



**AN ASSESSMENT ON THE PHYSICAL FACTORS  
THAT INFLUENCE READING PREFERENCES OF  
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE  
SUBURBAN AREA OF KUALA LUMPUR**

**BY**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of  
Master of Science (Built Environment)**

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**SEPTEMBER 2015**

## ABSTRACT

Several studies have been conducted to identify the nature and influencing factors of reading preferences. For example, it has been found that gender, socioeconomic, availability of material and location of the area either urban or rural are factors that influence reading preferences. However, there is still a lack of studies that assess reading preferences in relation to physical factors. Bearing this in consideration, this research aims to determine the relationship between physical factors and the reading preferences of secondary school students within suburban areas in Kuala Lumpur. Prior reviews undertaken had confirmed three problems related to reading preferences; i) lack of studies assessing physical factors and reading preferences ii) Malaysian reading level is at a lower level iii) teenagers have an adverse impression towards libraries and use libraries only to study in, rather than to read for leisure. Based on these problems raised, research objectives were formulated. 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. A sample of 300 respondents was taken for data collection; 150 samples from Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Gombak Setia and 150 samples from Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Bandar Baru Sentul. Self-completed questionnaires were distributed to 300 respondents in both schools. 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.

## ملخص البحث

جرت عدة بحوث علمية لمعرفة طبيعة تفضيل القراءة والعوامل المؤثرة له. فعلى سبيل المثال، من الملاحظ أن الجنس والتأثيرات الاجتماعية الاقتصادية وتوافر المواد المقروءة وكذلك موقع المنطقة إما في المدن أو القرى هي العوامل المؤثرة على تفضيل القراءة. رغم أن، هناك نسبة ضئيلة من البحوث العلمية في تقييم تفضيل القراءة فيما يتعلق بالعوامل الفيزيائية. مع الأخذ بعين الاعتبار فتهدف هذه الدراسة في تحديد العلاقة بين العوامل الفيزيائية وتفضيل القراءة لدى الطلبة في المدرسة الثانوية في ضاحية مدينة كوالا لمبور. ويبدو من الدراسات السابقة أن المشاكل الثلاثة ذات العلاقة بتفضيل القراءة هي؛ (1) قلة البحوث العلمية في تقييم العوامل الفيزيائية وتفضيل القراءة (2) مستوى القراءة لدى الماليزيين منخفض جدا (3) لدى المراهقين الانطباع المعاكس للمكتبات واستخدامها كمركز لمراجعة الدروس فحسب بدلا من كونها قاعة المطالعة الترفيهية. وتم صياغة أهداف الدراسة استنادا إلى هذه المشاكل المطروحة. الهدف الأول من هذه الدراسة هو تحديد الخصائص السكانية للطلبة في المدرسة الثانوية وعلاقتها بتفضيل القراءة. والهدف الثاني هو تقييم موقف الطلبة في المدرسة الثانوية وقيمهم الأخلاقية تجاه أنشطة القراءة والمكتبة؛ أما الهدف الثالث هو تقييم العلاقة بين العوامل الفيزيائية وتفضيل القراءة. والهدف الأخير هو اقتراح المفهوم ومعايير التصميم لقاعة المطالعة حسب نتائج البحث. قد تم تقييم 300 عينة من المجيبين لجمع المعلومات؛ وذلك 150 عينة من مدرسة غومبوق ستيا الثانوية الوطنية و150 عينة من مدرسة بندر بارو ستول الثانوية الوطنية. وتم توزيع الاستبانة الشخصية على 300 مجيب في كلتا المدرستين. بناء على التحليل، تشير النتائج إلى أن معظم المجيبين لهم الموقف الإيجابي تجاه القراءة ومكتبة المدرسة. إلا أن معظمهم قضوا وقت فراغهم بالأنشطة الأخرى سوى القراءة. وأغلبية الثلثين من المجيبين وافقوا على أن القراءة تكون أكثر جاذبة بتجاوز التسهيلات المتنوعة الداعمة لإيجاد البيئة العفوية للقراءة مثل التسهيلات المتاحة للقراء الاستماع إلى الموسيقى وتناول الطعام والكلام أثناء قرائتهم. خلال تحليل العوامل والتحليل الاستدلالي، تم استنباط العاملين الفيزيائيين؛ (1) التسهيلات والخدمات (2) البيئة الداخلية والخارجية لقاعة المطالعة. وثبت التحليل على أن هذين العاملين الفيزيائيين مؤثرين على تفضيل القراءة. وفي النهاية تفتتح الدراسة إيجاد البيئة العفوية كقاعة المطالعة وتوافر التسهيلات المتنوعة في قاعة المطالعة خاصة لجذب انتباه الشباب مثلما طبق في المكتبا الأخرى على سبيل المثال، مقهى الكتب (Book Café)، المكتبة بيتي الثاني (Library My Second Home)، حديقة المكتبة (Park Library) والمكتبة التخيلية (Virtual Library) وغيرها الملائمة لمتطلبات الشباب وفي نفس الوقت متماشيا مع اتجاه القراءة المعاصرة. في حالة تلقى المفهوم القبول، فلعن البحث يكون تخريفا وتحفيزا لبيئة قراءة الماليزيين.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science (Built Environment)

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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*I dedicated this thesis to my beloved husband, Mohd Ridzuan Mad Rosli and to my parents, Murad Mad Nor and Azizah Mat Saman. Not forgotten, my sons, Mukhsein, Noh and Hud. Their love, patience, support and understanding have lightened up my spirit to finish this study and this thesis. Alhamdulillah.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful. Alhamdulillah, all praises to Allah for the strengths and His blessing in completing this research. Special appreciation goes to my supervisor, Prof. Dato' Dr. Mansor Bin Ibrahim, for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the research team and thanks for his supervision and constant support. His invaluable help of constructive comments and suggestions throughout the research work have contributed to the success of this research. Not to be forgotten, my appreciation to the internal examiner, Assoc.Prof.Dr. Mariana Mohamed Osman and the external examiner, Prof.Dr. Sohaimi Zakaria from Universiti Teknologi MARA, for their comments and support regarding this topic.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Principal of SMK Gombak Setia, Mrs. Maimun and Mr. Zakaria, teacher of SMK Bandar Baru Sentul for sharing information and guiding me in data collection at their school. Special gratitude to my friend, Brother Abdul Somad Habeeb Rahman for helping me in collecting the data.

Sincere thanks to my husband, Mohd Ridzuan Bin Mad Rosli for his kindness and moral support during this study and helping with data collection at both schools. Thanks for the love.

Last but not least, my deepest gratitude goes to my beloved parents; Mr. Murad Bin Mad Nor and Azizah Binti Mat Saman for their endless love, prayers and encouragement. Also, not forgetting my children, Muhammad Mukhsein, Noh and Hud for being good and understanding during my study. To those who indirectly contributed to this research, your kindness means a lot to me. Thank you very much.



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

DEAR	Drop Everything and Read
IIUM	International Islamic University Malaysia
NILAM	Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca
RII	Relative Importance Index
SMK	Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan
SPSS	Statistical Package of Social Sciences
USP	Universal Service Provision
USSR	Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an introduction and insight into the research, which deals with identifying the physical factors that influence the reading preferences of secondary school students at suburban area. At this stage, the research framework is developed based on an initial literature review and identifying gaps in the literature. Issues and problems are then identified, leading to the formulation of objectives and questions. Based on this framework, the scope of study and limitations are formulated. The love of reading is not intrinsic, but it is a habit that must be cultivated. However, Jean Grambs (1959) asserted that “the habit of reading will not flourish if the only nourishment comes from a text. If we rely too heavily on textbooks, and then we cannot expect to nurture the reading preferences” (Jean Grambs, 1959, pg. 220). Many activities and strategies have been implemented to nurture a preference for reading among the people of Malaysia. In order to achieve this Malaysian Government has planned several approaches that are hoped to boost the reading culture among the citizens. However, statistics revealed by the National Library showed that Malaysians read 8 to 12 books per year (New Straits Times, 2012). Compared to our nearest neighbouring country, Singaporeans read 30 books per year (Low and Sattar Chaudhry, 2009). Meanwhile, the reading rate in Japan and Britain is 20 books per year (Hoong, 2007). So this means that, from the perspective of reading level, Malaysia is far behind other developed countries.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND**

Several studies have been conducted to identify the nature of reading preferences, including the influencing factors. Studies done by previous researchers found that gender, socioeconomic, 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). Thereby, it is the interest of the research to study the physical factors that are influencing the reading preferences of secondary school students at suburban areas. In order to create appropriate conditions and encouraging Malaysians to read, there are a few tools that the government and related organizations have used, such as libraries, including the National Library, Rural Library, Mobile Library, School Library and etc. However, the conventional space arrangement of library for reading activities provides a stressful and boring reading environment because reading is considered as a passive activity (OMC, 2007). Many groups of people, especially children and youngsters, are unable to continue reading for prolonged periods of time in such provided spaces. In addition, G. Freeman (2005) asserted that the library would become obsolete due to the emergence and integration of information technology and the impact of such advancement on reading activity. Regardless of this phenomenon, a reading place should be designed attractively in terms of the concept, layout design. It should also be complemented with various facilities, including information technology, in order to be in line and caught up with the current reading trend.

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. The research also deals with studying the students' perspective towards reading as an activity and also their perspective towards libraries. Moreover, it also deals with identifying preferences on the concept of reading places and this could lead to some recommendations on the design criteria of reading places.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENTS**

#### **1.3.1 Lack of studies being conducted that assess reading preferences in relation to physical factors**

Previous researchers have conducted many studies related to reading preferences. According to Norvell (1950), gender and age are the two factors affecting reading preferences, as cited by Hanna and Marianna (1960). Cabral and Tavares (2002) found that a majority of students read for the purpose of studying and chose to read as their hobby. Devarajan (1989) reported that the majority of students are interested in reading literature (51.96%), consisting mainly of novels, followed by Science (34.66%). Further detail on studies conducted by previous researchers in relation to reading preferences is explained in Chapter 2, section 2.3.

From the reviewed literature, it has been highlighted that gender, age, the purpose of reading, socioeconomic, and the availability of reading material all influence reading preferences. Based on the reviewed literature, it is also found that there is a lack

of evidence to substantiate that physical factors affect reading preferences. Thereby, it is the interest of the research to investigate the relationship between reading preferences and physical factors, thus investigating a suitable concept for a reading place that can attract people to come and read.

### **1.3.2 The Malaysian level of reading is still at a low level**

Empirical studies carried out by the National Library found that in the year 1996, the reading rate of Malaysians is only two books a year. However, in the year 2010, the reading rate had increased to twelve books annually (Malaysian National Library, 2010). This shows that the reading habit has improved among Malaysians. However, statistics revealed that the number of visitors to the National Library had declined from 464,317 in 2010 to 416,672 in 2011 (Malaysian National Library, 2011). This is due to changes in reading trends, especially among youngsters, as they are exposed to sophisticated technologies and smart gadget applications that assist in reading (Bernama, 2012). Further elaboration on the reading habit in Malaysia can be referred to Chapter 2, section 2.7.

In America, the reading habit among citizens rose when the e-book was introduced (Steve, 2011). E-book, or electronic book, refers to the book in digital form consisting of text, images, or both, and produced on, published through, and readable on computers or other electronic devices. The proliferation of e-books among Americans has resulted in an epic shift from printed to digital material (Steve, 2011).

Reading will be more attractive with the use of technology as applied in America. Nowadays the reading trend in all countries, including Malaysia, keeps changing. People prefer to read in digital form rather than on hard copy (Long, 2003). Due to the emergence of these technologies, it should be the consideration of this

research to recommend the concept of a reading place that considers the present reading trends in order to instil the love to read among citizens.

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

According to the National Library, the numbers of visitors have declined by around 23% from the year 2010 to 2011 (Malaysian National Library, 2011). It cannot be denied that the library is the best place to read as it provides a comfortable space to read. However, most teenagers see libraries as a resource for reading, study and Internet use and, simultaneously, as boring, silent spaces, primarily for older people and younger children. Some young people reported experiencing libraries as dark, drab and functional, rather than stimulating and inviting (McGrath, Rogers and Gilligan, 2010).

Having all these considerations, the main part of this research's intention is to identify the physical factors that are influencing reading preferences and thus proposing the concept of a reading place based on the findings specifically to attract teenagers to the study area. Thus, through architectural design, these reading places are to be designed and built to promote the attractiveness of reading; sharing of knowledge and education; social interaction and recreational activities among all teenagers in the case study. With these reading places, a community could experience fun, innovative and conducive ways of reading as it would allow for noise, eating and drinking, music and watching television or movies at the reading place.