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Use of the School Resource Centre among Malaysian High School Teachers

Yushiana Mansor
International Islamic University - Malaysia, yuhiana@yhoo.com

Norhiyah Mohd Nor
International Islamic University - Malaysia, norhiyah@yahoo.com

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Yushiana Mansor
Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of ICT
International Islamic University, Malaysia

Norhiyah Mohd Nor
Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of ICT
International Islamic University, Malaysia

Introduction

The term School Resource Centre (SRC) emerged in Malaysian education since 1st May 1983 when the Ministry of Education directed all schools to use this term instead of school library. The directive was issued to signify the variety of SRC's collection which not only limited to printed materials but also other formats including audio visual collection. Doucette et. al (1999), defined SRC programmes as consisting of planned learning activities which support the school curriculum and contribute to the development of life-long learners. In addition, Loertscher (2000) suggested that an ideal SRC programme is built on the foundation of an information infrastructure that includes materials, equipment and facilities, and direct services to students and teachers. He further identified four areas of SRC programme that needed to be given attention namely collaboration, reading, enhancing learning through technology, and information literacy.

The importance of strong SRC programme will be heightened when combined with information literacy. In this respect, the IFLA/UNESCO school library guidelines recommended that the national curriculum and education development programmes at national level should consider SRC as vital means for fulfilling ambitious goals regarding the following:

- information literacy for all, gradually developed and adopted through the school system
- availability of information resources for students at all educational levels
- open dissemination of information and knowledge for all student groups to exercise democratic and human rights

SRC, as evidenced in the literature played an important role in developing information literate students. Many studies (ACRL, 2002; Lau, 2006; Bruce, 2002) considered IL as fundamental to the pursuit of lifelong learning. The importance of information literacy can be seen from its definition given by the American Library Association (ALA), i.e. a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognise when

information is needed and the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information (ALA, 2001). One of the challenges of the 21st century is about living in an increasingly complex world. People are faced with abundance of information choices in a variety of formats such as print, electronic, image, spatial, audio, visual, and numeric. Without information literacy skills, it is impossible for individuals especially students to search for relevant knowledge materials effectively, notwithstanding the need to ensure the integrity and merit of the information source particularly in this fast growing multimedia, print and internet world.

Earlier in 1998, the American Association of Librarians and the Association for Educational Communication and Technology (AASL & AECT), came up with the new national guidelines for school library media programmes, *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programmes.* The guidelines emphasise on the importance of information literacy, as one of the mission statements stated in the guideline is "to ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information" (AASL & AECT, 1988). Three means were identified by AASL & AECT in order to accomplish the mission including:

- providing intellectual and physical access to materials in all formats;
- providing instruction to foster competence and stimulate interest in reading, viewing, and using information and ideas; and
- working with other educators to design learning strategies to meet the needs of individual students (ALA, 1988).

The Government of Malaysia has put a lot of emphasis on the development of human capital in the Ninth Malaysia Plan. The Malaysian Ministry of Education, in turn, has taken further steps including the creation of smart schools, empowering the national schools and the setting up of school clusters. As such, schools are seen as the institution responsible for realising the nation's aspiration of building a new generation with creative, innovative and critical thinking culture. The challenge of developing human capital lies mainly in the hands of educators and teachers who are directly involved in training and moulding the potential, talent and quality of a student. The issue arising is whether the teacher is fully capable of rising up to the challenges of today's era of information explosion. Are the SRCs equipped enough with the appropriate programmes and services that should be geared towards creating a new generation with creative, innovative and critical thinking culture?

SRC is regarded as an important institution in Malaysia and efforts have been continuously taken to improve their standards and level of service qualities. Various measures have been implemented by the Ministry of Education to increase literacy rate in Malaysia and the role of SRC in facilitating literacy is considered vital. Numerous studies conducted from all over the world evidenced that effective SRC programmes have positive impact towards academic achievement. However, not much is understood on the relationship between SRC programmes and students' academic achievement in Malaysia. While information literacy skills is considered important in the current scenario where the world is overflowing with easily available digital information, there is still very little literature focusing on the implementation of SRC programmes and their impact on students' academic achievement.

There has been very limited research conducted in Malaysia regarding the level of usage and the perception of teachers towards the programmes and services provided by their SRCs, hence the lack of understanding of this issue. Nevertheless very few but fragmented studies indicated that SRCs and teacher librarians did not play an effective role in education. Teacher librarians not only failed to promote effectively the use of resources in teaching and learning but they also did not succeed in developing students with the skills in using information (Kwan, 1995). Teacher librarians were also reported as playing only minimum role in teaching IL. Among the factors that prevented the teaching of IL in schools are

lack of qualified teachers, librarians, computers and insufficient SRC collections (Choovong & Singh, 2005). Given the lack of understanding of this problem, it is important to investigate the extent and gravity of the issues mentioned above. By understanding the situation, appropriate recommendations can then be made to improve SRCs in line with the nation's aspiration.

Choovong & Singh (2005) reported the findings from the surveys in seven countries in Southeast Asia on the project entitled "Development of Information Literacy through School Libraries in South-East Asian Countries". In this summary report, they pointed out that training in IL was generally low among administrators regardless of location of schools (urban or rural). Most of the schools integrate IL into courses and /or taught as an orientation in the library. School libraries and teacher librarians are reported as playing only a minimum role in teaching IL. It is also reported that two out of the seven countries conducted IL classes in library and taught by teachers; and in five countries, it is a part of extra-curricular activities. The project also identified several factors that prevent the teaching of IL in schools such as lack of qualified teachers, librarians, computers and insufficient library collections.

School administrators are responsible in ensuring the effectiveness of SRC and its role in improving students' performance. It has been argued that school principals have a critical role in the implementation of change in schools (Haycock, 1992; Oberg, 2006; Van Hamersveld, 2007). According to Oberg (2006), effective principals are collaborative leaders who adopt effective strategies to facilitate the transformation of school culture. Oberg (2006) cited earlier studies (Campbell, 1991; Haycock, 1995) in the school library field which found that in general teacher-librarian view principal support as being critical to the success of the library programmes, they often have low expectations of school principal support.

School Resource Centres in Malaysia

Libraries have existed as important public institutions in Malaysia since the era of British Colony. During that time it was more well-known as *kutubkhanah*. It was later called library, a term that signifies building which kept a collection of books for public reading (Fatimah, 2002). Today, most schools have their own libraries or also known as school resource centres (SRCs), and efforts have been continuously taken to improve their standards and level of service qualities. According to Abdul Rahim (1990) SRCs are centres that constitute the collection of both printed and non-printed materials including reference books, documents, newspapers, models, charts, diagrams, maps, slide films, projectors, tape recorders, multimedia kits, and others. Later, this definition has been changed to reflect the changing landscape of the education system. Today, most schools define SRC as a unit that integrates library books, learning tools, as well as teaching aid services (Mok, 2003).

Efforts to improve the standard of SRC are not new. According to Fatimah (2002), in 1962 the Library Association of Malaya (*Persatuan Perpustakaan Tanah Melayu*) drew up a minimum standard for secondary schools among which outlined that:

- Collection of books and materials is to be placed in a designated room called library.
- Teacher-librarian will be required to attend library management courses for a year at recognised institutions.
- A minimum of three types of newspaper are to be made available in school library daily.
- Total number of book collections in library should be rationed at least 10 books per student.

In 1998, the National Policy on Education acknowledges the importance of school libraries through the setting up of SRC Department in Education Technology

Division. Thus, the development of all SRCs has since become the responsibility of the Education Technology Division (ETD), Ministry of Education. Training of teacher-librarian is carried out by the Teachers Training Division of ETD which runs the training through the network of 14 State Educational Resource Centres and the 367 Teacher Activity Centres (Fatimah, 2002).

Research Design

Similar to most quantitative studies, the present study was designed as an exploratory study, with a focus on the school teachers. Questionnaire administration was conducted with school teachers from five high schools in Gombak area of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Questionnaire questions focused on the contents and pattern of School Resource Centre use from frequency of visit, various materials and reasons for using the materials. The selection of schools and participants was guided by a research interest in deriving rich variation in interest and experiences of the respondents. Altogether one hundred and eighty four (184) school teachers' in five public schools participated in the study. Analyses of the questionnaire was directed at understand the pattern of SRC use among high school teachers in Malaysia.

Findings of the Study

Five schools in the District of Gombak had been chosen to take part in this survey. 13% (24) of the survey respondents were male and 87% (160) were female, reflecting the female dominance among the respondents in all the school selected in this survey. It is observed that majority of the respondents were between 31 to 40 years of age which make up 49.5% (91) of the respondents surveyed. The remaining respondents were aged between 20 to 30 years i.e. 23.9% (44); between 41 to 50 years i.e. 24.5% (45); and finally only 2.2% (4) of the respondents were more than 50 years of age.

The breakdown of work experience shows that about 6% (11) of the respondents had less than one year experience. Those who had been working between 1-5 years comprised 17.4 % (32) while 29.9% (55) had been working as teachers between 6 to 10 years. Majority of the respondents in this survey had worked between 11 to 15 years (30.4% or 56). The remaining respondents were either had worked between 16 to 20 years or more than 21 years. Both of the categories made up 8.2% (15) of the respondents.

Frequency of Visits to the SRC

Majority of the teachers 41.8% (77) seldom visited the SRC. It is observed that 27.2% (50) of the respondents visited the SRC only several times in a month while 23.9% (44) of the respondents visited the SRC one to two days a week. Only 7.1% (13) of the respondents frequented their SRC everyday.

Table 1. Frequency of Visit to SRC

Frequency of Visit	Number	Percent (%)
Seldom	77	41.8
Several times a month	50	27.2
1-2 days a week	44	23.9

Everyday	13	7.1
Total	184	100.0

Reasons for Visiting SRC

The result shows that 56.5% (104) of the respondents visited the SRC for leisure reading. Other reasons cited include accompanying students for the National Reading Program (NILAM) programme (35.9%, 66); borrowing reference books (32.6%); searching materials for preparing teaching and learning lessons (29.9%); and teaching aids preparation (19.6%). It was also observed that 12% of the respondents visited the SRC for other purposes such as attending school programmes or meetings, talks and briefing which were held in the SRC.

Table 2. Main Reasons for Visiting SRC

Reasons for Visiting SRC	Responses	
	N	Percent
Leisure reading	104	56.5%
National Reading Program (NILAM)	66	35.9%
To borrow reference books for teaching and learning purposes	60	32.6%
Searching materials for Teaching & Learning preparation	55	29.9%
Others	36	19.6%
Teaching aids preparation	22	12.0%

Types of Materials Read in SRC

Most of the respondents chose to read newspaper (30.3%) and magazine (25.1%) in the SRC. A lower percentage of the respondents go to the SRC to read more serious materials such as materials from red-spot collections (12.5%), collections of past year examination questions (11.2%), non-fiction materials (11.2%) and fiction materials (9.7%).

Table 3. Types of reading materials read in SRC

Type Of Reading Materials	Responses	
	No.	Percent
Newspaper	138	30.3%
Magazines	114	25.1%
Red-spot	57	12.5%

Non-Fiction	51	11.2%
Pass Year Exam Collection	51	11.2%
Fiction	44	9.7%

Types of Materials Borrowed From the SRC

For this question, respondents were allowed to select more than one answer in specifying the types of materials normally borrowed from the SRC. Table 4 shows that most teachers borrowed 'non-fiction' materials form the SRC (42.9%, 79). The non-fiction materials include subject reference books such as for Geography, History, and others. Most of the books were borrowed for just one to two lesson periods because most teachers wanted to use them as in-class reference. The result also shows that 25.5% (47) of the respondents borrowed 'fiction' books from SRC. The fiction material includes both English and Bahasa Malaysia literature. Some respondents also borrowed magazine (20.1%). However, not all SRC allow teachers to borrow magazines because it is usually considered as leisure reading materials and thus can only be read in the SRC. Besides reading materials, respondents also borrowed CD-ROM (14.1%), cassettes (1.6%) and portable radio (7.6%) from the SRC.

Table 4. Type of Materials Borrowed from SRC

Types of Materials	No.	Percent (%)
Non-fiction books	79	42.9%
Fiction books	47	25.5%
Magazines and others	37	20.1%
CD-ROM	26	14.1%
Portable radio	14	7.6%
Cassette	3	1.6%

Average Books or Materials Borrowed from SRC (In a Month)

The result also revealed that majority of respondents borrowed between 1-2 books a month (57.6%); 8.7% of the respondents borrowed three to four materials a month while only 2.2% borrowed between 5-6 materials (Table 5). Only 1% of the respondents borrowed more than 7 materials in a month. Surprisingly, 30% of the respondents never borrowed any books from their SRCs.

Table 5

Average materials borrowed from SRC in a Month

Average	Frequency	Percent
1-2	106	57.6
Never borrow books from SRC	56	30.4
3-4	16	8.7
5-6	4	2.2
7 and above	2	1.1
Total	184	100.0

Awareness of Schedule for NILAM Programme

In order to assess the respondents awareness of the implementation of NILAM programme in their school, they were asked to tick a 'yes' or 'no' answer for this question. It was observed that almost all respondents (91.3%) were aware that their schools have well scheduled NILAM programmes.

Table 6. Awareness of Schedule for NILAM Programme

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	168	91.3%
No	16	8.7%
Total	184	100.0%

Visiting Time to SRC

Table 7 illustrates the times when the respondents normally visited the SRC. The result shows that most of the respondents (50.5%) visited the SRC during their spare time, whereas 32.6% visited the SRC during NILAM programmes. At least 8.2% of the respondents visited the SRC during relief period or when school programmes were held there. A small number (4.9%) frequented the SRC during recess hour which is only twenty minutes, i.e. when the teachers took breaks, and another 7 (3.8%) teachers visited the SRC after school hours.

Table 7. Visiting Time to SRC

Visiting Time	Frequency	Percent (%)
Spare Time During School Hour	93	50.5
During Scheduled Nilam programme	60	32.6
Others	15	8.2

Recess	9	4.9
After School	7	3.8
Total	184	100.0

Methods Use in Searching Materials in the SRC

When asked on how they searched materials in SRC, surprisingly majority of the respondents were still using traditional method. More than half of the respondents (57.6%) performed shelf to shelf browsing in their search for the right materials rather than using Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) or catalogue card. About 29.3% (54) of the respondents chose to get assistance from student librarians for the needed materials. Only 9.8% (18) respondents used catalogue card as their searching tool. More surprisingly, only 2.2% (4) respondents stated that they used OPAC. Table 8 exhibits the search methods used by respondents.

Table 8. Methods Used in Searching Materials from SRC

Searching Methods	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Browse From Shelf	106	57.6
Help From Librarian	54	29.3
Catalog Card	18	9.8
OPAC	4	2.2
Others	2	1.1
Total	184	100.0

Using Materials from Red-spot Collection

Red-spot collection usually consists of important reference books and materials that are normally being used extensively in teaching and learning and are shelved at the Red-spot Collection. Examples of books and materials normally classified as Red-spot Collection by many SRC include dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and academic reference books for students and teachers. The borrowing period for Red-spot Collection materials is normally limited to two hours only.

The result from this study revealed that 66.3% (122) of the respondents had experienced using materials from the Red-spot collections while the remaining 33.7% (62) indicated that have yet to use this collection. The result of this analysis is summarised in Table 9.

Table 9. Frequency of Using Material from Red-spot Collections

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	122	66.3

No	62	33.7
Total	184	100.0

Person in-Charge of SRC Programme

When asked about the person in charge of the SRC programmes, 56% (103) of the respondents indicated their teacher librarian (Table 10).. However, 37.5% (69) of the respondents said that the programmes were usually joint-organised by teacher librarian and the Head of English and Malay Language panels. It was also observed that 4.3% (8) of the respondents named the Head of English and Malay Language panels as the person in charge of the programmes and 2.2% (4) stated others. The respondents specified Information Literacy teachers as the one who organised classes on how to use audio-visual equipment and other Information Technology related courses.

Table 10. Person In-charge of SRC Programmes

Person in-charge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Teacher Librarian	103	56.0
Both (Teacher Librarian and Head Of Bahasa Inggeris and Bahasa Malaysia Panels)	69	37.5
Head Of Bahasa Inggeris and Bahasa Malaysia Panels	8	4.3
Others	4	2.2
Total	184	100.0

Discussion

The result of this study showed that the level of SRC usage among teachers is still low. Majority of the respondents only seldom visit their SRC. While many of those who visited their SRC daily or 1-2 days a week did so for leisure reading such as newspapers and magazines. Only a small number of teachers really used SRC services for their teaching-learning purposes. The average monthly material borrowing pattern from SRC was also not very impressive. Most respondents indicated that they were either only borrowing between one to two books in a month or not borrowing any material at all from the SRC. The study also found that at least 34% of the respondents indicated that they never accessed materials from red-spot collection.

In terms of searching method, the study revealed that the respondents were not using enough of the latest search methods. Almost all respondents still used shelf to shelf browsing as their preferred searching method. The percentages of respondents who used OPAC or catalogue cards are very small. One possible explanation for this situation is either the selected schools did not provide OPAC facility, or the respondents did not know how to use OPAC. The low utilisation of catalogue cards maybe due to its inadequacy and lack of awareness about the service. In general, the study showed worrying trends for SRC usage level.

This finding is quite consistent with the claim that "school libraries or school resource centres, as many of them are now known, have long been underused and detached from students' learning environment" (Intan Azura, 2005). In general, the study seems to suggest that there was an overall lack of interest in the use of SRC by teachers. The factors that might have contributed to this low utilisation could be due to limited awareness about the importance and role SRC play in supporting and complementing the school curriculum or the materials available in SRC are not in support of the curriculum. Another factor leading to low utilisation of SRC may be due to the lack of training, promotion, and implementation of information literacy programmes for teachers and students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study showed that school teachers had rather low interest on the needs and want to use the SRC for their specific teaching and learning activities. This low interest varied according to their demographic factors and other various activities. They used printed textbooks more for the design of their curriculum, class room lesson plans and teaching and learning activities. The issue of quality in high school education in Malaysia has become more paramount now, this is because high school education in particular is the level of education that develops individuals' capacity to innovate and have critical thinking. In tackling the problem of quality therefore, it is imperative that the provision of adequate library facilities, information infrastructure such as information technology should be the nucleus of the strategies for improving quality. Adequate training must be given to teachers so that they know how to integrate SRC resources to augment their teaching and learning methods and in turn enhance effectiveness and spur interest among students.

Recommendations

1. One way to encourage teachers to frequent the SRC is via effective communication channel. As such, teacher librarian needs to plan proper communication with all teachers. This includes not only poster and announcement in meetings, but also other communication medium including newsletters, e-mail, and announcement through library or school homepage. Teacher librarian should also periodically announce new acquisitions and titles added to the SRC collections to the knowledge of all teachers. Promotion of SRCs not only brings awareness on the latest SRC materials collections and programmes but it can also motivate higher use of SRC to improve teaching–learning methods.

2. Teacher librarian should ensure that the resources and media collections in SRC support the school curriculum. One of the strategies to achieve this is by encouraging all teachers to recommend titles or materials for SRC collection. Upon availability of the recommended titles or materials, they should be alerted. Thus, allowing teachers to be involved in SRC would likely increase utilisation of SRC facilities and services in support of their teaching tasks.

3. Teacher librarian are highly encouraged to collaborate with teachers to ensure that their lessons are not only limited to classroom and textbooks but also use variety of resources available in SRC. Teachers should be advised to integrate the type of teaching aids or SRC resources that they use in their daily lesson plan. By doing this, all teachers will start using the resources or media collections available in the SRC and their lessons too will therefore become more interesting and resourceful.

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