

Bibliotherapy in the Malaysian Public Libraries : A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

The formation of an information society is for the development of society and it is a ticket to face the challenge especially in social, cultural and economic. While information literacy is a prerequisite to role in the formation of knowledge societies and it is an element of a basic human need for lifelong learning. The Key to success is reading and it is not just in schools but throughout life. Through reading, we acquire new ideas and knowledge. Poor reading may cause problems for living, working and survival in general. Despite living in the age of technological advancement, reading continues to be a challenge for the knowledge society. Lack of knowledge and information children tend to involve in many problems. Bibliotherapy involves books to help children cope with early access to their lifelong learning and proper development in the learning process. By adopting a qualitative case study approach, this study intends to provide in-depth interpretations of the real-life context about the adoption of bibliotherapy in a public library. This paper attempts to provide a conceptual understanding of the adoption of bibliotherapy in context of public libraries in nurturing reading habits. The proposed framework is appropriate to be studied as guidance in the context of public libraries in Malaysia.

Keywords: Bibliotherapy, public library, knowledge society, reading habits, children

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Introduction

The formation of literacy society, reading habits become an essential aspect to be considered. Reading's play a crucial role in creating success in education and lifetime. Through reading, an independent learner and literate person, according to H Husaini (2012), Simisaye (2010) no one can be literate without reading. It is also language skills that children today need to survive in the learning environment. The language skill has to be developed and build upon as children goes along education ladder in life. Simisaye (2010) claim it is in recognition of this that reading is being taught, promoted and advocated right from the tender age of a child in every serious nation of the world. Since it is a process of lifelong learning, it is important to instil good reading habits among children. Children today are citizens of tomorrow, they are the key player in the development of knowledge societies. Along with the aspiration to culture reading habits in Malaysia, the Malaysian government has made initiatives into it. Various types of activities and programme initiate by government and educational organization, especially public library to support the reading campaign. According to H Husaini (2012) initiatives taken by National Library such as reading campaign, organizing a reading month to Malaysian, even in National Library Malaysia, a unit of reading promotion was created. This is to motivate and encourage the society about the importance of reading habits in Malaysian culture.

The unit is responsible to create the opportunities and motivate Malaysian society to gain lifelong education and knowledge. The role is to support the aim of the National Library's effort to instil and inculcate reading habit among Malaysian and to make reading as cultural habits for Malaysian (Malaysia National Library, 2006). Books can be used as a very good strategy to develop economy and culture, especially in the era of information and knowledge society, where the information become a power and knowledge become as an asset. Simisaye (2010) also support that the ideas to cultivate the interest when they young, efforts are being geared worldwide to catch the interest of children in reading. From this perspective, libraries, especially, public libraries have been working tirelessly to inculcate and promote a reading programme in children. Those activities are to encourage Malaysian society to read.

With the advent of advanced technology, in the world of information society and highly competitive societies, most people at all level felt the heat of pressure than ever before. The pressure will invite uneasy situation such as people have to face various types of new things, distractions, challenges, personality conflicts and dissatisfaction. When overwhelmed with these difficulties, those people need guidance, a proper guide from an expert, especially at the young age level, they require a lot of attention, guidance, example to keep survive in the new heat of the era. Since children prefer to copy or model characters (Lucas, 2013; Yusuf & Taharem, 2006; Gladding & Gladding, 1991), bibliotherapy could be useful to them on identifying characters feelings and thoughts. Lucas & Soares (2013) cited (Branco, 2001; Lucas, Caldin, & Silva, 2006) explained bibliotherapy as medium that using a book collection development and organize activities to help the children especially when it is involved emotionally. Akinola, 2014 discussed bibliotherapy is the process of using books to help children to think, get ideas, and have a feel and understanding, also be able to go through social and emotional aspects. Bibliotherapy, is one of library services that is known to help librarians, to handle various types of situation that involved user emotional, behavioural and social. According to Yusof & Taharem (2006),

bibliotherapy as a guided medium by trusted social organisation and expert people that have a close role in the community in term of the services and facilities that give the ability to enable children and adolescents ready to face various developmental changes of adolescence in term of personal problem-solving and social adaptation. Through bibliotherapy, children are able to control their problem in a proper manner. However, bibliotherapy is still new in Malaysia and Public library, Engku Chik et al. (2014) and Yusuf & Taharem (2006) in their articles suggested that the adoption of bibliotherapy concept and expand it to a more efficient level. Therefore, this paper proposes a conceptual framework to investigate the public library adoption and the bibliotherapy concept in carrying out the functions of bibliotherapy, stimulates and develops reading habits.

Background

Study done by Issa et. Al, (2012) said poor reading habits could responsible for poor academic performance and this will result a lack of literacy skills including reading that may cause a problem for living, working and survive. Due to that Inderjit (2014) in his study found a lack of knowledge and information children are tending to involve in many problems. Children are the victims and experience of more than one type of maltreatment and traumatic events Tukhareli (2011) due to the stress of life, it's responsible for issues likes families, life cycle and societal Rudman (1995). These situation study by Professor Atan Long in 1984 reported that the reading interests and habits of Malaysians are still considered very low, Malaysians only read an average of two books a year and an average Malaysian read for information rather than to seek knowledge. Similar results are also found by Pandian (1997), in a study commissioned by the National Library of Malaysia (2006), carried out a survey by Frank Small and Associates (1996) reported that the literacy rate has slightly decreased to 92 percent from 93 percent in 1996.

The research by Pandian (1997, 2000) and Inderjit (2014) that most students just read for educational purpose only. As mentioned by H Husaini (2012) reading has to be strongly promoted as an interpersonal, social or family related activity, everybody involved and help each other to promote and inculcate reading habits and attitudes in the society. Literacy is a crucial aspect of a child's life in order to face the challenges in the information age based on a study done by Engku Chik et.al (2014). Early literacy is what children know about reading and writing before they can actually read or write. Inderjit (2014) also agreed that Malaysian students read for examinations and there is nothing to ensure that the situation will continue after school. Previous studies by Pandian (1977, 2000) have shown that the students were reluctant to read for information and pleasure, according to Pandian (2000) if the problem is not solved properly, Malaysia future will be led by people who are reluctant to read. It's going to affect the health growth of social and economic because Malaysian who reluctant to read is people who are lack of information and these going to affect their ability in knowledge, intelligence and maturity. They are not able to make a decision or to solve problems even to initiate ideas

In Malaysia, Professor Atan Long in his study in 1984 mentions, libraries are not fully utilized. Among the reasons given are; insufficient time (59 percent), the presence of other more important tasks (11 percent) and difficult to get reading material (10 percent). Today, as explained by Lack (1985); Jurkowski (2006) public libraries serve

as one of community centres which exist to support community and society's development. Students, teachers, educators, parents, people and many more use public libraries as a medium for information sharing and knowledge benefit and libraries also being called as a therapeutic place in Brewster (2014) and Walwyn & Rowley (2011) study. It is kind of use library as an emporium to shop for knowledge, in general to a specific area. The library can play a major role in a child's development, if used correctly by society. However in Malaysian's society, generally the usage of libraries, especially for youth and children is rarely exposed to them, especially in rural areas as stated by Mohamad Yusoff et al., (2013) rural libraries lack of information needs assessment conducted by library personnel; outdated and unattractive (for youths) reading materials; and the provision of irrelevant materials that do not apply to the local context. In many cases, rural libraries fail to construct positive attitudes among youths and this demotivates them as they do not see the benefits. The perception of society towards public libraries in Malaysia is still at low level. Society still doesn't realize the importance of libraries.

As mentioned by Brewster (2008), Zakaria Z. et.al (2011) libraries are also in a strategic position, the resources, facilities and services also the expert guide are reachable by the community, Engku Chik et.al. (2014) stated that these are also due to the capabilities of libraries to serve their surrounding communities. To support it, Jurkowski (2006) did mention the relationship of the library resources with the community needs in term of supporting in developing community's development. Even in Lack (1985) study explained about the roles of libraries is mainly to support and develop a society's by using the resources, services and facilities, the people at that time has aptly called library as 'the university of people'.

In order to proper gain the library's positive perception in the eyes of communities, an approach to children's program and child development should be adopted more aggressive as it will inspire children at an early age by the excitement of finding knowledge and by works of the imagination, they are likely to benefit from these vital elements of personal development throughout their lives, both enriching themselves and enhancing their contribution to society. Libraries can take an opportunity to use bibliotherapy as a way to connect books with experiences in their own lives and use events in the stories to learn approaches for handling problems. Beside that children can encourage parents and other adults to make use of the library. It is also important that young people who experience difficulty in learning to read should have access to a library to provide them with the appropriate material, IFLA/UNESCO (2001). A study by Hutchinson (2014) emphasizes bibliotherapy services at public libraries and discovers best-practice for implementing therapeutic programs in a public library environment.

According to Noordin (2015), Engku Chik. et.al (2014) bibliotherapy is still not in trend in Malaysia. In Malaysia, Hamdan Tahir Library with the collaboration of University Sains Malaysia (USM) hospital has taken an initiative to participate in serving the community, especially at paediatrics patients (children) Engku Chik et.al (2014). It is still at the new stages and many more need to establish the programs, Besides that, lack of studies on bibliotherapy implementation in public libraries in Malaysia, if there is a programme name bibliotherapy, the implementation and the definition has still remained unclear (Hutchinson, 2014, Engku Chik. Et.al, 2014, Janaviciene, 2012, Brewster, 2008, Yusof & Taharem, 2006).

Bibliotherapeutic Literature

In the article, 'A Feeling for Books' by Jennifer Burek-Pierce, a professor of library at the University of Iowa, described bibliotherapy as a method of healing (Burek-Pierce, 2010). Books, both fiction and non-fiction, picture or chapter, can be used for bibliotherapy. In the public libraries, fictional children's books are the most widely used types of literature because children are better able to identify with characters in these stories. Bibliotherapy does not claim to cure, but rather to enlighten and to promote insight as mentions by Lucas & Soares (2013). It is intended as an adjunct to treatment (Caldin, 2009). Literature is used to educate individuals about the personal issues they are facing, said Tukhareli (2011). Literature in bibliotherapy needs to be focused on using the literature in therapeutic ways to aid children in working through a crisis (Kramer, 1999). It was concluded by Yusof & Taharem (2006) that bibliotherapy works in the setting that a good book can model a child's self-concept. Good reading materials provide insight that would change children and adolescent behaviour to face the problem problem. The climax of the therapy is for children and adolescents to grow up to be assertive and socially well adjusted so that they could keep themselves away from trouble and to be a productive member of society.

The Proposed Model

Table 1 depicts the proposed model for studying the effect of bibliotherapy on reading habits. The framework is conceptualized based on previous studies of Brewster (2009); Janaviciene (2010); Shrodes (1949); Pardeck (1994); Rubin (1978); Ogbodo (2010); Karim & Hassan (2007); Walia and Sinha (2014). Three main elements are gathered together in this study. The dimensions of the library are roles & function, objective, policy and services. The dimensions of bibliotherapeutic scheme are bibliotherapy category, bibliotherapy process, bibliotherapy practices and bibliotherapy strategy. The dimensions of reading habits are reading types, reading attitudes and reading skills.

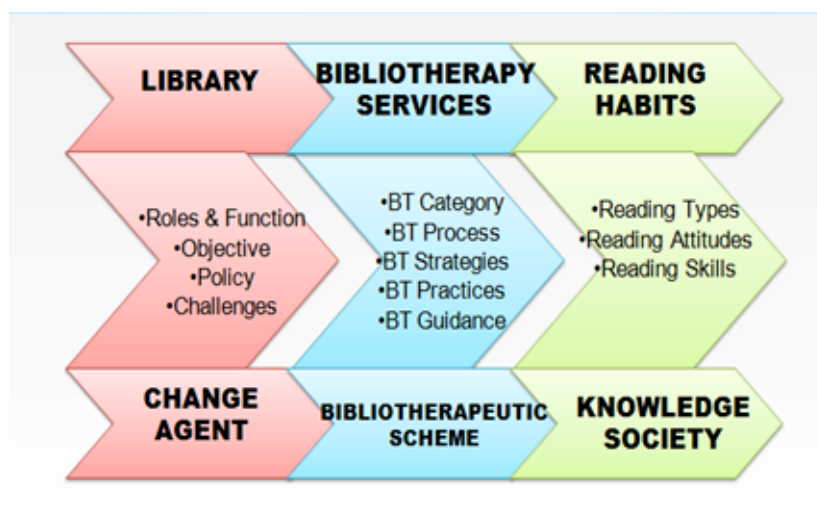


Table 1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is constructed based on previous studies of Brewster (2009), Janaviciene (2010), Shrodes (1950), Pardeck (1994), Rubin (1978, 1979), Ogbodo (2010), Karim & Hassan (2007), Walia and Sinha (2014).

Three main elements are gathered together and rationalised in this study; Library as the change agent, Bibliotherapeutic schemes as the initiatives and Knowledge Society as the national aspiration to have a literate society with good reading habits. The dimensions of the library are roles & function, objective, policy and services by Brewster (2009), Janavice (2010). As for the bibliotherapeutic scheme, the dimension includes bibliotherapy category, process, practices and strategy Janaviciene (2010), Brewster (2010), Shrodes (1950), Pardeck (1994), Rubin (1978, 1979). The dimensions of reading habits are reading types, reading attitudes and behaviour, and reading skills Ogbodo (2010), Pandian (1997, 2000), Malaysian National Library (2006), Karin and Hasaan (2007).

Public libraries today face a challenging environment. The roles and functions of public libraries act as a community centre to support the community and society development. A Public library in a unique position in a community that have an access to the resources, services and facilities to provide free access to books and be able to conduct a variety of programs to the community by Brewster (2014). According to Battleson & Nessel (2012) cited Fanner and Urqhart (2008) the practices of bibliotherapy for help mentally ill continues be well-recognized by a librarian who often take part in programmes of rehabilitation and bibliotherapy. Library play a role as a stress-reduction agency through their services and activities of bibliotherapy. Through the programme the children learn to solve the threatening problems. Literature discussed to introduce bibliotherapy in public libraries could affect positively the nature of librarians as well, it is a new approach for librarian to communicate with the library user, bibliotherapy programme could help to spark an idea towards the user (Arulanantham and Navaneethakrishnan, 2013).

According to Hutchinson (2014) the library is a door to the rest of the world, a place for relation, recreational, leisure and refuge as well as a busy, active and sometimes noisy environment for collaboration (Shen, 2006; Limberg & Alexandersson, 2003). The Public library objective is to serve and educate the community. To that public library will try to meet user requirements. The status of political, social, economy, races won't be an obstacle towards service. In library science field Janaviciene (2010) study cited Margaret Monroe (in Rubin, 1978) views bibliotherapy as part of the continuum of library services. Reference services, reading guidance and bibliotherapy is closely related functions in serving informational, instructional and guidance needs. Unlike reference services and reading guidance, bibliotherapy is a long term approach to library services used for therapeutic purposes. It's part of the essential services of public and school libraries because of the growth of bibliotherapy applications.

Methodology

The aim of the research is to provide a conceptual understanding of the adoption of bibliotherapy in context of public libraries in nurturing reading habits. For the research paradigm, the researcher subscribing the interpretivism research philosophy. The research of the study will be on qualitative approach. According to Hancock (2002) qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social

phenomena, therefore, the qualitative research approach was adopted in the study. Its aim is to explore the adoption of bibliotherapy in the Malaysian public library in order to nurture reading habits especially among children. During the pilot study, a semi-structured interviews were conducted, supported by the interview guides which we constructed based on the research framework in Table 1.

Preliminary Study

A preliminary study was conducted in February, 2015 at Pustaka Negeri Sarawak, involved the librarian in charge in bibliotherapy implementation. Semistructured interview was conducted. The questions were based on the interview guides which was derived from the framework. The qualitative data generated was analysed according to the framework. From the preliminary study, the researcher realizes that the interview guide needs to be strengthened and refined as to be used in the main study. However the proposed framework remains as it is applicable to govern this exploratory study.

Discussion

Finding from the pilot study, informant highlighted that in every programme of bibliotherapy, it does involve the process of bibliotherapeutic scheme and collaboration with an expert in the psychology. This scenario was pointed out by Brewster (2008) related the collaboration of social institutions in different social awareness. This is in order to know the skills, the techniques and how to manage and handle the situation. The role of library and librarian as providing services also mentioned by Javavience (2010). In fact, along the way, the execution of the programme will generate solutions, new ideas and suggestions by using public library materials especially books.

The informant agreed that the appropriate reading materials are able to give new insight towards the client. It also helps to instill reading habits and reading recommendation (Janavience, 2010). Since librarian is expert in searching techniques and reading materials, they are able to provide a reading recommendation as a tool that might help the mediators to handle a situation. As mentioned in study by Janavience (2010), education or personality development bibliotherapy, normally happen in social institution and social service. It is helping the client with personality development, adapting to the changing environment. The informant revealed that the mediators exist in the programme.

The execution of the programme is not made directly to end client. The informant explained, the programme is through the mediator due to the issues of expertise and lack of skills. The informant also highlights the role of the mediators such as teacher, counsellor, librarian and a social worker in the programme is to help the end client. They enhance the value of reading through bibliotherapy. Together with the adoption of bibliotherapy they are also highlighting the importance of reading through the reading campaign and activities. Therefore, it can be understood that the role of library as change agents are important in adopting bibliotherapeutic scheme in promoting and encouraging the continuity of reading especially in the information and knowledge societies.

Conclusion

From the preliminary study, it revealed that the public library really puts the most of their effort ensuring the adoption of bibliotherapy implementation. Despite that, the implementation and collaboration were still at the beginning stage, the library and librarian still learning on the practical basis and skills on the bibliotherapeutic scheme to offer to the client. However, it was continuously promoted from time to time with different category of bibliotherapy and client. The library tries to help and build a knowledge society through the reading. Library and reading have an empowerment to change the society through various types of programs, activities and campaign. Bibliotherapy and the strength of reading materials is the strength of the public library. Today, in the era of developing knowledge society, libraries need to have a high impact service to claim that is their contribution and role in the developing the knowledge society. It is an interesting to see the public library as empowering place (Brewster, 2014) to support community and society's development as the ability of the libraries is to provide and use the resources as mentioned in a study done by Noordin (2015).

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