

Malaysian Community Managed Library (CML): An Unconventional Community Knowledge Hub

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Abstract: Presently, community public library models that have been applied around the world is said to be a model that appears to offer the best prospect of sustainability, viability and a suitable emphasis on user's service quality and needs. Nonetheless, various studies found that a library authority-led community library (also known as 'community managed library') offers a better range of alternative in assisting community knowledge and economic development. The term 'community managed library' emphasis on maintaining community private individual libraries that is designated for community intervention and management of different types. In theory such arrangement exists in a very formal basis. Meaning, a library authority should be able to include the services offered by such community [managed] libraries for such members of the community [users]. This study will enlighten the pragmatism of the 'community managed library' notion in Malaysian setting and values. Several current Malaysian existing community managed library will be put forward as the foundation of the investigation on this 'new' community library model. The successfulness and challenges faced by current Malaysian community library will be discussed. Most importantly this study will show that a library managed and funded by a community (community managed library) can support a local community development.

Key words: Community, community managed library, community knowledge hub, community development, community empowerment, Malaysian, economic

INTRODUCTION

Over generations, libraries have serves as the route for access to knowledge, ideas and information. It is an institution where community members can access information do their reading or simply obtaining materials to help them to improve their quality of work or get tips to improve their lives. Hence, library plays an important role in the lives of individuals and communities.

In a library context community development means building relationships with people, allowing the library to go beyond a simple consultation and support process. Further on, this relationship leads to a more meaningful and inclusive community collaborations. Strong relationships and partnerships ensure that libraries engage in the sometimes complex process of listening to community voices and facilitating the expression of a community's needs within the library (Anonymous,

2003). Community development in the library context also includes community participation to the activities that are carried out by the library. Library services and activities involving the community is a necessity. The biggest difference between traditional models of community development and community-based development model is the development of library developing library with the community and to collaborate with the community. Killmier pointed out libraries and community development are a natural fit and libraries are increasingly recognizing the importance of using community development principles to engage with their communities.

Literature review

Community and library: Library services evolve very rapidly. Within its rapid changes, library services constantly transformed to unveil more space for community members involvement in the management of

the library and many community members have showed keen interest to serve the library (Anonymous, 2015a-c). Often libraries offers a local library facility or reading room in which books are located and opened to some extent for public use by members of the immediate neighbourhood and which is operated without seeking to make a profit, nor is it supported in any way by public funds (Cheunwattana, 2008).

Community engagement with the library always exist but with a reduction in finance from the government against a significant impact library services library. Community development and library service focuses on the community contribution to served by involving the community members. Community service-led service planning model support community participation from traditional library excursions towards community involvement in the relationship among the community. It involves community development activities such as education, community relations and external education. The community with expertise will be identified to meet the needs of the local community to replace a service conducted by the staff of the library itself.

In Nepal, READ Rural Education and Development program, involved directly with the development of community libraries in rural and remote areas. This program has successfully established 53 libraries in different parts of the country. Many local community members expressed their gratitude and appreciation on the development. They now see library not as a storehouse of books any more instead they understand that library services are a value to their personal and community “social development”. Libraries have become the “backbone of the society”, a “centre of knowledge and information” and a “lifelong learning center”. They now see the library as their common “platform” where all the community members can get together to address communal problems. The group reported that they had learned about the scope and potential of the library through the development and offering of different programs.

Currently, many community libraries are internationally recognized as social institutions that can effect social and economic transformation in society and for the development of society. The community libraries serve many diverse functions and needs, being both venues for the reading and lending of books as well as community development centres with a strong focus on grass-roots education, empowerment and economic development, creating hubs for life-changing, community-based activities and programs.

Community libraries are built to serve the needs of rural populations outside the reach of standard information services (Dent Goodman, 2008). They may be organized by a school, church or community group but the needs of the community at large are of the utmost importance and the collection and services of the library represent those needs. These libraries also often provide informal educational services, such as literacy instruction (Dent and Yannota, 2005). Library and community development are very closely connected. The public knows that the importance of the relationship between the library and community development was increased and interconnected.

Community managed library: Community Managed Library (CML) are community-led and largely community delivered type of library services. It rarely administered by a paid staff but often with some form of ongoing local council or community members support and often still considered as part of the public library network. In many countries around the world, CML have shown success in reducing operating costs increasing the involvement of community library in terms of library services, improve the quality of library services, diversify activities and innovation library and increase the efficiency of access to the service.

The notion of Community Managed Library (CML) has actually been long applied in Western countries, especially in Britain. CML are community-led library and own by a council. The council paid the staff in CML with its own financial. CML have shown success in reducing operating costs increasing the involvement of community library in terms of library services, improve the quality of library services, diversify activities and innovation library and increase the efficiency of access to the service. In England, there are about 170 community libraries operates principally in England where 40% of them are CML .

One of the major difference between the CML and Community library (CM) was in terms of administration. In Malaysia, CM is a library which is administered whether by public library or the National Library of Malaysia. CML is under council support that has a board of directors which manages council itself as well as the CML. CM under National Library of Malaysia or public library runs by professional staff either by librarian or library assistance while CML which is under council support runs community itself. The staffs were either volunteer or paid by the council.

The characteristics of success for community managed libraries are: public sector support (local authority or precept based), co-location, enterprise, asset transfer or ownership, specialist staff support and a clear

sense of social purpose. With a genuine partnership arrangement with a local authority, opportunities around scale increasing the number of community managed libraries that target social change, creating economies of scale and involving more communities in ownership and influence over services can be achieved. The door is open for local authorities not to simply transfer libraries to community management to save their own money but to work with communities to transition the process in a thoughtful and strategic manner to create shared benefits for local government, local community and local user.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study applied a qualitative research method, by using YPMKP Community Managed Library as its case study design. YPMKP has a number of community activities facilities such as ICT services, lecture hall, computer lab and dining hall. YPMKP also provide a resource centre services with quite a big number of collections 2000 books including leisure reading material such as magazines and academic materials namely reference books for Malaysian local major academic examination namely SPM, PTS, UPSR and PMR. YPMKP materials also cover all ethnic's languages. YPMKP funding comes from it's own local businesses and at times also by state funded grants. Their board of directors consist of local community members that serve the community as government served, local entrepreneur event community leaders.

The respondents of this study consist of all range of YPMKP users from teenagers (aged 13-17 years) to youth (aged 18-40 years) from adult to senior adult (aged 41-50 years) and elderly (aged 51-60 years). A total of 1871 respondent have answered a survey conducted by researchers

For the purpose of this study, an inquiry of finding will be summarize with the aims to show that a library managed and funded by a community (community managed library) can support the local community development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discussion and research analysis

Community involvement: YPMKP CML served various types of community users. The most common users who use YPMKP CML are students 82.3%, labour and factory workers 14%, educators 4.8%, clerical workers 1.7%, skilled workers 0.2% and unemployed 1.0%. This various level of demographic and character is in line with the current YPMKP range of activities and programs. Many

of YPMKP CML activities and programs seem to be fitting to the needs of its users, namely computer classes, self-development workshops, community programs and information retrieval services. This study also reveals that, many community surrounding YPMKP CML are either aware or actively using of CML in YPMKP. From the total 1870 respondents, 597 respondents know about CML in YPMKP and 244 respondents are currently using the CML in YPMKP

The involvement of the respondent towards programmes and activities with YPMKP CML is also viewed in this study. About 34.8% youth respondent have join at least one of program or one activity offered by YPMKP CML. Those programs and activities are computer classes, prefect leadership workshop, study and information retrieval. Meanwhile, for adult group, 33.3% respondent engage with activities or programmes carried out by YPMKP CML. Among the activities involved by the adults group was computer course, personal development courses and meetings.

Further findings identify that the age of respondents who actively undergo an activity or program in YPMKP CML are teenagers (aged 13-17 years) and youth (aged 18-40 years). Majority of respondents who are very interested in engaging in activities organised by YPMKP CML are 21.8% while 54.8% stated their interest to join future activities and program in YPMKP CML. This survey shows that community of the surrounding area are either currently active or keen on being involve in using YPMKP CML and they sees the library as more than just a place of reading and learning. It is a platform for lifelong learning for in according to all the activities they are interested.

Community empowerment: Researcher has received various positive responses from respondents on the notion of improving YPMKP CML to become a better information and knowledge hub for the local community. Many offer ideas and thoughts on how YPMKP CML can become better platform of engagement and self-empowerment for the community

In-depth interview done by researcher on community members being empowered by YPMKP CML has led to a list of propositions from the respondents. The propositions categories are Image, infrastructure Improvement, promotion and marketing and activities and Programs.

Decoration: Respondents believe that YPMKP CML needs an image makeover. Many respondents stressed on the importance of offering a good image and better furnishing for users comfort.

“... They (YPMKP CML) need to decorate their building...it looks very dull and lifeless” (Respondent L1: Y07)

”...Decoration would be pleasant, ..., informational posters ... I will (personally) paint the building, ..., the paint look old, ...,” (Respondent L1:Y14)

Infrastructure improvement: Youth respondents (72.8%) request for an improve form of infrastructure provided and used in YPMKP CML. Many stated that the indoor space and hallway need to be upgraded. A better facilities will attract users to come and become activity involve with YPMKP CML.

“...I would renovate that foundation to be bigger so it will fit more people, ...,” (Respondent L1: Y05)

“... First, I will be renovating this foundation, ..., change services, ..., all businesses I will asked workers to use computer, ...,” (Respondent L1: Y06)

“...I’m going to renovate the canteen, toilets and offices, ...,” (Respondent L1:Y09) and

“...I will upgrade the computer room to be a cyber cafe, ...,” (Respondent L1:Y12)

“...Upgrade the existing rooms, the air conditioner... comfortable chairs and table... computer should be change, ..., the internet should be strong” (Respondent L1:A10)

“...First I will upgrade the front of foundation, ..., to make public see this foundation, ..., the make foundation complete with high speed internet, ...,” (Respondent L1:A11)

Promotion and marketing: Respondents (25%) believed that, promotion should be carried out intensively to inform the local community members about activities, programs and services offered by YPMKP CML. Though, currently, YPMKP CML is known as a place of community get together and carry out activities in supporting community development, many respondents said that the effort is not enough. Many are still blurry on the roles and function of YPMKP CML.

“...Introduce the place, ..., the programs that have been done, ..., that we don’t know, ...,” (Respondent L1:Y01)

“...Possible programmes organised...can probably increase, ... and like I said a while ago that promotion, ..., so, people more aware of the existence, ...,” (Respondent L1:Y02)

“...Put the example like pictures in internet so foreign people better known, ..., for example foreign countries, ..., Outsiders more to know when they come here, ...,” (Respondent L1:A02)

Activities and programs: To attract user to use YPMKP respondent proposed an implementation specific activities and programs for the community. YPMKP CML service provider and administrator are suggested to organise activities and programs that offers a one-stop place for community members. Meanwhile, 4.3% respondents suggested activities for people with disabilities. They stated that:

“...Community based event should be added like charity program for the community, ...,” (respondent L1:A01)

We want a variety of programs here, ..., not that there none but more in needed” (respondent L1:B05) and

“...Make a one-stop place to the youth, ..., requests to the youth to do activities, ...,” (Respondent L1:A07)

“... Organized a program for disabled people for young people who have not studied, which age 16 who has quit school, ..., this is what we need” (Respondent L1:Y13)

CONCLUSION

Community public libraries have always involved and worked with the community. Now, however, Community Managed Libraries (CML) are increasingly being looked at as part an unconventional community knowledge hub, especially in Malaysia. Many local community members are now attempting to involve and empowered their community in an innovative way to assist in both the delivery of the service and to create an empowered community.

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