

EXPLORATORY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN STRENGTHENING THE GOVERNANCE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING IN MALAYSIA

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Published online: 30 April 2025

To cite this article: Sharifah Syahirah, Nisrin Ishak and Marsila Ahmad. 2025. Exploratory issues and challenges in strengthening the governance of rural development training in Malaysia. *Kajian Malaysia* 43(1): 95–116. <https://doi.org/10.21315/km2025.43.1.5>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.21315/km2025.43.1.5>

ABSTRACT

Efficient management of training programmes within a public training institution necessitates systematic planning and execution to attain programme objectives and ensure substantial impacts on participants. Despite the aspirations for a rural institution in Malaysia to become a comprehensive training centre of excellence, a review of its performance from 2016 to 2020 revealed a shortfall in reaching benchmark standards. This study employs qualitative methods, including document analysis, focus groups, and interviews, to identify and address issues and challenges affecting the governance of training programmes at a rural training institution in Bangi, Malaysia. The findings highlight 18 key challenges, such as inefficient human resource management, programme success weaknesses, and the absence of a long-term strategic plan. The study recommends developing a comprehensive strategic training plan, enhancing coordination and communication, establishing systematic participant selection processes, updating and maintaining training modules, reducing reliance on external experts, and improving financial allocation strategies. These insights provide valuable guidance for enhancing the management of rural training centres dedicated to human capital training and research, serving as a reference and benchmark for improvement.

Keywords: governance, issues, challenges, rural development, training

INTRODUCTION

Training programmes in rural communities are crucial for enhancing human capital and improving societal well-being, aligning with the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development's vision of rural well-being (Kementerian Pembangunan Luar Bandar 2019). Despite this alignment, studies indicate that coordination, integration and alignment between the training needs of rural communities and the institutions providing these services remain challenging (Esparcia and Abbasi 2020). This involves understanding the types of training that address individual needs, the specific industry context, collective leadership and ongoing cooperation.

The real problem lies in the operational challenges faced by training institutions in rural Malaysia. Fulfilling the role of institutions as training providers presents tension, especially when public policies restrict the operational activities required for effective coordination of training centres. These restrictions can lead to inefficiencies in governance, negatively impacting the effectiveness of training programmes. Addressing these aspects is fundamental to ensuring that training programmes are effectively facilitated and successfully implemented.

A systematic and high-quality approach to human capital development is essential for fostering prosperity in rural life, particularly in economic, educational, and social dimensions. Effective management and implementation of training programmes necessitate strategic and comprehensive planning to achieve overarching goals. Establishing good governance is crucial in enhancing institutional management professionalism and garnering trust from all stakeholders (Yulianti and Suryandari 2017).

In the face of rapid societal changes, continuous learning through training programmes is indispensable for rural communities. Providing ample opportunities and targeted training is vital for community development. Past research indicates that participation in agricultural skills training programmes, focusing on areas such as rice cultivation, animal husbandry and fisheries, has effectively elevated household income and business performance (Kunjuraman 2019; Mahmud et al. 2017; Noor and Dola 2010). Incorporating relevant experiences into training programmes can enhance the engagement of low-qualified and non-working rural youth. Additionally, introducing innovative approaches to training programmes is imperative for increasing productivity (Simões and Brito do Rio 2020; Kulkarni and Narkhede 2016; Tenzin 2018). Therefore, a paradigm shift in rural skills training, applying the theory of social learning and the communities of practice (COP) method, is necessary. COP involves groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better through regular

interaction. These approaches facilitate a more holistic and participatory learning experience in rural settings (Landini, Brites and Mathot y Rebolé 2017).

In Malaysia, a training centre has been established with the core function of organising and monitoring various training programmes specifically for rural communities. This centre aims to become a centre of excellence in training, research, consultancy, publishing and rural innovation. The training areas focused on by this centre include rural management, rural leadership, entrepreneurship, and skills development (Sharifah et al. 2021).

This study, therefore, focuses on identifying issues and challenges in the governance of these training programmes. Analysing these problems is crucial for the training institution to identify the causes of governance inefficiencies that may ultimately impact both the participants and the organisation of the programmes. To achieve the objectives and effectiveness of the training, improvements in training methods need to be evaluated in terms of their appropriateness and impact. It is essential for the training institution to formulate a comprehensive strategy so that training programmes can be managed more systematically and with minimal negative impact.

By addressing these governance issues, the training centre can enhance its effectiveness and better serve the rural communities, aligning with its vision of becoming a centre of excellence. This study is important to assist the training centre in restructuring the management procedures of the training programme to reduce weaknesses and improve the effectiveness of future training programmes. Improvements in training programme modules should be made from time to time to ensure they remain dynamic and responsive to the evolving needs of rural communities (Babel and Sharma 2016; Iqbal et al. 2010; Kobba et al. 2019; Moreira and Martins 2009; International Labour Office 2009).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Governance of training programmes in public training institutions, both local and international, has been the subject of extensive debate. In Malaysia, these challenges are particularly pronounced in rural institutions that strive to fulfill their roles as training providers. This literature review explores the issues and challenges faced by these institutions, focusing on governance inefficiencies and their impact on training outcomes. It also examines the alignment of training programmes with national rural development agendas.

Governance in rural institutions often struggles with playing their pivotal roles as training providers. Studies have shown that despite various training programmes being conducted over several years, the outcomes remain suboptimal due to ineffective governance in managing the training (Esparcia and Abbasi 2020). Facilitating training is crucial, yet issues and challenges remain scarce. The impact of training on participants is relatively low. For instance, Noor Azmi, Safar and Jessica (2015) highlighted that management's ability to plan and implement leadership development programmes regularly can significantly increase the transfer of training within the organisation.

Similarly, Guan, Ryan and Raj Gururajan (2006) emphasised the necessity of providing training for staff, underscored by insights from comprehensive research and analysis. Learning and training are recognised as enablers of knowledge management, essential for enhancing the knowledge and performance of employees. However, inefficient human resource management, where employees are not effectively utilised, managed, or supported, can lead to various governance challenges in training programmes. Effective leadership is crucial to ensuring that knowledge management efforts are well-managed within the organisation.

National Rural Development Agendas and Policy Delivery

The eKasih micro-programme showed a positive relationship between the participation time period and the number of loans to household income, suggesting that the amount of training does not have a significant impact on household income (Abdullah et al. 2018). Therefore, improvements in training methods need to be studied in terms of the appropriateness of training experience to achieve the objectives and effectiveness of the training.

Innovative approaches in training programmes are necessary for increasing productivity. Simões and Brito do Rio (2020) emphasise that incorporating appropriate experiences in training programmes can increase the involvement of low-qualified and non-working rural youth. Training programmes should also consider changes in participants' attitudes and actively involve them (Noor and Dola 2010; Simões and Brito do Rio 2020). Unofficial skills training is often more suitable for attracting rural youth (Chea and Huijsmans 2017; Rosenfeld 2019).

Previous research in agricultural skills training programmes for rural populations, such as rice cultivation, animal husbandry and fisheries, has proven effective in augmenting household income and business performance (Mahmud et al. 2017; Noor and Dola 2010). Nonetheless, the combination of skills training and subsequent support, including crop materials, livestock breeds, agricultural inputs

and associated services, is crucial for enhancing the capabilities of those with lower productivity (Mahmud et al. 2017).

Theory of Social Learning and Communities of Practice (COP)

Landini, Brites and Mathot y Rebolé (2017) have proposed a paradigm shift towards rural skills training by applying the theory of social learning and the COP method. These methods involve groups sharing a concern or passion, learning how to improve through regular interaction. Transformations in training content should be implemented to enhance its effectiveness. Sharing experiences from practitioners should be emphasised so that participants deepen their real experiences, reflective practices are implemented, and practical training is prioritised over theory.

Entrepreneurship Training Programmes

Entrepreneurship training programmes play a significant role in rural progress by improving living standards, opening up business opportunities and reducing the income gap between rural and urban residents (Hazarika 2016; Kulkarni and Narkhede 2016; Patowary and Parida 2014; Prayitno, Noor and Hidayat 2020). These programmes should be comprehensive, including practical elements such as hands-on activities, interaction with other entrepreneurs, partnerships with financial divisions and successful entrepreneurs.

Continuous Improvement of Training Modules

Improvements to training programme modules should be made periodically to keep them dynamic and responsive to changing needs (Babel and Sharma 2016; Iqbal et al. 2010; Kobba et al. 2019; Moreira and Martins 2009; International Labour Office 2009). Training should involve group learning, integration with technology, and enhanced networking and lobbying skills (Collett 2010; Pratiwi and Suzuki 2017).

METHOD AND STUDY AREA

This study integrates multiple data collection methods to comprehensively explore the governance challenges faced by rural training programmes. To thoroughly identify these issues and challenges, we selected one of the public training institutions under the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (MRRD). Our qualitative study consisted of several phases, including document analysis, focus groups and in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interview technique was

chosen because it is an efficient way to obtain a significant amount of information in a short period of time (Sa'adi, Siti Arni and Hasan al-Banna 2019).

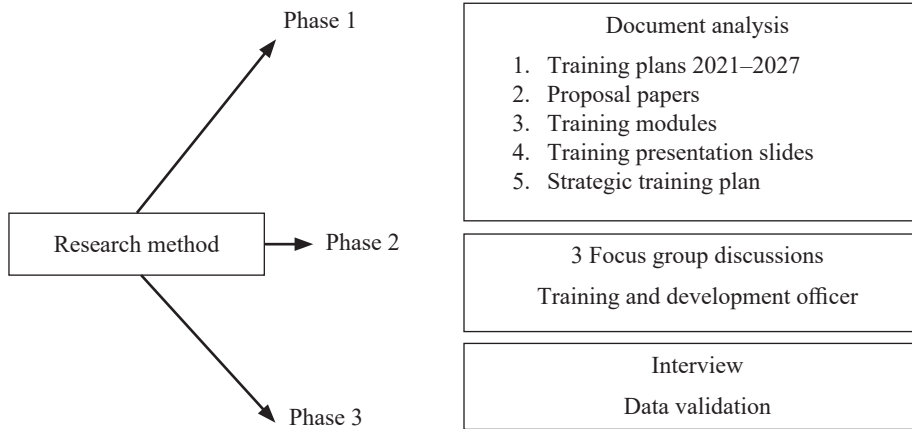


Figure 1: Research methodology.

The research methodology is illustrated in Figure 1 and involves several key components. Firstly, a detailed document analysis was conducted, focusing on reviewing previous data, including training plans from 2021 to 2027, proposal papers, training modules, training presentation slides and strategic training plans. This secondary data analysis provided a foundational understanding of the existing training frameworks and identified potential areas of improvement. To complement the document analysis, three focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with training and development officers. These discussions aimed to gather in-depth insights into the practical challenges and experiences faced by those directly involved in the training programmes. Additionally, individual interviews were conducted with key stakeholders to further explore specific governance issues and to validate the data obtained from the focus groups. Finally, data validation was undertaken to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the findings. This approach not only facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the governance challenges but also enabled the formulation of strategic recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and management of rural training programmes in Malaysia.

Document Analysis

The document analysis was conducted to explore information on training facilities and activities carried out over the past five years. This analysis is essential for providing an overview of current training initiatives, evaluating their purposes and outcomes, examining the frequency of training sessions conducted annually and identifying the types of training provided. Information was gathered from nine

primary sources, including Training Plans (2021–2027), Training Proposal Papers, Training Modules, Strategic Plan (2021–2025) and other supporting documents. The findings from the document analysis are integrated into the 3P assessment framework. Figure 2 illustrates the 3P assessment framework specifically designed for the study of the respective institution.

3P INDICATORS		
Planning	Implementation	Achievement
1. Rationale of the training interest based on facts 2. Accuration of the target group 3. Training design aligned with the Ministry's Key Performance Indicator (KPI) requirements 4. Justification of allocation for training 5. Clear and aligned objectives with the target group 6. Method of training implementation 7. Facilitator selection method 8. Module development planning 9. Considering relevant stakeholder collaboration 10. Training location based on population needs	1. Systematic and fair participant selection method 2. Method of obtaining feedback from participants 3. Systematic data management of participant information 4. Periodic follow-up training 5. Method to ensure the training materials suitable for target group 6. Obtaining cooperation with stakeholders 7. Method for measuring participants' understanding (knowledge transfer)	1. Measurement of the effectiveness of training on participant motivation 2. Measurement of the effectiveness of training on thinking and knowledge enhancement 3. Measurement of the effectiveness of training on participant action (after the programme) 4. Analysis of feedback from participants 5. Proposed improvements from the analysis of accepted feedback 6. Periodic measurement of effectiveness 7. Measurement of prudent financial usage 8. Measurement of the effectiveness of collaboration with stakeholders

Figure 2: 3P assessment framework.

The 3P assessment framework is a systematic and comprehensive evaluation model used to assess the effectiveness of a project or programme—particularly in the context of training or capacity building (Sharifah et al. 2022). “3P” refers to the three main components: Planning, Implementation, and Achievement. The 3P framework helps ensure that a programme is conducted in a well-organised, systematic, and impactful manner, while also providing complete documentation essential for monitoring, auditing, and continuous improvement. It serves as a valuable tool for institutions or organisers in evaluating and enhancing the quality of the training offered.

In this planning phase, we assess the preparation and design of training programmes. Document analysis focuses on evaluating the goals, target audience, curriculum development, resource allocation and scheduling of training sessions. Key questions include the objectives of each training programme, the needs assessment of the target audience, resource allocation and selection of the key stakeholders. The second indicator is the implementation phase where we examine the delivery and management of training programmes. The analysis examines the methodologies employed, participants' selections, data management, and the measurement of participants' knowledge. In addition, the feedback mechanisms are also considered in this study.

In the final assessment is the achievement. We measured the effectiveness of the training programmes, the outcomes and their impacts. The document review measures the effectiveness, participant motivation, and overall impact on participants and the institution.

By systematically applying the 3P assessment framework to the data collected from the document analysis, this study identifies strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in the governance of training programmes.

Focus Group

The current study applies focus group to identify the main issues and challenges faced by the officers. Three different sessions were conducted, where a total of 14 officers from the training and development department were selected to participate in this study. The participant is chosen based on the several criteria. First, the participants were screened based on their backgrounds and their involvement in training activities. Second, the participants were those who had been involved in the strategic plan for the rural development training department for over five years. Thirdly, we identified key individuals responsible for managing training and development across various regions in Peninsular Malaysia. Additionally, participants were selected based on their roles as representatives of their respective departments. Establishing specific criteria is crucial, as the feedback should encompass various units that cover the entire rural training development area. Therefore, it is essential to collect information that contributes to focus group and in-depth interviews.

Table 1: Focus group discussion

Subject	Method	Participants	Target aim
Session 1	FGD1	Four senior officers in training development department	Gather information on the 3P (planning, implementation, and achievement) and assess training performance for the period 2016–2020
Session 2	FGD2	Five senior officers in training management department	
Session 3	FGD3	Two senior officers and three senior executives in training strategic plan department	Obtain information and map out the training strategic plan

The current study applied three different sessions with officers directly involved in managing the training programmes. Based on Table 1, Sessions 1 and 2 are conducted to gather information on the 3P and assess training performance for the period 2016–2020. Session 3, on the other hand, is conducted to gather information and develop the training strategic plan.

To critically validate the information gathered in the FGD, the researchers conducted three series of semi-structured interviews with a total of 14 officers who are directly involved with the training and strategic planning. This approach ensured that a comprehensive perspective was obtained from all relevant stakeholders. The officers were carefully selected to finalise and validate the information from the previous focus group sessions. The interview sessions were recorded and transcribed using applications that support research conduct. These interviews aimed to clarify issues, identify causes, and provide suggestions to justify and validate the findings from the document analysis and FGD, thereby ensuring the accuracy of the information.

This approach aligns with the methodology used in the study by Nisrin and Syafiq (2023), where a similar strategy was employed to examine managerial perspectives on customer co-creation through an engagement platform. By involving a diverse group of officers, the study ensured a robust validation process, enhancing the reliability and integrity of the findings (Nisrin and Syafiq 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The finding suggests that there are 18 issues and challenges classified into 4 main aspects: planning, training implementation and evaluation, as well as governance. These four aspects are gathered based on the 3P framework.

Table 2: Issues, factors and recommendations

No.	Dimension	Issues	Factors	Recommendations
1.	Planning	5	6	9
2.	Implementation	6	7	16
3.	Evaluation	3	5	5
4.	Governance	4	6	5
	Total	18	24	35

The study evaluated the governance of training programmes across four key dimensions: planning, implementation, evaluation, and governance. In the planning dimension, five significant issues were identified, along with six contributing factors, leading to nine recommendations aimed at improving the strategic planning process. For the implementation phase, 6 critical issues and 7 contributing factors were uncovered, resulting in 16 recommendations focused on enhancing delivery methods and optimising logistical arrangements. The evaluation dimension highlighted three primary issues and five contributing factors, with five targeted recommendations to improve the assessment of training outcomes. Finally, the governance dimension revealed four key issues and six contributing factors, leading to five recommendations to strengthen governance practices. Overall, the study identified a total of 18 issues and 24 contributing factors, culminating in 35 recommendations. These findings provide a comprehensive framework for improving the planning, implementation, evaluation, and governance of training programmes, offering actionable insights to address existing challenges and enhance the effectiveness of rural training initiatives.

Dimension 1: Planning

From the training planning perspective, the findings revealed that no strategic training plan was in place for this institution during the years 2016–2020. Training implementation relied solely on training schedules. According to the Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU), an agency should develop a comprehensive strategic plan to ensure clear and achievable agency directions. A strategic training plan refers to a formal document that outlines the training goals, objectives, strategies and actions for the institution. It serves as a reference for all departments within the institution to ensure cohesive and aligned efforts toward common training objectives. This plan provides an organised and systematic framework to help agencies achieve

their goals, addressing both current training needs and anticipating future changes. Many officers were unable to understand the purpose of the strategic training plan due to its absence, leading to uncoordinated training efforts. A robust and flexible strategic plan would assist agencies in facing future changes, making the implementation of training programmes more organised and controlled. This issue is supported by the following narratives:

I tried to find our organisation strategic training plan for 2016–2020, but couldn't find it. (FGD1, Officer 1)

I never knew about the strategic plan. I was only given KPIs during the annual work target setting. (FGD2, Officer 6)

Additionally, overly ambitious training planning also contributes to the failure of training programmes. The study found that this issue exists due to the lack of training needs analysis, disorganised training planning, and top-down directives from time to time. This issue is supported by the following narratives:

After setting the schedule, unexpected course directives emerge from certain parties. Now I focus on quantity; I need to implement training based on KPIs. I only focus on the quantity – the number of implementations. We need to achieve 10 courses per year. (FGD2, Officer 4)

This is supported by Yulianti and Suryandari (2017) who state the need for a well-understood governance system at various management levels to ensure effective implementation. Effective communication between top-down managers is crucial to ensure clear instructions and effective programme implementation.

Furthermore, the issue of careless participant selection and sometimes arbitrary choices often leads to problems in training programmes. Dependence on participants from other agencies and state governments results in a heterogeneous group, especially for courses such as Mosque Institution and Village Development and Security Committee courses. Clear criteria and requirements should be the main focus when selecting participants to achieve comprehensive training objectives. This issue is supported by the following narratives:

Our participant list depends on the involvement of various agencies, such as the Islamic Religious Department and the Youth Department. (FGD2, Officer 6)

We sometimes receive participant names one day before the course, so we don't have time to conduct an analysis. (FGD3, Officer 11)

This is also supported by Mohd Anas and Norasmah (2021) in their study, which states that selecting the right participants for a training programme is crucial, besides providing selection criteria for participants. Therefore, institutions need to provide clear requirements and criteria for participants that align with the suitability of the target group in order to be in line with the training objectives.

The lack of trainers and experts to conduct training programmes is also a challenge in managing a training programme. Frequent turnover among officers responsible for training has led to this issue. Since the Training of Trainers programme is not systematically implemented, officers taking over these duties lack the necessary skills to handle training. The following are related narratives:

Officers keep moving and changing. It's difficult to find someone who is truly an expert. (FGD1, Officer 2)

The main challenge is to make the trainer an expert as the audience consists of experienced individuals, which makes it difficult to identify suitable officers due to transfers and changes in personnel... that's the cause. (FGD3, Officer 12)

Inappropriate selection of training locations is also identified as a challenge in strengthening training programme governance in Malaysia. This issue has led to participants' lack of commitment to attending training sessions. Additionally, the study found that location selection does not align with the recommended training type. The following narratives are related to this issue based on the authors' survey in 2021, "The course is about homestays, but it is conducted in a hotel. We don't get the feel." and "Training should include visits to successful homestays."

Dimension 2: Implementation of Training Programmes

In this aspect, six issues have been identified as weaknesses in the implementation of training programmes in this training institution. The study findings indicate that 36% of the planned programmes were not executed. This is due to the cancellation and postponement of training programmes, which were intended to provide ad hoc and top-down training. The following narratives support this finding: "We had to accept that the planned training could not be implemented because it made way for new programmes that were directed" (FGD3, Officer 11).

To address this weakness, it is proposed that the training institution allocate 80% of the planned training and 20% for ad hoc training. Additionally, the institution should categorise the training into four categories: (1) mandatory, (2) advanced, (3) general, and (4) specific. Training schedules should also be updated and disseminated online.

The second identified issue relates to non-compliance with training procedures. This situation arises due to the lack of procedures and standard operating procedures for module development, implementation, and improvement by the training institution. This is supported by the following narratives:

We will create a schedule, prepare programmes for implementation. In the past, modules, schedules were not synchronised, but now they are handled by the policy section and appear more organised. Our management manuals do not have a standard format. (FGD2, Officer 3)

If we follow the training procedure, we do everything, starting from programme planning, preparing proposal papers, programme procedures, procurement, allowances, financial payments, and participant certificates. (FGD3, Officer 12)

Therefore, each training institution should provide development, implementation, and improvement procedures for its modules. The institution should also establish a special evaluation committee to review the modules and periodically analyse their impact.

Furthermore, the study also found that the training modules in this institution are incomplete and outdated. This occurs because the existing modules are not updated and rely solely on modules developed by previous officers. It is also due to the lack of suitability analysis for the implemented modules. Additionally, there is no systematic storage and management method to ensure the preservation and relevance of these modules. This is supported by the following narrative:

Most of the modules are collaborations with external parties... some of this organisation modules are not saved as copies... some exist, some don't... we ask the officers to translate the modules into hard copies, not just slides or notes... we make them modules... because some of them are missing... now we create them according to our format... objectives... targets... participants... teachers... lesson plans... assessment methods... outcomes. (FGD1, Officer 3)

Therefore, the training institution should revise its branding as a centre of excellence that conducts comprehensive training to ensure continuous improvement of the training programmes.

The study findings also indicate that some training institutions excessively rely on external expertise and lack cooperation with non-governmental organisations. This results in all information and modules being possessed only by the stakeholders and not stored in the institution's repository. This issue is supported by the following narrative:

Our unit focuses more on administrative matters. We lean towards implementation. How we manage participants for courses organised in Malaysia. The trainers are entirely academic figures who are experts in their respective slots. (FGD2, Officer 5)

To address this issue, the training institution needs to clarify the terms of reference to stakeholders, ensuring their understanding of the importance of the conducted training for the target groups. It is also important to obtain and share information and feedback analysis with stakeholders. The training institution is advised to hold discussion sessions with stakeholders to make improvements based on the analysis of feedback.

Dimension 3: Training Evaluation

The study findings reveal three issues under the training achievement aspect. The first issue is the lack of implementation of participant feedback analysis. Participant feedback analysis is crucial for improving the quality of the conducted training programmes. Through the received feedback, programme management can identify weaknesses in previous training programmes and develop higher-quality programmes. The research findings indicate that this training institute does not adhere to training procedures and standards, and there is no assessment of the programme's impact. Furthermore, the institution does not systematically document participant evaluation and feedback. This issue is supported by the following narratives:

Did it achieve the goal of empowering human capital and promoting the well-being of rural communities? We have to ask the senior officers... there might be impact studies... related to mosque institutions... but we have to find where... around 2015. (FGD1, Officer 1)

I conducted a field study on homestays, but I'm unsure where the results are located. That was for the 10th Malaysia Plan, but for the 11th Malaysia Plan... this organisation doesn't have it... but for Basic Homestays, Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture (MOTAC) has it... under Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). (FGD2, Officer 4)

Additionally, the lack of information collection regarding participants' success poses a major challenge in enhancing the management of training programmes. This issue arises because the training institution does not systematically record participants' achievements. Consequently, measuring knowledge enhancement cannot be effectively implemented. This is further driven by a lack of follow-up communication with participants after the completion of the training programme. This issue is supported by the following narrative:

For Basic Homestays, this organisation does not create it... but MOTAC does... maybe I can get the soft copy... continuation and empowerment... only ordinary assessment... indicators are the number of participants or series. Specific studies exist for homestays, but it is uncertain for other training. For homestays, we evaluate how many successfully register as homestay operators under MOTAC. For SKM (National Skills Certification), it's the percentage of pass rates. (Interview, Officer 4).

The third issue identified under the training evaluation aspect is the non-implementation of training and follow-up actions. This occurs because the training institution focuses solely on the quantity of training and participants' attendance without considering the quality of the training. Moreover, the implementation of ad hoc programmes prevents the analysis of data and follow-up training. The following narratives support this issue:

For other core areas, there are no advanced courses due to limited budget and facilities. The training we provide is only at the basic level. The demand is very high, but there is no capacity to continue with more practical advanced training. Assessing achievements is difficult. But in terms of the number of participants, we already have 300,000 participants from various courses. But in terms of training empowerment, there is none. (FGD3, Officer 13)

Dimension 4: Governance Challenges in Training Management

There are four key challenges related to training management in public training institutions. The first challenge is the absence of a strategic plan (2016–2020). The research findings have revealed that officers at the public training institution lack information regarding the institution's strategic plan for the period 2016–2020. All activities are planned and implemented based solely on directives from top management. This issue is supported by the following narratives:

We actually looked for the Strategic Plan for the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (RMK11), but we couldn't find it... we couldn't find the document... we had to ask people from before... the document just doesn't exist... the director said forget about the old plan, start with a new one. (FGD3, Officer 11)

My strategic plan is not visible, so the work is done based on directives from the boss. (FGD3, Officer 12)

Furthermore, the unorganised/inadequate/ineffective human resource management also poses a challenge in strengthening training programmes in the Malaysian Public Training Institution. Inefficient human resource management controls, such as unsystematic task delegation and unclear job scopes, have created this challenge. As a result, new officers rely on old abandoned files as a source of reference. Vacant positions that have not been filled also contribute to this problem.

Our human resources are insufficient compared to the workload we have. We cannot assess the quality of the courses due to a lack of manpower. (FGD1, Officer 3)

The training institution should establish an online system for systematic task delegation and file management (cloud-based) and analyse human resource needs based on existing workloads and current strategic planning to address the issue of insufficient human resource management.

The third challenge in strengthening the governance of training centres is the uncertain financial allocation for training. The cause of this problem is that the allocation changes according to the ad hoc demands of new programmes that need to be implemented based on management directives. This issue is supported by the following narrative:

Why are some programmes not implemented?... it usually depends on the current situation. In the past, it was because we followed the directives at that time, sudden new courses that needed to be implemented caused overlapping dates... when there are too many ongoing courses directed, we have to delay or cancel the original course because there is not enough time or because the allocated budget was withdrawn for the ongoing courses. (FGD3, Officer 13)

To ensure there are no financial-related issues, public training centres should determine a fixed number of training programmes and allocate only 20% of ad hoc training, including the distribution of financial resources for planned training.

The final challenge under the governance aspect is the ineffective access and dissemination system as a hub for rural community training. The cause of this issue is the failure of training centres to update current training information and the lack of a comprehensive website. The absence of success stories regarding rural achievements has also resulted in limited exposure to the training centre as a hub for rural community training.

We only know it ourselves... but it's not documented... but in terms of homestay entrepreneurs' income generation that database is held by MOTAC... all entrepreneurs have to undergo organisation's training before they can register. (FGD2, Officer 5)

This organisation is excellent... but only the leaders, only they know about this organisation... we lack promotion. (FGD2, Officer 6)

Therefore, the organisation should appoint administrators for the website and social media platforms along with a list of tasks to ensure that information is regularly updated.

Data Analysis and Validity

The data gathered from the FGD and interviews were analysed using a rigorous qualitative data analysis approach. Each session was recorded and transcribed, ensuring accurate capture of the participants' insights. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and themes across the data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the governance challenges faced by rural training programmes. This method ensures that the findings are grounded in the real experiences and perspectives of the officers directly involved in training and strategic planning.

In addition, the current study's findings align with existing literature on the importance of strategic planning and effective governance in training programmes. For instance, the absence of a strategic training plan aligns with MAMPU's guidelines, which emphasise the necessity of a comprehensive strategic plan for clear and achievable agency directions (Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit 2019). The issues identified in our study, such as the lack of coordination and the ad hoc nature of training implementation, are supported by Yulianti and Suryandari's (2017) findings on the need for well-understood governance systems and effective top-down communication.

The problem of inappropriate participant selection and arbitrary choices is corroborated by Mohd Anas and Norasmah (2021), who stress the importance of clear criteria for participant selection to ensure training effectiveness. Furthermore, the challenge of relying heavily on external experts without systematic knowledge transfer aligns with broader discussions on the necessity of building internal capacities within organisations (Nisrin and Syafiq 2023).

CONCLUSION

Every organisation, whether big or small, public or private, that implements training programmes will inevitably face various challenges. The research findings reveal several challenges encountered in strengthening the governance of training programmes in Malaysia, such as failures in planning, implementation, evaluation, and management of these training programmes. All these challenges need to be effectively addressed by the management to ensure the success of the conducted training programmes.

To realise the goal of strengthening the governance of training programmes in the Malaysian Public Training Institution, this study has developed 10 strategies that need to be implemented. Under these 10 strategies, there are 16 programmes and 52 initiatives that will be carried out to achieve the set 54 target indicators. The Training Strategic Plan (2021–2025) has been formulated based on the MRRD Strategic Plan and is aligned with the Centre of Rural Excellence Master Plan for Rural Excellence (MRRD) 2021–2025. The strategic focus, strategies, programmes, initiatives and targets that have been planned will contribute to the targeted achievements, taking into account the needs and expectations of the target groups, especially rural communities. The achievements each year should be monitored, analysed and periodically reported. This process ensures that performance is assessed and improvements are implemented. If the achievements are less satisfactory, reviews and follow-up actions should be conducted to ensure the end-of-term targets are achieved. For future strategic planning, the preparation of a new plan should be initiated earlier based on the analysis of the current term's annual achievements to ensure continuous sustainability. The development of this strategic plan will assist this organisation in formulating training agendas in a more organised and systematic manner for the well-being of rural communities.

To address the recurring issues and challenges that often lead to failures in managing training programmes in the Malaysian Public Training Institution, eight immediate initiatives need to be taken. Firstly, the Public Training Institution should serve as an information hub for training programmes under other MRRD

agencies, particularly Department of Orang Asli Development, Community Development Division, Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority, Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority and Majlis Amanah Rakyat. Additionally, the public training institution should also serve as a training hub that provides information and educates stakeholders on the importance of promoting the well-being of rural communities. Furthermore, the training plan should be the core element in the strategic plan of the public training institution since 70% of the main activities in the institution revolve around training.

The fourth initiative is that every training programme should adhere to the training implementation procedures using the 3P assessment framework provided by consultants. To ensure that training centres can focus on delivering training according to the needs of rural communities, ad hoc directives from superiors should be limited to only 20%. Financial allocations for the public training institution should also be increased for the purpose of infrastructure improvement, trainers, and training programmes. The seventh initiative is to maximise the enhancement of the training centre's image through the empowerment of social media, logo rebranding, and website development. Lastly, the developed strategic plan should be implemented with agile and systematic planning to deliver effective impact.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research is funded by the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (MRRD). Special thanks to the consultants from Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia (UPTM) in Kuala Lumpur and officers from various MRRD agencies, including Farah Fatin Alysa Fauzi, Zulfariah Ghazani and Aziyani Azizan, for providing input, ideas, data and analysis for this manuscript. Thank you is extended to Mrs. Asmah Yusof for her assistance in providing information for this study.

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