

# **Family Engagement in Children Public Libraries during the Post-Pandemic Period in Malaysia**

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## **Abstract**

### **Introduction**

Public libraries as a third place or a meeting place to support collaborative learning and community engagement is well known. This includes a provision of spaces and resources in library for children's learning and development that also support family engagement through co-learning between children and family members. However, when pandemic hit the world, lockdown and movement restriction control has somehow affected every single aspect including library services.

### **Purpose/problem statement/research questions**

Public libraries are supporting family in development of literacy among children primarily focusing on early literacy with conventional printed media and gradually on new media. However, engagement between children-family in a new media literacy such as computers and handheld devices was briefly available. This study reports on family engagement in children's public libraries in supporting early literacy in the digital age. The investigation was guided by Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework focusing on library leadership, engagement processes, and support services (Lopez et al., 2017; Weiss et al., 2016). The specific research questions that guided the study are: i) How do caregivers perceive library leadership for promoting family engagement? ii) How do caregivers engage with family engagement programmes in libraries? and iii) How do caregivers perceive support services for promoting family engagement?

### **Research methodology**

The data was collected from June to December 2021 during a post-pandemic period in Malaysia. A convenience sampling method was used since there is still restriction on movement in several service sector in Malaysia. The data was collected through survey questionnaire. The survey was distributed to investigate caregivers' perspectives on family engagement practices in the public libraries. A total 96 responses were gathered from visitors of three public libraries.

### **Findings**

The survey finding indicated that caregivers perceived library as encouraging in engaging family through discussion and collaboration, but less involvement in decision making process. Discussion and feedback were mainly on children's collections, activities, services, and infrastructure.

Library-family engagement process involves collaboration and coordination of activities among library staff and family in achieving a common goal of supporting learning. In doing so librarian should have

knowledge of children development and know how to engage with family, aware of their roles, establish relationship with children and caregivers, and developed partnerships with community.

Public libraries supported family engagement through library resources and services to encourage learning from early to middle childhood. Most of the caregivers reported that they participated in conversations about selecting books and resources appropriate for children's ages and early childhood literacy programmes. However, they have never or rarely participated in developmental activities for children with special needs. caregivers acknowledge support services for promoting family engagement in the library which entails activities for children from primary to secondary schools. digital media and technologies were also found to support family engagement. Although a number of services, activities and information was provided by the libraries for families, the majority of the caregivers reported that they have never or rarely used them.

## **Conclusion**

In order to take a leadership role in promoting family engagement, public libraries are suggested to proactively understand families' interests and needs, involve families in the library decision-making process, and engage families in digital literacy programmes. Although caregivers were aware of services and activities provided by the libraries to foster family engagement, most of the caregivers reported that they have never or rarely used. This could be due to the movement restriction order that still took place during the data collection process and a few months before it. While libraries were reported to have established collaborations with communities to encourage family engagement activities, more strong strategic partnerships could be formed in the future.

## **Implication**

Findings from study have reported on the current condition of library-family engagement status since such study at the national level was still in its infancy. The findings could be used to inform library practitioner on how to improve library-family engagement in supporting children literacy. However, generalisation of the findings should be treated with caution since a convenience sampling method was used, and a small number of respondents surveyed. Future research can increase the sample size and involve different stakeholders, such as children and community partners, to elicit different perspectives and get a holistic picture.

**Keywords:** Early literacy, family engagement, public libraries

## **References:**

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**Proposed Themes for Authors' Guidance:**

- i. Rethinking libraries as community place
- ii. Library services, collection, resources, and spaces to multicultural populations

**Biography**

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