

Impingement Factors of Rural Library Services on Community Lifestyle in Malaysia

Siti Zobidah Omar^{1*}, Jeffrey Lawrence D'Silva¹ and Jusang Bolong²

¹*Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia*

²*Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of the impingement factors of rural library services on rural community lifestyle in Malaysia. The quantitative method is used in this study and a survey and distributing questionnaire are employed as the main instruments in collecting the data. A total of 400 rural communities that used 16 rural libraries are selected as the respondents using multi-stage cluster sampling. The results of the study show that all the factors studied, namely sources, services, access criteria and interaction have a positive and significant relationship with rural community lifestyle. Further analysis using multiple linear regression confirmed interaction as the factor that most contributed to developing the rural community lifestyle. A number of recommendations are highlighted that can assist the parties concerned in constructing the best strategies to further develop rural library services in Malaysia.

Keywords: Community lifestyle, information development, rural development

INTRODUCTION

In this modern era, the evolution of information technology has resulted in bigger digital and information gaps between rural and urban communities (Abu Samah, Hayrol Azril, Jeffrey, & Musa, 2010; Omar, Shaffril, D'Silva, Bolong, & Hamzah, 2014; Sahharon, Omar, Bolong, Shaffril, & D'Silva, 2014; Tobgay & Wangmo, 2008). The Malaysian government has

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E-mail addresses:

zobidah@upm.edu.my (Siti Zobidah Omar)

jld@upm.edu.my (Jeffrey Lawrence D'Silva)

jusang@upm.edu.my (Jusang Bolong)

* Corresponding author

taken the initiative to narrow the gaps via the establishment of several rural Internet projects such as 1 Malaysia Internet Centre and Rural Internet Centre and the establishment of rural libraries. Rural libraries, although 'traditional' in approach, remain viable in today's fast-paced and service-orientated society. At the same time, rural libraries are also able to face the challenges connected to ICT usage while staying on the cutting edge of technology. Consequently, rural libraries are able to act as lifelong learning centres that help to narrow the existing information and digital gaps in communities (Omar et al., 2014; Omar, Shaffril, Bolong, & D'Silva, 2012).

To date, there are 1114 rural libraries across the country with Sarawak, Sabah and Kedah having the highest number. Additionally, the number of rural library visitors across the country is huge; in 2012 for example, a total of 6.3 million rural library visitors were recorded, and out of whom 1.34 million were registered users (National Library, 2013). Among the major objectives of rural libraries are to cultivate the reading habit among rural communities, to provide useful reading sources to rural communities, to offer educational resources for students and to conduct related recreational activities for rural communities. Some rural libraries offer ICT services such as use of computer, notebook and the Internet to the community.

Albeit the services offered and the huge number of visitors and users, policy-makers and scholars have begun to ask if the

services offered by rural libraries are able to develop a positive lifestyle among rural communities. However, not many studies have been conducted on rural library usage and any resulting positive lifestyle among rural communities. The existing studies focused on the patterns and problems of rural library services usage. The dearth of related studies in this area has resulted in lack of understanding among policy-makers, consequently affecting decision-making, causing it to be not in line with the needs and interests of the main users of rural libraries i.e. rural communities.

This study aimed to fulfil two main objectives i.e. to examine the relationship between the factors studied, namely sources, services, access criteria and interaction relationship with rural community lifestyle and to identify the factors that most contribute to rural community lifestyle.

Rural Libraries in Malaysia

Malaysia's first library was established almost 100 years ago in 1817 in Penang. The number of libraries in Malaysia increased consistently from then, particularly in 1881 in states such as Malacca and Kuala Lumpur (Tee, 1986). Among the main purposes of its establishment was to guide the people towards alignment with the social, political and recreational purposes set for the nation at the time. Although it was aimed at serving the elitists, the Malayan Public Library Association attempted to upgrade the social, educational and cultural standards of rural

communities. However, it met with little success due to financial limitations (Tee, 1986).

Library development in Malaysia entered a new era after the country gained its independence on 31 August, 1957 with the establishment of a blueprint for public library development in 1968, an effort of the Library Association of Malaysia (Tee, 1986). Among the focus points of the blueprint were a comprehensive survey of public library services in Malaysia and references for the minimum standards of a library. A plan for the establishment of independent library corporations to operate public library systems on a state basis was also included (Tee, 1986).

In addition to this effort, the establishment of the National Library of Malaysia (NLM) in 1966 was another significant achievement towards library development in the country. For almost 12 years, the NLM was placed under the National Archives and eventually, in 1977 it became a full federal department. Presently, NLM is a unit under the administration of the Information, Communications and Culture Ministry and is the forerunner of much of rural library administration in Malaysia. The history of the rural library started in 2000, when a total of 25 rural libraries were established in a number of selected states (National Library of Malaysia, 2011). To date there are 1,114 rural libraries in Malaysia, with the most located in Sarawak (212 rural libraries), Sabah (124) and Kedah (96) (National Library, 2013).

The Emerging Community Lifestyle Created by Rural Library Services

Rural library services that are available in rural areas have proven to foster positive community lifestyles. Rural libraries are capable of producing knowledgeable and well-informed communities via the inculcation of positive lifestyles (Omar et al., 2012). Among the lifestyle traits that are recommended for communities is the habit of reading and writing. Rural libraries contain a lot of reading materials (Omar et al., 2014) that meet the needs of various age groups from children and teenagers to adults. Omar et al. (2014) demonstrated the rural community's ability to transform what they have read at the rural library into practical things, for example, housewives can now prepare a variety of dishes for their family after reading cookbooks in the library. In addition, rural libraries are also seen to encourage users to buy their own reading materials and to establish their own reading corner in their house (Omar et al., 2012).

Rural libraries offers a conduit through which communities can strengthen family ties (Scott, 2011). These libraries can now become a 'low cost' viable option to parents as a venue for spending time with family members Apart from bringing their children to the library, parents can also use the opportunity to teach their children to read, spell, count, participate in community activities and so on (Omar et al., 2012; Samsuddin, Omar, Abu Samah, & Bolong, 2016).

Doubtlessly, rural libraries foster a culture of knowledge sharing among their visitors. The wide space available in rural libraries can be utilised to organise pleasant group discussions, and this offers a myriad of knowledge sharing opportunities among the users. In addition to this, the rural library is a place where the learning culture is cultivated (Scott, 2011; Omar et al., 2014). With the availability of reading materials, ICT facilities and adequate space can encourage users, especially students, to make rural libraries a proper place for revision or group discussion. Rural libraries are also seen as an avenue for fostering ICT culture among the users. With most of the rural libraries now equipped with computers, laptops and the Internet, rural residents now have wider access to ICT, reducing the digital gap between urban and rural communities (Samsuddin et al., 2016).

In addition, activities organised by the rural libraries serve as an access point for the rural community to further strengthen social bonds among themselves (Scott, 2011). Apart from coffee-shops, rural libraries can now be made avenues for social discussion. Omar et al. (2014) looked into the ability of rural libraries to curtail social problems that are rampant through activities that can encourage rural residents, especially the youth, to visit the library and to use its services.

Potential Factors Affecting Community Lifestyle

Although several factors are believed to affect community lifestyle, the scope

of this study was the four main factors suggested by McDonald and Micikas (1994), namely sources, services, access criteria and interaction.

Sources. Sources, according to McDonald and Micikas (1994), refer to all of the resources offered at the rural library. In the modern context, among the pertinent resources that must be available in libraries are updated reading sources (Norshila, Masitah, & Wan Norhazila, 2011), ICT facilities (Tveit, 2012; Tenopir, King, Edwards, & Wu, 2009), resources and facilities that are updated and free from damage (Howard, 2011), large space (Dewe, 2006; Omar et al., 2012) and relevant community activities (Omar et al., 2014).

Services. Services, according to McDonald and Micikas (1994), refers to the effectiveness of library services. Among the effective services that must be considered in developing a positive community lifestyle is the adequacy of search tools (Corradini, 2003; Melentieva, 2009), availability of library staff (Omar et al., 2014), proactiveness of library staff in promotion efforts (Omar et al., 2012), efficiency of the borrowing and returning process (Omar et al., 2012) and a conducive environment (Howard, 2011; Islam, 2009).

Access criteria. The factor of access criteria refers to access to library resources and frequency of usage of library resources and services (McDonald & Micikas, 1994). Omar et al. (2014), Howard (2011) and

Corradini (2003) have looked into the superior condition of infrastructure in rural areas such as roads, street lamps and telecommunication connection that make it possible for a rural library to be accessed by the rural community. Albeit the availability of most of the components of the infrastructure that ease access to rural library services, the unavailability of signage has caused difficulties for users, especially first timers (Omar et al., 2012). Due to the availability of most of these components of infrastructure, Omar et al. (2012) concluded that rural communities are actively interacting with rural library services.

Interaction. Interaction refers to the effectiveness of the interaction between the library and the user based on the user's awareness of library resources and services and how the user 'interacts' with the library services provided (McDonald & Micikas, 1994). To create effective interaction between rural communities and rural library services, according to Omar et al. (2014), Zickuhr, Rainie and Purcell (2013), and Omar et al. (2012), the library services must be visible to the community and they should perceive that the library is important. Furthermore, Zickuhr et al. (2013) stated that the library must provide the information needed by the community and the services offered must be related to their ability, needs and interests.

METHODS

Research Design and the Questionnaire

In conducting this research, a cross-sectional quantitative study was employed. The advantages of using this method is that it contains multiple variables at the time of the data snapshot, findings and the outcomes from the study can be analysed to create new theories/studies or in-depth research and the data can be used for various types of research.

A questionnaire was used as the main instrument for obtaining the required data. The questionnaire was developed based on a literature review. After the first draft of the questionnaire was completed, two focus group discussions were conducted, one with rural library staff and the other with rural library users. The main purpose of the focus group discussions was to seek the opinion of the staff and the users on the appropriateness and suitability of the questions included in the questionnaire. Based on the feedback from the focus group discussion, the questionnaire was further strengthened. The final version of the questionnaire consisted of seven sections, namely demographics, pattern of rural library usage, sources, services, access criteria, interaction and community lifestyle (Table 1). In order to fulfil the study objective, the paper focused only on demographics, sources, services, access criteria, interaction and community lifestyle.

Table 1
The instrument

Part	Number of Questions	Option of Answers	Type of Questions Asked	Example of Item(s)
Demographic	7	Open-ended and closed ended	Related to demographics	Age, gender, income, education achievement
Sources	23	5-point Likert scale	Related to reading sources, ICT facilities, building spaces and activities conducted	"The available reading sources at the library are updated."
Services	15	5-point Likert scale	Related to assistance offered by staff, number of staff, the returning and borrowing process, ICT services and arrangement of sources	"The library staff encourage me to use the services provided."
Access criteria	8	5-point Likert scale	Related to access to the sources, services and activities conducted at the rural library, condition of the infrastructure (road) to the rural library	"I am allowed to join activities organised by the library."
Interaction	10	5-point Likert scale	Related to the purpose of visiting the rural library	"I come to the library for group discussion."
Rural community lifestyle	23	5-point Likert scale	Related to the impact resulting from the services used such as users' attitude, habits, personal achievement and their activeness in social and recreational activities	"The services provided at the library cultivate my reading habits."

The Pre-Test

After the questionnaire was developed, it was pre-tested among 30 rural library users at a selected rural library in Kuala Selangor. The pre-test resulted in most of the parts obtaining values exceeding the 0.700 recommended by Nunnally (1978) (Table 2). The factor of services, C2_8, which did not exceed the recommended value, was deleted as suggested by the reliability analysis to increase the Cronbach's alpha value to 0.919.

Table 2
Results of the pre-test

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Sources	0.912
Services	0.919
Access criteria	0.785
Interaction	0.870

Population and Sampling

The population of the sample was made up of the registered users of the rural library, numbering 1.34 million. The sampling

process of the study was based on the multi-stage cluster sampling. At the first process of sampling, zones in Malaysia were listed. Then, a total of four zones out of five were randomly selected. The selected zones were central, southern, east coast and Sabah/Sarawak. At the second stage, all the states within the selected zones were listed. Then, states were randomly selected to represent their zones. The selected states were Perak (central), Negeri Sembilan (southern), Terengganu (east coast) and Sabah (Sabah/Sarawak). At the third stage of the sampling, all rural library zones in the selected states were listed and one zone for each state

was then randomly selected. The selected rural library zones were A8 (Perak), N5 (Perak), T8 (Terengganu) and S13 (Sabah). At the fourth stage of sampling, a total of four rural libraries were randomly selected to represent each selected zone (Table 3). At the last stage of sampling, a total of 25 library users from each selected rural library were randomly selected as the respondents (25 respondents x 4 rural library x 4 zones = 400 respondents). Each library was represented by 25 respondents to ensure that all the selected libraries were represented by an equal number of respondents.

Table 3
List of selected states and rural libraries

States	Name of the rural library
Sabah (Zone S13)	1) Rural Library of Kg. Mesilou
	2) Rural Library of Kg. Terolobou
Perak (Zone A8)	3) Rural Library of Kg. Mohimboyon
	4) Rural Library of Kg. Kauluan
Negeri Sembilan (Zone N5)	1) Rural Library of Kg. Pdg tembak
	2) Rural Library of Kg. Lekir Batu 15
Terengganu (Zone T8)	3) Rural Library of Batu Tiga Segari
	4) Rural Library of Teluk Raja Bayang
	1) Rural Library of Kg. Serting Tengah
	2) Rural Library of Kg. Serting Ulu
	3) Rural Library of Taman Tunku Puan Chik
	4) Rural Library of Kg. Bukit Kerdas
	1) Rural Library of Kg. Banggol Katong
	2) Rural Library of Kg. Alor Limbat
	3) Rural Library of Kg. Tasik
	4) Rural Library of Kg. Padang Tanjung

Data Collection

The data collection was carried out over seven months from June 2014 to December 2014. The data collection process was assisted by trained and experienced enumerators and monitored by the research team members. The survey was the main method used to collect the required data, and the respondents took between 25 and 35 min to complete the survey.

Analysis

Analysis was based on the descriptive and inferential analyses. Descriptive analyses such as frequency, percentage, mean score and standard deviation were performed to describe the general data of the study, while inferential analyses such as Pearson product moment correlation were performed to identify any relationship that might occur between the variables. Multiple linear regression was performed to identify the factor that most contributed to rural community lifestyle. Four factors, namely sources, services, access criteria and interaction acted as independent variables, while community lifestyle acted as the dependent variable.

The mean score gained for sources, services, access criteria, interaction and community lifestyle was categorised into three levels, namely low, moderate and high.

The categorisation was based on the range of score calculation, where a range of possible scores (in this case, 1-5) were divided by the number of categories required (in this case three, low, moderate and high). The resulted range, four (5-1), was divided by three, resulting in the class of interval, 1.33. Based on the class of interval, the mean score for the low category ranged between 1.00 and 2.33, the mean score for the moderate category ranged between 2.34 and 3.67 and the mean score for the high category ranged between 3.68 and 5.00.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4 shows the demographic data of the respondents studied. More than half of the rural library users were female (63.0%), and the majority (70%) of them who used the rural library were aged below 30 years old. This indicated that many of the rural library users were from the younger generations (mean 24.9), which included school children, housewives and the unemployed (66%). In terms of race, nearly three quarters of the respondents were Malay (74%), while the rest were Dusun. A total of 43.8% possessed an SPM/SPMV certificate and most were unemployed (66.2%). The mean score for income per month among the employed respondents was RM1415.44 and slightly more than half of them had between 4 and 6 household members.

Table 4
Demographic factors

Factor	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Gender			
Male	148	37.0	
Female	252	63.0	
Age (years)			
<20 years	184	46.0	24.9
21-30 years	93	23.3	
>31 years	123	30.8	
Race			
Malay	297	74.3	
Others	103	25.7	
Education achievement			
Never been to school	3	.8	
Primary school	14	3.5	
PMR	112	28.0	
SPM/SPMV	175	43.8	
Skill certificate/STPM	43	10.8	
Diploma	33	8.3	
Degree/Master/PhD	20	5.0	
Employment status			
Working	135	33.8	
Not working	265	66.2	
Income (n=135)			
<RM700	27	20.0	RM1415.44
RM701-RM1500	79	58.5	
>RM1501	29	21.5	
Size of household			
1-3	62	15.5	
4-6	208	52.0	
>7	130	32.5	

In seeking the influential factors of rural library services on rural community lifestyle, a total of five factors were studied. The selected factors were based on the model suggested by McDonald and Micikas (1994). All of the factors studied recorded

high mean scores ranging from 3.77 to 4.19. The factor of criteria recorded the highest mean score, with $M=4.19$, followed by services, $M=4.03$, while the lowest mean score was recorded by the factor of sources ($M=3.77$) (Table 5).

Table 5
Level of mean score for factors studied

Factors	Mean score
Sources	3.77
Services	4.03
Criteria	4.19
Interaction	3.99

As mentioned earlier, rural libraries have managed to develop a positive lifestyle among rural communities. This leads to a pertinent question: What are the factors that influence this lifestyle? To identify the possible factors, relationship analysis using the Pearson product moment correlation was performed to examine any relationship that might occur between the factors studied and rural community lifestyle. The analysis showed that all of the factors had a positive and significant relationship with rural community lifestyle (Table 6).

Table 6
Relationship between factors studied and rural community lifestyle

Variables	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Sources	0.629	0.0001
Services	0.609	0.0001
Access criteria	0.556	0.0001
Interaction	0.719	0.0001

The factor of access criteria has been confirmed as one of the factors that had a positive and significant relationship. The resulted value is not surprising and is in line with previous studies done by Omar et al. (2014), Howard (2011) and Corradini (2003). Omar et al. (2012), for example,

concluded that infrastructure such as roads, street lamps, telecommunication networking and signage to further enhance the number of visitors to rural libraries was important. The rural library has benefitted from the government's efforts to ensure huge rural areas equipped with basic infrastructure such as road and electricity. To date, more than two thirds of rural areas in Malaysia have tarred roads and are equipped with electricity (Yassin, Samah, Idris, Hamzah, & Shaffril, 2013). Having better basic infrastructure provides better access to the rural library for the community, thus enhancing their chances of frequently visiting the library and using the services offered.

Source is another factor identified as having a significant relationship with community lifestyle. Updated reading sources, ICT, large space and related community activities are among the important resources that must be made available in a rural library (Norshila et al., 2011; Tenopir et al., 2009; Tveit, 2012). According to Howard (2011), such resources must be up to date and free from damage. Although libraries are associated with traditional ways of offering information to the community, equipping the rural library with ICT facilities is one of the ways of ensuring its sustainability. Moreover, larger building space is vital for the rural library, not only to house its resources but also to accommodate and to ensure the comfort of a large number of visitors and members (Dewe, 2006; Omar et al., 2012). This will also ensure that all of the community

activities conducted at the rural library meet the interests and needs of all users from both genders and all age groups (Omar et al., 2014).

Services was confirmed to have a significant relationship with community lifestyle. Currently, although the numbers are discouraging, Omar et al. (2012) have looked into the ability of the small number of library staff to create a positive perception among visitors on the services offered. Their promotional efforts can motivate and cultivate interest among the community to visit and use the services offered in rural libraries.

Interaction is another variable that recorded a significant relationship with community lifestyle. Most of the users 'interacted' with the reading resources and activities available at the library. Within the scope of Malaysia, Omar et al. (2012)

had concluded that the rural community are aware of the rural library services offered. Referring to Omar et al. (2012, 2014), among the rural library services preferred by the rural community are reading materials such as novels, newspapers, magazines and educational resources; ICT-related services such as computers, laptops and the Internet; and community activities such as sewing and cooking classes and drawing and essay competitions.

Sources, services, criteria and interaction were used in multiple linear regression (enter method) analysis to predict lifestyle. The prediction model was statistically significant $F(4, 400)=140.507, p<0.001$ and accounted for approximately 58% of the variance of lifestyle. The lifestyle was predicted by lower levels of sources and services and to a lesser extent by higher levels of interaction (Table 7).

Table 7
The contributing factor towards rural community lifestyle

Variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	0.203				
Sources		0.059	0.198	3.932	0.000
Services		0.055	0.137	2.641	0.009
Criteria		0.052	0.060	1.263	0.207
Interaction		0.041	0.482	11.012	0.000

$R=0.766; R^2=0.587; \text{Adjusted } R^2=0.583, F=140.507, p<0.0001$

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Analysis performed confirmed that all of the four factors studied were significantly associated with community lifestyle, denoting that having better sources,

services, criteria and interaction in rural libraries increased the possibility of creating a positive lifestyle among the rural community. Eventually, having library services in rural areas is seen as one of the efforts in further strengthening family

and community bonds and, at the same time, reducing social problems among the community, particularly among the younger generations.

This study had several limitations. Firstly, it involved only a total of 400 respondents and secondly, it did not include states from the northern zone. The data can be enriched if a bigger number of respondents and all five zones in Malaysia were included.

As interaction plays a major role in developing a positive community lifestyle, several recommendations are highlighted based on four main criteria, which are to make library services 'visible' to the community, to create positive perception of the rural library among the community, to fulfil information needed by the community and to ensure that the services offered meet the community's ability, needs and interests.

Create Visible Services and Positive Perception among the Community

To create visibility for the services of the rural library and to encourage a positive perception of the rural library among the community, promotional efforts must be intense. Efforts to inform people of what the library offers are highly recommended. Hassan et al. (2011) looked into the effectiveness of using printed materials such as brochures and newsletters in disseminating information among the rural community, while Omar et al. (2012) highlighted the proactive roles of the librarian in conducting door-to-door promotions, school-to-school promotions exhibitions and community

activities and in cultivating the reading habit among children. Abu Samah et al. (2010) highlighted the roles of village leaders or the village leadership committee known as the JKKK in encouraging the rural community to use government services as these leaders are trusted and considered reliable sources among the rural community. These efforts will ensure that the rural library is visible and will also encourage a positive perception of the rural library among the community.

Fulfil the Needs of the Community

To fulfil the community's need for information and to provide services that are in line with the community's ability, needs and interests, the services and sources offered by the rural library must be of good quantity and quality. It is important to acquire sufficient resources at the rural library, particularly those related to ICT. To date, efforts have been made to strengthen ICT services offered at the rural library. The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission, for example, have provided free notebooks to rural libraries and placed several modems in rural libraries as part of the wireless village programme. Nevertheless, such efforts are can only be seen at selected rural libraries and these efforts should be widened to include other rural libraries. Doubtless, a limited budget would be the main constraint in ensuring a good quantity and quality of resources in the rural library. This can be overcome with donations of reading materials and learning resources from NGOs, private agencies and universities. It is crucial for the rural library

to provide information and services that meet the community's ability, needs and interests as the libraries need to be customer-based rather than place-based or collection-driven. Responsive programming targeted at meeting the needs of the rural community will offer much help in building a positive community lifestyle. This can be done by conducting periodical assessments among rural library users. Such assessment will alert librarians what needs to be upgraded and how to do so.

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