

How Can We Inculcate Reading And Bring Back The Library Culture Among Malaysians?

Malaysian Digest

17 November 2016

Back in the day, libraries used to be sanctuaries for piles of handwritten scrolls, manuscripts, and then it advanced into rooms filled with printed, bound paper books. But now the digital age has turned its back on libraries – with access to Internet at home, and mobile access rising steadily, particularly among younger people, reading has now turned into something of a digital realm.

According to www.worldpopulationreview.com, there are almost 1.5 million people in Kuala Lumpur, more than half a million people in Petaling Jaya, more than 700, 000 in Subang and over 480, 000 in Shah Alam. Yet the average number of visitors to libraries per day is only a small fraction of the population in the areas.

What lies ahead for libraries as a knowledge haven, now that thousands of books have been compressed into singular digital devices?

To get a better understanding on how we can encourage the library culture among Malaysians, we sought experts' opinions on how libraries are coping with changes in reading trends and what can be done to remain relevant among Malaysians.

Local Libraries Losing Its Charm



Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) has two major libraries - the Kuala Lumpur Library facing Dataran Merdeka and Taman Tun Dr Ismail Library along Jalan Anthinapan as well as 13 community libraries scattered in different areas. An article by *The Star*, highlighted the Kuala Lumpur library receives an average of 800 visitors a day.

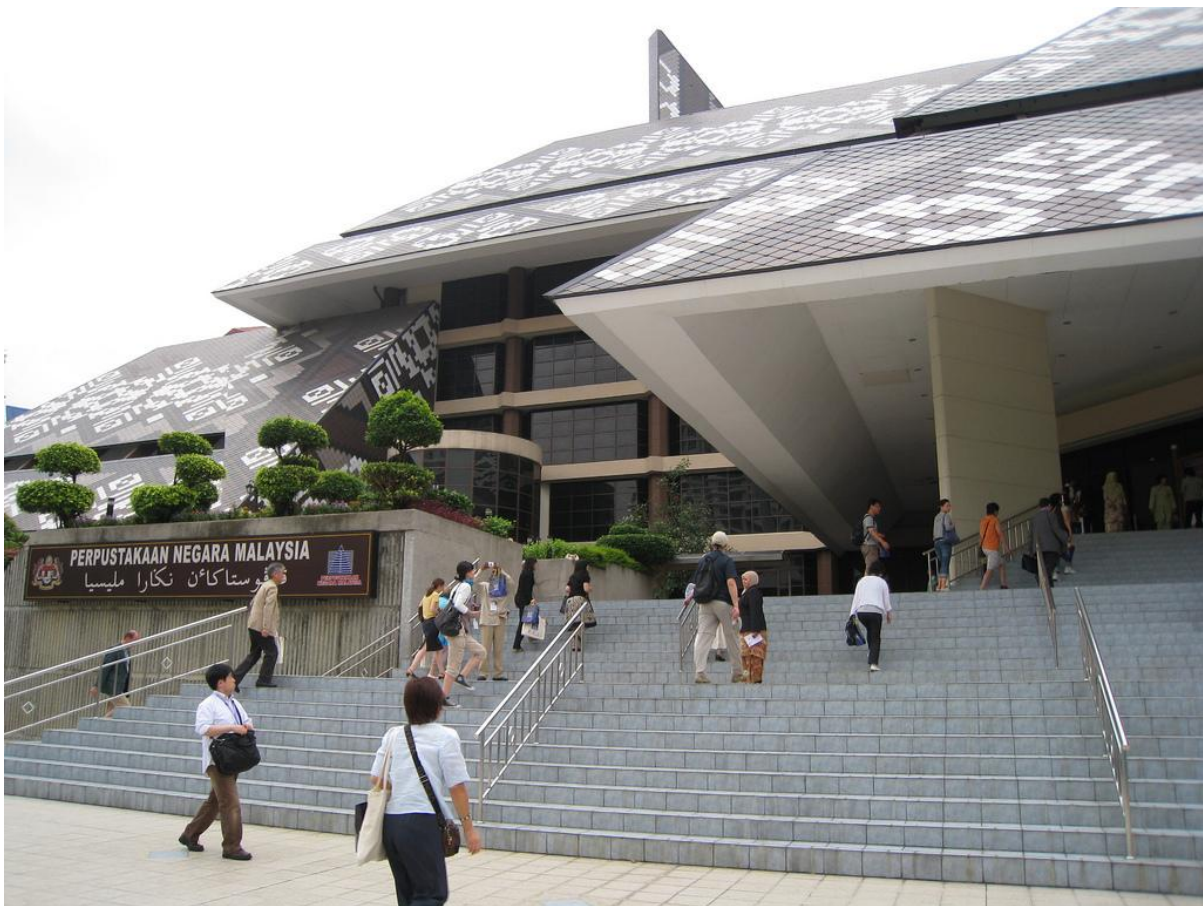
Meanwhile, the Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) has three libraries – the Petaling Jaya Community Library in Section 3, one in Kota Damansara, and another in Taman Medan.

Whereas Shah Alam City Council (MBSA) has only one community library located in Kota Kemuning. On average, the library receives from three to 40 visitors per day, but this number increases to between 70 to 80 people per day, during the weekend and school holidays.



While, the Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ) has three hypermedia libraries and these libraries receive on average about 135 visitors a day.

The National Library of Malaysia (PNM) has also seen a decline in statistics of people borrowing books –1.08 million users in 2013 from 1.35 million users in the previous year. A local librarian from PNM that wishes to remain anonymous, affirms this from her experience.



“The visitor rate is gradually decreasing and that their library mainly serves as a platform for students to study, and not so much for leisure reading,” she shared.

A PNM visitor on the other hand highlighted the free parking makes it more convenient for him to visit the National Library, but strongly wishes the management would update their books.

“However, the environment is the perfect spot for students to do their school revisions, especially law students, as there are a lot of references provided,” he told us.

Similarly, when we asked about the number of visitors that frequent the Damansara Community Library, the librarian there relayed: “Our visitors come and go, and the majority of them are mostly students who are studying in nearby schools.

“Occasionally, we have the working crowd looking to complete their proposals and such,” the librarian added.

In our random survey around the various libraries across town, a few visitors gave us their feedbacks, which concurred our libraries offer limited books and seats, but with an

adequate environment for completing assignments. Plus, others, commended having facilities like a cafe and a private section for kids, makes things a little more convenient.

A Reading Habit Starts From Young

Perhaps one of the many reasons why the library culture in Malaysia is slowly deteriorating is mainly due to the fact that Malaysians nowadays are just simply not interested with reading as much as they used to.

So for our local libraries to get more visits, we ought to know how we can encourage and develop our society to fall in love with reading again.



Pic: Dr Harlina

Dr. Norharlina Bahar, a Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist from Prince Court Medical Centre believes it all stems from parents who are responsible to shape their children and inculcate the reading habit.

She emphasised to be interested in reading from a young age, and to boost cognitive development, our environment plays a huge role.

“Parents introducing reading materials at home is one of the important criteria to encourage a continuous reading habit.

“Read for pleasure, to gain information, and so forth, then share what you read with others,” she added.

Among her suggestions on how to cultivate a reading habit among children include, start early, set time for reading and make it a part of family activities, constantly

communicate about what they have read and relating it to real-life scenarios, even have them story tell, and last but not least, bring them to visit libraries and get them to become members.

Meanwhile, Malaysian youths these days are more inclined to reading entertainment materials, instead of fiction or nonfiction paperbacks. That's why Dr. Tan Kit-Aun, senior lecturer from Department Psychiatry Universiti Putra Malaysia pointed out the importance of deep reading in contrast with skimming or superficial reading.

The excited educator shared some preliminary tips for teachers and parents on how to inculcate reading in their students and children, based on Warburton's (2003) framework on deep learning.

Dr. Tan states that deep learning strategies cannot be externally imposed and must be internally motivated, and be encouraged by emphasising principles and concepts through personal dialogues.



“If we are going to encourage children to read, we need to do it too - reading can promote a sense of self-accomplishment and satisfaction,” he suggests adding that

educators and parents must share what they have been reading as well.



He also encouraged the idea of organising book clubs as it allows children to interact socially, as deep learning is dependent on a child's level of engagement with the topic of interest, adding that a trip to the local libraries or a bookstore would be necessary to maximise discovery learning.

On that note, what better way than to get children spend their leisure time at the local children's libraries itself, be it after school or on weekends.

In case you didn't know, these are some children's libraries offered in the Klang Valley that may get your children interested in reading – Playcentre Library, Petaling Jaya Community Library, Kuala Lumpur's Children Library, CLiC Library, and Children's Library at the Islamic Arts Museum, among other varieties.

Local Libraries Should Encourage Book Sharing Sessions

Echoing the psychologists' stance, Dr. Swagata Sinha Roy, an Assistant Professor in Faculty of Creative Industries from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman by day, and co-organiser of The Paperback Book Club by night, admits it would be very tempting to blame electronic devices, social media and all related technology for the lack of reading culture, but posed a few questions for the public to ponder upon.

“Actually it is so much more basic than that. How many homes, for instance encourage reading in the home? How many parents read with or to their children? The schools must have an hour scheduled just for reading activities, maybe twice a week? It begins at home and then in school,” she opined.

She then suggested for parents to take their kids to the local libraries at least once a week to read, borrow books, and generally to be in a book-filled environment.

“As for in schools, they must make library attendance compulsory library at the primary level. Once we get the kids hooked to reading, we solve all the non-reading problems.”



Pic: The Paperback Book Club

Meanwhile, when it comes to local libraries, Dr. Swagata admits participants in the book club, including herself highlighted how the books they have all read were nowhere to be found in any of the reading premises.

“We don’t bother about libraries after a while and we start buying our own books. Many of us also have kindle, but only a few prefer e-books,” she states.

“Libraries perhaps could encourage book sharing sessions among various age groups and could arrange for author-reader discussions as we always have amazing local authors who’d be willing to participate.

“And local libraries could hold read-aloud competitions, among many other activities as exciting activities could attract more attention and interest,” she urged.

There Are No Reasons For Not Going To The Library

As reported by UNESCO, in 2015 the Malaysian literacy rate stands at 94.6% of its population, taking into consideration that there are people who have reading difficulty such as dyslexics, with estimates of 3.5 to 6 percent, the ordinary Malaysians are fully literate.



In our interview with Abdul Wahab Ibrahim, Director of the National Book Council of Malaysia, he informed us, “Our education and health quality is ever improving, I therefore do not foresee that our literacy rate is ever going to be decreasing. In striving to be a developed nation, we have to look beyond literacy.”

Abdul Wahab declared the council is more interested to know about the reading habits of an average Malaysian, what kind of materials do Malaysians read, or how many titles per year do they read.

The latest figure that Malaysia now have is an average of around 8 to 11 titles per year. The aim now, according to him is to get Malaysians to read around two titles per month.

“There are no reasons why Malaysians should not go to the library often, there are only excuses. I think Malaysians are very much aware of the benefits of reading, especially if you are a Muslim.

“The first surah that was bestowed upon our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was Surat Al-`Alaq. It is a prophecy for Muslims to read,” he declared.

“It could be that Malaysians are too busy with other priorities in life, so much so, that going to the library is low on their list.

“Libraries nowadays operate on a very different concept from what it used to be. Please pay a visit to PNM to find out,” he urges.

PNM is currently working on having a digital library, accessible to everyone wherever you might be as technology is overtaking the generation. If this can be realised, Abdul’s vision statement here at the National Book Council “a library in the hand of every Malaysian citizen by the year 2020!” will be achievable.

-mD

Copyright © 2010 - 2017 | malaysiandigest.com . All rights reserved.

Source: <http://malaysiandigest.com/features/643383-how-can-we-inculcate-reading-and-bring-back-the-library-culture-among-malaysians.html>