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## Social Influence among Rural Youth in Using the Rural Library Services in Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

The main attempt of this study is to identify the social influence among the youth that might impinge them to go and use the rural library services offered at their areas. This was a quantitative study where a developed questionnaire was used in the data collection process. The study was conducted at Johor, Terengganu, Kedah and Perak and involves a total of 400 rural youth aged between 15-40 years old. The analysis performed that all of the social sources listed recorded a high level of mean score whereby good communication with rural library staffs recorded the highest mean score while encouragement from village leaders recorded the lowest mean score. A number of recommendations were placed and hoped that such recommendations can assist the concerned parties in constructing strategic planning for rural library development.

**Key words:** Youth development, rural library, rural development, social influence

### INTRODUCTION

In modern context, the evolution of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) particularly the internet is swiftly changing the way, people seeking their information. Compared to the conservative ways of seeking information, most of the people now-a-days particularly the youth prefer the internet as the main tool in assisting them. However, not all people have access towards internet, particularly those in rural and remote areas. In response to this, rural people in Malaysia have been provided with rural library services. Rural library is a mini library placed at the rural areas in Malaysia and functions as one of the information providers to the rural community. Among the services offered at the rural library are reading sources, computer and internet. Furthermore, the rural library offers spaces for users especially students and professionals to conduct their social activities and group discussions. At the early stage 2001, the number of rural libraries in Malaysia were 25 and after almost 12 years, the current number of rural libraries across Malaysia was 1,197 and now the current number of rural libraries registered users are approaching half a million. In Malaysia, according to

Omar *et al.* (2012), among the main users of rural library services in Malaysia are children and youth.

According to the definition of United Nation (UN), age can be considered as those whose age range between 15-24 years old. However, different definitions can be seen in Malaysia where the Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia has defined youth as those whose age between 15-40 years old. In Malaysia, 40% of its total population are youth and a portion of this group is settled in rural areas. Though youth are always associated with advanced way of seeking information, indeed, some of them are still relying on the 'old' ways of seeking information particularly in rural areas. In the rural library setting for example, most of the youth over there come to seek novels and educational materials as it fulfils their interests, entertainment and educational needs. In addition, Omar *et al.* (2012) have looked on the demand of books, magazines and news studies among rural youth.

Reading printed materials, which is one of the 'old ways' in seeking information is still practiced by youth and indeed it displays a positive pattern among them. IYDR a research institute for youth development in Malaysia has informed that 13.6% of youths read news study daily and 6.8% of them

read a book daily. Furthermore, IYDR confirmed that 31.0% of youth in Malaysia read news two or three times in a week and more than a quarter of them read books two or three times a week where themes related to local news, entertainment, foreign news, sports education, religion, health and motivation are sought by them. Youth are those who are motivated to read news studies and academic books as they have to do so to improve their grades (Karim and Hasan, 2007; Yang, 2007; Pandian, 2000).

There are several social sources that youth keeps in mind in making their decision. Typically, such sources can influence youth and they are pressured to be in line with their trend, becoming attached and using them as a reference. Such people are known as reference groups and they can consist of their family members, government officers, leaders, teachers and peers (Makgosa and Mohube, 2007). In addition, these are the groups that can provide the youth with values norms and attitudes via direct interaction (Bristol and Mangleburg, 2005). Influences from these social groups are important as they inform and create awareness among youth on specific services or products available to them, within the scope of this study, the rural library services and resources. Furthermore, they can offer youth the chance to compare their own thinking with the attitudes and behaviour of the groups and influence individuals to include attitudes and behaviour which are in line with the norms of the group (Makgosa and Mohube, 2007).

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a quantitative study in nature where a developed questionnaire has been used as the main tool for collecting the data. The questionnaire was constructed based on review of literature and questions of past studies. For each of the questions (except for demographic data) all of the respondents were given a Likert-like scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). For the demographic part, the respondents were given an open-ended or closed-ended option of answer. The questionnaire was validated via series of instrument development workshop and later was pre-tested at selected rural libraries in Muar, Johor. The pre-test was conducted among 30 rural library users and has resulted in Cronbach Alpha value of 0.929.

**Data collection:** The data collection has started on February 2012 and ended on July 2012. The process was joined by experienced enumerators whom were briefed earlier on the instrument to avoid confusion during the actual data collection process. The data collection process has taken place at four selected states (Kedah, Terengganu, Johor and Perak), all of the selected states are represented by four selected rural library. The states were selected on the basis of multi stage cluster sampling. Each of the rural libraries was represented by 25 users among youth (aged between 15-40 years old). This makes the total of respondents were 400 (4 states×4 rural

libraries×25 users). After completion of the data collection process, the data was cleaned and analysed.

**Statistical analysis:** For the analysis purpose, descriptive analyses such as percentage, frequency, mean and standard deviation were performed. For social influence, the calculated mean score was grouped into three categories namely low (mean score from 1.00-2.33), moderate (mean score from 2.34-3.67) and high (mean score from 3.68-5.00). The categories were gained based on calculation of 5.00 (maximum mean score) per 3 (number of category).

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, the results analysed for the demographic data and the social influence for using the rural library services were discussed.

**Respondents' demographic data:** Table 1 has demonstrated the demographic data of the respondents. The data have informed that almost two third of the respondents are female (65.2%). Most of the respondents were included in the age group of 25-40 years old while minority of them were included in the age group of 18-24 years old. One third of the respondents have at least PMR level of education. Something must be done to attract youth at the tertiary level to come and use the rural library services as this group recorded only recorded 23.8% (Skill certificate+Diploma+Degree/Master/PhD). The mean score for their attendance to rural library was 2.413 whereby a total of 31.0% of them only came to the rural library once in a week.

**Social influence among rural youth in using the rural library services:** Based on data analysed in Table 2, all of the statements recorded a high level of mean score which denotes

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic data

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	139	34.8		
Female	261	65.2		
<b>Age</b>				
15-17 years	146	36.5		
18-24 years	73	18.3		
25-40 years	181	45.2		
<b>Education level</b>				
Not in school	4	1.0		
Primary school	45	11.3		
PMR	132	33.0		
SPM/SPMV	123	30.7		
Skill certificate/STPM	44	11.0		
Diploma	34	8.4		
Degree/Master/PhD	18	4.4		
<b>How many times you come to the library in a week</b>			2.413	1.363
1	124	31.0		
2	117	29.3		
3	77	19.3		
4	49	12.3		
5	23	5.5		
6	5	1.3		
7	5	1.3		

Table 2: Social influence in using the rural library services

Statements	Mean	SD
There is good communication between rural library users and rural library staff	4.33	0.759
There are interesting activities conducted at rural library	4.25	0.750
Rural library building is comfortable	4.17	0.870
Government officers/librarian encourage and help me to use rural library services	4.12	0.968
There are signboards showing way to the rural library	4.06	1.040
My family members encourage me to use rural library services	4.04	0.976
My family members use rural library services	3.95	1.010
My friends use rural library services	3.94	0.989
My friends encourage me to use rural library services	3.92	1.020
There are consistent promotion regarding rural library services	3.78	1.000
My teacher/employee encourage me to use rural library services	3.55	1.250
Village leaders encourage me to use rural library services	3.43	1.190

that social sources such as staffs, friends, family members, village leaders, teachers and employees do influence the respondents to go and use the rural library services. Furthermore, comfortable building, consistent promotion and signboards for showing direction are other sources that can influence the respondents in using the rural library services.

Within the scope of this study, rural library staffs do play a significant role in influencing the community particularly in encouraging and motivating the young one is using the services offered. According to Howard (2011), some of the reasons why youth refuse to come to the rural library as they are not feel welcome and didn't conceive rural library as a 'nice place'. Problem states by Howard (2011), however, can be solved via a good communication skill by the librarian. Such skill is a key among the librarian in attracting more people to come to the rural library and they should avoid being rude and trying to entertain the request from the users. Furthermore, according to Tveit (2012), young readers prefer to get recommendation and to have someone pick out books that are suitable and relevant to them and such need can be fulfilled via the assistance of the librarian.

The respondents admitted a number of interesting activities have been conducted at their rural library and these indeed have attracted them to come and joined it. For students aged 15 years and above for example, activities such as colouring and essay competition are occasionally held while there are activities such as cooking and sewing classes for adult. Such activities are able to attract rural community particularly youth as they are in line with their interests and needs. To have activities that are in line with youth needs and interest are important to avoid youth to perceive rural library as uninteresting and cold, solemn and rigid, boring and old-fashioned place (Corradini, 2006; Howard, 2011).

The rural library building according to the respondents is a comfortable place. Though the facts that majority of rural library in Malaysia are designed in small to moderate size (Omar *et al.*, 2012), probably, the small number of users might contribute to their positive perception that the existing building is comfortable to them. Furthermore, attractive decoration and air-conditioner are the other things that can create comfort among the rural library users (Omar *et al.*, 2012). Within the

scope of this study, all of the rural libraries are provided with signboard which can be clearly seen by the community.

The respondents do admit that their family members use and encourage them to use the rural library services. Rural library activities that involve family members' participation might contribute to this. The respondents also informed that they use the rural library services because their friend also use it and encourage them to use it. As it has been informed earlier that, friends are the influential sources among youth as they can inform and create awareness among youth on rural library services and products available to them while at the same time youth influence include attitudes and interest which are in line with their norms (Bristol and Mangleburg, 2005; Makgosa and Mohube, 2007).

Consistent promotions are vital in ensuring the sustainability of rural library services usage as Tveit (2012) has confirmed that people tend to leave the library when they reach age of 15-16 years old. In response to this, it is important for the librarian to get the words to the nonusers whereby intensive promotion will make them aware on the services and resources offered at the rural library (Scott, 2011). Within the scope of this study, the librarians have admitted the importance of getting out of the rural library building and constructing their own initiatives by conducting promotion at the school where a number of librarians will go to certain selected schools and informing them on what the services offered at the library. Furthermore, they were also inserting pamphlets within the news study that will be bought by the villagers and placing the pamphlets at the community places such as mosques, coffee stall and bus stand.

Though influence from village leaders recorded a high level of mean score, actually, it scored the lowest mean score compared to the other social sources. Probably, the village leaders have so many other things with regard to the village and community development; thus, encouraging youth to go and use the library services is not their only tasks. Teacher and employee also recorded a high level of mean score; nonetheless, it placed as the second lowest among other sources. Probably, they have prioritized reading places such as school library and workplace library rather than encouraging them to go to the rural library.

## CONCLUSION

To develop a quality rural library services, it demand a basic knowledge of the target groups. Information regarding social influence in using rural library services among rural youth can contribute informative knowledge to the concern parties. With regard to this study, all the social sources listed recorded a high level of mean score, with communication with librarian recorded the highest mean score. As communication between the librarians and the users are important, it is vital for the librarians to be provided consistent courses with regard to interpersonal communication. Consistent courses are important to inform the importance of continuing education to produce an informative community and failure to do so will lessen the interest on the services offered. To have a good connection with youth is important as it can help to make the library more visible outside its walls. In response to this, to have 'young librarian' or librarian representatives on voluntarily basis among youth is also seen as a good step as friend is seen as one of the influential sources among youth. Rural library management can hire such people and find appropriate ways for them to inform youth about services and resources available at the rural library so that they can easily pass over the information to their peers. Furthermore, rural library services should be 'exposed' more groups such as parents, administrators and other external stakeholders, so that they can also be the reference group to youth in using the rural library services.

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