

International Conference on Social Sciences & Humanities (ICOSH-UKM2012)
Theme: Knowledge for Social Transformation & Development in the 21st Century

Evaluating the Development of Technopreneurs: A Case Study of PPR Telecenter Jalan Jelatek

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ABSTRACT

Bridging Digital Divide (BDD) is aimed to bridge digital between those who affluent with information and those who don't, thus increasing the socioeconomic status of Malaysians. Telecentre is one of the method used by the government to bridge the digital gap in Malaysia. Issues and matters of this study are how far the effectiveness of telecentre in helping to bridge the digital gap and developed techopreneur for PPR residents in Jalan Jelatek as well as increasing their sosioeconomic. Data were collected through interview and observation. Cumulative data were analysed in descriptive. A total of 20 internet entrepreneurs were selected as respondents. The study found that this programme is capable to give big impact on the socio-economic community, especially for those who know how to seize the opportunity of ICT.

Keywords: BDD, Telecentre, Technopreneurs, socio-economic, ICT

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the problem of the digital divide was also experienced by the urban poors in the early 90's. This matter had prompted the government to implement the digital divide strategy by introducing IT development policies in Malaysia under the national IT agenda which moved from "rippel to tidal wave" meaning from the small wave to the large wave. Under this policy, mobilizing the internet usage policy which is beneficial to the community is created. Implementation of this policy is made through the establishment of electronic community, or commonly known as e-community (Mohd. Safar et.al 2005).

Therefore, Bridging Digital Divide (BDD) Programme or digital gap bridging programme by telecenter for those who have inadequate information access, is implemented to overcome the problem of the digital divide that existed via telecentre programme by making the urban poor IT literate. Thus they can make use of the digital opportunities available to increase their income, living standards and their socio-economic status to a

better level through ICT initiatives such as entrepreneurship activities and in the process moving towards the smart city (Arun, 1999).

This study was undertaken to examine the impact of the BDD programme (via telecenter) which was implemented by KPKT that is eradication of information poverty in urban communities. However, the scope of this study had been scaled down to the implementation of the digital divide (bridging digital divide-BDD) using telecenters that have been implemented since 2003 in an effort to bridge the digital gap between low-income and high-income earners in order to produce technopreneurs. It is expected that the creation of informative society and technopreneurs is capable to take charge of the country's economy development in the future .

Telecenter and Technopreneur

The term telecentre is a generic one for all kinds of arrangements – Rural Knowledge Centre, Information Kiosks, Village Knowledge Centres, etc – that seek to provide shared and mediated access to information and services by using new technologies, especially computers and Internet. Meanwhile, technopreneurs is a simple entrepreneurship in a technology intensive context in the globalization era (Bessant & Rush, 2005). It is a process of merging technology prowess and entrepreneurial talent and skills. Entrepreneurship is a way of thinking and acting that is opportunity obsessed, holistic approach and leadership balanced for the purpose of wealth creation. It is a search for change, responding to change, and exploiting opportunities. Innovation is the specific tool of entrepreneurs, the means by which they exploit change as an opportunity for a different business or a different service (Castells, 1989).

Scope and measurement of variables

This study is implemented to observe the roles of telecentre in supporting and promoting K-economy which was introduced by the government to develop the country's economy via the involvement of information society. The basic of telecentre development is to solve the problem of the digital divide that exists in Malaysia as the bridging digital gap programs implemented by the government. This study only focuses on telecentre in PPR Jalan Jelatek which was run by KPKT. PPR Jalan Jelatek's Telecentre was chosen because it was the first telecentre in urban areas in developing local community (KPKT Website).

An example of programme implemented by the telecenter PPR Jalan Jelatek in support of the K-economy is the implementation of the programme to produce technopreneurs among the locals. This study is focused on the effectiveness of

technopreneuship programmes organized by the PPR Jalan Jelatek's Telecentre under the Smart Community programme.

Previous studies

Studies related to "telecenters" or community center has been conducted by a number of international researchers. Cecchini and Raina (2004) worked on the telecenter projects undertaken in India, also known as "Wired Village" in Waran and have summarized four methods that can be used for socio-economic development, especially in rural communities. First, the government should provide information related to facilities required by the locals which is suitable with their capability towards the ICT before any ICT project is implemented. Second, things related to materials and softwares that will be used to actuate the local's economy. Software that will be used ought to provide feedback from the community in advance so that the software is not too difficult for villagers to learn later. Third, any programme to be implemented must take into account the interests and concerns of both elder and children users. These groups are usually the most difficult to accept changes, hence it is very important to take into account these groups' opinions before any facilities are built; and fourth is related to the operational level where management from the bottom to upper level is the best way to bring ICT programmes to those who need it. The 'bottom-up' approach should be taken into account in implementing a policy or programme. This is because the lack of understanding between the two parties, will render the policy useless.

Mathur & Ambani (2005) in their research stated how technology and ICT knowledge are so valuable to help communities to compete in the global economy if we know how to seize the opportunities. Their research also found that ICT had opened wider economy opportunities to rural communities in India to increase their economic status. The facilities and the skills of using the internet had enabled the individuals and the small-scaled businessman accessing the open market to run their business activities with lower cost and larger profit. The development of ICT technologies have driven the development of new industries and economy in India till now. Nevertheless, the benefits of ICT use in India is still not holistic because the level of awareness and IT literacy among the people of India, especially those living in rural areas is still low cause they are still far behind compared to the urban communities who have used ICT to access information and run their economic activities.

Not only that, the issues related to the information society has long been discussed by many academicians and economics since 1950-1960's in line with the growing development of technology at that time. Based on that, Information Society Theory by Halimah (2003) in Juhana et.al (2008) was introduced. The theory stated that information society or knowledge society have distinctive characteristics that are closely related to socio-economic impact of a

particular community. Obvious impact in terms of access, use and distribution of the information can be seen in their economic and social life. According to the theory as well, the information society can create an imbalance between those informative and uninformative society. This situation is said to occur in intersociety and intrasociety. Intersociety refers to the gap between informative society in developed country and uninformative society in developing country. Whereas, Intrasociety refers to the gap between informative society and uninformative society in the same country.

Juhana et.al (2008) commenting on this theory explain that communities with information can be considered as the richest, free and possess high self-esteem. Therefore, developing countries need to reengineer their community in order to produce informative society. In fact, all members in the society must realize the importance of information and possess specific skills that can make them members in the informative society (Castells, 1996).

Methodology

This study used qualitative methods which based on the scientific methods in social science research. To implement the qualitative method, the researcher has conducted three common steps performed by researchers in social science research, namely, selection of respondents, data collection and data analysis. To increase the reliability of this study, researchers have used qualitative analytical research methods, outlined by scientific methods of social science research. Qualitative method was chosen because it coincided with the number of respondents or groups studied i.e. limited and small. Selected respondents consisted of participants in entrepreneurship program organized by PPR Jalan Jelatek's telecentres which consist of the poor and those who are less familiar with ICT-based business.

Findings

The results of the BDD programme in PPRT Jalan Jelatek found that the program has a positive impact on the local community. The impact can be seen in the changes experienced by the local community, especially those who participated in this program seriously when their socioeconomic status began to turn improve. Some of them became successful technopreneurs and it was undeniable that not all participants in the program ended with success. In addition, this program is also said to have provided employment opportunities for the local community that seize the opportunity provided by adding an edge of knowledge and ICT to find the jobs for themselves without seeking help from others. This is supported from the interviews and observations in the research area. The study also found that they are potentiality in generate high income and value jobs, new technology enterprise, especially

ICT business which is capable of generating new jobs, new knowledge, and improving productivity and at the same time enlarging and sustaining telecenter entrepreneurial base.

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