EXPERIENCE AND EFFORTS IN LITERACY PROGRAMMES: BRIEF COUNTRY REPORT

By

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INTRODUCTION

Malaysia comprises of Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. It is situated in the heart of Southeast Asia and has a population of about 22 million people, comprising mainly of Malays, Chinese, Indian and others. It has a natural resource-rich land area of 329,758 square kilometres.

Malaysia, guided by the success of its five year socio-economic plans which is now in its Eighth Plan, is moving on to a new and more challenging phase in nation-building. Today we are guided by Vision 2020 which envisions Malaysia as a fully developed nation by the year 2020, developed economically as well as politically, socially and spiritually. We are now in the process of translating the vision into reality.

The major thrust of Vision 2020 is to develop an information-rich society, which nurtures science and technology culture. The education systems are changing with emphasis on Information Technology [IT] in teaching and learning. The policies on paperless administration and electronic government encourages public institutions to introduce IT in their daily operations. Government mega project such as the Multimedia Super Corridor [MSC] will become the nerve centre for the development of Malaysia as a global digital economy. The MSC will be the nucleus of multimedia R & D centre and the seat of the future electronic government of Malaysia.

One of the challenges of the Vision 2020 is to create a Malaysian society which possesses the characteristics of pursuing excellence, as well as a knowledgeable and informed society which would be respected by others. In line with this challenge, the reading culture is the pillar for moulding excellent thinkers and intellectuals.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MALAYSIA

- Establishment

The National Library of Malaysia is a Federal Department under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. It was established under the National Library Act [Act 80] passed on 1 September 1972. This Act was then amended in 1987 in keeping with the development of library and information services in Malaysia.

- Objectives

The purposes and objectives of the National Library of Malaysia as stipulated in Part II Section 3 National Library Act [Amendment] 1987 are as follows:

- a) to make available for the use of present and future generations a national collection of library resources;
- b) to facilitate nation-wide access to library resources available within the country and abroad; and
- c) to provide leadership on matters pertaining to libraries.

- Functions

One of the functions of the Director General of National Library as stipulated in Part II Section

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Reading Promotion Division
The National Library's organisational structure is made up of 15 divisions including the Reading Promotion division. One of the main functions of this division is to provide opportunities and encouragement for adults and children to gain lifelong education and knowledge. This is to support the National Library's effort to encourage, develop and inculcate reading habit among Malaysians and to make reading a cultural habit.

Strategic Plan
One of the seven major thrusts of the National Library Strategic Plan 2001 - 2005 outlines the following strategy:

'To expand and extend knowledge and information programmes through out the country in line with K-economy policy'

In this strategy, short-term and long-term action plans are spelled out to ensure information literacy and reading promotion programmes are implemented as planned.

ROLE OF NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MALAYSIA IN LITERACY PROGRAMMES

READING PROFILE OF MALAYSIANS 1996
A survey on reading profile of Malaysians was conducted in 1996 by an international-based research company, Frank Small and Associates on behalf of the National Library of Malaysia. Information for the study was collected by a household survey sample and survey respondents were persons aged 10 years and above.

The survey looked into the reading profile of selected groups of Malaysians, general literacy rate of the population in Malaysia, the early literacy activities of pre-school and school-going children in Malaysia, the reading habits of young children, youths and adults in Malaysia, the type of reading materials read, the availability of these reading materials and the reasons for reading materials selected. General findings of the survey were as follows:

- 93 percent Malaysians aged 10 years and above are literate
- Actual reading practice of Malaysians is 87 percent
- Malaysians read an average of 2 books a year
- 12 percent are able to use personal computers
- 29 percent use the library services

National Reading Promotion Committee
The National Library of Malaysia act as the Secretariat for the National Reading Promotion Committee since 1991. The Secretariat which is coordinated by the Reading Promotion Division is a coordinating body at national level to encourage, promote and nurture reading consciousness in our society. This is also in line with the national objective to achieve 100% literacy by the year 2010. The National Reading Promotion Committee is chaired by the Minister of Education, Malaysia and its committee members comprises State Reading Promotion Committee Chairman; representatives from selected government departments such as Ministry of Education, the Language and Literacy Agency, the Community Development Division, Ministry of Rural Development, representatives from the mass media and representatives from the reading and book-based institutions such as the Librarian Association of Malaysia, Malaysian Reading Association, Malaysia National Book Council, Malaysian Book Publishers Association, Malaysian Book Sellers Association and Malaysian Book Importers Association.

Reading Promotion Programmes
The National Library coordinates and conducts various reading promotion programmes and activities at national and state level for adults, youth and children. Main programmes include the following:-

* The National Reading Month
* Home Libraries Competition
* My Favourite Read
* Book Donations
* Workshops on Reading Promotion
* Information Literacy Seminar
**Reading Month**

August have been declared by the government as the National Reading Month since 1995, an important annual event aimed at highlighting the importance of reading and inculcating the reading habit amongst Malaysians. However, in 2001 the Reading Month was changed to July to avoid overlapping with the country’s independence celebration programmes usually held from middle August to end September every year. During the Reading Month, reading promotion activities are intensified throughout the country by libraries and other institutions.

**Home Libraries Competition**

Since 1999, the National Library provides financial allocation to public libraries to organise Home Libraries Competition at state level to encourage parents to set up mini-libraries or reading corners in their homes. The objective is to encourage family members especially children to read and to make reading a national passion among all Malaysians. The National Home Libraries Competition is held every two years, the first held in the year 2001. Guidelines on how to set up home libraries are publicised and distributed to the public libraries, schools and institutions.

**My Favourite Read**

My Favourite Read programme was mooted by the National Library of Malaysia and was carried out as a pilot programme for the Reading Month in August 2000. It was a successful programme and had attracted 27 participants from various groups of people comprising doctor, engineer, librarian, academician, housewives, student of institute of higher learning, writer, historian, film director, artiste and others. Interactive and spontaneous presentation with question and answer sessions enable the audience to obtain interesting and pertinent information, ideas and opinions of the book and presenter.

Objectives of the programme:

- To popularise reading amongst Malaysian society
- To encourage the participation of the general public in the programme
- To encourage reading from books of interests
- To provide a channel for purposes of sharing of ideas and opinions of the books read
- To publish a compilation of Favourite Books Read by Malaysians

The pilot programme is documented and available in published form entitled *Bacaan Kegemaran Saya: Program Perintis = My Favourite Read: Pilot Programme* where a summary of the 27 presentations were documented based on the audio and video recording made. The book covers the following aspects:

- The source of the favourite book read
- Theme and story line
- Why it is a favourite book
- Benefit and impact

The book act as a guide for other libraries and beginning from 2001, the programme was implemented by public libraries and special libraries during the Reading Month. Compilation of *My Favourite Read* sessions conducted in 2000 and 2001 by the National Library and other libraries is now available in multimedia CD format.

**Book Donations**

The National Library started receiving budget allocation to undertake reading promotion activities at the national level since the 7th Malaysia Plan [1996 - 2000] and continues to receive an allocation for reading promotion under the 8th Malaysia Plan [2001 - 2005].

One of the planned programmes is to support institutions which does not have sufficient funding to acquire reading materials particularly in the rural areas. So far, donation of books have been given to FELDA [Federal and Land Development Authority] reading centres, community libraries and child development centres under Ministry of Rural Development, aborigines centres, prisons and rehabilitation centres, schools, associations as well as orphanages and children’s homes.
Workshops on Reading Promotion
The National Library also conducts workshops on reading promotion activities for reading promoters in various institutions, particularly in the rural areas, to motivate them to promote reading habit amongst the communities they serve. It is also hoped that they will impart what they learn to reading promoters in other centres and through a multiplier effect continue inculcating the reading habit.

Information Literacy Seminar
Organised in conjunction with the Libraries Association of Malaysia (PPM) during the Reading Month. As a follow up, information literacy packages will be developed for 3 levels-basic, intermediate and advanced to be used by trainers in information searching workshops.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES
For Adults and Youths
Book Talks and Discussions
Book Reviews
Book Exhibitions
Motivation Talks
IT Literacy Skills

For Children
Storytelling
Puppetry
Theatre Club/Drama
Drawing/Art
Handicrafts
Educational/Recreational Games [Indoor]
Video Shows
IT Literacy Skills
Computer Camp
Competitions
• Storytelling
• Poetry recitation
• Art
• Scrabble/Chess
• Quizzes
Library Membership Drive

FUTURE PLANS AND STRATEGIES
The National Library will focus its efforts over the next four years on planning, coordinating and implementing national core reading programmes based on our Strategic Plan 2001-2005. We hope to accomplish the following plan of action which is now already underway:

(i) Strengthening the Reading Promotion Division by creating an Information Literacy Promotion Division under the National Library restructuring exercise which was approved by the Government in early April 2002.

(ii) Development of a reading and literacy programmes database.

(iii) Submitting proposal paper National Agenda on Reading: To Develop a Reading Culture and Knowledgeable and Well-informed Society in Malaysia for to the government for consideration.

(iv) Conduct a reading and information literacy survey in 2003.

(v) Prepare submission for additional development funds for national information literacy programmes under the 8th Malaysia Plan Mid-Term Review (2003-2005).

CONCLUSION
Reading promotion will continue to be an important core activity of the National Library of Malaysia. Inculcation of the reading habit and a high level of information literacy is the key to a knowledge society. Efforts to create a knowledgeable society is a continuous process requiring the support and involvement of all sectors of society.