the English language could hardly been used and borrowed by the local user. This problem will be severe, if irrelevant sources and activities are neglected. Sources in the English language will only create difficulties among the rural community especially to those who are not familiar with the language.

Nevertheless, albeit the problems stated, to know what should be added in the rural library from the youth perspectives is so important as the youth have 'just' cultivated the habits of reading and come to the library more frequently and secondly, because they are the future users of the rural library services (Corradini, 2003).

2. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative method. A total of 2 Focus Group Discussions (FGD) was carried out; one FGD was carried out with 6 librarians of the rural libraries in Kuala Terengganu and another FGD was conducted among six rural library users. All of the respondents are categorized as youth based on their age. Table 1 showed the details of the respondents of the study. Using phenomenology approach in qualitative method, it gives the opportunities to the researchers to identify the living experience of several officers and users on the use of the rural library services, its impacts and their understanding based on the meaning of these experiences (Creswell, 2007; Marshall and Rossman, 2011). It also provided a rich and thick phenomenological description of the phenomenon being investigated in a particular context.

The number of respondents was determined according to the quality of the data collected and findings as it was suggested in most qualitative methodologies. The researcher continued to conduct interviews until they believed that it had reached a point of saturation. Such point is understood as the moment when a researcher gained a fully

understanding on the experience and this understanding will not be altered through further discussion with participants (Laverty, 2003).

Table 2. FGDs respondents' background

FGD 1						
Name	Level of education	Gender	Position	Age	Experience	
Officer A	Diploma	Female	Assistant Librarian	28 years	6 years	
Officer B	STPM*	Female	Assistant Librarian	26 years	3 years	
Officer C	SPM **	Male	Librarian	25 years	2 years	
Officer D	SPM	Female	Assistant Librarian	26 years	6 years	
Officer E	Degree	Female	Librarian	28 years	3 years	
Officer F	Diploma	Female	Librarian	29 years	4 years	
FGD2						
Name	Level of education	Gender	Position/Job	Age	How long they know about the rural library?	How many times they go to the rural library within a week
User A	STPM	Male	Student	19 years	1 year	4 times in a week
User B	STPM	Male	Student	19 years	3 years	4 times in a week
User C	STPM	Male	Student	19 years	1 year	4 times in a week
User D	STPM	Male	Student	19 years	3 years	4 times in a week
User E	SPM	Male	Reporter	27 years	3 years	Once in a week
User F	SPM	Female	Clerk	23 years	3 years	Once in a week

*Malaysia Higher Education Certificate

** Malaysia Education Certificate

In this study, researchers managed to conduct 2 FGDs and it involved 12 respondents from various background, age, position, experience, gender and type of job (Table 2). Respondents involved in the FGDs are experienced officers and loyal rural library users. On average, both FGDs took almost one hour and 30 minutes. The FGDs began slowly with a small talk to get to know the background of the participant and later into deeper discussion to the issue discussed. The FGD was based on the interview protocol which was prepared for the purpose of keeping to a standard interview procedure and maintaining the flow of conversations. The key questions were initially prepared based on the literature review related to the use of the rural library services and the selection of these samples was through the National Library of Malaysia. Questions included in the interview protocol were designed to fulfil the objectives of this paper which is to identify the impingement factors of rural library services usage among rural youth in Malaysia. The questions served as a guide allowing respondents freedom and flexibility in their answers. Questions pertaining to ICT services within the rural library took the longest time in both FGDs. Data gained were later transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis.

3. Results

The impingement factors for rural library services usage among the rural community

3.1 Sources and Activities Provided Must Be Germane and Adequate to Their Needs and Interests

In order to attract more youth to come to the rural library, one of the determinants is by providing sources and conducting community activities which are relevant to their needs and interest and this has been emphasized by a number of respondents.

'For villagers who read the newspaper, they will come here to read it...' (Officer B)

'For me the best way to attract them is by conducting activities that are relevant to the user's level. For example, to attract students to come here, we can run tuition services for them, without these relevant activities, probably they wouldn't come here' (Officer E)

'There are a lot of activities conducted here but it is more related to children's activities as we can see in this building, it is the children's creative products. They were drawing and colouring something attractive on the wall. For us, they just asked us to involve in an essay competition, that's all.' (Users B)

'at our place, we will conduct activities 4 to 5 times in a month and we will conduct it every Saturday and Sunday. We will conduct more activities during the school holiday. Typically we will have activities such as storytelling, colouring, origami and many others' (Officer D)

'For adult we are conducting activities such as Sudoku competition, sewing class, we called the sewing expert and conduct the sewing workshop for adult or youth.' (Officer E)

'Looking at the poor condition of the books, we know that the books are frequently been borrowed by the users especially during the festive seasons, we do not have enough cooking books during the festive seasons' (Officer C)

Novel is among the top choices of the youth who come to the rural library. In fact, new novels are always in their top list of reference as the respondents stated.

'We come here because we love to read books. Here we have a lot of choices on novels, we can find a lot here (novels)...' (Users A)

'Usually demand for the novels is high, sometimes we cannot fulfil the users demand for the novel...' (Officers C)

They also argued that the supply for education sources is inadequate as the respondents have emphasized:

'The number is not enough, during their examination, the demand on the education reference is too high and we cannot provide them with adequate sources related to SPM, PMR and STPM' (Officer C)

'Some of the sources fulfil our needs, but books on STPM should be added, sometimes we need to share it with our friends, in addition, we cannot borrow the books (education sources), so we need to continue our study on another day' (User B)

3.2 ICT Services Provided

The availability of internet services is among the main factors that can attract the youth to use the rural library services offered. Youth nowadays are more comfortable to use the internet and it has been regarded as part of their life. The respondents have stated that a number of ICT facilities available in the library have an impact on the youth presence to the rural library

'for me the development of the science and technology change their thinking, there are possibilities when internet services are not available, people are less interest. Compared to places such as cyber café or restaurants where Wi-Fi service is available, people come there to use it. Probably that's the reason why youth don't want to come here' (User B)

'Probably, youth are seeking for the internet services and there is no such things provided here and it might be a reason only a few youth come here' (User E)

'if we are referring to the statistic, there are significant difference in term of attendance of users between rural library with internet services and without internet services, majority of the rural libraries do not have the internet services; for one which has the services, it will increase their statistic' (Officer C)

Apart from this, it is typical for youth nowadays to have their own computer/lap top; this can impinge the number of users of the rural library. In Terengganu, selected schools and students were provided with a free netbook computer by the state government as one of their strategies in cultivating ICT culture among the students. The respondents have stated:

'Indeed it has something to do with the numbers of rural library users. Having their own computer/laptop will encourage youth to rely more on internet for seeking information, but for me, using the internet has its own limitation and the rural library will be one of the alternatives for that limitation' (User B)

'... every time I use my computer I tend to use it more on Facebook or entertainment, so I rarely bring it together with me every time I go to the rural library...' (User C)

3.3 Comfort and Calmness

Among the potentials benefits offered by the rural library is that it is a suitable place to study. Compared to the school library, the rural library according to them, offers calmness and far away from noisy environment where they can put much focus on their study, as one of the respondents stated:

'There is lot of difference, rural library are not congested with users as the school library. At the school library there are many people using the services, we hear lot of voices. Things are different in the rural library, few people are here, there is no noise, so it give us more focus on our study' (User B)

3.4 The Librarians

Quality services provided by the officers in charge can be one of the pull factors, apart from this, good communication skills of the librarian can be a vital factor that can attract youth to come to the rural library as one of the respondents stated on this

'I'm very pleased, they (the officers) are very kind to us, here, they are like our sister, that's make us like to come here, they are nice and it is easy to communicate with them' (User B)

Rural library is a place for sharing knowledge and information among the colleagues and the librarians. With the availability of numerous sources there, the process of sharing and disseminating the information can be so captivating. One of the respondents has emphasized on this aspect:

'Typically we are discussing on our study, sometimes we are asking assistance and opinions from librarians because they have knowledge on certain things that we don't know. Sometimes we are discussing things other than our study such as career...' (User C)

3.5 'To Be Heard and Seen'

Promotion is another important factor to be considered. By doing this, the community will be exposed to the services and activities provided in the rural library. Furthermore, such promotional activities are needed to convey the new images of the rural library.

'We made intensive promotion, we went to the school and we have our own schedule to conduct the promotion on Saturday and Monday.' (Officer D)

'...to increase the number (users) we are encouraging people to come here and borrow the available books, at least they know this place and read the books' (Officer E)

'To further encourage the community, we have introduced award for those who frequently borrow the books, monthly or annually, we give award as one of the ways to encourage them to come here and read books...' (Officer E)

'We are conducting door to door campaign, moreover, we are going to the kindergarten to promote the rural library, we bring the member card together and register them as the members of the rural library' (Officer B)

'Some villagers think that rural library is only for children but when we conducting the activities and they been involved in it, indirectly it exposes them to our collection of books that are related to their interest. Interestingly, they are also promoting the rural library by informing to their colleague on the availability of books related to sewing, cooking and religious. By doing this, it promotes the rural library and increasing the number of our members.' (Officer E)

'For me, I will place the rural library poster at the stall, bus stop and other strategic places, we will also attached our pamphlets to the new newspaper, by doing that it will promote rural library to the community' (Officer A)

3.6 Their Perception towards the Rural Library

In a number of past studies (Norshila et al., 2011 and Corradini, 2003), youth are always related to negative perception on library. For them, library is only a place for those who love to read. For the youth, they prefer to seek information online and have more entertainment programs rather than using the library services

'When we talk about rural library, it is typically related to books reading and only a small percentage of youth are enjoying to read books, majority of them prefer to have entertainment rather than reading books at the rural library' (User B)

'It depends on their mentality, sometimes the rural library are congested with children and people perceived it as a place merely for children not for them, but in my place, majority of the community is professionals and they are the regular users of the services, it highly depends on the community mentality' (Officer E)

3.7 The Building Itself

Available spaces of the building play an important role and can be the factor that can attract people to the rural library. It provides comfort and relaxation to the users. One of the users has claimed

'I think it can be a factor, small building will limit the attendance of the users. Limited spaces will minimize the movement of the users. The path between the bookspace is too narrow; it is difficult for 2 people at the same time to search their desired book here and there, so the space can be the factor' (User B)

'....It should be bigger (spaces), it gives comfort to people here... now it is too compact...' (User F)

Location is another important aspect that should be considered. Accessible location can attract more people to come to the rural library. Typically, accessibility to a location can be impinged by geographical and mobility factors.

'It is quite difficult to locate this building, first time users will have difficulties to identify this building as rural library building. The location of the building is not suitable, it is quite hidden from the main road and people have difficulties to locate it' (User A)

The way the library is presented to the community can be an influential factor. The decoration and illustration can represent the interest of the users and the librarians should consider it seriously. One of the respondents has stated that the way the library is decorated can be a reason why people especially youth and adult don't want to come and use the services offered

'If we can see things decorated here, whenever people come in, they see things such this (the decoration), they said this things are decorated for children and not to them, the decoration is not suitable and attractive enough for them' (User D)

'For me it is not merely internal design, the external design can play effective role in attracting the youth to come to the rural library, a well decorated building can attract them to come. Typically, only regular users are coming here to use the services, to invite new users to the rural library is quite difficult, maybe they still do not know the benefits offered, but just like I said, external decoration is important....' (User B)

'It is true, some of the rural library is not attractive enough, and we are emphasising efforts to beautify this building..' (Officer E)

One of the respondents agreed when we suggested that a small café should be established outside the rural library when he stressed

'In term of positive effects to the users, it should be established. The café will provide us space to relax after doing our assignment/discussion...' (User D)

3.8 The Duration

There was also suggestion from the respondents to extend the duration of the rural library services. The request for an extended duration opening hours of the rural library is merely due to the fact that the available time of the youth to use the library is after the office hours.

'Yes, sometimes we request to extend the services till night, for me it is exciting (to have longer duration). We only can come here after 2 pm or 2.30 pm after school hour and we can only arrive here at 3 pm and 2 hours for us (rural library close at 5 pm) is not adequate enough...' (User B)

'There is a lot of benefits offered if the time can be extended, nevertheless, it depends on the users request, maybe if the additional time can be made by the management, it can be allocated specifically for SPM/STPM students...' (User F)

4. Discussion

This section will discuss and recommend a number of strategies that can be taken to further enhance the rural library services usage particularly among the rural youth.

4.1 Relevant Sources and Activities

Within this research, it can be seen that the most important thing to be considered in connecting the rural library to rural youth is to provide ICT services. To have ICT services such as computer, internet and Wi-Fi in each of the rural libraries can be the crucial determinant (Norshila et al. 2011). Certainly, the financial limitation will be the main barriers to this, nonetheless, this study is recommending that the related parties should seek adequate sponsorships and supports especially from the big players in main industries such as oil and agriculture industries. Certainly it will be demanding and challenging, but if it can be done, eventually it will aid in providing adequate ICT tools within the rural library. Apart from this, activities related that are preferred by the local communities such as sewing and cooking classes can be conducted periodically to attract more users.

Another area of suggestion, spaces in the rural library building should be allotted to the youth which allow them to decorate the building according to their interest and taste. Based on the researchers' observation, only children are allocated spaces and allowed to draw and paint on the rural library building wall. Sadly to discover that none of the youth users were given the chance to do so.

Additionally, the librarians should study youth as a whole, recognize their needs and interests. Research can be done in a survey form where it can be answered by youth and youth-orientated community organizations in order to identify what are the push and pull factors for them to come and use the rural library services. Output of such research will inform the librarians on the existing gap; what type of information sources are needed and not needed by the rural library. Apart from this, they will be aware on problems brought by sources presented at unsuitable reading levels (Raseroka, 1986). From this study, it is recommended that updated and new novels can be doubled its number in the rural library. Furthermore, education sources should be ensured its adequacy and relevancy. To do this, it is recommended that the rural library to have some sort of cooperation with the schools and institutes of higher learning and based on the cooperation, rural library will get advice and information on what sort of educational sources that they should provide. To do this is also important as youth, particularly the students, will see rural library as something different to their school or learning institutes' library. It is quite interesting to have a tuition class within the rural library, where the librarian or teachers can conduct it with the availability of the educational sources around them.

4.2 Involvement of Youth in the Planning Process

This study argues the importance of youth involvement in the planning process of the rural library activities, as it will provide apparent views on what kind of activities need to be conducted to attract the more youth to the rural library. Smith (2003) has come out with a suggestion to create a Teen Advisory Board where this board can act as advisor to the rural library in emerging a deep understanding of the needs of the rural youth and, in addition, the community participation of youth, which generates positive publicity for the library.

4.3 A Better Way of Promotion

As been mentioned earlier, the respondents have done the promotion of the rural library in the school in which Corradini (2003) did not agreed upon. The connection between rural library and school must be made carefully as Corradini (2003) has emphasized that the library is too strongly connected with studying and school. Through the promotion, students and teachers should understand that rural library is not merely a place to read books and study. Consequently, library persistent connection with homework and studying could create negative perception among youth and they might go somewhere else in their free time, thus undermining, if not destroying, the potential of the library as a place for gaining limitless information and informal learning and knowledge.

4.4 Roles of Librarians

Interestingly, one of the ways to attract more youth to use the rural library services is the librarians themselves (Braun, 2006). Librarians can demonstrate their politeness in dealing with the youth needs. It is crucial for them to evade any tough attitude, the first time users probably will be demotivated and embarrassed by such attitude. Based on the findings, it would be appropriate to provide the librarians and their assistants with a number of training and courses related to communications skills.

Referring to Corradini (2003) there are several tasks that can be done effectively by the librarians and it can be the key in increasing the statistics of the rural library. First, the librarians should build a strong and positive relationship with youth. Second, the sources provided in the rural library must be consistently monitored with special attention to multimedia and new technology. Third, planning on the effective methods of promoting the rural library services and activities should be made to the youth. Fourth, the connection to be built with schools, students and teachers should be in an appropriate ways so that they will not perceive rural library as merely a place for reading and studying. Additionally, it is also essential to promote the rural library not only to the students and teachers, but also to the whole community, parents, professionals and stakeholders. This

recommendation can be so demanding and challenging, but it is worth for the librarian to seek for sponsorship, patronages and supports from either public or private parties that would able and interest to share the responsibilities.

5. Conclusion

Rural library is indeed important and still has the relevant services and activities to be offered for the rural community. To ensure the relevance, the eight factors that have been discussed earlier should be considered. Albeit the eight factors mentioned, nonetheless, the issues of ICT services provided and relevant sources and activities should be tackled first as it hold the main key to attract more rural youth to come and use the rural library services. Four recommendations have been highlighted and expectantly it can aid the related parties in developing the rural library in Malaysia.

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