

# A STUDY ON THE FACTORS AFFECTING RURAL LIBRARY SERVICES IN MALAYSIA

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**Abstract:** *This study aims at identifying factors affecting the rural library services in Malaysia. This study focused on the staff capabilities in conducting rural library services, use of collections and ICT services in rural libraries. There are several problems associated with the rural library services, such as lack of commitment among the library staff, inadequate resources needed by the community, out-of-date collections, services such as multimedia connection are scarce and there was a lack of awareness among the rural community on the benefits of using the Internet. The research employed a case study approach in 2 rural libraries in Selangor. The findings indicate that: (a) majority of the respondents agreed the staff capabilities in conducting rural library services (mean=4.40); (b) majority of the respondents agreed that rural library provides sufficient and suitable collections to the users (mean=4.28); and (c) majority of the respondents agreed that ICT services is sufficient and should be continued (mean=4.22). Recommendations were made on the need for the better improvement for the efficient and utilisation of rural library. Finally, the researchers propose directions for future research in the area of rural library services.*

**Keywords:** *Rural area, library services, rural library.*

## INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the rural library or locally known as '*perpustakaan desa*' is placed under the authority of the National Library of Malaysia and the state government. These libraries often provide library and information services, such as literacy instruction, computer training and extension activities. Rural library, also known as community library, community information service, is responsible in providing basic services such as borrowing and returning of materials. The collections are also in small proportion and the building is located at the strategic place which may be accessed by people easily. Usually, the target users of rural library consist of the children, youths as well as employed persons with different information needs. According to Dent (2006) rural community-based project provides users with reading services, including the reading rooms and the book distribution services.

The purpose of this study is to identify factors affecting rural library services of the Rural Library under National Library of Malaysia's supervision, in Selangor. This study focuses on the library staff capabilities, the most used collections in the rural library and the ICT services usage in the rural library. The respondents involved in this study are delimited to the users of rural libraries in Selangor that include children, teenagers, adults and senior citizens.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The term rural library was coined by Vavrek (1980) who he postulates that a small population units which has modest financial support, a dearth of professional staff and provide service in an environment of geographical remoteness. According to Islam and Uddin (2005), rural library can simply be defined as a small building which is located in rural area; or it also can be regarded as mobile library whereby no library service is detected in that particular area. Dent (2006) suggests that the rural library has an advantage over other communication channels such as media and printed materials in that it can deliver highly personalised services to the village. Dent (2007) also adds that rural village libraries in developing areas of the world have great potential. These libraries may also impact local economic development, which can mean a lot in rural areas, where opportunity for economic growth is minimal. Goodman (2008) refers rural library as a village of "community libraries" which are built to serve the needs of rural populations outside the reach of standard information services and can be found scattered in a variety countries.

According to Siti Mariam (2011), among the factors that limit the knowledgeable community achievement is the library staff failure to play their roles. This includes the barriers that affect the status of library staff as contract workers, safety and logistics aspects which is the distance between houses in the village is the main reason on why the library staff were failed to implement the intended tasks. In terms of library services, Standerfer (2006) stated that in a rural public library, reference service may be very limited for many reasons, for example, lack of trained personnel (sometimes lack of any personnel), lack of proper sources to answer the request, or lack of space for the proper reference sources.

In addition, there is a scarcity of library services, such as multimedia collection. Isolation in rural areas and poor transport links are explicitly noted as barriers that library services need to overcome. The lack of public transport in rural areas has been found to be a significant barrier to access goods and services (Haggis, 2003). According to Litrell (2006), many libraries still do not have computers, and reliable high-speed Internet access is even more uncommon. This affects the community awareness about the library provision in term of the ICT services. There is a lack of awareness among rural community about the benefits of using the Internet as well (Mahmood, 2005).

In Uganda, Dent (2006, 2007) suggests that the community librarian has great responsibility in the development, promotion and running of the rural library. The study was conducted at Kitengesa Community Library in a rural village in Southeastern Uganda. Much of the population can read, as access to education has existed for quite some time in the community. This library is an example of a successful rural community library. One of the outcome of this research found that the promotion of the library as a model for other libraries in Uganda. In Pakistan, the Cyber Community Centers (CCCs) was found which was to provide access to information and communication channels that were previously beyond the reach of the poor and disadvantages communities resident in remote areas of Pakistan (Mahmood, 2005; Khan and Bawden, 2005). While in Thailand, Ahmed (2009) assesses the impact of boat library in Bangprok community, whereby it is essentially providing library services to rural dwellers. Under the public library system, this rural library act mainly to support informal education, non-formal education and local information provision. Goodman (2008) on th eother hand indicates the rural village libraries in Ghana and Burkina Faso are successful village/community libraries that are of great benefit to their users. The models for development of these libraries might be used in other similar rural villages to serve



both schools and the community. Menou and Mchombu (2007) suggests that information professionals have to be educated in order to become change agents and consider their role as essential part for their practise to be rewarding for themselves and more importantly for the people they serve. In Transylvania, Littrell, et al (2006) recognises that there is formal library training, computer usage and connection that need to be considered by the local authority. In Bangladesh, Islam and Uddin (2005) finds that there are six (6) problems are identified which includes lack of professional and adequate staff, lack of adequate ICT facilities and information resources, lack of infrastructural facility and so on.

A staff capability is important in conducting the rural library services. According to Shuman (2001) librarians have always strived to connect people of all ages, interests and backgrounds with the resources they need for education and enjoyment. This role is more critical now than ever in the new era of electronic information, as there is much more than ever in the new era of electronic information.

According to Littrell, et al (2006), Romanian librarians have not yet capable in conducting the community center services whereby they are deskilling, lack of professional recognition and no professional autonomy. Goodman (2008) examined the role of the librarian in two (2) different libraries through her surveys and found that 28 percent and 40 percent of users had asked the librarian for help at some point. The form of questions covered in those surveys is such as the assistance with basic reading and writing skills and understanding the library's guideline. The same author also conducted interview with librarians and found that the librarians shared specific reference questions, request and habits of their library users.

Islam and Uddin (2005) observed that the majority of the rural development libraries have no sufficient staff due to lack of fund and proper initiative of the concerned authority. They added that without skilled and qualified staff, it is not possible to disseminate information properly and to run the library efficiently. From the survey, they found that there is a lack of professional and adequate staff whereby most of the staff of the libraries surveyed is non-professional and a librarian to them is also considered as a non-professional. They also suggest that the proper dignity of the profession should be provided from the heart of the library users and the society.

This statement was also supported by Dent (2006) who found that the interaction between librarians and users is one of the important services the library facilitates. She strengthens that librarians should be trusted by the users, be able to suggest materials appropriate to the reader, familiar with nearly every item in the library collection, can provide feedback and answer questions. The librarians must be well-known outside of the library and involved in activities such as literacy instruction. Haas (1972) was commented on librarians by saying that the success in recasting professional services, library performance and institutional management depends on the people who do the work.

Library core business can be seen through its collections adequacy. According to Islam and Uddin (2005) they found that three (3) libraries in Bangladesh considered that their library resources were almost adequate, while another three (3) libraries indicate that the library resources is inadequate. This survey response demonstrates a need for ongoing collection development in terms of size and content to meet users' information needs. This was supported by Dent (2006) who postulates that the information in the library should be relevant to everyday lives of users such as local newspaper, the information on everyday

issues should concerns on health and civic such as local publications and the library information should be able to help users to cope with everyday issues that might arise in their daily lives.

Similarly, Ahmed (2009) reported that the most information needs of boat library users in Bangkok are regarding to health information and education, with 49 persons and 41 persons, respectively. While the average rating for the information needs are current issues, entertainment and politics. The least information needs by the villagers is information regarding to business/finance. Other than that, the findings showed that the access to library collection got average mean score. He added that the most used of boat library are young people and the result indicated that a consensus among library users that the library collections require improvements. The purchase of new books should reflect the information needs of village dwellers. It is also important that the library regularly reviews the information needs to see the relevance of its collections and services. This statement was supported by Goodman (2008) who states that the library was underutilised due to the lack of knowledge inaccessibility of the library, and lack of understanding on that part of community members regarding how the library might be used and the type of services available.

Littrell, et al (2006) discovered that people who used the public library have read almost everything in the library and were hoping more books would be acquired. The study also stated that the library did not have practical information, particularly on topics such as medicine, agriculture or automobile mechanics, and consequently, the village residents had to look elsewhere. Similarly, Pors (2010) found that most of middle group is prefer to collection of non-fiction with 79 score while the collection of fiction got 78 score. The older group in this study indicated that they prefer collection of non-fiction around 60 score only. Gomez and Gould (2010) found that the users suffer from a very low utility due to outdated resources and lack of locally relevant content.

Use of ICT services in rural library is also an important component that affecting the services of the particular library. According to Mahmood (2005) the majority of the rural community in Pakistan is not aware of the services and benefits of new ICTs regarding to their needs. He added that in rural areas, the Internet is perceived as an entertainment medium and youngsters mostly use it to see pornographic sites. Therefore, the elders do not like their women or children to have Internet access. Again, he also surveyed that the rates of Internet use per hour are too high to be affordable for poor villagers. He reported that the Internet is just an entertainment medium and it is not wise for women and children to learn and use it. It was supported by the study done by Islam and Uddin (2005) who point out that there is the lack of adequate ICT facilities and information resources in Bangladesh whereby only 11 computers are available in six (6) libraries. They stated that all the rural development libraries have no adequate ICT facilities and adequate resources for proper information services to the users.

Govindaraju and Mabel (2010) found that the women dominated men in obtaining computer training, accessing the educational information, e-governance, general information about the world issues and current affairs and using the Internet. While the men dominated in getting health information, job information, reading the newspaper and so on. Gamage and Halpin (2007) recommend that libraries which were engaged in information business should be capable in handling and providing information, and are engaged in community services. Norizan and Jalalludin (2008) found that there is a positive increase in terms of



searching for information and surfing the Internet. Majority of respondents preferred to use Internet surfing (66.8 percent), followed by e-mail (49.1%) and entertainment or games (47.6 %).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This descriptive study targets on the rural libraries which come under the National Library of Malaysia's supervision. There are three (3) research questions which are used as a guide for the study. The nature of the study is descriptive by using quantitative method. A survey research method had been adopted to address the research questions through survey questionnaire. A simple random sampling of 60 library users from the primary school and secondary school pupils, the employed persons who used the library, as well as those who come to the rural library collections regularly. The respondents were randomly selected (1<sup>st</sup> November until 14 November 2011 for PD Bandar Puncak Alam and 4 November until 25 November 2011 for PD Kampung Assam Jawa). A total of 60 set of questionnaires were sent to the library staff of selected rural libraries in Selangor in November 2011 to find out on the staff capabilities, use of collections and use of ICT facilities by the users. After a fortnight of distribution, a total of 60 (100%) respondents were returned the questionnaires where by 30 sets (50%) were from PD Bandar Puncak Alam and another 30 sets (50%) were from PD Kampung Assam Jawa.

A pre test has been conducted by distributing 5 to 6 questionnaires items to the colleagues or the respondents at nearby rural library. Any comment or suggestions from them had been used to repair the questionnaire. A pilot test had been conducted on one of the nearby rural library in order to test and fine tune the study. A letter wrote to Perpustakaan Desa Bandar Puncak Alam to participate in the pilot study. An appointment to discuss the questionnaire had been made. The researchers sent the questionnaire by hand together with the confirmed date for the discussion. As a result of the discussion and pilot study, some of questions in the questionnaire had been modified according to the questionnaire and the study setting suitability. After the pilot study, the final questionnaires were distributed to 60 respondents. Reliability tests were carried out to test the staff capabilities, use of collections and use of ICT facilities' scales. The mean score had been computed by using Cronbach's Alpha. If the result less than 0.4, it is considered as not reliable and it had been repaired and then was sent to the real study. The tested data are in mean form and got from the Likert scale, Interval scale and Ratio scale.

## **RESULTS**

In this study, out of 60 respondents, twenty three (23) or 38.3% of the respondents are male and thirty seven (37) or 61.7% are female. Thirteen (13) or 21.7% respondents are aged below 12 years old, twenty seven (27) or 45% are aged ranged from 13 to 19 years old. This is followed by 20 to 29 years old which have twelve (12) or 20%, whereby four (4) or 6.7% persons are 30 to 39 years old and 40 to 49 years old respectively.

In addition, about forty eight (48) or 80% of the respondents have SPM and below. It is because most of the respondents are school's pupils. This is followed by Certificate qualification which only one (1) respondent (1.7%), seven (7) or 11.7% are Diploma/STPM holders and about four (4) or 6.7% respondents are Bachelor and above holder. About fifty four (54) or 90% respondents are Malay whereby six (6) or 10% respondents are Indian.

## Staff Capabilities in Conducting Rural Library Services

In order to examine respondents' opinion on the staff capabilities in conducting rural library services, statements related to the library staff's skills were analysed based on the extent on their agreement with the statements provided. Table 1 shows the mean score of each statement. It can be seen that, by individual components, the users agreed that the library staff is good in each of the thirteen (13) components; *staff service provision satisfaction* (mean = 4.58, sd = 0.787); *staff can be trusted by the user* (mean = 4.55, sd = 0.699); *staff have good communication skill* (mean = 4.52, sd = 0.725); *interaction between staff and user is good* (mean = 4.48, sd = 0.701); *staff willingness to share the knowledge* (mean = 4.43, sd = 0.789); *staff known by the community* (mean = 4.42, sd = 0.850); *staff have good motivation skill* (mean = 4.41, sd = 0.873); *staff have close relationship within the community* (mean = 4.38, sd = 0.739); *staff user-friendly to all users* (mean = 4.37, sd = 0.882); *staff close with all users* (mean = 4.35, sd = 0.954); *staff involvement in 'literacy instruction' activity with user* (mean = 4.32, sd = 0.880); *staff recommend suitable materials to user* (mean = 4.25, sd = 1.019) and *services provided fulfil user needs* (mean = 4.22, sd = 0.821). The mean scores of the thirteen (13) statements are 4.40 (sd = 0.821).

**Table 1: Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Staff Services towards User in the Library by Components**

No.	Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.	I am satisfied with staff service provision	4.58	0.787
2.	Staff can be trusted by the user	4.55	0.699
3.	Staff have good communication skill	4.52	0.725
4.	Good interaction between staff and user	4.48	0.701
5.	Staff willing to share the knowledge	4.43	0.789
6.	Staff known by the community	4.42	0.850
7.	Staff have good motivation skill	4.41	0.873
8.	Staff have close relationship with the community	4.38	0.739
9.	Staff user-friendly to all users	4.37	0.882
10.	Staff close with all users	4.35	0.954
11.	Staff involved in 'literacy instruction' activity with library user	4.32	0.880
12.	Staff recommend suitable materials to me	4.25	1.019
13.	Services provided fulfil my needs	4.22	0.783
<b>Overall mean for staff capabilities</b>		<b>4.40</b>	<b>0.821</b>



### Use of Collections in Rural Library

The use of collections describes four (4) components, namely, materials keeping, collections satisfaction, currency of displayed materials, and materials needs fulfilment. Table 2 shows the mean scores of the use of collections as perceived by the users.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistic of Use of Collections in the Library**

No.	Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.	Materials are arranged nicely	4.47	0.568
2.	I am satisfied with the collections in library	4.37	0.740
3.	Displayed materials are current	4.15	0.784
4.	Books in library fulfil my needs	4.14	0.798
<b>Overall mean for use of books collection</b>		<b>4.28</b>	<b>0.722</b>

It can be seen that, the overall mean score for use of collections is agreed because it was '4.28' (sd = 0.722) and it fall into 'Agree' response. The user also agreed in term of '*Materials are keep nicely*' (mean = 4.47, sd = 0.568) which is the highest dimension as user perceived. This is followed by '*I am satisfied with the collections in library*' (mean = 4.37, sd = 0.740). Other than that, '*Displayed materials are current*' with mean score 4.14 and sd 0.798, in that order. Last but not least, '*Books in library fulfil my needs*' with mean 4.14 (sd = 0.798).

### Use of ICT Services in Rural Library

Respondents were asked to indicate their opinion on the use of ICT services. It can be seen that, the respondents unanimously agreed with the statements of the use of ICT services with mean 4.22 and standard deviation 0.794. The respondents perceived ICT services provided are satisfied (mean = 4.35, sd = 0.770). In term of its currency and easy to operate, most of the respondents agreed with this statement (mean = 4.35, sd = 0.627). The respondents also agreed with the suitability of place and facilities provided to use the ICT facilities (mean = 4.29, sd = 0.672). Other than that, the respondents also agreed that the computer program suit to the user level (mean = 4.25, sd = 0.717), followed by computer performance greatness (mean = 4.20, sd = 0.872) and last but not least is satisfaction of Internet access speed (mean = 3.88, sd = 1.107). Table 3 displays the mean scores of respondents by statement according to the level of satisfaction towards ICT services.

**Table 3: Mean Scores of Respondents by Statements: Level of Satisfaction towards ICT Services**

No.	Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation (sd)
1	I am satisfied with ICT facilities provided	4.35	0.770
2	ICT facilities are latest and easy to operate	4.35	0.627
3	Suitable place and facilities to use the ICT facilities	4.29	0.672
4	Computer program suit to the user level	4.25	0.717
5	Computer performance is great	4.20	0.872
6	Internet access speed are satisfied	3.88	1.107
<b>Overall mean for use of ICT services</b>		<b>4.22</b>	<b>0.794</b>

**Comparison of Perceived Statements between Different Rural Library Locations**

The observation values (perception scores of the individual respondents) were not normally distributed with respect to staff capabilities, use of collections and use of ICT facilities. Therefore, the appropriate statistical test of significant difference to use is a non-parametric one, and as it involves two groups of respondents (PD Bandar Puncak Alam and PD Kampung Assam Jawa), it is the Mann-Whitney U Test. Table 4 presents the summary statistics of the tests.

**Table 4: Summary Statistics of Mann-Whitney Test between Rural Library Locations**

Item	Mean rank of PD Puncak Alam	Mean rank PD Kampung Assam Jawa	Mann-Whitney U Test	Z-value	p-value
Staff capabilities in conducting library services	20.88	40.12	161.5	-4.362	0.000
Use of collections in rural library	25.07	35.10	287.0	-2.302	0.021
Use of ICT facilities in rural library	21.36	29.52	217.0	-1.982	0.047

The Z-value for staff capabilities (-4.362) is significant at 5% level ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). It is concluded, therefore, that PD Bandar Puncak Alam and PD Kampung Assam Jawa has differ in their perceived staff capabilities in conducting library services. In the case of use of collections in rural library, the Z-value, which is - 2.302, is also significant at 5% level ( $p = 0.021 < 0.05$ ). It is concluded, therefore, that PD Bandar Puncak Alam and PD Kampung Assam Jawa has differ in their perceptions towards use of collections in rural library. About the use of ICT in rural library, the Z-value, which is - 1.982, is also significant at 5% level ( $p = 0.047 < 0.05$ ). It is concluded, therefore, that PD Bandar Puncak Alam and PD Kampung Assam Jawa has differ in their perceptions towards use of ICT facilities.



## Comparison of Perceived Statements between Different Gender

The Z-value for staff capabilities (-1.228) is not significant at 5% level ( $p = 0.219 > 0.05$ ). It is concluded, therefore, that male and female do not differ in their perceived staff capabilities in conducting library services. In the case of use of collections in rural library, the Z-value, which is -1.578, is also not significant at 5% level ( $p = 0.115 > 0.05$ ). It is concluded, therefore, that male and female do not differ in their perceptions towards use of collections in rural library. About the use of ICT in rural library, the Z-value, which is 0.115, is also not significant at 5% level ( $p = 0.190 > 0.05$ ). It is concluded, therefore, that male and female do not differ in their perceptions towards use of ICT facilities. Table 5 presents the summary statistics of the tests.

**Table 5: Summary Statistics of Mann-Whitney Test between Gender**

Item	Mean rank of male	Mean rank of female	Mann-Whitney U Test	Z-value	p-value
Staff capabilities in conducting library services	27.07	32.64	346.500	-1.228	0.219
Use of collections in rural library	25.70	32.75	315.000	-1.578	0.115
Use of ICT facilities in rural library	22.68	28.15	243.500	0.115	0.190

## CONCLUSION

The study had identified the staff capabilities in conducting rural library services, use of collections in rural library and use of ICT services in rural library in selected rural libraries in Selangor. It has provided data about services provided by the rural library. This study has contributed to the understanding of the staff capabilities, use of collections and use of ICT services and to what extent the users' satisfaction towards the services provided.

The researchers hope that the findings of this study will contribute positively towards the development of rural library services, as well as other aspects of library management and services, in rural libraries in Malaysia and globally. In a broader sense, it is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute towards the excellence of rural library services in Malaysia in line with the Government mission to transform Malaysian society into an information society, then to a knowledge society and finally to a value-based knowledge society. Other than that, it is hoped that the ICT services provided will facilitate the nation in bridging the digital divide through the enhancement of the current implementation of Universal Service Provision (USP) programme.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Rural areas, or commonly synonym with isolated areas, should be supplied with optimum information and knowledge. There are too much initiatives that had been implemented by authorised bodies in order to bridge the digital divide. Digital divide, which connects with the 'information have' and 'information have-not' should be take into considerations due to the vision 2020 accomplishment.

The government efforts to create knowledgeable rural community have never ended. NLM should play their roles in order to enhance the use of rural library infrastructure.

The government should actively promote and encourage the effort to develop the rural library project by providing sufficient financial incentives to attract more corporations to participate in the development and implementation of ICT services in rural libraries. Rural library management also should conduct suitable educational programmes that enabled to develop and help the users to assimilate into the Internet society. The minority people in the society should also be encouraged to pick up sufficient ICT skills.

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