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REVIEW ARTICLE

TRANSFORMING PUBLIC LIBRARIES INTO DIGITAL KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION CENTRE IN SUPPORTING LIFELONG BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAMMES FOR RURAL YOUTHS

Alizah Ali¹, Tan Luck LEE¹, Ng Khar Thoe², Noraini Ismail³, Siti Zariikh Sofiah Abu Bakar⁴¹ Law Department, UiTM Johor, Kampus Segamat, Malaysia² Independent Researcher³ Regional Centre for Education in Science and Mathematics (RECSAM). Penang, Malaysia⁴ Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Johor, Kampus Segamat, Malaysia*Corresponding Author Email: kampungsulir@gmail.com, aliza941@johor.uitm.edu.my, researchwkpub@gmail.com, norai257@johor.uitm.edu.my, sitiz148@johor.uitm.edu.my

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ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

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This research aims to examine how commissioning, transforming and maximum utilization of the digital technology infrastructure in public libraries through blended mode digital education platform could support open and distance lifelong learning in upgrading knowledge, livelihood and human capital for the constant improvement and upgrading of knowledge/skills among village youths. Mixed-method research design was implemented including administration of survey, interviews and observation. The five dimensions of enhancing the innovative open and distance digital platform to support a blended-mode dissemination of knowledge were examined, including demographic, digital technology availability, Open Education Resources in public libraries, learning culture and corporate support. Findings show that there are significant differences among factors stated above which will upgrade the potential of village youths technical and livelihood knowledge to be relevant and competitive in building human capital. The use of a blended digital education platform in public libraries could be beneficial to village folks in upgrading their knowledge and skills. This model could be used as framework of practice for enhancement of life skills among developing nations as well as under-developed countries in line with SEAMEO's Education Agenda to promote lifelong learning and 21st century skills. If such technology-enhanced skills development programme could be implemented from earlier stages in educational settings in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Malaysian Education Blueprint, more skilled workers could be produced to raise the performance in the workplace and contribute to the worldwide improvement of human capital. Legal and policy issues on digital facilities will be discussed as to advocate lawful and ethical application of this initiative. Future direction of studies to develop a comprehensive structural model will also be deliberated.

KEYWORDS

Blended mode, Open and Distance Learning, village youths, Lifelong learning, Legal and policy issues, Sustainable Development Goals.

1. INTRODUCTION

The utilization of digital education technology in developing Malaysia's human capital has leap forward in the twentieth first century and beyond. But the group of Malaysian village youths in the outskirts villages are left out of the main stream of digital technological enhance livelihood knowledge particularly comprising of village youths with secondary and diploma qualification are in dare need of technical and livelihood education. Their disparity could be complement with the utilization of the district libraries and resource centre that equip with basic digital technologies Learning Management System as a platform to compensate the disparity, in addition to the existing books, e-books, magazines, audio visual gadgets. As the application of digital technologies enhancement in education has been placed as top priority in Malaysian educational system, not only it has been commissioned in schools of all levels but also in every district public library. It does not only upgrade and digitize the districts' public libraries savvy in the usage of digital information technologies for both village youths themselves but also to fulfil the government's vision of increasing the country's human capital, digital and electronic society.-

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Transforming Malaysian public libraries into digital knowledge dissemination centre in supporting lifelong blended learning is a significant move in supporting one of the eleven shifts presented in Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 which is highlighting on the leverage ICT to scale up quality learning across Malaysia [1]. Researches have been conducted on distance, collaborative and e-learning in education but rarely any researchers conduct on the utilization and enhancement of digital technology for village folks' lifelong livelihood blended collaborative learning that enable the accessibility to educate and transmit the much needed day to day knowledge for social transformation and knowledge development of village youths as to bridge the digital divide of citizens between the urban and rural as well as Malaysian's education disparity. This is utmost important as people from all walks of life especially village folks needed the know-how of accessing to knowledge and education. Indeed, collaborative digital blended learning environment can be used widely either for educational or training purposes when the government sector and private sector team up for the purpose of human capital development in the country. Therefore the enhancement of blended learning platform connected to all districts libraries is in fact an effective way of utilizing digital technology for rural folks in acquiring the much needed livelihood education and the contents

to the users. A study stated that blended learning is usually found in three delivery mode/media/method of learning, firstly combining online and face-to-face instruction, secondly combining instructional methods and thirdly combining instructional modalities or delivery media [2]. The first definition reflects more accurately on the historical emergence of blended learning systems as compared to the latter two that were much debated about since blended learning was so broadly defined that they encompass virtually all types of learning systems that involve multiple instructional methods and delivery media [2].

The creation of a blended digital learning environment by commissioning and utilizing the existing digital technologies in the district libraries throughout the country, will in turn create a regional collaborative adult blended lifelong learning management system to connect and be wired throughout the country, will be a cost-effective move in the dissemination of livelihood knowledge among the village youths. This would enable them to be centred into one place based in district vicinity not only for the purpose of networking among their peers, but also for friendship, racial integration, religious tolerance and knowledge acquisition especially during weekends. Therefore, as quoted that academic community is addressing more and more on the rise of on-line community that will be instrumental in the realization of advanced learning society [3]. Internet on-line environment enables new and interesting designs for the support of traditional learning for the development of new forms of learning. All these could also apply into enhance blended learning environment in transforming a regional learning management system into a regional collaborative district youths lifelong livelihood learning platform to create a learning society and human capital of the country.

The much preferred lifelong learning tenure for village youths could be to combine both the electronic-enabled learning system and traditional face to face classroom teaching and learning methodology as they maybe comprise those first time learners and users of digital technology that should be guided by an instructor preferably a groups of well-trained librarian cum teachers who are savvy in computer because there a researcher suggested that collaborative e- learning works best within a blended training solution which incorporates traditional methods as well as technology-led learning [4]. One method is to utilize it as a method of providing a consistent level of skills within a team of delegates prior to them participating in an instructor-led session so they can get the most out of the training from the instructors' time and knowledge. In other hand, a study conducted also mentioned that by combining traditional learning characteristics with the unique environment available on-line, elements that emerge would differentiate excellent e-learning, namely the sharing of knowledge through blended learning environment for industrial sector workers and upgrading of knowledge capital for societal development in Malaysia [5].

Young suggested that within the web-enabled environment, individuals can access learning materials, courses, individual topics and performance support resources any centralized centres of office, at home or while traveling [4]. Standard web browsers offer a consistent and seamless user interface across a wide variety of workstation platforms and networks. One might also ask for the fulfilment and requirements of the curriculum as well as the content relevancy because most of the courses followed, distance and collaborative interactive project [6]. The production of learning materials could be enjoyed nationwide by those users in the collaborative lifelong blended learning centres irrespective of their location. New ideas and materials would become immediately available for discussions and trials after dispatch by e-mail to a central server. The central server would serve as main frame to enable the instructor to upload all learning files and document as well as instruction to the learners from the manufacturing sectors around the districts.

Evaluating program effectiveness includes a documented technology plan, password protection, encryptions, back-up system and reliable delivery, established standards for course development, design and delivery, good facilitation of interactive and feedback as well as the application of specific standard for evaluation. All these would enable smooth accessibility for them to achieve excellence and acquiring those much-needed societal knowledge and adult technical education and thus lead to the progressiveness of developing human capital in Malaysia. On the other hand, Rajasingham also noted that effective, cost-efficient instruction that can match the needs for skills related to technological change, delivered interactively, at the convenience of the learners [7]. The learners, no matter where their physical location would be, should be able to interact with the instructors and other peers, with the content as well as with one another in synchronous or asynchronous mode. This digitalization allows the mergers of tele-communications and computer giving us information technology, new ways of learning and teaching in this digital age as well as further providing alternatives to adult learners.

Another issue needed to be addressed is the effectiveness in the management of district and village libraries blended learning environment in collaborative lifelong blended learning centre for village folks whereby the collaborative and blended learning management platform needs to have certain quality. As proposed, elements of quality control and assurance system in distant learning should produce resource learning materials and monitor correspondence of learning activities [8]. Thus, the sheer newness of e-learning for many individuals and groups brings pressure on evaluation to yield information about its effectiveness as well as efficiency as a learning solution especially the industrial sector workers without digital technology. What's more on the awareness of the burden on the instructor in terms of time-consuming management tasks that must be attended to in order for any technology-support learning to occur [9]. Therefore, all the district and village libraries librarians need expertise and qualified instructor cum knowledge disseminator to guide the village folks the proper ways to use the sophisticated digital technology to create and enhance a blended digital learning environment. The management perspectives of digital technologies in the regional collaborative industrial sector workers' lifelong blended learning platform are of utmost importance to ensure the success teaching and learning approaches. As quoted that networked learning will be exciting commentator which leads to virtual university, driven forward by policy emphases on lifelong learning. All these must be taken into consideration [10]. By doing so, we are able to see the impact and its effectiveness towards the implementation of a wholesome collaborative blended lifelong learning platform for district and village libraries. In the management perspective, techniques and technologies can be taught as principles prior to application, whereas the management processes and their complications have to be experienced to be sensed prior to a required theory [11]. Therefore, trained ICT facility management instructors need to be appointed as permanent staff in the blended learning environment. Local school teachers are also the best choice as they have acquired the digital technology know-how as well as all the perspective contents needed by the village folks.

Embarking on the journey of creating and enhancing a sophisticated blended learning implementation leads the instructor and librarians to being censorship and law literate. Hence, codes of ethics should be followed by them in serving the community. As listed by IFLA, members of a certain profession are entitled to code of ethics which provide general principles in guiding them in performing their duties to the community [12]. Furthermore, librarians in the Polytechnic of Ibadan, Nigeria are abiding the codes of ethics mentioned in avoiding any misconduct or harmful acts that could risk their profession [13].

3. LEGAL AND POLICY ISSUES

In protecting the morality of the society, laws and regulations should be imposed as well as the instalment of digital security since each individual youths and village folks are equipped with their own private access password. Government seems to play their vital role by imposing the following Acts: Computer Crime Act 1997, Personal Data Protection Act 2010, Communications And Multimedia Act 1998, Malaysian Communications And Multimedia Commission Act 1998, Copyright Act 1997.

Online public library users have easy access to obscene images and have the tendency to share them. Sending obscene images is an offense under Section 233(1)(a) of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998. If convicted, a fine not exceeding RM50, 000 or imprisonment not exceeding one year, or both, may be imposed. The role of censorship by the internet controllers will effectively prevent the dissemination of obscene materials to the public. Censorship is not restricted to pornographic materials only but also covers any misinformation. However, censorship will affect the usage of the internet and disturb its application by users. A closer and tedious consideration must be given before censorship is executed [14]. Internet users in public library especially youths are exposed to the spreading of deceptive content which are fake news and fake reviews. As highlighted by some researchers, the phenomenon of fake news either by writing or beliefs is a dangerous prospect for online users [15]. In Malaysia, those who commit this offence are subject to punishment of fine not exceeding RM50, 000 or imprisonment not more than one year, or both. This is stated under Section 233(1)(a) Communication and Multimedia Act 1998. In addition, on 27th March 2018, new Bill known as Fake News Bill 2018 was presented for Second Hearing Session in Malaysian Parliament. Instructors for digital facilities in public library are responsible in handling the users' personal data, such as passwords, address, photos and other related information. This responsibility is governed under Personal Data Protection Act 2010. Those who breach the Act is subject to punishment of fine not exceeding RM300, 000 or imprisonment not more than two years, or both.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are -

1. Determine ways of achieving an effective management of the districts libraries as collaborative blended open and distance lifelong learning management system for village youths and folks in using technology in the learning process which has an influence on the level of their knowledge achievement and the nation's human capital building

2. Determine further ways of achieving excellence in maximizing utilization of the existing districts libraries into a regional collaborative blended learning environment in delivering quality and lifelong education to every village youth in the district.

3. Bridge the digital divides between urban and rural areas, technology have and have not. between urban and rural areas, technology have and have not.

4.1 Research Framework

Dependent Variable

Regional Collaborative Lifelong Digital LMS through districts Libraries In Supporting the Transformation of Village youths Human Capital

Independent Variable

Demographic factors
village youths Learning culture and environment
Digital facilities (ICT and LMS platform accessibility)
Learners' efficacy
Digital leadership and managerial quality

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework, anchored on constructivist and social-cultural framework

4.2 Research Methodology

A set of questionnaires was given to a total of 300 respondents from village youths randomly selected from various district from different states in Peninsula Malaysia. The questionnaire consists of Parts 1 and 2. Part 1 was focusing on the respondents' demographical data and Part 2 on dependent and independent variables. Non-parametric and parametric statistical tests were used to analyse the data.

4.3 Findings

Reliability of instruments: Cronbach Alpha statistic was found to be 0.89. Therefore, the reliability of the questionnaire was acceptable.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Summary of Respondents' Characteristics

SUBJECT	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. Gender		
Male	50	16.7
Female	250	83.3
2. Race		
Malay	150	50
Chinese	100	33.3
Indian	50	16.7
3. Academic Achievement		
Secondary/ Diploma education	120	40
Primary education	180	60
4. Working Experience		
6-15 years	250	83.3
>16 years	50	16.7
5. Experience in using Internet		
0 - 1 years	220	73.3
2 - 4 years	60	20
>5 years	20	6.7

Table 1 and 2 summarize the respondents' characteristics. There are 50 males (16.7%) 250 females (83.3%), village youths from 4 states in peninsula Malaysia. Table 1.3 shows that 40% of the workers only possess basic secondary or diploma education and the rest only primary education. Among them are 150 Malays (50%), 100 Chinese (33.3%) and

50 Indians (16.7%). Table 4 shows 83.3% of them have between 6 to 15 years of working experiences and the rest have more than 16 years of work experience. Table 1.5 shows that 73.3% of the respondents have only have less than one year of experience in using internet.

4.5 Statistics and Discussion

Table 2: Data Analysis by Pearson Correlation Tests

Correlation test between	r	p value	N
1. Village youths' academic achievement and villages libraries digital facility provided	0.734	< 0.001	300
2. Villages youths' working experiences and the extent of using digital technology for lifelong learning	0.583	<0.001	300
3. Librarians and Learning platform instructors' commitment and the learning content provided	0.695	<0.001	300
4. Learning culture and practice of village youths and folks and the digital technology provision in the districts libraries	0.749	<0.001	300

Note: $\alpha = 0.01$; r = Correlation coefficient; N = Total respondents

Table 1 shows that there is a strong positive relationship between villages youths academic achievement and districts libraries digital facility provided. Each district library digital technology platform surveyed is trying to provide some form of learning facility to their learners who follow collaborative enhance lifelong learning programs. Village youths

are encouraged to use the internet facility like networking with their respective librarian or instructor via learning portal provided through the blended LMS. In few libraries digital platform in particular, villages' youths and folks are encouraged to attend classes in the weekend using blended learning methodology. Majority of the youths comprise village working

people or school drop-out who are constantly upgrading themselves. Table 2 shows that the village youths are able to learn better when instructors incorporate the use of ICT and blended learning in their instructions. Librarian or Instructors and village youths are the users of ICT in the teaching and learning process. However, some instructors faced limitations in the lifelong learning process as the software and hardware provided were limited. Librarians or Instructors encounter the problem of being unable to facilitate village youths in this perspective because not all the library and units of desktop can access to the electronic learning portal. The only means is through the use of their own Internet at home for learning and individual consultations individually at their home. This affects their learning process. During the beginning stage of learning, guidance was very slow as the village youths who are technology first timers were facing a lot of problems in the usage of digital technology.

Table 3 shows that there is a strong relationship between Librarians as instructors' commitment and the learning content provided. Librarians or Instructors are committed in proving and maintaining the learning contents in the portal which is always ready for the learners to access. The librarians or instructors download and upgrade their learning contents from time to time and maintain their portal. In applying this, they must follow the guidelines formulated by the government. For example, the district information department could channel information on the country's development plan and national agendas or live experiences or success stories. As state that experiential learning-based and team-based assignments which make extensive use of ICT with real life setting could be the best solution in achieving total learning experience by combining theory and practice for learners' application in their daily life [16].

Table 4 shows that there is a strong relationship between the learning culture and environment of village youths and the digital technology provide in the villages libraries. The survey by some researchers shown that nearly all students had access to a computer and the Internet, but younger students were more likely to have access to other technologies than older ones. Moreover, younger students could spend longer time using those technologies and having more positive attitudes to digital technology than the older students [17]. However, there was no evidence for any discontinuity around the age of 30, as would be predicted by the "Net Generation" and "Digital Natives" hypotheses [18]. The village youths are belonging to the younger generation age group, therefore a regional lifelong digital technology enhances blended centres provide as an effectiveness platform for collaborative village libraries lifelong learning programs.

5. DISCUSSION

The significant difference between librarians in districts libraries lifelong and livelihood digital technology learning platform and the application of the much-needed enhanced collaborative lifelong learning among the village youths could be due to the unavailability of general guidelines provided by the governmental authority in managing the appropriate procedures to be practiced. Certain cyber laws and legal pertinent should be formulating to safe guard the utilizations of digital platform in village libraries. So, the effectiveness in the management and application of digital technologies in lifelong education in those digital learning enhanced lifelong learning district libraries surveyed depends much on the librarians and instructors' personnel's experiences as well as the digital platform and learning contents and the managerial knowledge.

A committed districts librarian as digital learning instructors will yield the success of the implementation of ICT programs and enhance blended collaborative learning application for the village youths teaching and learning process. Successful implementation of ICT and enhanced blended collaborative lifelong learning application needs to be compelling to the targeted audience by offering the learner a resource that seems to be appealing, valuable and productive to their goals and aspirations [19]. The support of the education processes are all in such a way that they provide key elements of providing learning materials, facilities for practical work or simulations, enable questions and discussions, assess and provide support services to the learners [20].

The significant difference between the districts and village youths' academic achievement, and work experiences in the usage of ICT and Internet in enhanced blended collaborate lifelong learning in district libraries may be due to the inadequate learners' experiences, qualification, usage and application of ICT. This may account for the differences and consequently affect the effectiveness in the management and usage of ICT infrastructure provided in the entire chain of digital learning management system in district libraries in the country [21]. They need experienced portal administrators and content managers'

contribution to minimize those short-changes. The increase of users especially village youths in the enhanced blended collaborative lifelong learning districts libraries have prompted the government to adopt a more moderate approach by seeking extra funding and extra digital facilities as well as construct more libraries in the country especially in the rural vicinities.

Village youths' demographic factors play a vital part in the success of a blended collaborative lifelong learning. As a user in the digital facility, one has to equip him or herself with the state of the art digital learning tools at home too and this needs money. The villages youths could afford to do so either by buying for themselves or sponsored by the manufacturing sector association to in order to subsidize. However, the problem may be for them to be solely committed to the life-long learning process. If this is the case, they will have to spend time to equip themselves for that purpose or they may set priority themselves. Therefore knowledge gained by workers through the collaborative lifelong learning application, empowers them to know more and learn faster with less cost and to harness the power of information and knowledge which can result in greater productivity and harmony in knowledge based society.

6. CONCLUSION

The five dimensions of collaborative blended district libraries learning environment, namely demographic, workers' learning culture and environment, digital facilities and technology accessibility, digital leadership and management of quality and the learners' efficacy in using technology has constituted to the success of the program. Each one of them is equally important in the development and transforming the village youths into knowledgeable society. Librarians and instructors are not only managing the organization as a whole but also other units in that organization. So long as the public distance learning facility in the country could see the need and initiate personal requirements for the well-being of the society then it will carry out the much needed social responsibility towards the Malaysian community.

Broadband facilities should be free for all in the country and whatever expenses should be borne by the government. In fact there are disburse through the telecommunication ministry and government privatized telecommunication and Multimedia Corporation whereby corporate social responsibility is one of their priority and agenda for the benefit of the citizen of the country.

The success in the management of the blended collaborative lifelong learning districts libraries need trained, committed, skilful, experienced, competent librarians and instructors. This will make a vast difference in influencing village youths' learning process towards gaining insight into various kind of knowledge needed for the advancement of rural society and livelihood.

All in all, *the findings of this study show that* there are significant differences among the five dimensions stated above contributing to the upgrading of skills among the village youths with the latest technical and livelihood knowledge that are relevant and competitive as compared to their peers from the urban areas. The implication is that the use of a blended digital education platform through districts libraries connected via a common main frame server could be beneficial not only to village youths and lifelong learners who wish to upgrade their knowledge and skills. Such model can be used as framework of practice for life (work/entrepreneurial/survival) skills development.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended for the public library management to launch an attractive promotion in welcoming public especially youth to utilise provided facilities in the library. The blended LMS and librarians, instructors and portal administrators' effective management and application of ICT in the blended collaborative lifelong districts libraries for village youths must be trained and well verse in library sciences and employment on full time basis and may conduct in shift methodology whereby district libraries should open for operation on seven days per week basis. Speaking in the same vein, maintains that media supported distance courses are concentrated in setting-up interactive communication between the instructor and the learner [21]. Moreover, it is regarded not as a substation of service with a new technique but as a completely new beginning using new media. Furthermore, the digital facilities in the district libraries need to be scrutinized to determine the maximum usage of the government facility for the society with societal financial assistance from time to time in upgrading and maintaining the digital technology facilities.

The government should at least reduce import taxes and tax exemption on all purchase of desktop or laptop computers for its entire citizen in the country. On the other hand, government should provide free or reduced rate on online facilities such as Wi-Fi. In addition, electricity should be provided nationwide so that there will be no interaction in the youths and folks learning process. Bigger districts libraries which cater for larger crowds of youths may introduce Web 0.3 facilities to facilitate the ease in download of learning resources by technology savvy village youths from the open access resource centre in the district public libraries.

Another important factor in encouraging the village youths to frequently visit district public libraries is the government could locate the district libraries in the same vicinity as district largest shopping mall. Apart from that, the accessibility and other facilities such as public transports, kiosk, prayer room and eateries should be taken into consideration. This would enable people from all walks of life from the district especially youth to come to the district library as well as parents to encourage their teenage children to learn in the district libraries. Government should also launch legal awareness campaign on the issues of online users' rights. Since the Acts and Regulations are provided, government has to play their role in strictly enforcing them.

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