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An Assessment on the Physical Factors that Influence Reading Preferences of Secondary School Students in the Suburban Area of Kuala Lumpur

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ABSTRACT

Background: This research aims to determine the relationship between physical factors and the reading preferences of secondary school students within suburban areas in Kuala Lumpur. The first objective was to identify the demographic characteristics of the secondary school students in relation to reading preferences. The second objective was to assess the attitude and values of secondary school students towards the reading activity and library; the third was to assess the relationship between physical factors and reading preferences. The final objective was to recommend a concept and design criteria for a reading place based on findings. Self-completed questionnaires were distributed to 300 respondents in both schools, SMK Bandar Baru Sentul and SMK Gombak Setia. Based on the analyses, it was found that a majority of the respondents indicated a positive attitude towards reading and the school library. However, the majority spent almost of their leisure time doing activities other than reading. Two-thirds of the respondents highly agreed that reading would be more attractive with the existence of various facilities that supported an informal environment for reading, such as facilities that allowed people to talk, eat and listen to music while reading. Based on inferential and factor analyses, two physical factors could be extracted; i) facilities and services, ii) internal and external environment of reading places. These analyses confirmed that these two physical factors influence reading preferences. The research then recommended to set an informal environment as a reading place and provide various facilities in the reading place, aimed especially at attracting young people as applied in other libraries, such as Book Café, Library My Second Home, Park Library and Virtual Library, that suit the demands of young groups and also being in line with current reading trends. If the concept is well received, it is potentially a transformative research finding and a breakthrough for the Malaysian reading environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Several studies have been conducted to identify the nature of reading preferences, including the influencing factors. Studies done by previous researchers found that gender, socioeconomy, availability of material and location of the area either urban or rural influence the reading preferences (Norvell, 1950; Sahai, 1970; Christina and Amelia, 2005; Fayaz Ahmad, 2011). Nevertheless, reviews undertaken have found that there is a lack of evidence to substantiate the physical factors influencing the reading preferences as concerned by this research. Reviews undertaken have also confirmed that the literacy rate among Malaysian teenagers was the lowest compared to others country

(Malaysian National Library, 2012). With these considerations in mind, this research deals with discovering the physical factors that influence reading preferences. In other words, the research intends to study the relationship between reading preferences and physical factors in terms of facilities and services, as well as external and internal environment of the reading places. By having some idea of the development of the reading place, this idea could perhaps contribute towards cultivating an attraction to reading, thus improving the level of reading among Malaysian citizens.

Problem Statements:

I. Lack of studies being conducted that assess reading preferences in relation to physical factors.

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II. The Malaysian level of reading is still at a lower level

III. Teenagers have an adverse impression towards libraries and use the libraries just to study rather than to read for leisure.

Research Objectives:

I. To identify the demographic characteristics of the secondary school students in relation with reading preferences.

II. To assess the attitude and values of the secondary school students towards reading activity and library.

III. To assess the relationship between physical factors and reading preferences.

IV. To recommend the concept and design criteria of reading kiosk based on the findings.

Literature Review On Reading Habit:

Many researches have been conducted to assess the reading habit of individuals. Research on reading habit has been conducted on youngsters (Wicks, 1995; Machet, 2004), on college students (Gallik, 1999; Kirsch and Guthrie, 1984; Ali, 1994), and in particular cultures and society, such as Malaysian (Long, 1984; Frank Small and Associates, 1996). Based on the previous studies conducted, most of the studies are concerned with the factors that influence the reading habit.

Table 1: Matrix on factors associated with reading preferences by previous researchers.

	READING PREFERENCES			
	Time Spent for Reading	Reading Purposes	Reading Motivation	Reading Material
Gender	Hastings and Henry (2006)	Zainab (1977) Chai (1996) Abilock (2002)	Clark and Foster (2005)	Moffit (1992) and Simpson (1998)
Location (Urban and Rural)	Fayaz (2011)	Fayaz (2011)	Fayaz (2011)	Fayaz (2011)
Physical Factor (facilities, environment)	Research Gap			

Although studies have been conducted in relation to physical factors, these previous studies have been more concerned with the library patrons and space arrangement inside the libraries. Based on the diagram above, the gap in this literature has been identified, and it found that no studies had been conducted in assessing the association between physical factors and reading preferences. Reviews undertaken found that there is a lack of evidence to substantiate that physical factors influence the reading preferences, as is the concern of this research. Thereby, it is the interest of the research to investigate the relationship between physical factors and reading preferences, thus investigating the suitable concept of a reading place that can attract people to come and read which shall be the final output of this research.

The Reading Habit In Malaysia:

In a survey conducted by the Malaysian National Library (1996) it was found that Malaysians read an average of only two books a year in 1996. Furthermore, a survey conducted by the Malaysian National Library in 2006 revealed that the literacy rate had slightly decreased to 92% from 93% in 1996 (Malaysian National Library, 2006). Based on this result, there has been no increase in the amount of reading over the past ten years.

Concepts Of Libraries In Other Countries:

Many countries are developing attractive reading places to nurture the reading habit amongst their citizens. The function of the library has been modified by providing interactive facilities and being surrounded by an enjoyable environment in order to attract members of the community.

Table 2: Concepts of libraries in other countries.

CONCEPT	LOCATION	CHARACTER
Open Air Library	Magdeburg	-Sport facilities attached with reading facilities -Built in open air condition
Incubator Library	Willesden, UK	The library attached with: -Workshop -Cafe -Working space -Play school
Park Library	Bogota	-The kiosk built inside park area offers reading facilities within open air and greenery environment. - People can read and borrow books, children can get help with their homework and it offers various activities including book reading and music events
Uni Project	New York City	- It is a portable reading room which aimed to temporarily transform almost any available urban space into a public reading room and venue for learning
Virtual Library	Austria	-The stickers are placed in public locations such as bus stops, containing QR codes and NFC technology that enable citizens to download e-books.

Research Methodology:

Survey and questionnaires were designed to collect the data. The population consisted of secondary school students and the sample was students of SMK Bandar Baru Sentul and SMK Gombak Setia aged 16 and 17 years old. The total sample size was 300 students from these two secondary schools. SMK Gombak Setia and SMK Bandar Baru Sentul were given 150 questionnaires each.

Convenience sampling had been chosen as the method of sampling where all the students of Form 4 and Form 5 were invited to participate in this survey at their convenience. The questionnaires were given by the researcher to the teachers of Form 4 and Form 5 students in both schools. The teachers then distributed these to their students and after one week, the questionnaires forms were returned to the researcher.

Based on the result, 74% of respondents were from a Low Income family background where the household income is lower than RM2000. Table 4 also indicates that 36.7% of respondents lived in terrace houses and 26.6% lived in apartments or flats.

Table 5 indicates a summary on the perception of respondents towards the school library. The analysis found that seven in ten respondents liked to visit their school library. However, the school library was seldom visited by respondents. 38% of respondents had visited the library for the purpose of studying and 35% of respondents visited the library to complete their assignments.

Based on the Relative Importance Index on satisfaction with the facilities and services offered at the library, the result indicates that physical factors in terms of the colours of the walls, lighting, and interior design of the library were the most important

factors that contributed to satisfaction with the facilities and services of the library.

A summary of the reading preferences of respondents is illustrated in Table 5.4. Based on the findings, almost two in five (39%) respondents spent 2 hours on reading, followed by 28% who spent more than 2 hours on reading. 19% of respondents spent 1 hour on reading and the remaining 14% spent 30 minutes on reading. A majority of respondents spent more than 2 hours on reading. The results also show that 28% of respondents chose novels as their most liked reading material followed by comics, academic books, magazines and newspapers.

The overall findings on the Relative Important Index (RII) on the perception towards reading reported that respondents preferred to have other facilities attached to the reading place so that they can carry out activities other than reading. At the same time, by providing other facilities at the reading place, it could attract them to come and read, thus nurturing the reading habit.

Based on the analysis on the perception of respondents towards the concept of 'attractive reading place', it can be seen that respondents preferred to have a reading place in an informal environment where some activities such as eating, chatting, watching television and listening to music are allowed within the area. The respondents also preferred a homey atmosphere for a reading place that is equipped with sofas, DVD players and other facilities so that they can enjoy reading in a comfortable and relaxing environment.

Table 3: Method of Analysis.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	HYPOTHESIS	METHODOLOGY
To identify the demographic characteristics of the secondary school students in relation with reading preferences	To test the relationship between parents' household income and time spent on reading	ANOVA
	To test the relationship between gender and time spent on reading	T-Test Analysis
	To test the relationship between gender and the types of material most liked	Chi Square Analysis
	To test the relationship between availability of reading space at home and the preference to read at home	Chi Square Analysis
To assess the attitude and values of the secondary school students towards reading activity and library	To test the relationship between gender and perception towards reading as an activity.	Chi Square Analysis
	To test the relationship between availability of reading space at home and frequency visiting the library	Chi Square Analysis
	To test the relationship between gender and feelings towards visiting the school library	ANOVA
	To test the relationship between gender and purpose visiting the library	Chi Square Analysis
	To test the relationship between age and purpose of visiting the school library	Chi Square Analysis
To assess the relationship between physical factors and reading preferences	To test the relationship between the physical environment of reading places and the reading preferences	T-Test Analysis
To recommend the concept and design criteria of reading place based on findings	-	Descriptive Analysis

Findings and discussion:
Demographic of respondents:

Table 4: Frequency Analysis on the Demographic of respondents.

	Percentage (%)
Sex	
Boys	40.7
Girls	59.3
Age	
16 years old (Form 4)	50
17 years old (Form 5)	50
Races	
Malay	89.3
Chinese	4.7
Indian	1.3
Others	4.7
Hobby	
Sport	43
Reading	18
Internet Surfing	27
Listening to music	4
Others	8
Parents Household income	
Less than RM1500	22.3
RM1501-RM2000	51.3
RM2001-RM4000	16.3
More than RM4000	10.1
Types of house	
Detached House	11.7
Terrace House	36.7
Condominium	6.7
Apartment/Flats	26.6
Others	18.3
Reading Space at home	
Yes	56.6
No	43.4
Activity after school hours	
Sports	32.7
Tuition/Addition Class	15.7
Shopping	11.7
Meeting Friends	18.6
Others	21.3

Perceptions towards the school library:

Table 5: Summary on the perception towards the school library.

	Percentage (%)
Feelings towards school library	
Like to visit school library	69
Do not like to visit school library	31
Frequency visiting school library	
Frequent	26
Seldom	69.3
Never	0
Visit whenever asked by teacher	4.7
Purpose of visiting school library	
To study	38
For leisure	21
To use internet	6
To do homework/assigned by teacher	35

Table 4.10 indicates a summary of the inferential analysis between demographic characteristics and reading preferences, attitudes towards the school library, attitudes towards the reading activity and the analysis between physical factors and reading preferences. Based on the analysis, there is a significant relationship between household income and time spent on reading. The findings show that

respondents from a high income family background spent more time on reading compared to respondents from a low income family background. Chi Square analysis had been used to test the variable between gender and time spent on reading. The result of the analysis recorded that it failed to reject the null hypothesis due to the small number of sample size. However, crosstabulation analysis shows that girls

were reported enjoy in reading more than boys. Nevertheless, the mean differences between boys and

girls for the time spent on reading was not statistically significant.

Table 6: Relative Importance Index on Satisfaction with the Facilities and Services Offered at the Library.

	RII	Rank	Satisfaction
Comfortability of reading space	0.768	1	Satisfied
Colors of the wall	0.740	2	Satisfied
Lighting of library	0.738	3	Satisfied
Reading material	0.720	4	Satisfied
Interior decoration at the library	0.706	5	Satisfied
Services provided at library	0.680	6	Satisfied
Arrangement of reading material	0.670	7	Satisfied
Temperature of library	0.650	8	Satisfied
Rules of library	0.636	9	Satisfied

Perception towards reading as an activity:

Table 7: Summary on the reading preferences.

	Percentage (%)
Time Spent for Reading	
30 minutes	14
1 hour	19
2 hours	39
More than 2 hours	28
Types of material most liked	
Academic Books	18
Novel	28
Magazine	15
Newspaper	14
Comic	25
Reading Motivation	
Parents and family	28
Teachers	18
Friends	16
Own initiative	38
Use internet for reading	
Yes	90
No	10
Read at home	
Yes	61.3
No	39.7
Reasons for not read at home	
Like to read at library only	14
Unconducive environment at home	9
Like to spent time for other activities other than reading	65
No reading material at home	12

Table 8: Relative Importance Index on the Perception of respondents towards reading.

	RII	Ranking	Perception
If there are other activities that can be done while reading it would attract me to read	0.880	1	Strongly Agree
I like the informal environment of a reading place	0.730	2	Agree
I prefer to read through the internet compared to printed materials	0.660	3	Agree
I do not like to read at the library	0.636	4	Agree
Reading makes me feel sleepy	0.600	5	Agree
Reading is my hobby	0.584	6	Neither Agree nor Disagree
I only read for the purpose of study as preparation for exams.	0.552	7	Neither Agree nor Disagree

The analysis also found that gender is significant with the types of material most liked. The analysis reported that the girls preferred novels while the boys enjoyed reading comics. Therefore, the mean differences between boys and girls for the time spent on reading was not statistically significant as the material preferred, both novels and comics, are for leisure reading.

Table 10 also shows that there is a significant relationship between the availability of space for reading at home and the preferences to read at home. Based on the analysis, the majority of respondents who read at home had the space for reading in their homes and almost two in five of the respondents did not read at home and did not have any space for reading at their homes. The analysis showed that the

preference to read is significantly dependent on the space provided for reading. Therefore, this study suggests providing an attractive reading space to nurture the reading habit among young people. The

inferential analysis between demographic and reading preferences has answered research objective number 1.

Preferences On The Concepts For A Reading Place:

Table 9: Relative Importance Index (RII) on the Perception of respondents towards the concept of an attractive reading place.

	RII	Rank	Perception
A reading place built in an enclosed area equipped with a café and spacious reading space and chatting, music and eating are allowed while reading	0.888	1	Strongly Agree
“Library My Second Home” concept, where a reading place is built in an enclosed area equipped with sofas for visitors to rest, listen to music and have a meal.	0.872	2	Strongly Agree
A service to upload reading material via a particular application using a smartphone.	0.810	3	Strongly Agree
A reading place built in the open equipped with sports facilities such as cycling, skateboarding, etc.	0.684	4	Agree
A reading place built in the open at a park and equipped with a collection of books and seating areas.	0.684	5	Agree
A reading place built in an enclosed area equipped with a workshop	0.576	6	Neither Agree nor Disagree
A reading place built in the open at a public area without any structure and equipped with bookshelves and seating areas	0.476	7	Neither Agree nor Disagree

Inferential Analysis:

Table 10: Summary on the inferential analysis between demographic characteristics and reading preference, attitudes towards the school library and attitudes towards the reading activity, physical factors and reading preferences.

	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Acceptance of Null Hypothesis
Demographic vs Reading Preferences	Parents's household income	Respondent's time spent on Reading	Null Hypothesis Rejected
	Gender	Respondent's time spent on reading	Fail to Reject Null Hypothesis
	Gender	Types of reading material most liked	Null Hypothesis Rejected
	Space provided for reading at home	Preference to read at home	Null Hypothesis Rejected
Demographic vs attitudes towards reading	Gender	Perception towards reading activity	Fail to Reject Null Hypothesis
Demographic vs attitude towards library	Availability of reading space at home	Frequency visiting the library	Null Hypothesis Rejected
	Gender	Feelings towards visiting the school library	Fail to Reject Null Hypothesis
	Gender	Purpose of visiting the school library	Null Hypothesis Rejected
	Age	Purpose of visiting the school library	Fail to Reject Null Hypothesis
Physical factors vs reading preferences	Time spent in reading (present)	Time spent on reading (if the attractive reading place were built)	Null Hypothesis Rejected

Meanwhile, research objective number two has been achieved through the descriptive and inferential analyses between demographic and attitudes towards the reading activity and school library. Table 10 also indicates the results of the inferential analysis between gender and perception towards the reading activity. Chi Square analysis had been done to assess the relationship between gender and the perception towards reading as an activity. The analysis found that it failed to reject the null hypothesis. Meanwhile, the descriptive analysis found that the boys had slightly negative perceptions towards the reading activity as they described reading as a boring activity and that reading was not even their hobby. Additionally, both boys and girls did not like to read at the library and both preferred the informal environment of a reading place. Therefore, the research suggests that such an attractive reading place where the concept in terms of facilities and

physical environment should be different from the existing library and needs to be developed to attract this group of people.

Objective number two also highlighted the assessment on the relationship between the demographic of respondents and their attitude towards their school library. Therefore, Chi Square analysis had been carried out to test the significance between the availability of a reading space at home and frequency of visiting the school library. Findings showed that the null hypothesis was rejected and it was also found that there is a significant relationship between these two variables; availability of a reading space at home and frequency of visiting the school library. However, based on Phi and Cramer's V value, these two variables were moderately associated as the values recorded were 0.32.

Chi Square analysis had been carried out to assess the significance between gender and purpose

of visiting the school library. However, the results recorded that it failed to reject the null hypothesis. Similar results were generated for the analysis between age and purpose of visiting the school library, where it also failed to reject the null hypothesis. The crosstabulation analysis reported that a majority of Form 5 respondents visited the library for the purpose of study for the reason that the Form 5 students would sit for the exam known as 'Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia' during the year. These students therefore needed to do revisions as preparation for the examination. In the meantime, most of the respondents aged 16 years old or Form 4 students visited the library to complete their homework or were assigned to do so by their teachers.

The findings also reported that there is a significant relationship between gender and purpose of visiting the school library. The results show that almost 40% of the boys visited the library for the purpose of study while 38% of the girls reported that they had visited the school library to complete their homework or were assigned to do so by their teachers. However, 37% of the girls had visited the library for the purpose of study. Based on the descriptive analysis on the attitude of respondents towards the reading activity and the school library, supported by the inferential analysis between demographic and the attitude towards reading and the school library, objective number two had been achieved.

Table 11: Table of Rotated Component Matrix.

	Component		Factor
	1	2	
1.Types of Reading material	.804		FACILITIES AND SERVICES
8.Rules of library	.688		
9.Overall services of library	.657	.331	
2.Arrangement of reading material	.624	.346	
3.Comfortability of reading space	.537	.444	
5.Colors of the wall		.854	INTERNAL DESIGN
4. Interior decoration of library		.815	
6.Ventilation of library	.310	.598	
7.Lighting of library	.374	.517	

Based on the results, two components had been extracted. The variables such as types of reading material, rules of library, services offered at the library, arrangement of reading material and comfort of reading space were included under one factor, which is Facilities and Service. The variables of interior decoration of library, ventilation, lighting and colours of the walls were categorized under the Internal Design factor. Based on this factor analysis, the findings showed that the factor extracted, which are the Facilities and Services and Internal Design, were considered as the physical factors. Therefore, it can be concluded that Facilities and Internal Design factors are the physical factors that influence the reading habit. Overall, these two factors, which are facilities and internal and external environment, should be considered in any development of a reading place. Based on an overall analysis, research

Table 4.10 illustrates the inferential analysis between physical factors and reading preferences. In order to achieve objective number 3, which was to assess the relationship between these two variables, Independent Sample T-Test has been carried out. In this case, the variable of time spent on reading if 'attractive reading place' were to be built represents the physical factor of a reading place. If the physical factors influence the preference of people to read, which is referred to as reading preferences, it must be an increment on the mean time spent between before and after the 'attractive reading place' was built. Based on the analysis of T-Test between these variables, there is a statistically significant improvement in time spent on reading between the present time and the time spent on reading if the "attractive reading place" were built. The mean time spent on reading if the "attractive reading place" were built is higher than the mean of the present time spent on reading. This therefore shows that the physical factors of a reading place influences reading preferences. Thus, this analysis has answered research objective number 3.

Factor Analysis:

In addition to support the research hypothesis, Factor Analysis had been conducted. Factor Analysis was carried out in order to extract the factors, thus determining factors based on the dimension.

objective number one, two and three have been achieved.

Recommendations:

Recommendations are drawn based on the literature review and findings regarding the approach in relation to the physical factors that can be applied in developing a reading place. From the examples of the library concepts applied in other countries, the criteria of an attractive reading place were highlighted.

I.Locating Various Facilities In A Reading Place In Response To The Needs Of Young People:

According to OMC (2007), the availability of various facilities and services at a public library can draw young people into accessing literature as well as information relevant to their needs. Based on the

analysis and findings, the respondents preferred to have access to internet facilities, followed by café and television in a reading place. Nevertheless, the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the provision of sports facilities, workshop and playground facilities at the reading place.

Based on the analysis and findings, the respondents highly agreed with the concept of a reading place that is built in an enclosed area equipped with a café and spacious reading space. People can enjoy their meal while reading and listening to music and chatting is allowed inside the area.

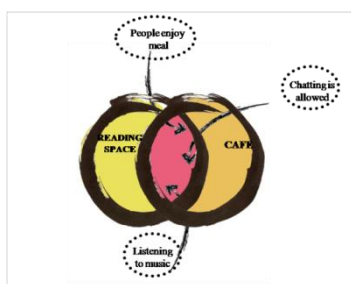


Fig. 1: Conceptual diagram of Book Café concept.

II. Setting Up The Informal Environment Of A Reading Place To Attract Young People:

The analysis found that the respondents were satisfied with the facilities and services offered by their school library. However, there was group of respondents, especially boys, who had described reading as a boring activity, which made them feel sleepy. The analysis also confirms that the respondents preferred to have an informal reading place environment where eating, chatting, listening to music, watching television and sports are allowed while reading. In response to their needs, this research suggests that an informal setting should be created at any development of a reading place to encourage active reading.

The Park Library is one of the examples that afford an informal environment for a reading place. It offers the visitors the opportunity to read and borrow books, work on their assignment and homework, and also offers various activities such as music events to attract people to come. In Bogota, there are about 50 library kiosks around the city's parks and 100 across the country.

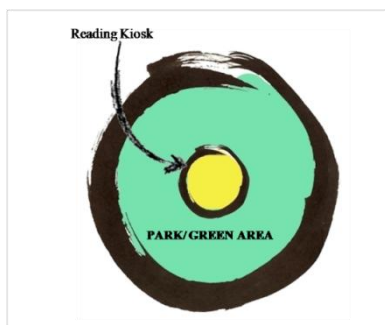


Fig. 2: Conceptual diagram of Park Library concepts.

Locating a reading kiosk within the park area is a brilliant idea to promote the reading habit. People could enjoy reading in an environment surrounded by greenery. Developing a reading place in the park area can attract many groups of people as the park is commonly visited by the community to carry out their leisure activities. While performing those activities, people are also able to enjoy reading, hence promoting communication among them.

Conclusion:

This research was conducted in an attempt to enhance the understanding about reading preferences among teenagers specifically in the suburban areas of Kuala Lumpur and the significance of physical factors towards influencing the reading preference. In this effort, secondary students from two schools at suburban areas in Kuala Lumpur were chosen as respondents. In the overall analysis, results indicated that some students described reading as a boring activity and a majority of students used the library for study rather than for leisure reading. In addition, the respondents demanded an informal reading place environment that allowed other activities such as chatting, eating and listening to music, which seems to be totally different with the concept and system of most of the current library concepts in Malaysia. This research proposes some approach in terms of the physical aspects of reading places, aiming to attract young people to come and there by cultivating the reading habit. This approach has been carried out in many western countries. The knowledge acquired through this study should contribute to a better understanding of the phenomena of the reading habit and attitude in Malaysia specifically, and in contributing to future research in similar areas generally. Since this study may be treated as a case study, the results should contribute greatly in terms of methodology for studies to be conducted at different levels of population or with a broader population scope.

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