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Malaysian Public School Libraries

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ABSTRACT

School libraries are believed to have positive impacts on students' achievement. It is said that a strong library program that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to a higher student achievement regardless of their parents socioeconomic or educational levels as well as the local community demographic background. Thus, these achievements must in one way or another link with the quality of the collection of the school library and its success in integrating information literacy into the school curriculum. This attainment will determine students' mastery of both content and information seeking skills. Furthermore, an effective school library management and resources, is believed in making positive differences to students' self-esteem, confidence, independence and sense of responsibility regarding their own learning efforts. Nevertheless, the context in which school librarians and teacher librarians operate today has changed significantly. In Malaysia particularly, there has been a very low numbers of qualified teacher librarians employed in public school libraries. Hence, explosions in information production and the development of information communication technologies (ICTs); changes in educational philosophy and practice, including a greater focus on learning outcomes, inquiry-based learning, evidence-based practice and school accountability; and changes in the nature and role of the teacher librarian because of these developments, is making it harder for our local school libraries. These recent challenges and trends suggest that a review of literature on the impact of school libraries on students' achievement in Malaysian context is urgently needed. This paper will investigate the current state of Malaysian public-school libraries - its usage, its impact and its future in relation to endorsing young Malaysia Highfliers.

1.0 Introduction

School libraries offer a wide range of information and knowledge tools, especially for the development of literacy which include increasing reading confidence and influence the expertise in the development of information literacy, plus promoting reading for enjoyment. School librarians also play a critical role in the infusion of technology, information, education and learning

skills among teachers and school children. In many occasions, school libraries address educational technology and information literacy skills instruction that are embedded in the school curriculum. It provides support to teachers, counsellors, and administrators in preparing students to succeed in higher education institution, the work place, and even in society. Most importantly school library are able to generate support to students leadership develop attributes of responsible use of information and technology standards. In short, school library support the development of successful learners and confident individuals (KPM, 2016). Hence, it also promoting skills for lifelong learning by encouraging students to grow as responsible citizens, to make effective contribution to society, also to be able to work self-sufficiently. It is in the school library that students have the opportunity to exercise their entitlement to access information and to develop comprehensive literacies in a supportive environment (Azman Larut, 2005). Hilary Hughes (2013) in her article title 'School Libraries And Teacher-Librarians: Evidence of Their Contribution to Student Literacy and Learning' insist that,

> …school libraries should be a vibrant hub for learning, information, reading promotion, creativity, student leadership and social interaction within their school community. In addition to providing a congenial learning environment and 'safe haven', the school library often offers a venue for extra-curricular activities, as well as school community events and meetings.

Nevertheless, the context in which school librarians and teacher librarians operate today; in Malaysia particularly, there has been a very low numbers of qualified teacher librarians employed in school libraries in public schools in Malaysia. Despite of all the guidelines and guiding principles provided to these teacher librarians (KPM, 2016), the skill of managing, organizing and planning of a school library requires formal training and endorsement. Skills such as referencing, cataloguing, material variations, library science technology services even databases required formal training. Hence, explosions in information production and the development of information communication technologies (ICTs); changes in educational philosophy and practice, including a greater focus on learning outcomes based, inquiry-based learning, evidence-based practice and school accountability; and changes in the nature and role of the teacher librarian, is making it worst for our local school libraries.

2.0   Purpose & Method

The core purpose of this paper is to report on the nature and the extent of evidence that has linked school libraries to student achievements in public schools in Malaysia - the aims is to identify Malaysian school libraries contribution towards Malaysian school children educational success and its challenges in providing the support that are much needed by the pupils. Although many other research finding in other countries around the world suggest that school libraries can have positive impact on students' achievements, the extent to which this body of evidence is transferable to Malaysian setting is not clear. This investigation has been conducted with the intention of providing a clearer and accessible synthesis of existing local studies to inform subsequent action in Malaysian context. This paper is based on a critical desktop review, which covers a range of studies both locally and internationally since the year 2000.

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3.0   The Success Stories

There is no doubt that a good school library with a list of good library programs and certified librarians are critical to students' achievements. In fact quality school library activities can play a greater role in providing academic support to its students. According to Debra E. Kachel, (2013), over 21 state studies in Canada confirm that school librarians and school libraries support students in academic achievement, lifelong learning, 21st century skills, and reading. Her study, describe that all these school have a solid school library that are staffed by the state certified or licensed librarian and supported by clerical assistance library. Moreover, these school libraries are also equipped with up-to-date books, materials, equipment and technology; including regular collaboration between classroom teachers and school librarians

Meanwhile in USA, a study on third through fifth grade students scores from 2007- 08 showed that schools with at least one full-time librarian scored higher, on average, than schools with less than one full-time librarian (Francis, B. H., Lance, C. K., & Lietzau, Z. 2010). In literacy improvement, schools with the best USA assessment reading and language scores had teachers who work together with school librarians. Furthermore, these students were over 3 times more likely to visit the school library (Scholastic 2008).

These findings support the indication that more than 99 percent of school children in USA, felt their school library and school librarian had helped them in regards to academic achievement and supporting their educational progress. Eighty five percent agree that the school library and librarian had helped them do school work better; 89 percent stated that school library helped them get better grades on their school projects and assignments; and over 75 percent said that school library helped them to get better grades on tests and quizzes, as well as to think critically and be more confident in doing school work (Todd, R. J., & Kuhlthau, C. C. 2004). Even in Malaysia the percentage is overwhelming. According to Yusof Boon and Rohaizad Selemin (2010), 63.8 percent teachers are currently using school library to enhance teaching method and material. Meanwhile more than 65 percent teachers agree that the collaboration done between them and school library helps to boost students' academic achievements. However, in Malaysia, very little research has been done in analysing Malaysian school libraries performance from the students' perspectives. Nevertheless, what's more important here is that, many studies indicates that school libraries are not only beneficial to students in their studies, instead it help students to discover their interests and providing them with strategies and methods. A good school library will further help students find information; stay organized; and provide support to deal with personal concerns or issues

4.0 The Challenges

Many Asian and 3rd world countries, school libraries are not up to the users' expectation. In many situations, teachers who were given the task of building up and managing their school library possessed very little professional library skills and expertise (Holm A. K., 2006). This situation brings a lot of complications in trying to set a good and qualified school library.

In Nigeria, a study done by Queenette Udoh-Ilomechine indicates that most Nigerian school children are not satisfied with the services and collections of their school library.Only fourteen percent of respondents stated that they always get the information they need at their school library. Nearly eighty percent of respondents find that the library does not satisfy their educational needs

(Queenette Udoh-Ilomechine, 2008).

In Malaysia, researcher Zailani Shafie (2009) identified that many science and technology resources and materials in local school libraries are outdated. These findings are consistence with another study by Tiew Wai Sin and Nik Asma binti Nik Ahmad in the year 2000. It was stated that fifty four percent of current science and technology books were published in 1989, and shockingly only 1.1 percent of the total number of books in school library is science and technology based. Meanwhile the number of materials provided to students in current school library are out of the ratio recommended by the American Association of School Librarians (1988) and the Malaysia School Library Development Plan 1979 (Rancangan Pembangunan Perpustakaan Sekolah di Malaysia 1979). It is suggested in both studies (Shafie, Z., Omar, N. E., Sahrani, R., & Sukiman, A., 2009 & Tiew, Wai Sin; Nik Asma binti Nik Ahmad, 2000) that a major restructuring of school library collection is critically needed.In addition to the above scenario, the inadequate funding for technology, including sufficient connectivity, electrical access, hardware, software, subscription databases, and online tools to equitably support research and inquiry-based learning, also causes a lot of disruption to school library services.

In general, teachers and educators familiarity of the role of school library and its librarian must be elevated. All parties need to improve the usage of current school libraries. Everybody needs to see school library as an entity that supports not just literacy but as a school component that offers lifelong learning and ongoing knowledge process. Partnership between teachers and school librarians, between school libraries and students, between school administrator and school library, should be introduced and applied for the benefit of our future youth. Most importantly, school libraries need qualified and skilled individuals as its librarian.

In Australia, they find that a significant positive correlation between the number of school librarians employed and the national reading and literacy (NAPLAN) test result for schools (Hughes H. 2013). This is consistent with a study done by Comes (2008) where, she found that majority (90 percent) of school libraries in Australia employ at least one qualified teacher librarian. Meanwhile in United State, there are compelling evidence that relates the presence of a qualified teacher librarian and literacy (Hughes H. 2013; Lance K.C & Hofschire, L., 2012; Francis, B. H., Lance, C. K., & Lietzau, Z. 2010). In Malaysia there are needs and request, according to Zailan Shafie (2009), more than 60 percent respondents of his study agree on the needs for school in Malaysia to hire professional and certified librarian in handling and managing school libraries.

5.0 Recommendation & Conclusions

School library and school itself in general has always demonstrated 'love and hate' relationship. Many studies show that most respondent satisfied with their school library services and collections due to the lack of emphasis on understanding the nature and the role of school library and its librarian. On the other hand, much literature demonstrates the importance of a good school library in supporting students' academic achievement. Partnership between teachers and school library librarian is being acknowledged as platform to shape a better and balanced student- academically and socially. Yet, there are still issues surrounding school library and its qualified teacher librarian. With reference to the Malaysian setting and the importance and the benefits of the school library to both teachers and students, it is highly recommended that Malaysian schools take into consideration some of these recommended suggestions.

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Employ a professional and qualified librarian.

This act will extract effective and better services of school libraries. The skills and knowledge of pure library sciences will help the management, planning and organizing efforts in school library to become more constructive.

Create better awareness of the school library service.

This effort should be incorporate with all parties – students, teachers, administrators and even parents. An excellent promotion of the school libraries can help to boost closeness and confidence level among its users. School library can organize more than just the common activities such as school orientation day, cultural day, display, exhibitions and many more.

Enhance collections and resources

Despite all, material and resources are the key component of a library, especially school library. It is important for school library to provide staff and students with material and resources that are up-to-date, meets their classroom teachings needs, theirs educational needs and personal development's needs.

Information and Technology

Both teachers and students need audio-visual materials as well as print and other formats of resources, namely online resources and databases. School library are the best provider that can offer a wide range of information and technological resources for knowledge and education purpose, provided there are skilled staff to maintain and manage it.

In the end, regardless of what is the best and what the consequences will be, it is essential for a school library to provide adequate recreational and informational materials to stimulate student interest and mindfulness.

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