

THE TRAINING OF TEACHER LIBRARIANS IN COMPARISON WITH PROFESSIONAL LIBRARIANS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

A recognition of the crucial role of libraries to education has led to the establishment of school libraries and resource centres in almost all school systems in Malaysia. Each school has conventionally allocated a teacher to take charge of the administration and services of the libraries in addition to the teaching load they have to accomplish. For the past five decades, this system has been going on and it would be interesting to study how the teachers acquired the training in the library management and services. Although there have been calls for the establishment of well developed school libraries headed by professionally trained librarians, the current practice of training teachers to take charge of the library is widely done. The reengineering and the creation of new information programmness to comply with the new demands of ICT have made it imperative for upgrading of the training for the teacher librarians. This paper attempts to describe the current training for teacher-librarians and the prospects of providing a more advanced training as needed by the job market.

Keywords: Teacher librarians; Library science education; School libraries; School librarianship; Training; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Education and training involve the transfer, dissemination and acquisition of information and knowledge through a number of mediums. The conventional method has been the direct class room teaching, with teachers playing the main role as the disseminator of knowledge. Even before the phenomenal increase in the information and the proliferation of information formats, the role of library as the centre for any educational institution has become even more important to act as intermediaries between students and the wide range of information. It can be said that almost all schools have a library to support its education and programme. To what extent the school library has been effective in supporting the school system remains to be seen. Nevertheless, it is convenient to say here that almost all school libraries are managed in an ad hoc manner while the teacher librarian position has been regularly changed and the time allocated has been at the average of about six hours per week only. With that limited time

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allocated it is assumed that there is nothing much the teacher librarian can do in particular to meet the minimum standard of the school and library resource centre. In Malaysia, the post of a professional teacher-librarian still remains unfilled, and their training and experience is far different from those acquired through the main stream information professional programme.

Recognition of the crucial role of libraries to education has led to the establishment of school libraries and resource centres in almost all school systems in the country. Each school has conventionally been allocated a teacher to take charge of the administration and services of the libraries in addition to the teaching load they have to accomplish. For the past five decades, this system has been practiced and it would be interesting to study how the teachers acquired the training in the library management and services. Although there have been calls for the establishment of well developed school library headed by professionally trained librarians, the current practice of training teachers to take charge of the library is widely done. Research from selected schools in the Klang Valley and Kuching revealed that the majority of the teacher-librarians are not given reduced subjects to teaching.

NEED FOR QUALIFIED TEACHER LIBRARIANS

Evidence from the results of studies made on the impact of school library media programmes on academic performance provide support on the need for professionally trained and credentialed school library media specialists affects achievement. For this to materialize, support from the principals, teachers, and supporting staff is essential. The need to move towards knowledge society will not be easy unless there is a shift in the national education agenda towards a smart school concept. Such move must also be in parallel with the school library policy which should be geared towards the success implementation of this concept to enable the creation of an information literate society, which is not an option anymore. It is crucial for the school systems to be able to tap knowledge in the resource centre and this call for a more serious effort in providing personnel with professional qualification and the post that enable them to conduct according to the best practice concept. The success of the resource-based learning can be accomplished better through qualified library personnel, especially with the growth and diversity of information and knowledge assets. "A qualified teacher-librarian is a highly skilled teacher, with competencies provided by a combination of teacher education, classroom experience and courses in teacher-librarianship and information studies" (ATLC, 1997, p.2). This training enables the teacher-librarian to develop a school library programme that meets the learning objectives of the school. This includes teaching the students how to access and use learning resources, to develop the criteria and skills to select quality information, and to read widely and well. The

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teacher-librarian is a catalyst for ideas in the school, offering access to community and world-wide resources and linkages to resource people.

SCHOOL LIBRARY MANAGEMENT IN MALAYSIA: ASSOCIATED PROBLEMS

In Malaysia, School Resource Centres are part of the whole continuum of educational provisions. Most schools in Malaysia have libraries although the size varies according to the financial allocation received and the number of staff and the student population available. According to Fatimah (2002), “for financial support, two grants are allocated yearly to all schools. They are the Library Grant and the Educational Resource Centre Grant. Combining the two grants, each school has a minimum of RM 2,000 (for schools with less than 100 students) and to a maximum of RM 6,900 for schools with 1,000 students.”

(a) Low Information Literacy

One of the main problems facing the students in Malaysia is the low information literacy level among them. This problem can be linked to the uncoordinated school library facilities, although the call for its proper management is clearly stipulated in all the instruction and standards given by the Education Ministry. For example, the guideline given by Jemaah and Yusop (1995) underlined the need for a trained teacher-librarian in resource centre management and educational technology, dedicated and committed and interested staff. There is no provision of full-time personnel who can initiate formal information skills programme at the school levels. In order to ensure the success implementation of the resource-based learning in line with the development of a knowledge-based society, the following problems must be addressed:

- Disparity in the school library development
- Chronic lack of time among teacher librarians
- Conflict between library management and teaching duties
- Lack of understanding among the authorities about the functions of resource centre and the role of teacher librarians
- Lack of coordination between teacher librarians and other staff members on curriculum and role of library in resource-based learning
- Inadequate support from the authority in manning the administration and services of the resource centre.

Although school library and resource centre facilities are provided in most Malaysian schools, the amount of budget allocation being channelled to the school library systems is not adequate. This is compounded with the increasing number of schools in the whole country resulting in the inequitable and

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inadequate budget. Figure 1 shows the number of schools by type in Malaysia. In 2002, there are 7,406 primary schools and 1794 secondary schools with a total of 9052 schools throughout the country. From the total population of about 24 million people, 33% is under 14 years old and 19% of our youth is between 15 to 24 years old (Fatimah, 2002). The findings of a recent study commissioned by the National Library of Malaysia indicates the literacy rate of Malaysians aged 10 years and above as 93% (Frank Small and Associates, 1998).

Table 1: Number of Schools in Malaysia by Types (2002)

Types	Number
Primary	7, 406
Secondary	1, 794
TOTAL	9052

Source: Fatimah, Jusoh, "School Libraries in Malaysia," *The 2002 IASL Conference*, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia 4-9 August.

The school resource centres are being managed by teacher-librarians who are allocated with minimum hours but essentially are still responsible in the teaching process. However, there are a number of junior colleges that conduct secondary school education which employ qualified librarians. They are able to do so because their colleges are not tied down with the current educational policy of employing teacher-librarians to man the resource centres. From the observation and research undertaken, from the schools and the teachers involved in the management of school libraries, most students do not use the library fully because of numerous factors as follows:

a) Lack of Library Skills among Students

The factors contributing to this problem has been the lack of information skill programme and library education given as part of academic programme in school.

b) Inadequate Relevant Reading Materials

Most of the library collection is limited, not up-to date and characterized by numerous inadequacies such as irrelevant materials and fiction bias too. This type of collection will not nurture students to research in depth in books across their main text and curriculum. There is a need for proper book selection policy.

c) No Full-time Management Personnel

Teachers appointed to manage the libraries complain that they could not fully concentrate on the management and less so on the services, activities, library promotion and information skills programme. These are the basis for the development of school libraries and resource centre to enable the concept of resource-based learning in schools

d) Teaching Methodology Changes

Teaching, which emphasizes totally on text should be changed where teacher provides the contents of the subjects, while the rest will be given to student as tasks to do further references from the whole spectrum of information materials. Teachers with the help of the teacher librarian supervise the students to get access and to utilize the information.

e) No Formal Information Skills Programme

An information literacy programme is an understanding and set of abilities enabling individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the capacity to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. Malaysia should also have a standard on information literacy, which should be introduced (Table 2). It should be endorsed and promulgated by policy makers, educational institutions, professional and educational associations. Library media specialists have twofold teaching roles. They are teachers of students, facilitating the development of information literacy skills necessary for success in all content areas, and they are in-service trainers of teachers, keeping abreast of the latest information resources and technology.

Table 2: Standards Skills and Levels on Information Literacy

Types of skills	Primary years	Secondary years	Tertiary years
Library orientation	Basic	Mid-level	Advance
Library Instruction (Library Services and Collection)	Basic	Mid-level	Advance
Bibliographic Instruction (Index, Abstracts, reviews etc.)	Nil	Mid-level	Advance
Information Technology Skills	Basic	Mid-level	Advance
Term Paper Clinic	Nil	Basic	Advance
Inculcation of Reading Skills/Habits; Remedial Reading	Basic	Mid-level	Advance

The information literacy programmes should, not only provide the skills needed to address the many faces of information literacy but also to fit them into the new knowledge society. Among others, a well trained teacher-librarian would be able to assist in the following responsibilities:

- Finding information located in information sources
- Using ICT for information retrieval & communication

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- Executing a process that involves information use and info technology
- Controlling information
- Building up a personal knowledge base in a new area of interest

RATIONALE: ROLE OF QUALIFIED TEACHER-LIBRARIAN

Teacher librarians have a key role to play in the development of information literacy while reflecting their dual role as both teachers and information specialists (Figure 1). The teacher librarian's flexibility and positive response to change will directly influence the success of information literacy programmes.

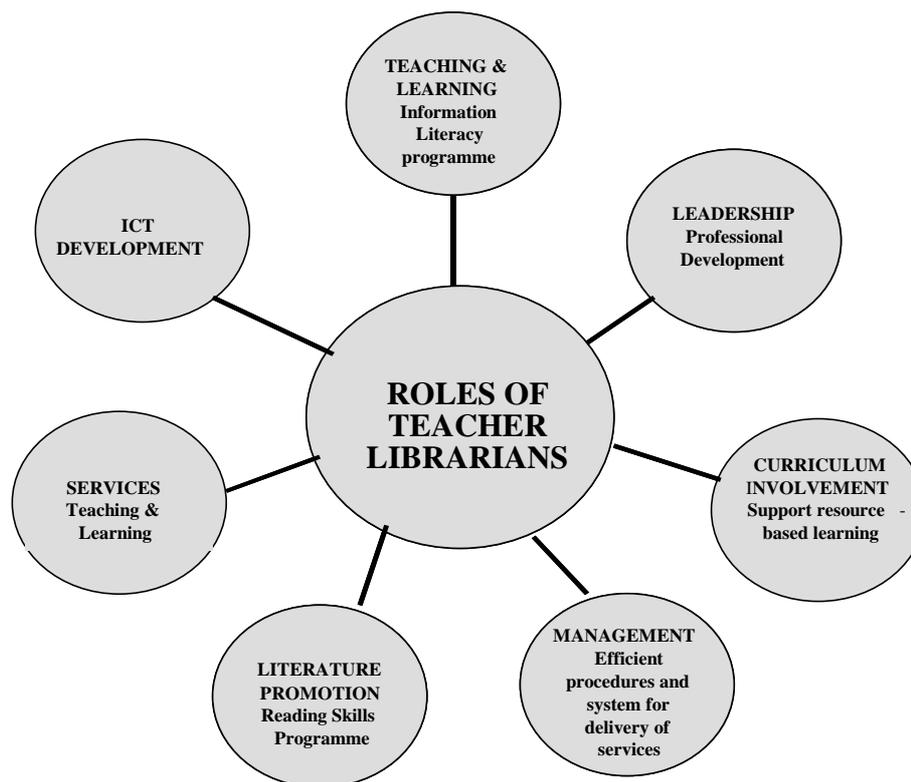


Figure 1: Roles of Qualified Teacher Librarians

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In line with the national education objectives to develop a national education system for the new millennium, the focus has been towards quality improvements in the teaching and learning support infrastructure. The technological developments and new methods in teaching-learning processes require the necessary moves or actions that will improve the quality and technology in teaching-learning.

The vision for School Resource Centres (SRCs) in the ICT era envisions that by the year 2005, information seeking would require the use of current information systems in the teaching-learning processes, suited for education in the information age. The critical role of the SRC and State Educational Resource Centres (SERCs) is to actively improve the quality of student-teacher in the learning-teaching processes through the implementation of various programmes and services that it offers. Some of the services relate to creating positive learning environment in schools by conducting various programmes & activities; teaching-learning processes through the preparation of, management and use of various resources in line with the concept of resource-based education. It is also the responsibility of the teacher librarian to develop the school library into an information technology centre in schools so as to enable teachers and students to use the latest technology for the acquisition, communication and processing of information. It is also responsible in inculcating students reading habit, acts as an avenue for teacher continuing education and prepares the information skill for prospective students pursuing a higher education

Up to July 2001, 22% of Malaysian schools have become automated with the use of a number of Integrated Library Systems (ILS) that are developed in-house or available in the market, whilst almost all the government institutions of higher learning are fully automated. A number of libraries that have implemented the ILS have plans to migrate towards the application of a client-server environment, Z39.50 protocol and a Web-based interface.

TRAINING OF TEACHER LIBRARIANS

An attempt has been made to train more qualified librarians specializing in school library and resource centre. In USA, the need for specialization has long been recognized, viz the development of the certification programme upon completion of the professional library science courses. To meet the new challenges of the emerging information needs, library schools have undertaken curriculum review which enables students to do specialization in the specific information field. However, within the context of the Malaysia, there is still no provision for full-time school librarians in Malaysian School. As revealed by

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Fatimah (2002), although all the 9,042 schools have libraries, the facilities vary considerably and none of them employ full-time information professionals.

The employment of a teacher-librarian, whose main vocation would still be teaching, is still in practice. In cases where adequate number of teachers are available, they may be given a reduced teaching load. He/she would be assisted by a number of library prefects to at least ensure the library is in operation. In such cases, it is not possible for the teacher to devote their time to the library management and services on a full-scale. The advantages of having these teachers as school librarians is that, they are mostly trained teachers who are familiar with the school curriculum. The majority of them are very dedicated in raising the standard of the school in achieving high examination results. However, this situation has been aggravated by the fact that not all of them are well trained and for those who have substantial training is facing either time constrained or no time allocation for the library management responsibilities (Abdullah and Singh, 2000),

There are no standard method by which Malaysian teacher librarians attained their training and there is also a lack of uniformity in terms of training and the syllabus. Fatimah (2002) described that 36% of the SRC co-coordinators in Malaysia have undergone short courses of 3 months or 35 and 45 hours in library management. Only 0.6% of them had a 1 year course in library science.

The one year programme in the field of Library and Information Management has long been conducted by the teachers training colleges. For example, the Institut Perguruan Darul Aman (Darul Aman Teachers Institute), The Sultan Idris Education University, and other teachers training colleges, offer a one year in-service training programme. At the same time, all the 27 Teacher Training Colleges that offer pre-service programmes have included the resource management component in their programmes. The Diploma Programme (3 Years), for example, have made it compulsory for students to take up subjects like Resource Management, which include ICT Educational Technology and Library Science which is 105 contact hours. The Certificate Programme (one year) offers the subject Information Technology Skills with only 45 contact hours. With these basic information and knowledge, the teachers are not only able to manage the School Resource Centres and to enable them to apply the concept into the classroom.

Only about 30% of teacher-librarians received some training in managing the SRCs. Some SRCs that are fortunate may have one support-clerical staff or library assistants sponsored by the Parents Teachers Association. Some of the methods of training are as follows:

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- trained through in-service education – few days to three months course
- pre-service course in resource centre management
- selected number of teachers may attend a one-year specialist course in library science
- some may enroll in a post-graduate/masters in library science degree

According to Abdullah and Singh (2002), short courses available for teacher-librarians are carried from different sources such as follows:

- 367 Teachers' Activity Centres
- 14 State Education Resource Centre
- Teachers Training Division Educational Technology Division Subject and areas taught include, the management of libraries, reading promotion, cataloging and classification, information skills/literacy, ICT.

The development of SRCs in Malaysia is under the supervision of the Education Technology Division. To ensure that the SRCs play their role in disseminating information, inculcating the reading habit and effectively supporting teaching-learning activities, programmes have been formulated and implemented throughout Malaysia.

In addition to the above, a number of other bodies and agencies provide occasional courses for the teacher. They are the National Library of Malaysia, State Public Libraries and Library Association of Malaysia, The Library Association of Malaysia, and the Faculty of Information Studies, UiTM, Malaysia.

Areas covered in the short courses include the followings:

- Aspects of library management (acquisition, circulation)
- classification and cataloguing, indexing and abstracting
- Services (reference and information services, IT services – online searching and CD-ROMs)
- Reading and information skills work
- Use of ICT in teaching and learning processes
- Training of the trainers (given at the Federal level)
- Training of teacher librarians (given at the State level).

It is hoped that the development of the smart school concept would ultimately require the employment of the resource-based learning and the provision of a well-developed school library and resource centre run by a professional staff.

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PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

In Malaysia there are four universities that are currently offering professional library and information management programmes. The courses range for the undergraduate degree to the doctoral programmes. Teachers may opt to undergo for any of the programme as an extension to their current qualification in school library and resource centre. Students may also take electives in the areas of school and resource centres or write theses and dissertation on the same area at the masters and doctoral levels. The universities that offer this programme are MARA University of Technology (UiTM); International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM); University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and University Malaya (UM)

MARA University of Technology (UiTM) Programmes

Conversion Programme for Diploma Teacher to Degree in Education

The first professional programme for teachers was initiated in 1996 as a result of the government initiative to convert the diploma trained teachers into graduate teachers. One of the programmes offered was B.A. in Education, majoring in school library and resource centre under the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Information Studies UiTM. This programme was postponed during the economic downturn and only one hundred graduates were able to graduate from this programme. However, these graduates were not able to apply their knowledge when they returned to their school because of the non availability of a permanent position in the school library system. This conversion programme was not revived after a similar programme being introduced by the Faculty of Information Studies, leading to the Bachelor of Science in Information Studies (Hons), specializing in Information Resource Centre Management offered by the MARA University of Technology (UiTM)

Bachelor of Science in Information Studies (Hons), (Information Resource Centre Management)

This structure of the information professional programme at the Faculty of Information Studies has evolved from the strictly Anglo-centric basis into its current form of education that has been effective in the past in producing librarians and other information professionals to serve the realities of the nation and the information needs of the population. The expansion and revision in the faculty curricular has resulted in the introduction of new subjects within the field of library and information science, and other courses (Figure 2), designed in order to link information science courses with specific area of specialization.

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Such changes are necessary in conformity with the rapid development of the profession both within and outside the country.

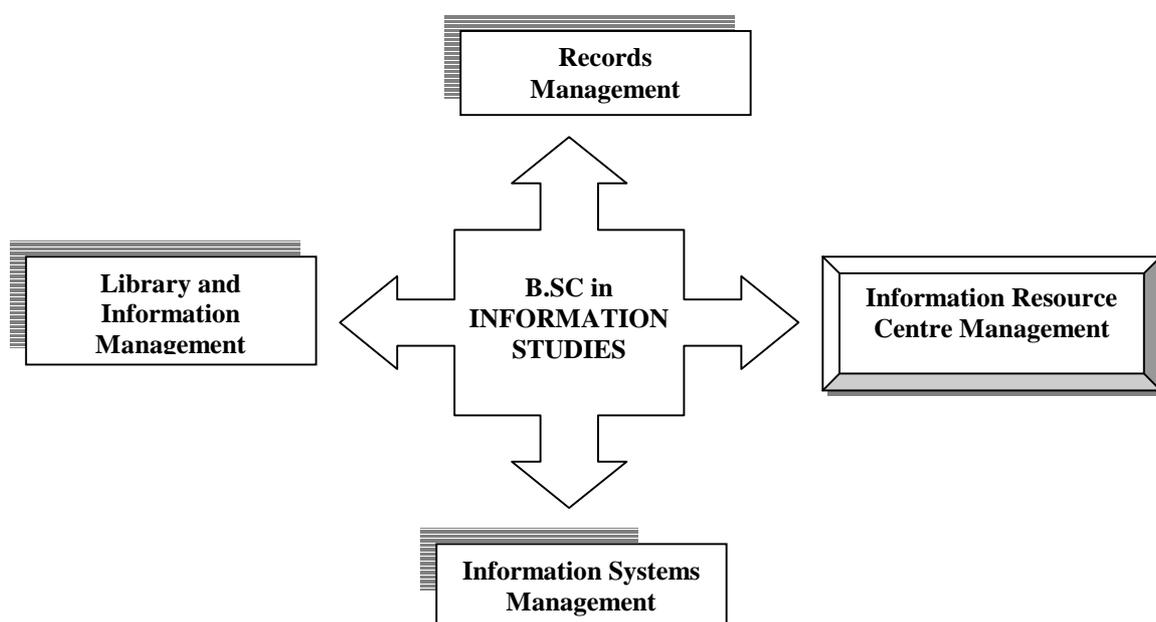


Figure 2: Bachelor of Science in Information Studies (Hons),
(*Information Resource Centre Management*)

The Bachelor of Science in Information Studies (Hons), (Information Resource Centre Management) is a three-year programme. The second package (Package B) offers a two-year programme for those holding the Diploma in Information Management from the same faculty. Prospective graduate are given specialization in library and resource centre management. As can be seen in the subjects listed in Table 3, students are given a blend of areas information studies, education elements and the specialization in school library and resource centres. Graduates of this professional programme are trained to work in school library and resource centres. However, in view of the constraint in developing permanent positions in school libraries, the products of this programme have resorted to work in other information agencies.

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Table 3: Bachelor of Science in Information Studies (Hons),
(Information Resource Centre Management)

Package A: Three-year Programme

SEMESTER 1
Foundation of Informaton Communication Technology
Foundation of Information Mgmt.
Introduction to Reference & Information Sources and Services
Management of Internet Information Sources and Services
Organization of Information.
Islamic & South-East Asia Civilization 1
Co-curriculum

SEMESTER 4
Database Management Systems in Resource Centre
Research Methodology in Information Works
Literature and Reading Guidance Programmes
3rd Language
Elective/Minor 3
Elective/Minor 4

SEMESTER 2
Organization of Resource Centre Materials 1
Electronic Resource Centre
Academic Library and Resource Centre Management
ICT in Resource Centre Managementt.
Information. Literacy
English 1
Co-curriculum

SEMESTER 5
e-learning
Human Resource in Resource Centre
Information Marketing in Resource Centre
Cooperative Learning
3rd Language
Elective/Minor 1
Elective/Minor 2

SEMESTER 3
Organization of Resource Centre Materials 2
Information Resources & Services in Education
Islamic & South-East Asia Civilization 2
English 2
3rd Language
Elective/Minor 1
Elective/Minor 2

SEMESTER 6
Practical Training for Infonmation Profession
Smart Education For Resource Centre Mgmt.
Promotional Activities in Resource Centre
Academic Project
Elective/Minor 1
Elective/Minor 2

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Table 3 (cont.): Bachelor of Science in Information Studies (Hons),
(Information Resource Centre Management)

Package B: A Two-Year Two-Tier Programme for Diploma in Information Management

SEMESTER 1
Introduction to Reference and Information Sources and Services
Organization of Resource Centre Materials1
Electronic Resource Centre
Academic Library and Resource Centre Management.
ICT in Resource Centre Management
Information Literacy
English 1
Islamic & South-East Asia Civilization 2
3rd Language

SEMESTER 2
Organization. of Resource Centre Materials 2
Information Resources & Services in Education.
Database Management Systems in Resource Centre
Research Methodology in Information Works
English 2
Elective/Minor 1
Elective/Minor 2
3rd Language

SEMESTER 3
Literature and Reading Guidance Programmes
e-learning
Human Resource in Resource Centre
Information Marketing in Resource Centre
3rd Language
Elective/Minor 3
Elective/Minor 4
Elective/Minor 5

SEMESTER 4
Cooperative Learning
Practical Training for Information Profession
Smart Education for Resource Centre Management
Promotional Activities in Resource Centre
Academic Project
Elective/Minor 6
Elective/Minor 7
Elective/Minor 8

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Training of Teacher Librarians in Comparison with Professional Librarians

It is recommended that in employing the standard for the school library programme, the training of the teacher librarians and the time allocated for them must be placed as top priority. The following consideration should be taken into account:

Qualifications: The standards need to be set up for teacher-librarians with the availability of on-going continuing education programme. Teachers should be motivated and given access to training.

Time Allotment: Equitable access to the expertise of a qualified teacher-librarian should be given. Every state should have a full-time state teacher-librarian consultant to maintain and support staff, programmes, and collections.

Staffing: Need to provide staffing that will enable the provision of formal services and information to the users. It should be systematically managed by professionally qualified staff who possess double degrees in Education and who are also ICT literate. This is also in line with the national policy of establishment of the smart schools.

Support staff: Need to provide clerical support and staff who are computer literate, hence they will require training in librarianship and technology application.

The professional association: Need to advocate the employment of professional school librarians to cope with the challenge of the new vision, the smart school as well as the increasing use of ICT. To rectify this problem, in the "Hala Tuju Pusat Sumber Sekolah" (Laporan pelaksanaan ..., 2001), a proposal which was made for full-time SRC co-coordinators and full time trained library assistants should be implemented.

Upgrade SRCs: The effort towards upgrading the SRCs to become Electronic/Digital Resource Centres (ERCs) should be implemented. SRCs that have been provided with the latest technology for its management and use can support as well as enhance the implementation of the curriculum in the teaching and learning processes. Through electronic networking, SRC users will be able to access information that is available locally as well as overseas. This will help build and strengthen the skills in information seeking as well provide the basis for teachers and students who are creative and innovative.

Information literacy: Facilitate all students' learning processes and critical thinking abilities through informed use of library resources. There is a need to coordinate public library and school library resources for all students' use through collaborative planning among librarians and teachers, as well as support development of information literacy skills to achieve independent and life-long learning.

CONCLUSION

The professional preparation and continuous training of teacher-librarians should help them develop realistic expectations related to programme implementation of

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the school resource centre management and services. This is especially critical in situations where novice teacher-librarians are introducing the programme to the school without having the essential practical experience. The publication of the "Standard and Guidelines for the School Resource Centres in Malaysia" could provide clear guidelines towards the development of the SRCs in line with the educational and ICT needs of today's knowledge society. The SRCs should become an important and integrated component in the teaching and learning process and the catalyst for smart school education and life long education in line with the National Education Philosophy.

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