

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES IN MALAYSIAN RURAL LIBRARIES

Siti Khadijah Rafie^{1*}, Roziya Abu², Nor Amira Mohd Ali³, Nur Syazana Mohd Nasir³, Azlyantiny Mohammad³

¹*Faculty of Information Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah, 08400 Merbok, Kedah*

²*Faculty of Information Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Selangor, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor*

³*Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah, 08400 Merbok, Kedah*

**Corresponding author's e-mail: khadijahrafie@uitm.edu.my*

Received: 28 July 2021

Accepted: 2 August 2021

Online first: 27 August 2021

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the practices of social sustainability in selected Malaysian rural libraries. A qualitative approach was employed through the observations, interviews and reviews of documents related to the selected six rural libraries involved in this study. This study concluded that all of the rural libraries involved in this study successfully implemented the social sustainability elements in their libraries.

Keywords: rural libraries, social sustainability, qualitative method



INTRODUCTION

Recently, in the 11th Malaysia Plan the ‘sustainability’ has been widely debated and highlighted. The plan aims for building the future that centres on the comprehensive macroeconomic policy in improving the people’s wellbeing, human capital development, green and sustainable growth, infrastructure that supports economic expansion, and a citizen-centric public service with high productivity so that no Malaysian is left behind. In hope that every Malaysian will have equal access to quality living, public spaces which is safer and achieve to greater social integration leading to a more united and cohesive Malaysian community. To support the delivery of plan, the Government is obligated to transforming the public service by becoming more citizen-centric and enhancing the productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness of service delivery. Therefore, it is great for library to follow this trend specially to sustain the existence of the current local rural libraries by just not focus only to the urban area so that everyone is inclusive in the Malaysia Plan. Furthermore, according to specific objective of this study was to identify the social sustainability practices in rural libraries and to explore the social sustainability characters of rural libraries. In addition, this study also explored the awareness of social sustainability among rural library staff, users, and non-users. Hopefully, the findings might help the National Library of Malaysia (NLM) to fully understand their key roles in contributing to social sustainability practices. As accordingly, the researcher intended to focus on the rural libraries managed by NLM due to its uniformity of policies and procedures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The World Economic Forum (WEF) which is based in Geneva defined social sustainability as the organisations, procedures and factors that enable community to experience the best security, participation and health and that make the most of their potential to contribute to and get benefits from the economic wealth of the country which they live in (Ratiu & Anderson, 2015). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is another method for organisation to ensure social sustainability is practiced (Kocmanová & Dočekalová, 2011). Social sustainability of library refers to the community engagement by the library to ensure its sustainability (Ananda, 2015). Rural libraries

provide social engagement to their patrons. People from all walks of life can connect and engage through activities such as book discussion groups, gaming competition, and candidate forums (Real & Rose, 2017). It is the medium for the community to empower their social, environment and economic (Mansour, 2020; Ariyani, Wayan & Nengah, 2017). Some studies for social sustainability in libraries measured the different aspects of library being the place of socialising, engaging and leisure (Omeluzor *et al.*, 2017). Rural libraries act as an information and community centre for providing adequate information related to rural community such as childbirth, birth control, juvenile issues, illiteracy and government information. Besides that, social sustainability of library refers to the community engagement by the library to ensure its sustainability (Ananda, 2015). Thus, the library should be an essential community space which more citizen-centric, enables their patrons to access all the collections, and enjoying the recreational sources provided. As explained by Real and Rose (2017) rural libraries provide social engagement to their patrons. People from all walks of life can connect and engage through activities such as book discussion groups, gaming competition, and candidate forums. In relate that, rural libraries also played roles in the community to socialise thus developing knowledge-based society. It is the medium for the community to empower their social, environment and economic (Ariyani, Wayan & Nengah, 2017).

There are few studies exploring the interaction between rural libraries and the users regarding the lending and returning of library materials as well as being the community centre for the users to socialise (Ariyani, Wayan & Nengah, 2017; Siti Zobidah Omar *et. al.*, 2016). From these studies, it can be concluded that the social issues might be different between countries and business involved. The social sustainability focused on this study is about the roles of rural libraries as a medium for the rural community to engage, provided healthy lifestyle and ensure that they are informed citizenship (Chowdhury, 2013). Rural libraries in Malaysia are mainly established to fulfil the social, recreational, and political purposes (Omar *et al.*, 2014).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To delve into the social sustainability practices in Malaysia rural libraries, a qualitative approach was used in this study through semi- structured

interviews for data collection. This study adopted a whole qualitative research approach. Qualitative methodology approach allows the researcher to explain in detail the case study of the rural libraries involved in the study. There are six rural libraries that has been approved by National Library Malaysia (NLM) in the attempt to answer all the established research questions. The six rural libraries are consisting of two most active rural libraries were labelled as RL1 and RL2, two average performing rural libraries were labelled as RL3 and RL4, and two least active rural libraries were labelled as RL5 and RL6.

The researcher chooses the qualitative approach to seek deep understanding on the sustainability elements of rural libraries in Malaysia. In addition, qualitative methodology is the best methodology for this study in seeking deep and detailed understanding on the rural libraries' sustainability. The interview sessions were conducted with the rural libraries' staffs, users, and non-users of the rural libraries. All the interview questions were also open-ended, which allowed the participants to express their opinions and ideas regarding the study (Roziya, Grace, & Carroll, 2011). The respondents that involved in this study comprised the local library staff and volunteer participants from the local community. Approximately 10-40 minutes were allocated for each respondent depending on their responses during interview session. The researcher used an electronic device (voice recorder) to record the interview sessions and to gather relevant information. The interview questions were related to their awareness on social sustainability and the practices in rural libraries. As for this research, the researchers used ATLAS.ti version 7 to examine data in this study. The researcher separated the data through coding after compiling and organising the data. Coding is a term used and understood by the researcher for the researcher to define and explain the phenomenon in a meaningful way. Coding is thus a method that enables similarly coded data to be organised and grouped into categories or 'families' because they share some characteristics (Saldana & Omasta, 2016). In the context of this study, hundreds of coding were produced through and those coding led the researcher towards conducting thematic analysis involving all six case studies.

Table 1: Interview Questions

Respondents	Interview Questions
Rural Library Staff (Assistant Librarian and Library Assistant)	Could you please tell me about yourself? (name, age, qualification, experience, job scope, library policy)
	Are there any programmes/ activities for the community to engage with each other socially?
	If no, do you have initiative to do so?
Rural Library Users	Could you please tell me about yourself? (name, age, qualification, belongingness to the community, occupation, family income)
	Do you think rural library helps community to engage with each other socially?
	How do you think library could play roles for the community to engage with each other?
Rural Library Non-Users	Could you please tell me about yourself? (name, age, qualification, belongingness to the community, occupation, family income)
	How do you think library could play roles for the community to engage with each other socially?

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the study, all six rural libraries have shown excellent effort in implementing social sustainability in their respective libraries. Most of the activities and programs that have been organised by the libraries have found to inspire further engagement from the community. There were 65 respondents involved in this study where 12 of the respondents were the rural library staff and 26 were the rural library users. Meanwhile, the other 27 were the non-users. All the respondents (staffs, user, and non-user) agreed that rural libraries should adopt social sustainability in their programmes. Below is the summary of social sustainability practices in six rural libraries involved in the study.

Table 2: Summary of Social Sustainability Implementation in Rural Libraries

Library	Staffs	Users	Non-Users
RL1	1.Colouring Contest	1. Independence Day programme	1. Colouring Contest
	2. Sports event	2. Sports event	2.Organise more programmes
	3. Religious talk	3. Religious talk	
	4. Health check-up	4. Health check-up	
	5. Reading campaign	5. Reading campaign	
RL2	1.Sports event	1. Sports event	1. Sports event
	2.Cooking competition	2. Cooking competition	2. Cooking competition
	3. Quiz	3. Story telling competition	3. Organise more programmes
	4. Exam workshop	4. Flower arrangement competition	4. Library open day
	5. Drone workshop	5. Outreach programme	
RL3	1. Colouring contest	1. Colouring contest/ Drawing contest	1. Colouring contest
	2. Sports event	2. Sports event	2. Sports event
	3. Crossword puzzle contest	3. Crossword puzzle contest	3. Organise more programmes
	4. Reading campaign	4. Cooking competition	4. Reading campaign
	5. Independence Day celebration	5. Find hidden picture contest	5. Independence Day celebration
	6.Cooperate with other agencies	6 .Watermelon carving competition	
	7. Quran hour	7. Computer contest	
	8. Yasin reciting event	8. Bikedecoration contest RL4	
	9. Story telling competition		

RL4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sports events 2. Colouring contest 3. Yasin reciting 4. Reading campaign 5. Khat writing competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sports events 2. Colouring contest 3. Yasin reciting 4. Cooking contest 5. Khat writing competition 6. Open day 7. Flower arrangement competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sports events 2. Organise lot of programmes
RL5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quran hour 2. Handicraft competition 3. Colouring contest 4. Library campaign 5. Storytelling competition 6. Poem contest 7. Yasin reciting event 8. Reading contest/ Reading campaign 9. Crossword puzzle contest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sports event 2. Quiz 3. Colouring contest 4. Finding words contest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sports event 2. Quran hour 3. Library open day 4. Yasin reciting event 5. Religious fest 6. Colouring contest 7. Organise more programmes
RL6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aerobics class 2. Collaborate with schools 3. Collaborate with other local agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sports event 2. Reading campaign 3. Reading contest 4. Colouring contest 5. Drawing contest 6. Cooking competition 7. Quiz 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sports event 2. Reading campaign 3. Library open day 4. Organise more programmes

As shown in Table 2 above, all the rural libraries in the studies have adopted the social sustainability concept through various library activities and programmes. For example, colouring contest was one of the most common social sustainability in rural libraries. Besides, other activities such as collaboration with schools and local agencies to promote social sustainability between library and community, religious event to attract both youngsters and elders, sports event, handicraft competition, and many more. These are among the activities that have been organised to encourage engagement among users which are essential for the social sustainability of the rural library.

To nurture the social sustainability between rural libraries and students, librarians from both rural and school libraries should cooperate in developing programs which can attract school students such as providing reading list or tutoring services to students who are having deficiencies to improve their reading skills which will eventually help the students in their learning process (Smith, 2014). Rural libraries should cooperate with the school libraries for the purpose of educating the students and helping them to gain information literacy skills and also providing them access to information.

All the rural libraries in this study have organised multiple programmes to ensure that engagement exists in the community they serve. The activities held such as cooking competition, drawing contest, flower arrangement competition, grooming workshop, khat writing competition, health check-up, Quran hour, bike decorating contest, aerobics class, open day and many more. An empirical study reported that rural librarians should collaborated with school librarians to organise programmes and help students in their studies and such activities were being practised by three rural libraries in this study.

It is believed that library play their roles in providing information and knowledge to the users. Karioja (2013) shown that libraries, especially public libraries contribute significantly to the social and cultural values within the community. As rural libraries have a huge role in implementing environmental sustainability in which the social sustainability is of the element for it, this study attempted to review the social sustainability practices in Malaysian rural libraries.

By conducting interview among the participants which consists of rural library staff, users and non-users, the study discovered the social sustainability practises being implemented in the rural libraries. In general, the responses from the participants were acceptable and appropriate in answering the research questions. The rural library staff in this study acknowledged the importance of social sustainability elements; hence they already had several plans and programmess for future events that will increase the social awareness among users. In addition, all the users of the rural libraries were also aware the importance of social sustainability in the libraries and have agreed to continuing the practices.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully recognised two themes of social sustainability to be included in the rural libraries' sustainability framework namely, 1) religious and social activities, and 2) enhancement of activities. All respondents (staffs, users, and non-users) acknowledged that their rural libraries are the medium for them to socialise. The findings of this study are approximating to a study by Swan, Grimes, and Owens (2013) that highlighted small and rural libraries are the important medium for rural community to socialise and engage with each other. The religious programs such as Quran hour, Yasin recitation and religious fest are categorised as the religious and social activities, while other activities such as handicraft competition, open day, colouring contest, cooking competition, cooperate with other agencies, flower arrangement competition, Independence Day celebration, sports event, bowling competition and many more are classified as enhancement of activities. The rural libraries' users and non-users also added that the library should improve on the target audience. They highlighted that most of the programmes held at the library are more for the children, therefore it is hoped that more programmes for the teenagers, adults and senior citizen will be organised.

REFERENCES

- Ananda, A. A. (2015). Pengembangan perpustakaan desa berbasis community engagement di Kabupaten Lombok Timur Provinsi NTB. *Media Pustakawan*, 22(3), 23–29.

- Ariyani, L.P.S, Wayan M and Nengah B.A, D. M. (2017, Oct). Pemberdayaan pemuda dalam pengembangan perpustakaan desa untuk meningkatkan kemampuan literasi masyarakat. *Seminar Nasional Pengabdian Masyarakat 2017*, 449–455. [PDF file] Retrieved from http://digilib.mercubuana.ac.id/manager/t!@file_artikel_abstrak/Isi_Artikel_449186655088.pdf
- Karioja, E. (2013). Sustainability in libraries: A comparative study of ecological sustainability in IFLA WLIC 2012. 41+42
- Kocmanová, A. and Dočekalová, M. (2011). Corporate sustainability: Environmental, social, economic and corporate performance. *Acta Universitatis Agriculturae Et Silviculturae Mendelianae Brunensis*, 59(7), 203–208. DOI: 10.11118/actaun201159070203
- Malaysia., J. P. M. (2015). Rancangan Malaysia kesebelas (2016 - 2020). Putrajaya, Malaysia: Unit Perancang Ekonomi, Jabatan Perdana Menteri.
- Omar, S. Z., Shaffril, H. A. M., D’Silva, J. L., Bolong, J., Hamzah, A., and D’Silva, J. L. (2014). Mapping the patterns and problems in using rural library services among rural youth in Malaysia. *Information Development*, 31(5), 393-404. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666913515506>
- Omeluzor, S. U., Oyovwe-Tinuoye, G. O., and Emeka-Ukwu, U. (2017). An assessment of rural libraries and information services for rural development. *The Electronic Library*, 35(3), 445–471. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EL-08-2015-0145>
- Ratiu, C. and Anderson, B. B. (2015). The multiple identities of sustainability. *World Journal of Science, Technology and Sustainable Development*, 12(3), 194–205. <https://doi.org/10.1108/wjstsd-05-2015-0022>
- Real, B. and Rose, R. N. (2017). Rural public libraries in America: Continuing and impending challenges. *Advances in Librarianship*, 43, 37–59. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0065-283020170000043003>

- Roziya Abu., Grace, M., and Carroll, M. (2011). The role of the rural public library in community development and empowerment. *International Journal of the Book*, 8(2), 63–74.
- Saldana J. and Omasta, M. (2016). *Qualitative Research: Analyzing Life*. Los Angeles: SAGE
- Siti Zobidah Omar *et. al.* (2016). The quality of the rural library services in Malaysia: The views of the rural community. *The Social Sciences*, 11(3), 179–185. DOI: 10.36478/sscience.2016.179.185
- Smith, D. (2014). Collaboration between rural school and public youth services librarians. *New Library World*, 115(3/4), 160–174. <https://doi.org/10.1108/NLW-01-2014-0014>
- Swan, D. W., Grimes, J., and Owens, T. (2013). The State of Small and Rural Libraries in the United States. Research Brief, No. 5, 13. Retrieved from <https://www.ims.gov/ass>

