

# **Library Use and Information Seeking Behavior of Public Library at Mandalay**

*Yone Kyi Yar Knowledge Propagation Society*

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## Library Use and Information Seeking Behavior of Public Library at Mandalay

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### Abstract

Public libraries improve the quality of life in communities and are centers that offer financial and social benefits for community development. This study aims to describe how people perceive public libraries and how the characteristics of libraries and the people in a community influence library use. Data is collected from purposive samples of thirteen librarians, eighteen users and twenty-seven non-users in Mandalay through in-depth interviews and participant observation at libraries.

The information that different types of users need is determined by their respective personal profiles. The majority of non-users rely on the Internet, newspapers, radio and TV to fulfill their information needs. These resources provide fast and easy access to rich data sources. Whereas library users seek information from both libraries and the resources listed above, they seek information from printed books more frequently than the Internet or social media because data from printed books is more reliable than data online sources. However, there is a group of non-users who are unwilling to seek information from any of these sources.

The study finds that those users and non-users who are elderly, female, married and middle-aged workers have the greatest difficulty in accessing libraries compared to others. In addition, people have difficulty accessing libraries because they struggle to make a living and do not read as a hobby. The study also finds that library use correlates with the location of the library and how well-known it is. Library activities and the presence of Wi-Fi attract more people. Moreover, technology and entertainment have a high impact on the use of libraries. Finally, users perceive they gain social, financial, physical, mental and cognitive benefits by using libraries at the individual, community and country levels.

Key words: Public library, Information needs, Use of library, Impacts, Mandalay, Library use

## 1. Rationale

The presence of public libraries improves the quality of life within communities<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, people can get financial and social benefits by using public libraries. First, users can save on the cost of purchasing printed and non-printed materials themselves by borrowing these materials from public libraries<sup>2</sup>. Public libraries provide social benefits through story time programs, leisure activities, and recreational activities that offer a way for people to socialize with each other according to their interests.

However, the location of libraries and the quality of the information and services they provide may impact public use<sup>3</sup>. According to the Myanmar Library Survey, non-users indicated that they did not go to public libraries because of limited and outdated books, lack of varied books and journals, and the late arrival of newspapers. Furthermore, some barriers to library usage were a lack of systemic coordination and management, poor librarian training, fear of losing books, and the absence of a registration system<sup>4</sup>.

There are four types of libraries: national libraries, university and academic libraries, public libraries, and specialized libraries<sup>5</sup>. Hence, public libraries mean a library which is around people living area. In that case, it can be government public libraries. It can be funded mainly by community, private donor, a monastery or church and NGO<sup>6</sup>.

According to the Myanmar Library Survey, public libraries are a knowledge bank or information hub where people may gain knowledge and information and distinguish good from bad things<sup>7</sup>. Public libraries serve as community centers to hold meetings and discuss issues related to community development. In addition, people gain moral values, improve their thinking skills and behave better thanks to reading. Different from the Myanmar Library Survey, this study conducted in-depth interviews in different locations and analyzed the results using qualitative methods. In addition, this study included both registered and unregistered public libraries with the Information and Public Relations Department (IPRD), whereas Myanmar Library Survey limited its focus to those that were registered.

## 2. Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to describe public perceptions of libraries and examine how the characteristics of both libraries and people in the community shape library use. This study identifies four questions which are:

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Zickuhr, Harrison Rainie, Kristen Purcell, and Maeve Duggan. *How Americans value public libraries in their communities*. (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Charles R. McClure, Bruce T. Fraser, Timothy W. Nelson, and Jane B. Robbins. "Economic benefits and impacts from public libraries in the State of Florida." (*Final Report*, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Zickuhr et al, "How Americans value public libraries in their communities", 2013; The Asia Foundation, and Myanmar Book Aid & Preservation Foundation. *Myanmar Library Survey: A Comprehensive Study of the Country's Public Libraries and Information Needs* (2014).

<sup>4</sup> The Asia Foundation, *Myanmar Library Survey*, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Nu Nu, Daw and U Ba Kyein. *Library and Thu Tha Pyin Nyar: Library Structure and Management*, Information and Public Relation Department, (Myanmar Press, 2000), 180.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid supra* 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

- How do the characteristics of libraries affect library use?
- How do the characteristics of people in a community affect library use?
- How do people seek information in their daily lives?
- What are the public perceptions of library use in Mandalay?

### 3. Theories Reference

To understand the factors that influence public perception and use of libraries, **Wilson's information seeking behavior, 1999 model** is used. The model explains information needs, information solutions to problems and information sources<sup>8</sup>. Wilson's article states that someone is driven to seek information because he or she needs to know something<sup>9</sup>. Hence, people need information for various reasons and purposes in their daily lives. They use various channels to seek information like the Internet, TV, radio, books or newspapers.

The pursuit of necessary information may be impeded by barriers stemming from **personal characteristics** (educational and demographic), **social and interpersonal characteristics**, **environmental characteristics**, **economic characteristics** and **source characteristics**. In term of **education**, highly knowledgeable or educated people may feel less need for information and be able to seek information more easily than others. In addition, **demographic** variables such as age, sex, leisure activities and other factors also determine people's information seeking behavior stages<sup>10</sup>.

**Social or interpersonal** problems directly affect information seeking. As users have to deal with librarians and library staff, their relationships are important factors that influence information seeking behavior. **The environmental** variables of **time and geography** also determine information seeking behavior. Access to information may be limited by **the available time** that people have as well as the location or **geography** of the information. **Economic** barriers may limit the ability of information users to visit libraries during working hours if it requires a personal financial sacrifice<sup>11</sup>.

Easy access, reliable and accurate data as well convenient channels are essential **information source characteristics** for information seekers. Finally, if the source of information is available and accessible to fill the demands of information needs, information users are satisfied and use the information<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas D. Wilson. "Human information behavior." *Informing science* 3, no. 2 (2000): 49-56.

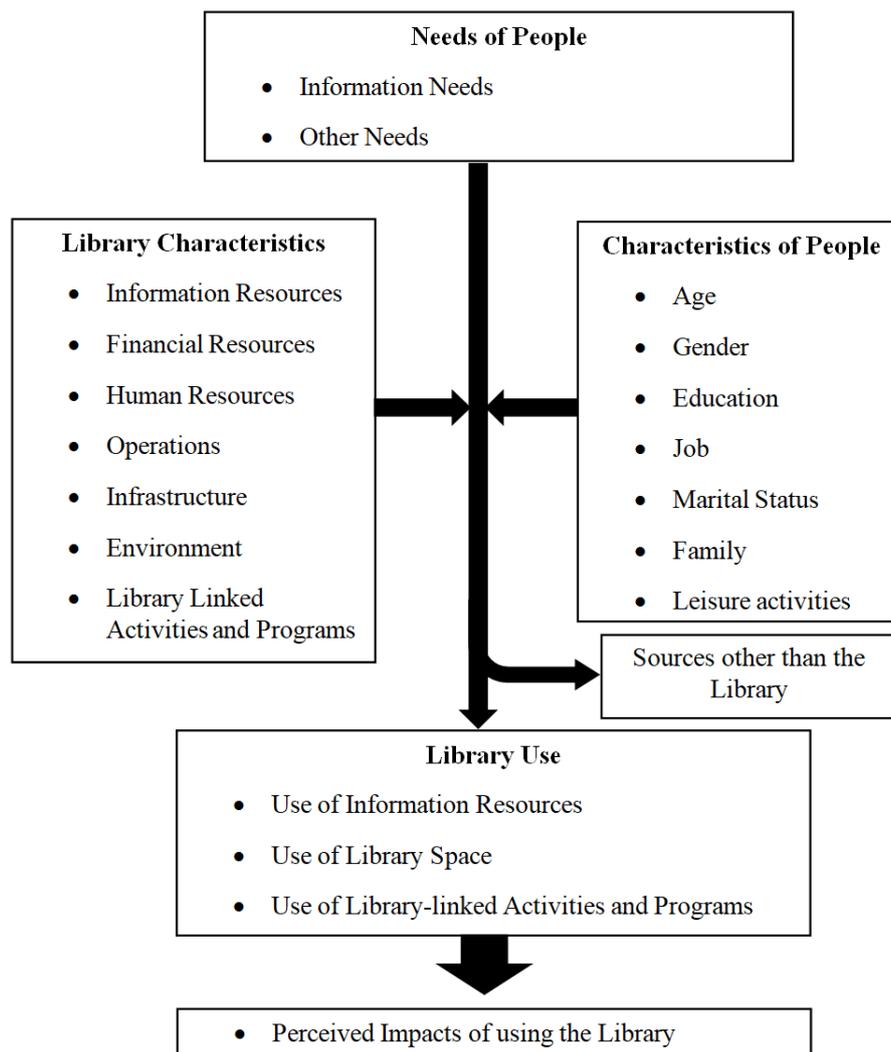
<sup>9</sup> Thomas D. Wilson. "Information behaviour: an interdisciplinary perspective." *Information processing & management* 33, no. 4 (1997): 551-572.

<sup>10</sup> Wilson. "Information behaviour: an interdisciplinary perspective.", 551-572.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



#### 4. Methodology

This study describes characteristics of people and libraries that influence the use and public perceptions of libraries through the information seeking behavior model. Data collection and transcription was conducted between January and March 2018 using a purposive sampling method. This explanatory, qualitative research method utilized open-ended in-depth interviews and participant observations at libraries. Participant observations were done to understand the perception of libraries by users and librarians. The study units of analysis are individuals(users and non-users) and organizations(public libraries in Mandalay).

**Table 1. Selected Public Libraries in Mandalay**

No.	Type of Library	Actual Total No. of Libraries	No. of Libraries Surveyed
1.	Township public libraries run by IPRD or the government	7	3
2.	Public libraries with more than 1000 books supported by communities or organizations, but not the government	24	9
3.	Public libraries and ward libraries with less than 1000 books supported by community or organization, but not by government	13	1
Total no. of actual and surveyed libraries in Mandalay		44	<b>13</b>

A preliminary survey was conducted prior to the beginning of data collection to ascertain the total number and locations of libraries in Mandalay. Following the survey, libraries were selected randomly among five townships in Mandalay. Although we initially selected twenty libraries to survey, we were only able to survey thirteen libraries. This was because of time limits and because some of them did not meet the criteria for libraries for the study.

Four libraries were excluded for not meeting the criteria to be considered public libraries. Two of these consisted of just one or two small shelves with books located in front of grocery stores or clothes shops. One library was accessible to students but not the public. Finally, one library was open and running during the preliminary survey. But, it closed before an in-depth interview could be conducted and the space was converted into a clinic.

**Table 2. Recruitment Process for Key Informants and Informants**

No	Sample Population	Inclusion Criteria	Sampling Method	Number of Participants and Number of Times Visited
1	Key informants (users)	- Visit at least twice per month and know about library's resources and activities - Are involved in some activities at the library	Purposive sampling	18 informants and one visit
2	Key informants (non-users)	-Have used the library's services for less than three years; but used school library or book corner or public libraries before	Purposive sampling (and snow ball for 5 non-users)	27 informants and one visit
3	Informants	- More than six months of job experience -Strong knowledge of the structure, function and operations of libraries	Purposive sampling	13 informants and one visit

Librarians introduced some users for interviews. Members from the technical support unit in Yone Kyi Yar conducted non-user interviews for this study. Data collection stopped after surveys of 18 users, 27 non-users and 13 librarians had been completed as no new phenomena were found after that.

## 5. Findings

The whole things of this chapter can be imagined by understanding characteristics of users, non-users and librarians and then characteristics of libraries by librarians. In addition, information seeking behavior provides a framework for understanding why and how each user finds information according to their needs. Moreover, users and non-users shared difficulties that they faced in accessing library services based on their personal situations and the library they were using at the time. Finally, users discussed the impacts of libraries at the individual, community and country levels.

Table 3. Demographic Information of Users, Non-users and Librarians

Demographic Information	Users	Non-users	Librarians
<b>Age in years</b>			
• 20s	9 (50%)	11 (40.8%)	3 (23.1%)
• 30s	2 (11.1%)	4 (14.8%)	4 (30.8%)
• 40s	-	7 (25.9%)	6 (46.1%)
• 50s	3 (16.7%)	3 (11.1%)	-
• 60s	4 (22.2%)	2 (7.4%)	-
<b>Sex</b>			
• Male	9 (50%)	8 (29.6%)	6 (46.1%)
• Female	9 (50%)	19 (70.4%)	7 (53.9%)
<b>Marital status</b>			
• Single	10 (55.6%)	13 (48.1%)	11 (84.6%)
• Married	8 (44.4%)	14 (51.9%)	2 (15.4%)
<b>Education</b>			
• Post-graduate	1 (5.5%)	-	3 (23.1%)
• University	6 (33.3%)	1 (3.7%)	9 (69.2%)
• Some university	3 (16.7%)	5 (18.5%)	1 (7.7%)
• High school (Grades 10-11)	2 (11.1%)	5 (18.5%)	-
• Middle school (Grades 6-9)	5 (27.9%)	2 (7.4%)	-
• Primary school (Grades 1-5)	1 (5.5%)	2 (7.4%)	-
• No data	-	12 (44.5%)	-
<b>Occupation</b>			
• Student	4 (22.2%)	5 (18.5%)	-
• Retired	2 (11.1%)	-	-
• Housewife	4 (22.2%)	5 (18.5%)	-
• Low-paying job*	4 (22.2%)	15 (55.6%)	-
• Professional job**	4 (22.2%)	2 (7.4%)	-

\* Low-paying jobs include astrologers, cleaners, goldsmiths, hawkers, manual laborers, security guards, betel nut sellers, tailors, workers at side-street shops or tea-shops and welders

\*\* Professional jobs include dealers, IT technicians, business owners and teachers

Table 4. Library Information Resources

Library	Total No. of Books	Registration System	Shelving System	Book Classification	E-books	Wi-Fi	Membership Requirements
L 2	Over 80000	Manual	Open	Authors	No	Yes	Passport photos, personal profile
L 10	9990	Manual	Open + catalog	Books* + authors with alphabets	No	No	Recommended persons or letter
L 9	8000	Manual	Open	Authors	No	No	Passport photos, fees
L 6	7823	Manual	Open + catalog	Books* + authors with alphabets	No	Yes	Passport photos, NRC, fees, household registration form
L 13	5614	Manual	Open	Books* + authors with alphabets	Yes	No	Recommended persons, NRC
L 4	5360	Manual	Closed + catalog	Authors	No	Yes office use	Passport photos, personal profile
L 8	5000	Computerized	Open	Books*	Yes	Yes	Personal profile, fees
L 1	Over 4000	Manual	Open	Books' height	Yes	Yes	Personal profile, NRC, paid card
L 3	About 4000	Computerized	Open	Books*	No	Yes	Passport photos, personal profile
L 5	Over 3000	Manual by users	Open	Not classified	No	No	Nil
L 11	2927	Manual	Open	Books*	No	No	Nil
L 7	1500- 2000	Manual	Open	Books*	Yes	No	Personal profile, NRC, paid card, fees
L 12	400- 500	Manual	Open	Not classified	No	No	Nil

**Books\*** – Types of books means aesthetics (e.g: novels, poems, plays, drama...) or knowledgeable books (e.g: encyclopedia, dictionary, travel diary,...), **NRC** – National Registration Card

Table 5. Library Usage

Library	Total Registered Users	Users/ Day	Books Loaned/Day	Books Allowed/User	Lending Period (Days)
L 2	2442	10-20	15-30	2	7
L 10	418	30	30	1	7
L 9	1442	150	300-400	3	3
L 6	407	20	25	2-3	7-10
L 13	714	45-80	55	2	7
L 4	1800	50	60	2	7
L 8	9000	Over 200	Over 120	4	14
L 1	2900	13	20	No limit	7
L 3	820	15-25	45	3	7
L 5	No data	No data	40	3	No limit
L 11	No data	30	90	3	No limit
L 7	100	No data	No data	3	3
L 12	No data	10	20-25	3	No limit

Table 6. Library Financial Resources and Operations

Library	Financial Source	Hours	Days Closed
L 2	Self-funding	9am- 5:30pm	None
L 10	Receiving new books from IPRD + receiving 20000 kyats/month from IPRD donations*	9:30am- 4:30pm	Sunday and Monday
L 9	Membership fees + program operation (computer classes)	9am-8pm	Sabbath day
L 6	Receiving new books from headquarter government office of Ser Pae Bait Man + membership fees + donations*	9:30am-4:30pm	Weekends and public holidays
L 13	Receiving new books from IPRD + receiving 20000 kyats/month from IPRD + donations*	9:30am-4:30pm	Sunday and Monday
L 4	Self -funding + donations*	8:30am-5pm, 7:30am-4pm (Sat, Sun, Wed),	None
L 8	Membership fees + donations*	9am-4pm	Sunday and Monday
L 1	Membership fees + program fees (English and guitar classes)	6am-8pm	Saturday
L 3	Donations*	10am-5pm	Monday
L 5	Self-funding + donations*	6am-10pm	None
L 11	Membership fees + donations*	1pm-11pm	No
L 7	Program running (parking and shoes box fees) + receive support from an organization of Pagoda Trustee	4pm-8pm	Sunday
L 12	No external funding (the librarian and their colleagues donate their own books to the library)	7pm- 10pm	No

**Donations\***- money or new/second-hand books, IPRD- Information and Public Relation Department, Ministry of Information.

## Library Characteristics

Librarians were interviewed mainly about information resources, financial resources, human resources, operations, infrastructure and the environment, and library-linked activities and programs.

### Information Resources

When discussing the **total number of books**, most librarians did not know the exact number of books their library had because of weak or a lack of systematic cataloging or working process from manual to computerized system. Libraries that use manual **registration** have a difficult time tracking which books are popular and demographic information (age, sex, occupation and education) about their users. However, libraries 4, 6, 10 and 13 were able to provide an exact number when asked how many books they had. Three of them were government public libraries and fourth receives help from skilled government librarians. Librarian 4 said:

A librarian from Mandalay University comes to check our classification every weekend.

Both open and close **shelving systems** have advantages. Users prefer open systems because this system draws more attention from users. However, open systems make it difficult for librarians to find books because users pull books out and put them back where they like. Librarian 6 said:

We can't use a closed system here. But users pull books out from the shelves and put it where they like. I have trouble when books cannot be found because they aren't where we put them.

**Information resources** are updated according to language preference, targeted library users, popularity of books, preference of librarians and essential information resources. Nearly all of the libraries we surveyed buy Burmese language books, but Library 2 had both Myanmar and Chinese books, and Library 8 had only English books. Some libraries target children and try to buy more books for kids. Furthermore, librarians usually buy books that are well-known and popular among users. Essential information for daily use can be obtained from journals, newspapers and magazines, and librarians need to update them regularly. If librarians update their resources as detailed above, their libraries will generally contain the books that users want. However, even updated information resources aren't always what users are looking for. Some librarians receive updated books from donations and government headquarter offices with quotas to meet. These books may or may not match the taste of library users. Librarians 2 and 6 said:

We do not buy every new book that is published. We buy books that users frequently ask for.

The new books sent from the Yangon office are not up-to-date. Only newspapers are up-to-date.

At some libraries, **reference books** cannot be borrowed and users are only allowed to read them at the library. These reference books are rare and difficult to find today. If users need to read these kinds of books, some librarians allow users to take photos and some do copying either for a fee or free of charge. Librarian 6 said:

I do not allow users to borrow reference books. If users want to take the information home, I go to the copy shop and they have to pay for it.

Librarians have both positive and negative views on e-books and Wi-Fi at libraries. Librarians think that **e-books** can improve the development of a library and users can read up-to-date books. But, users do not want to use them as the screens can cause eye strain, and some users just prefer to read printed books. Having **Wi-Fi** available is convenient and attracts users, especially young ones. However, it can cause people to focus less attention on reading and is vulnerable to misuse. Librarians 10, 2 and 6 said:

E-books do not take up space. Some people who want up-to-date books read them.

It is great if people can use Wi-Fi. But, some do not use it for reading and they use it for other purposes. If so, I think the purpose of the library will be lost.

Children come on holidays. When they come, I have to turn on the Internet and they watch cartoons. They know about it more than me.

Most libraries cannot get an accurate **total number of users** because they do not have a systemic membership process. Even though some libraries have accurate data, this does not mean all users access the library regularly. Some libraries have users on their records who have died or who disappeared after visiting one or two times. In addition, some people who are not members of the library come to look in newspapers or journals to find job vacancy announcements or to read old news.

Similarity, the **total number of users** and **books loaned per day** are not accurate in most libraries because they lack a monthly or annual reporting statistic system. Besides it is hard to get accurate data, the total number of users who visit also varies day by day. Libraries receive many more users in the mornings, evenings, weekends and during library tours. However, the number of users decreases in the afternoons, on weekdays and during examination periods. Librarian 11 said:

On weekends and holidays, the number of books borrowed is between 80 and 100. But, it is just between 30 and 60 during school days.

Library **membership requirements** are not difficult to meet, with the exception of household registration forms and a letter of recommendation or personal recommendation. The majority of migrants and suburban dwellers do not have household registration forms and they face difficulties in accessing library services as a result. Two government township public libraries ask that new members be recommended by people like 10 household leaders, teachers or gazette officers, which is a complex requirement to meet. However, fees are in the affordable range, between 1000 kyats and 5000 kyats (\$0.75-\$3.50 USD). Two libraries have paid borrowing card and users have to pay between 500 and 1000 kyats to borrow 20 and 15 books respectively. However, some paid libraries offer cards free of charge to children and monks. Librarian 6 said that the main reason that libraries ask for many things is that they need to be able to follow unreturned books to users' houses.

### Financial Resources

When librarians are asked about the financial resources of a library, they do not want to answer direct questions, for example, how much do you receive money per month? Thus, researchers ask questions like “how do you update your information resources?” to learn about their financial capacity. By obtaining this kind of information, researchers can make educated guesses about the financial capacity of a library. Libraries fill new or updated books from five channels: self-funding, donations, programs, membership fees, and receiving new books from IPRD. Although some libraries have only one financial source, some have two or three different financial sources.

There are two kinds of donations: money and books. Librarians receive more new or secondhand books than money. All in all, most libraries do not have strong financial sources because monetary donations are irregular and insufficient to update book collections. Librarian 3 said:

I buy new books when the donation box is full.

### Human Resources

Librarians have a lot of duties, some of which are very technical. Technical duties include cataloguing, recommending good books to users, finding books for users, keeping books safe from bugs, telling users the library rules and regulations, and reading books to recommend to users. In addition, librarians must also build good relationships and notify users of library activities. Outreach can vary from personal communication to posting announcements on noticeboards and social media. Librarian 6 said:

Librarians should know where all books are located. If they read book reviews, they can refer books to users.

Promoting the library is the most important duty of a librarian. Promotion tactics include making sign boards, distributing pamphlets, making websites, joining groups on Facebook, and visiting users' houses or schools. Last but not least, librarians have to be enthusiastic about their work. Librarian 9 said:

When hiring a librarian, it is best to hire a person who understands how to run a library very well, is enthusiastic about reading, and is proud to be a librarian.

### Operations

The majority of libraries operate during regular working hours (9 am to 4 or 5 pm). This means that people who are working in government or private companies have a difficult time accessing the library during working hours. However, four libraries surveyed are open later because they offer language classes, are operated within a home, or are linked with social warfare services in the local ward. As almost all libraries are open on public holidays including weekends, more users can access library services and activities. Five libraries surveyed did not have regular closing days. They close when there are long water festivals or heavy rain. Librarians 10 and 5 said:

Students can come to the library after school. They come on Saturday. So, I have to open on Saturday for them.

I close during water festivals because of the children who throw water. I do not close when it is raining a little bit- I just cover the bookshelves. But, if the rain is heavy, I have to close because of water leaks.

Libraries also offer **services** like copying and printing, lending extra books, providing electronics for public use, and selling snacks and drinks. While some libraries allow unlimited copying and printing free of charge, others charge a fee. This is why some libraries make electronics such as desktop computers, laptops, portable tablets and chrome books available to assist users in reading.

Some libraries provide special services such as door-to-door delivery or mobile libraries. One library with home delivery service sends books that users order by phone around Mandalay city. Later, a librarian returns to exchange the old borrowed books with new ones. There are two township public libraries that offer mobile libraries and usually go to middle or high schools.

### Infrastructure and the Environment

Infrastructure and environment includes parking, space, furniture and noise. Some of the data was received from librarians and some from observation. Library exits are located beside major roads, restaurants, in the center of markets and in crowded houses in the ward make noise and disturb users who are reading. The space of libraries is also small, offering enough space for five to 20 users to sit and read at the same time. Two of the libraries surveyed have full facilities such as separate reading and discussion rooms, large parking lots and enough furniture for both rooms.

Some libraries shared their space with shops, reducing the space available for users. In addition, two libraries surveyed did not have enough quality furniture for reading. Librarian 9 said:

This library is 71 years old. But, soon we will have access to the back of this building. When the leasing contracts of the shops in the back are finished, the library will be large.

### Library Activities and Programs

Seven out of thirteen libraries surveyed had no activities at the library because they lacked either experience or supporting materials like human or financial resources. Some librarians do activities within limited budgets or use their own money. Libraries generally offer activities such as talks, discussion forums, panels, training, and professional skills classes for adults. While some libraries have regular activities or programs, others do not. Irregular activities mean libraries hold literature talks on special days like the founding anniversary of the library or big special public holidays like Independence Day. But, some libraries focus on children's activities like essay competitions, poetry competitions, or drawing and painting competitions. Librarian 10 said:

Last week, there was drawing competition of General Aung San's picture. Ten children came for it and asked me what will be next week? I am thinking about holding a potato sack game for them. Having a snack game will cost me a lot.

### **Information Seeking Behavior**

Each person has their own **information needs** depending on characteristics such as education, age and occupation.

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Student users for educational materials, whereas elderly users frequently look for information on religious and health issues, housewives need cookbooks, and women look for books about other issues. In terms of **non-information needs**, they need information to gain knowledge and wisdom. While library users visit the library because they need information, some non-users do not have any willingness to seek out or learn new things. They stop at the “information needs” step and do not progress to information seeking and use behavior.

**Initial stimuli to seek information** may be internal (inspired by a thought) or external (inspired by something outside the user’s mind). Some users encounter constant stimulus while others only encounter occasional stimuli. Internal curiosity may result when a user thinks about something like clothes or sees an unfamiliar place or thing while reading. External stimuli include other people’s experiences, such as news of a friend suffering from disease or economic, political or health issues at the global or local level.

In terms of **information seeking behavior**, people use more than one information source to learn specific things. Library users seek printed books to get precise information. They may prefer to use books due to being unfamiliar or uncomfortable using smartphones or wary of the unreliability of data on the Internet. Users may also prefer books because Facebook does not have long stories like books do, and elderly users may suffer from poor eyesight. They use soft copies when they cannot find printed books. On the other hand, non-users rely on the Internet, Facebook, newspapers, journals and television rather than printed books. They look for information online because the Internet offers easy, fast and rich resources. Newspapers and journals give reliable information daily and regularly and television is easy to access at home.

Looking at **information use behavior or actual library use**, two-thirds of users just borrow books to read at home while the remainder borrow books to take home but also spend time reading in the library. But, latter users try to read some kinds of information resources like journals or newspaper which they are not able to borrow and take home. Only a few use library’s internet and programs or activities. Novels are the most popular type of books borrowed, followed by translation of foreign books and religious books. A very small number of users borrow traditional health books, psychology books, and books related to school subjects. Male users are more likely to borrow books about politics and history.

### **The Relationship between Library Characteristics and Library Use**

Although library use does not necessarily relate directly to the **information resources** available, users have certain expectations. They want access to up-to date books, books full of knowledge, a variety of books, and books for different ages and reading levels (beginner, intermediate and advanced). User 15 said:

Libraries should put out journals for trishaw drivers who are passing through. They cannot read authoritative and serious literature.

There are some barriers for library users when it comes to **e-books**. Users who have difficulties with technology do not use them. Other users do not use them as they prefer holding physical books while reading. Public education levels are not high enough to follow e-library or e-books due to it is far to reach for common manual workers. And then, e-books are for university students and educated young people because e-books are good for them including for their school learning subjects. Unlike e-books, Wi-Fi attracts more users to the library and has had a direct effect on library use. User 9 and 16 said:

E-books are not as good as physical books because I can't navigate smartphones well. The problem of our nationalism is they do not want to read. Looking at their living condition and situation of ward, e-library is too high for them.

I won't use library if it change as e-library. But, I will tell about it my children.

Although users have to go through different steps at different libraries to become a member of that library, the users we interviewed all thought that **the process of registration** was easy. However, User 7 pointed out that some people in her ward have difficulty because the library asks for a copy of the household registration card. As mentioned above, many people do not have one and it is difficult for them to become a library member as a result.

In this study, library **operating hours** do not have a big effect on usage because most libraries have flexible operating hours that accommodate different types of users. In addition, users adjust their visits to match the hours of the libraries. However, the type and location of their job may influence their ability to visit the library, especially if a user is running their own business or working near a library.

**Library activities and programs** can increase library use by attracting users. Users know can learn about the type and schedule of library activities and programs online through platforms like Facebook, through signboards, or through internal book club member channels. Programs like English language or computer classes support libraries financially, but there is a downside to imposing increased fees for classes. User 11 said:

The teacher's club has a discussion once every couple of weeks. The topics are advertised through Facebook. If I like it, I join.

The **infrastructure and environment** of a library does not have a big impact on library use. However, users want to get more space especially during weekends and other crowded days. In addition, some libraries without separate rooms for reading and discussion are noisy which may disturb users who come to the library to read. Libraries that offer language programs are also noisy during class time. User 12 said:

This library has discussion sessions. While some people are having a discussion, others are reading. It's a little disturbing. It would be better if these two activities could be separated.

The **total number of libraries, location, and distance** also influence the number of users a library has. Some non-users do not know where their local libraries are. Others know the location, but are located too far away to go easily. There may not be enough libraries in their local areas. Users who are located closer to a library visit more than those who live far away. One library shares a space with clinic and funeral services, making it difficult for people to visit. Librarian 12 said:

It would be great if the library had its own location because some parents do not want their children to come to the library at night. We can open it at night. I don't know if it is because of superstitions or other beliefs, but they don't come to here at night.

### The Relationship between Characteristics of Community Members and Library Use

The personal characteristics of both users and non-users may create some difficulties in accessing the library. The major characteristics that impact library access include age, marital status, occupation, gender, habits, hobbies, and personality. **Elderly** users and non-users have difficulty accessing libraries because of poor eyesight and transportation. In addition, **married** users and non-users have a harder time going to the library than single people because they family obligations like escorting children to and from school or taking care of an ill spouse. User 4 said:

I read books all day. But, I can't read at night because of my poor eyesight.

**Middle-aged working** users can go libraries during their free time, although it depends upon their job. But, non-users cannot visit libraries as they have to work for long hours and have less free time. One **young female** user we interviewed and some non-users, particularly those who were single, said their older family members do not let them visit libraries alone. Moreover, males who were surveyed indicated that they have more chances to visit the library because females are expected to do household chores at home when they have holidays. User 7 and Non-user 22 said:

As I have to work at my sewing job, I can come to the library during my free time. I come here whenever I have free time. But, if I am busy, I won't come.

I am not free to go there. I have kids and time flies by so fast when I take my kids to school.

In term of **habits**, some young users are more interested in spending time with friends or going out than going to the library. Users feel bored if regular visits are stopped for a while. In fact, some users mentioned that they spend more time on social media than they do going to the library. However, non-users answered that they do not usually go to libraries because they are not in the habit of reading and they think that reading is boring. On the other hand, users and non-users told other people cannot access library because they prefer to spend time gambling or going to tea shops, bars or restaurant rather than reading. Non-user 26 said that

Most men go to tea shops and spend most of their time there, so fewer people go to the library.

Most non-users said that reading is not their **hobby**. It is interesting that a few non-users said that they do not go to the library although they do not have any difficulties or barriers. In addition, some users and non-users are reluctant to access library services because they are too timid to go alone.

Moreover, individual views on reading, financial situations, views on children's education and the influence of entertainment and technology affect library use. Some non-users think that **reading** is limited to education and others will not go to the library after finishing their studies. In addition, most people, including non-users, find it difficult to go to the library because they have to **struggle to make a living**. User 9 said:

It is the job market and financial situation. If people have an easy time making a living, they will have time for reading. Now, they have to struggle just to get morning and evening meals.

In Myanmar's **education system**, students have to spend almost all of their time attending school and extra tuitions for school subjects. Parents do not push their children to read novels even though they push them to study full time. Furthermore, the great influence of **entertainment and technology** on the public has resulted in people spending too much time on Facebook, social media, playing games, or watching movies. This has a big impact on library use. User 15 said:

From 7 am to 11 pm, children have to go to school and tuition. They have to do homework for school and tuitions at home.

### **Perceived Impacts of Library Use**

After eighteen users access library or read books for a certain period of time, they notice some kinds of changing in their lives. Their lives improve after accessing library or reading books. Specifically, they experience that reading has great impacts on their social, economic, health, education, physical and mental parts. Hence, users can answer impacts of library at individual level because they experience these benefits themselves. However, users cannot answer well the questions of having enough libraries or less libraries which impacts on community and country. Thus, they try to answer by guessing so that findings under impacts on community and country are not based on users' real experience.

#### Impacts on Individuals

Individual impacts are subdivided into social, economic, health, education, physical, emotional, and cognitive impacts. Reading has positive impacts on the social skills of young users including improvements in their socialization and communication skills. By reading books, young users who aged between 17 and 29 change their actions such as not arguing with friends, listening to others, not creating problems and not competing with others. These actions make them good at socializing with others. Libraries can have a direct economic impact on users because they do not need to spend money buying books. Indirect economic impacts include emotional support for those doing business, the opportunity to learn lessons from others, and setting ambitious goals. Users 1, 3 and 1 said:

I see an obvious improvement in my social skills. At first, I was not good at socializing and I couldn't interact with others. I do not usually speak with people but it is better than before.

Students cannot buy normal books. Prices are 4000 kyats for normal and 8000 kyats for thick books. If I buy books myself, I can only read a few books. It costs money.

The book 'Who moved my cheese' makes me a lot of courage. I read it when I feel I can't do or hesitate to do business. After reading that book, I get courage to do ice-cream distribution job.

In a **health** impact part, elderly users said that they get health knowledge not only from books and articles, but also from health literature talks at the library. From an **educational** point of view, all student users and young users describe that their academic skills such as learning English class, writing good essays, pre reading before lecturing and expanding network for further study. Users 15 and 12 said:

I can abstain from bad things by getting knowledge from health books. I do exercise and I haven't felt sick in four years. I learned these from books.

There is a change in education. I have found some books at the library about topics I didn't learn about at school.

**Physically**, some users said they have improved their lives by abstaining from bad actions like hitting their younger sisters, taking the wrong path in life, arguing or fighting with others, and making excuses for doing jobs or things. But, they also said that if they concentrate too much on reading during working hours, it can disrupt their job performance. **Emotionally**, most users surveyed stated reading gave them positive feelings. They felt that reading not only reduced feelings of stress, anger and greed but also feelings of ignorance, leaving them feeling peaceful and more mature. However, one user said that some books evoke so many strong emotions that readers feel bad. **Cognitively**, users reported gaining knowledge and wisdom as well as improved ways of thinking and reasoning. User 6 and 15 said:

I used to hit my younger sister when she makes mistakes at home. Now, I don't. Instead I explain her mistakes to her. I was very angry before. I was sensitive and not ashamed to argue with others. Now, I let them go whether they argue or not. It is because of reading.

Instead of going out with friends, I read books when I was young. My thinking has also changed. So, I did not reach wrong path like some of my friends.

### Impacts on the Community

The users we surveyed did not describe actual community impacts resulting from current library use. However, they stated that if the number of libraries in the community were to be reduced, it would negatively impact children in the future. The largest negative impact predicted was that children would fail to develop the habit of reading in their childhood. Moreover, people who live in areas with fewer well-stocked and developed libraries suffer from greater poverty because user 10 said that people who do not read earn less than those who do. Libraries also create a better social environment by educating citizens who in turn can push their environment to develop. User 6 said:

If everybody reads, there is no need to fight. Instead of gossiping during their free time, people can read or discuss books. So, there is no reason for war.

But, user 3, 11 and 15 have both positive and negative view on impacts of having libraries on community while user 9 has only negative view. They pointed out that the internet is a substitute for the library in this regard. They said that not having a library would not have any impact on their daily routines. People struggle to make a living with or without library access. User 9 said:

There are no libraries in my ward. But, people are still living their lives.

### Impacts on the Country

A lack of libraries in a country affects development because the number of people with access to educational materials impacts the standard of living. Libraries provide an opportunity for people to learn freely. A lack of library access means that people remain limited in their knowledge. Countries that read less tend to be less developed than countries that read more, such as Japan and Singapore. User 10 and 7 said that:

The gap of country's development is very big between reading and not reading countries. For example, like Japan and Singapore, development of countries is very fast because of reading.

If there are less developed libraries in a country, people cannot read and they just do their jobs. So, they do not know what they need to know. If so, standard of living will be low.

## 6. Discussion

**Information needs** are impacted by individual demographic and personal characteristics including age, occupation and marital status. Students need information for educational purposes, while elderly people seek out information on religious and health-related issues. Those who are of working age show less need for information generally. These findings are consistent with those in other countries, including those of Mutshewa in Botswana<sup>13</sup>. However, elderly users and non-users in Myanmar were found to focus on religious and health issues while elderly non-users in Mutshewa's study focused on agriculture.

The **information seeking behavior** of library users demonstrated that they rely on printed books rather than other information resources. Library users find data from books to be more reliable than information from the internet. However, non-users tend to rely on the internet as it provides easy and quick access to rich data. Some non-users do not seek any information at all because they do not feel a need to..

Two-thirds of the users we surveyed said that they never use the library as a space to read. The remaining third stated that they only read newspapers or journals at the library, which users are not allowed to bring home. Very few library users indicated that they use the library to surf the Internet or participate in library activities. The question is whether these results are indicative of today's busy lifestyles or whether they highlight the poor provision of library services to the public.

The **characteristics of a library** strongly impact its use. First of all, the location of a library is important as

<sup>13</sup> Athulang Mutshewa. "Information behaviours of non-users of libraries in Botswana." *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science* 20 no. 1 (2010).

it facilitates access. People who live closer to libraries can go more often than others<sup>14</sup>. This study found that distance has great impact on how often users and non-users access the library. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous studies done by Burke and Mutshewa<sup>15</sup>. In addition, as in Mutshewa's study, our study found that library use was also dependent upon hours of operation as well as library resources and services.

What is more, our survey confirmed the finding of the Myanmar Library Survey that the financial resources of libraries are weak and very limited<sup>16</sup>. In addition, users try to adapt themselves to the operating hours of the library and do not complain. Librarians and staff members need more training to implement a systemic registration system. Users also want more up-to-date and a greater variety of books.

Unlike the Myanmar Library Survey, we surveyed paid librarians and library founders, although some of the students we included were considered volunteers<sup>17</sup>. Although the Myanmar Library Survey pointed out that most libraries do not have basic technology, this study found that some libraries have upgraded their technology, changing from a manual to a computerized system and offering Wi-Fi, e-books, laptops, desktop computers, and Chromebooks.

This study also found that entertainment and technology have a significant impact on library access. More libraries are expanding from printed materials to include e-libraries or e-books. However, people who are not familiar with technology, particularly elderly citizens, still face difficulties in dealing with these upgrades. According to Jaeger, P. T, et al., the use of printed books in most libraries has decreased over time<sup>18</sup>. In addition, librarians need to upgrade their own technology skills because most libraries in Mandalay still use manual systems. We also found that some librarians have a negative view of Wi-Fi and e-books.

An examination of how individual personal **characteristics** impact library use revealed that some of the barriers encountered by both users and non-users include poor eyesight and being too busy due to work. This study also found that many young single females are forbidden by senior family members from going to the library alone. To understand more about this, the next study should be conducted from a gender perspective. Non-users that we surveyed stated they do not access the library because reading is not their hobbies and they have to struggle to make a living. Finally, because children do not have enough time to go to libraries on their own, two township IPRD libraries have taken the initiative to create mobile libraries that visit schools. However, these mobile libraries do not extend to all schools and children in Mandalay.

Finally, the **role of public libraries** in communities differs between rural and urban areas. According to the Myanmar Library Survey, libraries play the role of an essential community development center<sup>19</sup>. In addition to information access, people use library space to hold meetings and discuss issues related to community development such as health and agricultural issues. Public libraries, on the other hand, are places where professionals can enhance their computer skills, take language classes, and receive training. This finding is consistent with McClure, et al<sup>20</sup>. This study also found that more libraries offer academic activities such as talks, discussions, panels, book

<sup>14</sup> Zickuhr, et al, 2013; The Asia Foundation, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Susan K. Burke. "Use of public libraries by immigrants." *Reference & User Services Quarterly* (2008): 164-174; Mutshewa, "Information behaviours of non-users of libraries in Botswana," 2010.

<sup>16</sup> The Asia Foundation, *Myanmar Library Survey*, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Paul T. Jaegar, Kim M. Thompson, and Jonathan Lazar. "The Internet and the evolution of library research: The perspective of one longitudinal study." (*The Library Quarterly* 82, no. 1 2012): 75-86.

<sup>19</sup> The Asia Foundation,, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> McClure, "Economic benefits and impacts from public libraries in the State of Florida, " 2000.

clubs, and movie clubs.

There were some **limitations** encountered in the conduct of this survey. It was difficult to recruit users to take the survey because many of them just came to borrow books did not have time for interviews. Users at two of the libraries we visited were primarily children, whom we did not interview due to concerns regarding informed consent. Other libraries did not have any visitors during the time our researchers visited.

We also found that it was difficult to approach some non-users because they did not want to answer survey questions if they did not know who the researchers were. So, some non-users introduced their friends or colleagues to be interviewed. The main challenge we encountered as we conducted interviews was trust building. When we asked some people for their name and age, they became afraid and did not want to answer. If they know the researchers, it is easy to conduct interviews, but researchers have to explain a lot so that the interviewees could understand the questions.

## 7. Recommendations

The following policy recommendations are suggested based on the findings of this study to promote the usage of public libraries in Mandalay. This section also offers recommendations for further study based on the methodology limitations of this study.

### Policy Recommendations

To develop public libraries, all government authorities, the Myanmar library organization, individual public libraries, and members of the public need to collaborate. We recommend engaging in the following activities to promote the usage of libraries among the public.

- a. Marketing and Promotion
- b. Fundraising
- c. Capacity Building
- d. Technology
- e. Complementary Activities

#### Marketing and Promotion

Libraries needed to be promoted to attract more users. It is fundamental that a library needs to be well-known and familiar among public. Then it can receive more users and more donors. Libraries usually attract users who are already interested in books. In order to expand the number and type of users, libraries should create promotional strategies that not only target bookworms, but other members of the public. Libraries should advertise themselves in many ways. Flyers, events, campaigns and social media promotion are all one effective and efficient way to reach out to the public. Finally, libraries need to support services like holding activities and putting Wi-Fi.

#### Fundraising

Financial resources are crucial for the sustainable development of a library. Libraries must pursue the development of sustainable financial sources. Reasonable membership fees, rental fees and other service fees are general

ways to raise funds. Other innovative social enterprise models can draw in additional funds and attract members of the public. Furthermore, libraries should actively search for every possible donation source (both local and international). In general, the government should allocate a greater portion of the budget for library development. They should do this not only for IPRD-run libraries, but also allocate greater government subsidies for community libraries.

### Capacity Building

Human resources are directly related to the success of a library. A skillful librarian can manage library and information resources more effectively and efficiently than one who lacks training. Librarians, especially those who staff community libraries, still need capacity building in both technical and other general skills such as public relations, English, and IT. The government should initiate capacity building programs for librarians. Trainings, seminars, conferences, exchange programs and other activities should be provided for librarians. Moreover, INGOs that focus on community development should also implement programs to build the capacity of librarians.

### Technology

Technology is a great gift that allows us to enter the world of knowledge. Technology can help libraries reach the next level as knowledge hubs. Libraries should be fully equipped with technologies that help users access information and learning. Wi-Fi, computers, tablets, audio books, printers, and e-libraries are all examples of useful technology for libraries. At the same time, people, especially the elderly, need to adapt to new technology and the demands of modern society. They need an orientation on how to handle electronics and how to surf the internet and find data when they first visit the library.

### Complementary Activities

Libraries should not limit their services to book lending. Other activities should also be held to attract more people. Activities such as book clubs, movie clubs and discussion sessions can foster the popularity of libraries and attract more people.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

First, the best way to measure and understand trends in library use is through longitudinal studies. In the future, we recommend that longitudinal studies be conducted to accurately grasp whether library use is increasing or decreasing. Second, this study used qualitative methods to understand how people are using libraries and what barriers prevent access and discourage more people from taking advantage of library resources. Qualitative research is not statistically representative. So, to represent all users, non-users and librarians, quantitative methods should be used in future studies in Mandalay. Larger sample sizes enable the conclusion to be generalized and getting data is high reliability and integrity. Finally, the most common users at public libraries are students. Structure and operation of academic libraries are different from public libraries. By doing research at academic libraries, researchers can use comparative study between academic and public libraries. After doing this comparative research, policy makers will get big pictures to do improvement of both academic and public libraries by understanding strengths and weaknesses of each library. ■

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