

Attitude towards Rural Library Services among Youths in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to discover the attitude towards rural library services among youths in Malaysia. In addition, it considers the individual factors that might influence attitudes towards the services offered. This is a correlational study in nature, and uses a developed questionnaire to obtain the data needed. A total of 400 respondents among rural youths from 16 selected rural libraries in four states of Peninsular Malaysia were chosen. Based on the analysis performed, it can be concluded that rural youths have a favorable attitude towards the services offered by local libraries. Moreover, further analyses show that the frequency of attending rural libraries has a positive relationship with attitude towards rural library services. A number of recommendations have been highlighted, and it is hoped that these will help concerned parties in constructing an effective strategy for developing rural libraries in Malaysia.

KEYWORDS: Attitude, rural library, rural youth, community development.

INTRODUCTION

Since Malaysia gained its independence, various strategies and initiatives have been taken by the government to instigate development and changes within its rural communities. These ventures should be continued as rural areas have unlimited potential, much of which is yet to be explored and could ensure the communities' future well-being. The rapid development of the economy has resulted in the development of a wider gap between urban and rural areas. In line with the government's efforts to transform the country's economy to become knowledge based, several policies and initiatives have been taken to accelerate the development of information technology. Hence, in order to further the government's vision of maintaining a k-economy, the digital divide should be addressed. One government intervention to address this problem is the establishment of The National Library Malaysia (NLM) in 1971. Various projects have been conducted by NLM, of which the establishment of rural libraries is one. Rural libraries began to be established in 2001; at that time, a total of 25 rural libraries were established as pioneer projects, and such establishments attempted to provide updated information and knowledge for rural communities (13). To date, a total of 1,179 rural libraries have been established throughout the country. Nevertheless, limited study has been conducted on rural libraries, particularly with regards to the attitude of rural youths towards them. It is therefore important to conduct more research to understand the information needs of youths, and their perceptions of rural library services (14). This study aims to address this need, and to determine the demographic factors that might determine youth attitude in this regard. The study is important, as data on attitudes play a vital role in government intervention programs, in that it can be used for policy evaluation and policy improvement on a continuous basis. Using attitude data, policy makers can identify individual differences within the target group, thereby encouraging the government to take initiatives or interventions that differ across different groups in society (6).

Rural youths, their attitude, and rural library services

According to the Department of Town and Country Planning, rural areas may be defined as having a population of less than 10,000, with characteristics of agricultural land with natural resources in which the distribution of residences is either clustered, aligned or scattered. In 2010 there were 2,859,162 youths living in rural areas of Malaysia (11). Taking into account the distance between rural areas and the nearest town, in the year 2000 the government took the initiative to establish rural libraries, which act as "mini libraries", to facilitate rural communities and simultaneously encourage the pursuit of knowledge and information among them. The rural library initiative aims not only to provide useful reading material and book-lending services for rural communities, but also to further the deeper will of the government and policy makers to foster reading habits among rural communities,

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and provide alternative recreational activities for them – especially youths (21). While information and knowledge dissemination is undoubtedly essential, (19) views the advantages of rural libraries from a wider perspective by taking into account the fact that rural libraries also act as venues for many socially related activities, such as important occasions, IT literacy programs, and many more.

The young generation will inherit the country's administration; thus, it is not surprising that they are the main subjects of the government's development program, as shown by the examples of rural libraries and other community development projects which drive the delivery of information and technology. Based on the adopted definition of youths set forth by (12), "youths" can be defined as individuals aged from 18 to 40 years old. To date, youths constitute 40% of Malaysia's overall population. Rural communities, in this case youths, are usually lagging behind in terms of information and new technology due to their geographical location, which is relatively more remote than that of their friends from the same age group who live in urban areas (3). Thus, government interventions such as rural libraries are a good indicator that the knowledge gap between rural and urban communities will be eradicated in future, as the rural community are given increased access to essential information (10). Although various amenities are being provided by the government in order to help deliver information and technology to rural youths, there are still some who refuse to use the services. A negative attitude towards these services is one factor affecting this. (1) defines an attitude as a mental or neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence on the individual's response to all objects and situations to which it is related. In much simpler words, an attitude may be defined as mind-set or a tendency to act in a particular way due to an individual's experience and temperament. An attitude includes three components: an affect (a feeling), cognition (a belief), and behavior (an action). Attitude helps us define how we see situations, as well as how we behave towards the situation or object. In many cases, attitude will play a vital role in increasing usage of the government's interventions, including rural library services. People who have a more positive attitude towards rural library services are predicted to exhibit higher levels of usage of the services provided (8,4).

There are many things that contribute to a negative attitude towards rural library services, including a lack of information needs assessment conducted by library personnel; outdated and unattractive (to youths) reading materials; and the provision of irrelevant materials that do not apply to the local context (20, 16). In many cases, rural libraries fail to construct positive attitudes among youths, as there is a failure to promote their books and services, which in turn demotivates youths from using them as they do not see any reason for doing so (20). To further aggravate this situation, there are several misconceptions and negative perceptions towards rural libraries. Certain groups of youths are discouraged from attending due to these misconceptions, and a view of rural libraries as cold, solemn and rigid, which indicates their thoughts on how boring and old-fashioned rural libraries are (7). These findings are consistent with later research conducted in Malaysia by (14), who observe many negative attitudes amongst youths towards rural libraries. Rural libraries should be the ideal solution towards covering the knowledge gap between urban and rural communities, but as long as the attitudes towards rural libraries remain the same, the benefits of the service are yet to be fully utilized. Thus, this paper will consider the attitudes of youths towards rural libraries, as attitude is one of the elements that will influence behavioral intentions with respect to any interventions. For instance, positive attitudes towards preserving natural resources may encourage individuals to engage in different specific behaviors, such as recycling glass or paper, using public transport more, turning down the heating and so on (2).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a quantitative study in which a developed questionnaire was used to obtain the data needed. To measure attitude, a set of questions were developed, largely based on the literature review. For each of the question with regard to attitude towards rural library services among youths in Malaysia, the respondents were given a five likert-like scale option which range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The developed questionnaire then was pre-tested to determine its reliability at a rural library in Muar Johor, which resulted in a Cronbach's alpha value of .725, which exceeds the value of .70 recommended by (15). Furthermore, the instrument was shown to a number of librarians in selected rural library to ensure its validity. The librarian then informed the researchers on the suitability of the questions to be asked to the respondents. After the pre-test process completed, it can be seen that the respondents were familiar with the five-likert scale option used as it offers more simplicity for them. A total of 400 of rural youths were randomly chosen as the respondents for the study, and a total of 16 rural libraries were considered from four states (Johor, Perak, Terengganu and Kedah). Eight of the rural libraries were non-ICT libraries, while the remaining eight offered ICT services. Descriptive and inferential analyses were run, whereby statistical measurements such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and Pearson product moment correlation were employed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. From the table, it can be observed that most of the respondents are females (65.3%). This finding is consistent with previous research on the difference regarding usage of rural libraries between genders (John, 1995). Most of the respondents are students, as there a high percentage are PMR (Lower Certificate of Education) (33.0%) and SPM (Malaysia Education Certificate) (30.8%) candidates. More than one-third of the respondents (36.8%) are employed. In terms of visiting frequency, 31.0% of the respondents visit a library once in a week, and some visit twice a week (29.3%). Failure to visit rural libraries frequently is probably due to time constraint (14); as some of the respondents are students and employed, they may have little spare time to visit rural libraries.

Table 1: Socio-economic profile of the respondents.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Gender				
Male	139		34.7	
Female	261		65.3	
Age				24.3
15-17years	146	36.5		
18-24years	73	18.3		
25-40years	181	45.3		
Education level				
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	8.5		
Degree/Master's/ PhD	18	4.5		
Job status				
Employed	147	36.8		
Unemployed	253		63.2	
Frequency of library visits per week				
1.0	124		31.0	2.413
2.0	117		29.3	1.363
3.0	77		19.3	
4.0	49		12.3	
5.0	23		5.8	
6.0	5		1.3	
7.0	5		1.3	

Table 2 summarizes the results with regards to the overall level of attitude towards rural library services, while Table 3 demonstrates each of the specific statements used to measure the respondents' attitudes. To obtain the overall mean score, the cumulative mean score of all the statements was calculated, and was then divided equally into three categories, namely low (1.00-2.33), moderate (2.34-3.67) and high (3.68-5.00). The results demonstrate that the respondents scored a high overall mean score (M = 4.22), which portrays the probability that the majority of them possess a positive attitude towards rural library services. To measure respondents' attitudes towards rural library services, a total of nine statements were developed. It can be seen that all of the statements recorded a high mean score (3.67-5.00) ranging from 3.68 to 4.49. The highest mean score was recorded from the statement, "I'm happy with the rural library services" (M = 4.49), followed by "I'm entertained by the environment in the rural library", and "I'm satisfied with the rural library services".

Table 2: Overall level of attitude towards rural library services

Level	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	S.D
Attitude			4.22	.535
Low (1.00-2.33)	2	0.5		
Moderate (2.34-3.67)	49	12.3		
High (3.68-5.00)	349	87.2		

Table 3: Level of attitude towards library services

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Moderate (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean	S.D
I'm happy with the rural library services	0.8	0.5	6.0	34.5	58.3	4.49	0.700
I'm entertained by the environment in the rural library	0.3	1.0	10.8	38.5	49.5	4.36	0.733
I'm satisfied with the rural library services	0.5	0.3	11.8	42.0	45.5	4.32	0.727
I'm comfortable with the rural library's environment	1.8	0.8	11.5	44.5	41.5	4.23	0.816
I'm satisfied as we are allowed to discuss in rural library	0.8	2.8	14.0	41.3	41.3	4.20	0.833
**I'm easily bored when I'm at the rural library	45	32.5	11.5	5.8	5.3	4.06	1.125
I can't wait till my next visit to the rural library	2.0	7.2	33.8	34.8	22.3	3.68	0.964

**Negative statement

Individual factors affecting attitudes towards library services

To determine the individual factors that influence respondents' attitudes towards library services, inferential analyses including the independent t-test, ANOVA and Pearson product moment correlation were employed. To calculate the difference between factors such as gender and job status, and attitude towards rural library services, an independent t-test was performed. Based on the data presented (Table 4), no significant difference was identified in relation to gender. This is based on $M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.574$ for males and $M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.513$; $t(400) = 1.288$, $p = 0.199$ for females. These results reflect the possibility that males and females possess a similar attitude towards rural library services, which contradicts the findings of (18), who claimed that females possess a better attitude as they are more comfortable and spend more time at libraries compared to males. This difference in scenario might be related to the environment of rural libraries in Malaysia, wherein internal decoration, reading sources and services offered are not biased towards either gender.

In terms of job status, based on $M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.500$ for employed respondents and $M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.556$; $t(400) = .249$, $p = 0.803$ for unemployed respondents, there was no significant difference between the employed and unemployed respondents in terms of their attitude towards rural library services. This finding differs to those of (14), who claim that unemployed users have a more favourable attitude towards rural libraries as they are not constrained by time or job commitments. This scenario might be affected by the fact that one of the important factors for constructing a favourable attitude towards library usage is time (18). This non-significant difference might result from the fact that a big proportion of the respondents in our study were students or employed; correspondingly, both are constrained by their schooling and job commitments during weekdays, which limits them to attending libraries and using the services offered only at the weekend.

Table 4: Differences in attitudes towards rural library services using independent t-test

Variables	n	Mean	SD	t	p
Gender				1.288	.199
Male	139	4.17	.574		
Female	261	4.24	.513		
Job Status				.249	.803
Employed	147	4.21	.500		
Unemployed	253	4.22	.556		

To identify any difference that might occur in terms of level of education, ANOVA was performed. For the purpose of the analysis, the level of education was re-grouped into four categories. Those who had never been to school or possess only a primary school level of education were included in the first category, known as <primary school. Those who possess a PMR level of education were defined as belonging to the PMR category, and those who possess an SPM/SPMV level of education were assigned to the SPM/SPMV category. The last category was defined as tertiary level, and contained those who had received a skill certificate/STPM, Diploma, Degree, Master's or PhD qualification. Based on the results, it can be seen that the F value ($4, 400$) = 1.339, $p > 0.05$ confirms that there was no significant difference across the groups studied. These results reflect that, no matter what their level of

education, all of the respondents have a positive attitude towards the services offered at rural libraries (Table 5). These findings are not in line those of (17) and (5) who found that education is one of the factors that affects attitudes towards library usage.

Table 5: Differences in attitudes towards rural library services using ANOVA

Variables	N	Mean	SD	F	p
Level of Education				1.339	.261
<Primary school	49	4.16	.568		
PMR	132	4.19	.515		
SPM/SPMV	123	4.30	.558		
Tertiary level	96	4.18	.513		

For further analysis, Pearson product moment correlation was employed to determine the relationship between attitudes towards rural library services, and factors of age and weekly visiting frequency. The analysis shows that weekly visiting frequency has a positive correlation with attitude towards rural library services, which denotes that the more times respondents visit rural libraries each week, the more favorable their attitudes will be. This makes sense, as frequent visits to the library will offer opportunities for the users to get “closer to” and understand the services offered (7). This is made possible as frequent visits will allow them to learn and do research on the services offered which then result in them to have an adequate information and knowledge on the services offered. The analysis also confirmed that there is no significant relationship between age and attitude towards rural library services (Table 6).

Table 6: Relationship between attitude towards rural library services and selected independent variables using Pearson product moment correlation

Variables	r	p
Age	-.032	.520
Frequency of weekly visits to rural library	.139	.005

Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, the attitude amongst rural youths towards rural libraries is positive. They portray a favorable attitude towards all of the items measured, as shown by the mean score. Nonetheless, there is a need to further improve the frequency of youth visits to rural libraries, as this has been proven to influence their attitude towards the services offered. A number of suggestions can be made here. First, there is a need for intensive promotion to further promote rural libraries to rural communities, particularly youths. Such promotion can be conducted using electronic media, the Internet, or printed media. In the case of electronic media such as television, the radio and the Internet, advertising can be made possible by financial allocation from concerned parties such as the NLM, the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, and the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission. Rural librarians can also play a role in conducting intensive promotion by disseminating printed media such as brochures and pamphlets to strategic places in rural areas, for instance mosques and coffee stalls. Making printed media available to promote something is indeed effective, as (9) confirm, since promotional materials are trusted and considered reliable by rural communities. Second, needs assessment surveys should be conducted in order to provide relevant material for youths to further strengthen their favorable attitudes towards the services offered. Rural librarians must be taught how to conduct effective assessment surveys; such surveys are important, as they will inform the librarians on the needs and interests of the library users.

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