

DIGITAL LIBRARIES INITIATIVES IN MALAYSIA:
READINESS AND PERCEIVED CONDITIONS
FOR FUTURE GROWTH

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ABSTRACT

The launching of the *World Digital Library* in April 2009 is reaffirmation of the importance of digital libraries in the future. Despite the limited literature on Malaysian digital library initiatives, but local library efforts towards automation have began way back in 1978 with the *MALMARC* project, before culminating in the national digital library initiatives in 1999 through the *PERDANA* project. Realizing the importance of digital library development, this study investigated their readiness in transforming from traditional based, through the extent of library automation and digital library initiatives, examining both general and digital library related problems and the perceived conditions for future growth. Eight major components were examined: demography, library holdings, automation and digitization projects, digital library related problems, training, budget, opinions of heads of libraries on digital libraries, and perceived conditions for future growth. Questionnaires were sent to 354 libraries and 223 (63%) were returned. It was found that 55% of the libraries were still print based, 36% have become hybrid, and only 1% digital. Monographs (89%) still dominated and the main problems identified were lack of IT personnel (64%), budget (63%), lack of digital library initiatives (60%) and ICT training (58%). Digitization problems were related to human resources (74%), absence of a blueprint (71%) and absence of a national information infrastructure (64%). Only 54% had installed library systems, led by *ILMU* but only 22% of the libraries had Internet access. OPAC was widely available (46%), as were online circulation (36%), Web OPAC (35%), web site services (26%), online reservation (26%), online registration (20%), digital reference (20%), online acquisition (15%), online SDI (13%), self-check machines (10%), mobile Internet service (8%) and online ILL (7%). Subscriptions to local and foreign online databases were 33% and 31% respectively. ICT training accounted for

42%, with a high dependency on parent organization's IT Unit (56%). Only 29% had carried out digitization projects, with 41% preferring outsourcing. Newspaper clippings recorded the highest priority (56%) of digitized materials. Based on the responses, 85% agreed that hybrid type was the best for Malaysian libraries.

The findings from the qualitative data were similar to the quantitative findings, emphasizing on the need to collaborate, staff and budget increase, need for role model and blue print, national infrastructure, ICT training, leadership and the revision of copyright acts. Among the problems highlighted were lack of human resources, budget, training and lack of central coordination, besides digital library expertise. As a result of the study, it was found that there was a gap between Malaysia digital library initiatives, many of which were done independently, with those libraries in the West which were supported financially by the government and private sponsors. Malaysian libraries had carried out some digitization projects, both at institutional and national levels, but needed more coordinated efforts to take it to greater heights. The findings from the questionnaire and interviews formed the basis of recommendations. What they perceived as conditions for future growth includes the establishment of a national commission on digital library, center for digital library research, national information infrastructure, blueprint, collaborative efforts, digital library policy, copyright and Intellectual Property Rights, budget, training and a national framework for digital library development. The findings of this study will be useful to library planners at all levels in establishing more concrete collaborative plans for national digital library system.

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DEDICATION

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMP	: American Memory Project
ARL	: Association of Research Libraries
BH	: Berita Harian
CDLR	: Center for Digital Library Research, Glasgow
DARPA	: Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency
DCMS	: Department for Culture, Media and Sport, UK
DL	: Digital Library
DLIs	: Digital Library Initiatives
DPC	: Digital Preservation Coalition
DSF	: German Research Foundation
ELINOR	: Electronic Library Information Online Retrieval
ETD	: Electronic Theses and Dissertations
EU	: European Union
FBI	: Federal Bureau of Investigation
HL	: Hybrid Library
ICT	: Information and Communication Technologies
IIDL	: International Islamic Digital Library
ILL	: Inter Library Loan
IMLS	: Institute of Museum and Library Services
IPs	: Information Professionals
IPR	: Intellectual Property Rights
ISP	: Internet Service Provider
ITR	: Information Technology Research
JCDL	: Joint Conference on Digital Libraries
JISC	: Joint Information System Committee
LC	: Library of Congress
MCMC	: Malaysia Communications and Multimedia Commission
MLA	: Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, UK
NARA	: National Archives and Records Administration
NASA	: National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NEH	: National Endowment for the Humanities
NLM	: National Library of Medicine
NSF	: National Science Foundation
OAI	: Open Archive Initiative
OCLC	: Online Computer Library Center
OPAC	: Online Public Access Catalog
PADI	: Preserving Access to Digital Information
PERPUN	: Persidangan Perpustakaan Universiti dan Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia = Conferences of University Libraries and National Library of Malaysia
PNM	: Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia / National Library of Malaysia
RSLP	: Research Support Library Program
SDI	: Selective Dissemination of Information Service
SI	: Smithsonian Institution
TL	: Traditional Library
UM	: Utusan Malaysia
WDL	: World Digital Library
WITSA	: World Information Technology and Services Alliance