

## **Youths' Perceptions on The Attributes of Sarawak State Library, Sibü**

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### **Abstract**

A public library is where valuable information or materials are maintained and preserved, whether in printed or electronic form. In the general public's view, a library is no longer just a storage facility for books. It has evolved into an integrated community centre that offers a variety of events. In recent years, Malaysian public libraries have been working on constructing a better library with an ideal interior environment in line with those in other developed countries. However, the success of the public library design will depend on the users themselves. This is due to the fact that certain perceptions exist, and each perception may be different from one user to the others when using the public library. In addition, this also extends to the public library, whether its design meets the needs of the users or not. Thus, Sarawak State Library located at Sibü is chosen as it has been observed that many users, particularly the youths, are utilising it. Therefore, this research aims to explore youths' perceptions as users on the attributes of Sarawak State Library, Sibü. This qualitative research was conducted through laddering interviews using purposive sampling. With that, content analysis method was applied to analyse all the data gathered from sixty respondents. A total of eleven attributes are identified namely quietness, good environment, many books, free Wi-Fi, comfortable furniture, good lighting, charging ports, air-conditioning, spacious, computer, and window views. Meanwhile, five rationales governing the youths' perceptions are derived from the eleven identified attributes, including good outcome, achievement, future assurance, sense of well-being, and health. The findings obtained from this research will help to provide insights for architects or designers in developing a better and more successful public library environment.

Keywords: Attributes, Library, Public Library, Rationales, Youths' Perceptions

### **Introduction**

A library is an important location where an organised collection of information resources such as books, documents, newspapers, and audio-visual materials are stored, whether in physical or digital form. In general, the library is often associated with a learning institution where one gains knowledge and undergoes a learning process through the use of information or educational resources made available to the community for reference or borrowing (Aliaa & Latfi, 2016). Sibü finally opened its state-of-the-art Sarawak State Library to the general public on 15th September 2020. According to Chua (2020), the State Library officer, Afiza Ibrahim, stated that the new state library, which is equipped with cutting-edge technology, will act as a catalyst in assisting the government in bridging the digital divide between those who have access to a wealth of information and knowledge and those who do not. As such, a public library, as a resource centre for learning institutions, is critical to the development of youth. Omar, Othman, Omar, and Ibrahim

(2017) reported that youth is best defined as a transitional period from childhood's reliance to adulthood's independence and recognition of their interconnectedness as community members. In the Malaysian context, youths are defined as those aged 15 to 30 years old, according to the Malaysian Youth Policy. Youths are frequently viewed as the primary contributors to community well-being and future planning. As a result, it is critical to study their experiences and perspectives in order to find the environment that positively influences their activity behaviours for a better public library design (Ismail, 2019). Hence, youth significantly impact the country's overall development and improvement, as they will one day become Malaysia's future leaders.

Nonetheless, despite the establishment of many public libraries, the advancement of digital technology in recent years has decreased the number of teenagers attending their local public libraries. This is owing to the advent of the internet and the world wide web (WWW), where users can utilise search engines like Google and Bing to find online documents. This is supported further by Aliaa and Latfi (2016) in their paper, which cited Montgomery (2014), in which the availability of internet sources has decreased library gate count and circulation activities because it has changed how users retrieve information. After all, they can get materials such as books, journals, articles, and other materials electronically. Majal (2017) emphasised that due to the evolved role of the physical library from a location to study and borrow material, to a place of social learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the user space must be well-planned, welcoming, and appealing as well. According to Sufar, Talib, and Hambali (2012), Malaysian public libraries differ substantially from developed countries in terms of comfort level, interior design quality, preferences, and physical interior environment aspects. In their paper, Juhnevica and Udre (2010) suggested that user demands, interior space planning, and interior environment design should be central to the library planning process.

Several research on public library design have been conducted in recent years. However, only a few of the smaller scope studies focusing on the relationship between youth preferences and the physical interior atmosphere of public libraries in Malaysia have been performed. Furthermore, there are just a few relevant sources in the study that are under-researched and poorly understood regarding youths' perspectives of public library layout and spatial design. In addition, a large portion of the research is directed toward academic libraries attached to higher education institutions, resulting in fewer studies on public libraries. Moreover, there is a lack of studies on how these attributes may truly affect youths. Since each youth comes from different background, the public library may not perform as expected. It is vital to recognise user-oriented concerns, such as youth perceptions in order to ensure that the library's design remains relevant. Therefore, this research aims to explore youths' perceptions as the users on the attributes of Sarawak State Library, Sibul. The objectives of this research are to identify the youths' perceptions on the essential attributes of Sarawak State Library, Sibul and examine the rationale that influences their perceptions.

## Literature Review

### *Definition of Public Library*

According to the National Library of Malaysia (2021), there are different types of libraries based on the target users they serve, such as the national library, rural library, school library, academic library, special library, and public library. Meanwhile, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and

Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defined a public library as the local centre of information, making all types of knowledge and information freely available to its users (Sufar et al., 2012). In a nutshell, a public library is a location where beneficial knowledge or content is stored and preserved, either in printed or electronic form. Today, in the eyes of the general public, a library is no longer only a book storage facility. The library has evolved into an integrated community centre that hosts various events for people of all ages. Moreover, by providing conference rooms, meeting spaces, and, on occasion, performing arts facilities or galleries, libraries become more successful where it serves as a site for interactions and social events (McCabe & Kennedy, 2003). Additionally, with free Wi-Fi access and a massive online database mainly for research purposes, Gisolfi (2015) stated that the public library has proved its ability to adapt to the current digital revolution while preserving physical books in its main space.

#### *Attributes of a Public Library*

McCabe and Kennedy (2003) stated that the interior environment of a library building must be pleasant and visually pleasing to the eye. According to Sufar et al. (2012), the library environment encompasses various attributes that fall under different dimensions, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

#### *Ambience*

According to Aliaa and Latfi (2016), ambience refers to the environment of space that can affect the mood of its users. Meanwhile, ambient impacts include non-visual sensory or atmospheric components of an environment, such as sounds, smells, and temperature (Sufar et al., 2012). As a result, a pleasant environment in a public library usually comprises lighting, colour, furniture, and space design. In addition, Shill and Toner (2004) stated that previous studies and surveys on library usage and design discovered that the physical interior environment has a significant impact on library usage. Hence, the library gate count is increased since more users are enticed to the public library to enjoy the facilities provided in a better atmosphere.

Meanwhile, according to Aliaa and Latfi (2016), sound or noise level is the loudness that indirectly impacts a specific space environment. Choy and Goh (2016) stated that with a lower noise level, a person could be more productive in producing high-quality work, particularly youths who can devote more time to reading and writing. Furthermore, despite the fact that smell is not often considered in library design, Bossaller et al. (2020) discovered that there may be favourable implications for concentration. The fragrance of books that smell like old books often draws readers to the public library. Schultz (2013) mentioned that this is because of the lignin breakdown that results in a “slight vanilla flavour.” Moreover, an optimum temperature is especially important in a library because excessive heat accelerates the destruction of books. A musty odour in the library is usually caused by mould growth, a common sort of book damage that thrives in warm environments.

#### *Lighting*

The lighting factor, which includes both natural and artificial lighting, can influence how a public library feels and looks. Hence, good and uniform lighting is important to provide not only comfort to the eyes but also aids in reading and other activities that increase users’ productivity. As Kilic and Hasirci (2011) mentioned, daylight is one factor that will influence the quality and length of

time someone spends in a given space. Illumination and outside vistas are important factors for library users' satisfaction. For personal preferences, the users tend to study in regulated daylight with low partitions as controlled lighting that is not too bright and glare helps to produce a sense of comfort (Othman & Mazli, 2012).

As cited in Dean (2004), Kilic and Hasirci (2011) reported that direct sunlight is also undesirable since the sunlight transmitted through the window or glass increases surplus light and heat energy into the room. As such, public libraries like Tianjin Binhai Library, King Fahad National Library, and Calgary Central Library have well-design façades, window shutters or excellent sun shading mechanisms to reduce excessive glare from the sun. Therefore, the public library building can minimise solar gain and, at the same time, maintain the ideal internal temperature.

### *Furniture*

Seating styles and furniture in libraries also play an important role in attracting youth to use them. Different seating configurations and work surface areas could aid in engaging the youths to suit their activities or purposes. Sufar et al. (2012) defines three types of seats: reading benches, reading tables, and flexible seating since library users should have a variety of seating alternatives to meet their learning style and mood at any given time. Some people prefer long wooden tables and chairs, while others prefer a more modern style with curved tables and colourful cushion chairs.

In addition, the adaptability and flexibility of the furnishings are also important. This is because moveable furniture allows users to reposition it based on their preferences or activities. These findings were verified by (Ramsden, 2011, cited in Aliaa & Latfi, 2016), who discovered that if the furniture can be modified to meet the activities that would be performed, users will be more captivated to complete their tasks. The furniture proportions used must be appropriate with ergonomic principles as youths spend a substantial amount of time sitting in the library reading area (Alozie, Binboga, & Uyal, 2020). Califano et al. (2021) observed that prolonged sitting on ill-fitting furniture and the resulting poor posture contributes to a variety of musculoskeletal illnesses in users.

### *Material and Finishes*

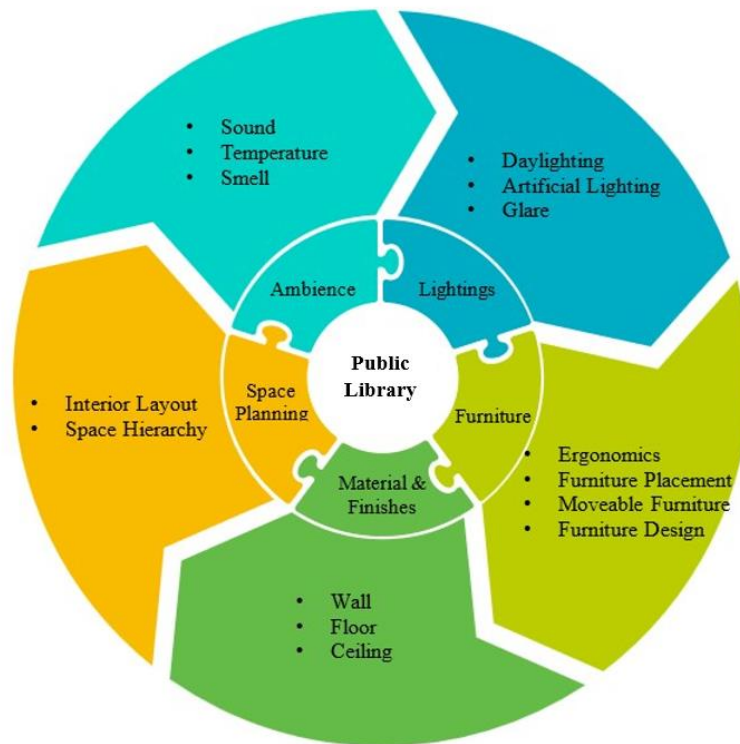
According to Brown (2002), the materials and finishes used must be ones that local custodial employees can easily maintain without needing expensive equipment or the procurement of costly outside services. This includes the public library's wall, floor, and ceiling. Sufar et al. (2012) also put emphasis on the importance of a clean line style backed by a layered, tactile, and timeless approach to materials and colour palette in a public library. For example, soft coverings, such as felt, which is a wonderful soundproofing material, should be utilised to cover the wall. On the other hand, carpeted flooring can reduce the sound of footsteps when walking. As a result, the amount of sound or noise in the library is reduced.

### *Space Planning*

Innovations in library layout and architecture encourage increased social interactions within the library and provide a variety of groups and children areas (Bell, 2008). As a result, the main body of the library has open-plan layouts that maximise user participation, as well as amenities such as meeting rooms and cafes. Furthermore, when correct space planning is paired with the use of

colours, it is possible to establish clear different parts of the library to fit the target groups (Sufar et al., 2012). For example, youths require a large reading area and a discussion room to discuss their assignments.

### *Conceptual Framework of Public Library*



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Public Library**

Source: Author (2022)

Based on the literature review above, a conceptual framework is constructed, as shown in Figure 1. The conceptual framework shows that the public library has five primary categories. These categories include ambience, lighting, furniture, material and finishes, and space planning. Each category encompasses the relevant attributes mentioned in the previous paragraphs.

### **Methodology**

This research employed a qualitative method to explore youth's perceptions. The research target was limited to the Sarawak State Library, Sibul, a public library located at Jalan Tun Tuanku Bujang, next to the University of Technology Sarawak (UTS). Apart from that, perceptions from other groups, such as adults and the elderly, were excluded since this research focused primarily on youths as public library users. Hence, as specified by the Malaysian Youth Policy, only youths aged 15 to 30 years old who used the public library were approached and interviewed only for this

study. In terms of sample size, the research adhered to Glaser and Strauss' (1967) guideline of collecting data until reaching saturation point to determine an ideal sample size.

During the actual data-gathering process, youths utilising the Sarawak State Library in Sibul were approached and questioned randomly. The researcher employed a laddering interview technique proposed by Gutman (1982) to collect as many attributes as possible in a short period. The laddering interviews were able to gain insight into youths' perceptions of library attributes in association with rationales supporting their views.

During the interview, the respondent in this study was asked to name the preferred attributes of the public library. Then, the researcher asked the respondent, "Why is it important to you?" utilising the mentioned attributes to gain insight into supporting rationales. Then, a new why-question was asked after each set of responses, forming a closely linked chain in which the respondent was encouraged to answer as best as possible. The why-question was repeated until all the rationales were identified or the respondent could no longer answer them. The entire process was then performed for each attribute mentioned by respondents.

The content analysis approach was used in this research to identify the attributes of the Sarawak State Library, Sibul highlighted by the youths and the underlying rationales driving their perceptions. The researcher then analysed the collected data by highlighting the mentioned attributes by youths and grouping relevant attributes under the same category, if any. With the help of transcription, the researcher identified the rationales and beneficial consequences resulting from each attribute. Then, all the relationships among attributes, beneficial consequences, and rationales were transformed into the perceptual orientation map depicting the overall youths' perception of the Sarawak State Library, Sibul.

## Findings

The researcher interviewed sixty respondents. Out of a total of sixty respondents, thirty-two male and twenty-eight female youths aged fifteen to thirty years old took part in the interviews. Based on information acquired during the interview, Table 1 depicts the gender distribution of the respondents, whereas Table 2 depicts the age distribution. The narrow numerical margin implies that both genders have a balanced and well-rounded perception of the research.

**Table 1: Number of Respondents and Gender**

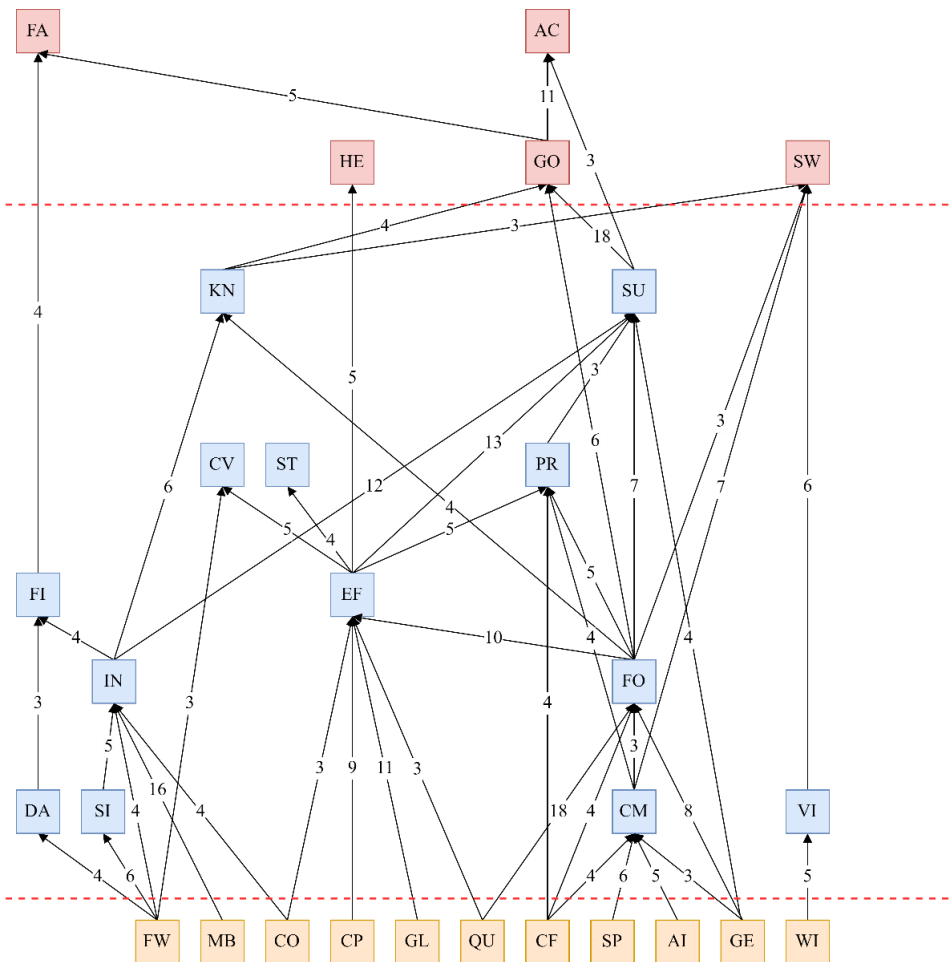
Gender	Number of Respondents
Male	32
Female	28
Total	60

Source: Author (2022)

**Table 2: Number of Respondents and Age Range**

Age Range	Number of Respondents
15 - 18	16
19 - 22	21
23 - 26	19
27 - 30	4
Total	60

Source: Author (2022)



**LEGEND**

**Attributes**

- FW Free Wi-Fi
- MB Many Books
- CO Computer
- CP Charging Ports
- GL Good Lighting
- QU Quietness
- CF Comfortable Furniture
- SP Spacious
- AI Air-conditioning
- GE Good Environment
- WI Window Views

**Beneficial Consequences**

- DA Data
- SI Surfing Internet
- CM Comfort
- VI View
- IN Information
- FO Focus
- FI Financial Issues
- EF Efficiency
- CV Convenience
- ST Saving Time
- PR Productivity
- KN Knowledge
- SU Studying

**Rationales**

- HE Health
- GO Good Outcome
- SW Sense of Well-being
- FA Future Assurance
- AC Achievement

**Figure 2: Overall Perceptual Orientation Map**

Source: Author (2022)

Based on the findings from the youth interviews, an overall perceptual orientation map is constructed, as shown in Figure 2. The perceptual orientation map is organised into three tiers, each with its own colour: orange, blue, and red, representing the attributes, beneficial consequences, and rationales, respectively. Moreover, the numbers on the linking arrows denote the frequency of each attribute, beneficial consequence, and rationale being mentioned by the respondents.

As shown in Figure 2, eleven attributes appear essential for youths as users of Sarawak State Library in Sibul. These attributes include quietness, good environment, many books, free Wi-Fi, comfortable furniture, good lighting, charging ports, air-conditioning, spacious, computer, and window views. On the other hand, there are thirteen beneficial consequences associated with eleven attributes, including efficiency, saving time, convenience, productivity, studying, focus, knowledge, comfort, information, financial issues, data, surfing internet, and view. The beneficial consequences explain why the attributes are as they are. For instance, the youths claimed they could concentrate better on their studies when the library is quiet. Besides, the rationales explain why the attributes discovered are important to the youths. The five rationales that govern the youths' perceptions of the Sarawak State Library's attributes are good outcome, achievement, future assurance, sense of well-being, and health.

## Discussion

Based on Table 3, there are similarities and differences between the constructed conceptual framework and the findings of this research. From the findings, seven attributes match the conceptual framework, whereas the remaining five newly discovered attributes have not been mentioned in the conceptual framework or from other related research papers. The new attributes denoted with the asterisk symbol are window views, many books, free Wi-Fi, charging ports, and computer.

**Table 3: Connections Between Conceptual Framework and Findings**

Category	Attribute
1. Ambience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Quietness</li> <li>● Good Environment</li> <li>● Air-conditioning (Temperature)</li> <li>● Window Views*</li> </ul>
2. Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Good Lighting</li> </ul>
3. Furniture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Comfortable Furniture</li> </ul>
4. Material & Finishes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● -</li> </ul>
5. Space Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Spacious</li> </ul>
6. Facilities**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Many Books*</li> <li>● Free Wi-Fi*</li> <li>● Charging Ports*</li> <li>● Computer*</li> </ul>

\*\* *New Category*

\* *New Findings*

Source: Author (2022)



Similar to the findings by Gisolfi (2015), Sarawak State Library has proved its capability as a public library to adapt to the present digital revolution while retaining the physical books in its main space. From the findings, the attribute essential to the youths is quietness which falls under ambience. Many of them state that they are willing to come to the public library to do their study as it is quiet. They find it easier to focus on their studies when the public library is quiet. Hence, this ties in with the report from Choy and Goh (2016), which stated that lower noise levels could allow individuals to be more productive in creating high-quality work. Under the same category, good environment also contributes to the library gate count as many youths are seen to be using it. Thus, this is in line with Shill and Toner (2004), who found out that a good interior environment can considerably impact library usage. Since Malaysia is tropical country where it tends to get hot and humid outside, air-conditioning is also one of the main reasons attracting youths to the public library.

Meanwhile, from the results obtained, the youths also mention the window views. Generally, the respondents linked the windows to views as they can see the outside view through the large glass paned windows. Apart from that, as expressed by the youths, good lightings help to keep their eyes from getting fatigued. This is proven accurate, similar to the study conducted by Othman and Mazli (2012). In addition, the results show that the youths do not bother with the material and finishes used. They focus on whether the furniture is comfortable or not. For youths, comfortable furniture is all about the size of the furniture instead of adjustability. For example, youths prefer a large table so they can have more space to put their belongings. This finding contradicts the study conducted by Aliaa and Latfi (2016).

In terms of space planning, the youths only require the space to be spacious, which can contribute to their sense of comfort level. They would feel overwhelmed if trapped in a small, crowded space. Apart from that, some newly found attributes do not match the conceptual framework, namely many books, free Wi-Fi, charging ports, and computer. Thus, these attributes are placed under a new category of facilities. Many youths emphasise that they come to the public library to borrow books for reference and the free usage of Wi-Fi to surf the internet. The availability of charging ports entices youths to congregate for study or assignment completion. This is because the youths can utilise the available charging ports to charge their gadgets, such as smartphones and laptops, without worrying about low battery issues. Besides, youths use computers provided in the library to do their assignments and other tasks. Those who are less privileged or do not have access to a computer can still benefit from the free computer service provided by the public library.

The rationales behind youths' perceptions on the attributes of Sarawak State Library, Sibu are mainly for good outcome, achievement, future assurance, sense of well-being, and health. These five rationales influence the eleven attributes mentioned by youth. For youths, the eleven attributes are essential for a conducive library environment for them to achieve their goals. The youths believe they can achieve good results in terms of outstanding grades in the examination. Furthermore, the majority of the youths highlight that their main accomplishment is to continue their studies at the tertiary level. Meanwhile, having a good job that pays well helps to safeguard their future. Aside from that, one's sense of well-being is strongly linked to happiness, feeling good, and life satisfaction. Finally, for youths, health has a body free of illness and in peak physical condition.

### **Limitation/Implications/Conclusion**

Several limitations have been recognised throughout this research. Nevertheless, there are numerous potentials and opportunities for additional research to be conducted in order to make the research topic more in-depth and complete. The research area is only limited to the Sarawak State Library in Sibul, Sarawak, Malaysia. As a result, the results may or may not differ if the research is conducted in a different public library with various locations. As such, researchers interested in this topic could conduct their research in other public libraries at different locations to compare the findings. Apart from that, this research is also restricted to youths who use the Sarawak State Library. Therefore, any inputs or perceptions from other age groups, such as children, adults, and the elderly, can also be covered for future research. In addition, this research used a qualitative approach and gathered data from only a small population of respondents. Responses from this kind of approach cannot be generalised since it lacks statistical representation. As a result, the quantitative approach or a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches can be used instead as alternative data collection methods.

This research reveals the relationship between the youths' perceptions and rationales on the attributes of the Sarawak State Library in Sibul. According to the findings, eleven attributes of the public library have been identified, as well as five rationales that regulate how youths think. Five new attributes of the public library have been identified as a result of this research that has not been discussed in earlier research publications. As such, the new attributes and the extended conceptual framework will serve as a stepping stone for further research in public libraries. In addition, it is also beneficial to the Sarawak State Library's administration, other public libraries, architects, and interior designers who can use this research to obtain insight into what the users, especially youths want. Furthermore, offering a comfortable and conducive user environment will contribute to more successful public library usage that enhances the long-term and sustainable development of the library. Ultimately, directly or indirectly, it encourages people to pursue lifelong learning in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all, established by the United Nations in September 2015.

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## Appendix

### *Interview Questions*

CODE	
GENDER	MALE <input type="checkbox"/> FEMALE <input type="checkbox"/>
RACE	MALAY <input type="checkbox"/> CHINESE <input type="checkbox"/> IBAN <input type="checkbox"/> OTHERS <input type="checkbox"/>
AGE	15 – 18 <input type="checkbox"/> 19 – 22 <input type="checkbox"/> 23 – 26 <input type="checkbox"/> 27 – 30 <input type="checkbox"/>

What do you like about this public library?

Why is it important to you?