

Positive Youth Development and ICT usage among Rural Youth: A Case Study of Rural Library Services in Malaysia

Samsul Farid Samsuddin¹, Siti Zobidah Omar^{2,3}, Bahaman Abu Samah⁴, and Jusang Bolong².

¹ Sultan Abdul Samad Library, ² Faculty of Modern Language and Communication, ³ Institute for Social Science Studies, Infoport, ⁴ Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

Correspondence: Samsul Farid Samsuddin, Sultan Abdul Samad Library, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia. E-mail: samsulfarid@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to identify the level of positive youth development (PYD) on ICT usage among rural youth communities at the rural library. Data for the study were collected via a questionnaire, and based on multi-stage cluster and simple random sampling. A total of 400 rural youth from four zones in Malaysia were selected as the respondents. Findings indicated that all six dimensions of PYD were at a high level. This paper will provide useful information for those concerned with formulating strategies to provide ICT services for rural youth community development.

Keywords: rural youth, ICT usage, community development, positive youth development, rural library

Introduction

Information and communication technology (ICT) is no longer a foreign matter in the current era of globalization. The proliferation of ICT has occurred due to the needs and interests in the use of technology. The Malaysian government is emphasizing the need for enhanced Information Technology (IT) usage due to its potential to accelerate the national development process. ICT enhances communication ability through connecting others by providing sufficient and advanced communication infrastructure such as internet networks.

ICT is playing important roles in terms of national development. The use of ICT has helped to transform the socio-economic environment in many nations. Malaysian society also benefitted from government efforts to incorporate ICT into the education, industrial, health and commercial sectors. ICT also acts as a mechanism for bridging the digital divide that exists between rural and urban areas (Bashir et al., 2011). Since the beginning, the development of rural projects has been introduced such as National Information Technology Center, Rural Internet Center and Rural Info Center (Abu Samah, et al., 2011). Similar with Thioune (2003), explaining on the important role of an ICT in improving and how its changed people's

lives. Furthermore, ICT could positively impact not only on economic growth, communication, and education, it also could provide opportunities for positive development especially in youth. The objective of this study was to identify the level of positive youth development which consists of six dimensions (competence, connection, character, confidence, caring, and contribution) among rural youth in Malaysia on ICT usage.^[L2]

Methodology

This study is quantitative in nature, whereby a questionnaire was used as the main data collection tool. All the measures^[L3] used a 5-point Likert scale of agreement (1 – Strongly Disagree to 5 – Strongly Agree). The population of the study was the rural youth community^[L4] ages 15 to 40 which also the rural library members.^[L5] The combination of multi-stage cluster and simple random sampling was used to select four areas for data collection, namely Manjung (Perak), Alor Gajah (Melaka), Seberang Prai (Pulau Pinang) and Temerloh (Pahang). Each of the areas is represented by four rural libraries and each rural library involved 25 respondents (4 areas x 4 rural libraries x 25 respondents = 400 respondents). Data collected were analysed using SPSS, whereby descriptive analyses such as frequency, percentage and mean scores were performed in order to describe the general findings of the study.

Results and Discussion

In this study, Positive Youth Development (PYD) was measured by the 6C's of positive youth development framework introduced by Lerner, et al. (2003). The measure was confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The six 6's and associated items are: (1) competence (3 questions), connection (3 questions), character (3 questions), confidence (4 questions), caring (3 questions) and contribution (3 questions). The descriptive analysis of each dimension of positive youth development is as follows (Table 1):

The mean summated scores for the PYD scale were computed as a mean score ranging between 1 to 5. The computed mean scores were compared using three levels of PYD, namely low (1 – 2.33), moderate (2.34 – 3.57) and high (3.68 - 5). The mean score for 'competence' was 3.89 (SD = .683) revealing that rural youth community in Malaysia exhibited a high level of competence on positive youth development. The respondents' indicated that by using ICT in the rural library they can improve their information searching technique efficiently and enhanced their thinking skills in more healthier manner^[L6]. In line with Samsuddin et al. (2015), it was found that computer usage has benefitted rural youth in terms of searching for information and also enhancing career opportunities. They also agreed with the statement

that their academic competency level has increased by using ICT at the rural library. The mean score for 'connection' was 3.87 (SD = .774), indicating that the study participants were at a high level of connection. The respondents' responded that their relations with neighbours, villagers and colleagues were better when using ICT at the rural library. Bashir et al. (2011) argued that the ICT facilities provided in rural libraries allowed young people to communicate among rural communities especially youth via Email and mobile applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, regardless of time and location. Rural communities tend to connect with their close or distant relatives. It was contradictory from previous studies that rural community are lack of social interaction^[17] (Hosseini et al., 2009).

The results showed that the mean score for 'character' was 3.90 (SD = .757), indicating that the participants exhibited a high level of character. In relation to the use of ICT as provided by the rural libraries, respondents' awareness of the ethics of Internet usage, and their sense of responsibility were high, as reflected by the scores on both measures. This is where the 'digital transfer' process occurs, which is the change in how one thinks, learns and communicates with others in the presence of Internet or ICT (Abdul Razaq et al., 2009). In addition, good character can be developed through strong background experience, a positive attitude and relations with others.

The mean score for 'confidence' was 3.98 (SD = .719). The finding indicates a high level of confidence when using ICT at the rural library. The results somewhat contrasted with a study by Hasim and Salman (2010), which showed rural youth in Kota Bharu, Kelantan lacking confidence in using the Internet. Majority of the respondents' in the current study stated that by using ICT in the rural library gave them confidence to use ICT. ICT usage in the rural library also gave them the confidence to communicate with the community and taught them to be more respectful of people's dignity. Continuous courses related to ICT could encourage ICT usage among the rural youth community (Hassan, 2008), further enhancing ICT knowledge and skills. Lack of confidence is related to prejudiced beliefs about the advantage of ICT and negative attitudes about modern technology (Hosseini et al., 2009), which can reflect in the refusal of ICT usage.

The mean score for the 'caring' outcome was 3.89 (SD = .760). 'Encouraged me to help others who in need of help' was the highest scored statement by the respondents. By using ICT in the rural library, the rural youth community better understands the meaning of justice and hardship^[18] and allowed them to share feelings with others. Furthermore, environmental and social influence also have an impact on rural communities that use ICT especially through social networking. Neff (2009) found a relationship

between courses conducted in ICT centres and sense of caring among participants (mentor-mentees relationships with instructors, and romantic relationships with other students).

The mean score for 'contribution' was 3.84 (SD = .738) revealing a high level of contribution on among the study sample. The respondents' perceived that using ICT in the rural library will give them the opportunity to contribute in terms of views and opinions. Moreover, ICT allowed them to get involved in local community programs, and to contribute their energy and money to the community. For example, youth should be involved in the planning process of local community programs, which will further attract other youth to join the programs, as they are an important asset to the communities (Smith, 2003).

Table 1. The level of 6Cs Dimensions of PYD (n=400)

Dimensions	Mean	Standard deviation	Level
Competence	3.89	.683	High
Connection	3.87	.774	High
Character	3.90	.757	High
Confidence	3.98	.719	High
Caring	3.89	.760	High
Contribution	3.84	.738	High

Conclusion and Recommendations

It can be concluded that rural youth in Malaysia perceive a high level of positive youth development on ICT usage at rural library, with the 'confidence' outcome showing the highest score. ICT usage in rural libraries can benefit young people from the perspective of the 6 C's of positive youth development. It is recommended that similar studies be carried out in different information centres or ICT provision in rural areas, to discover the level of positive youth development in different settings.

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