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EMPOWERING A READING CULTURE:
A BRUNEI DARUSSALAM'S PERSPECTIVE

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EMPOWERING A READING CULTURE: A BRUNEI DARUSSALAM'S PERSPECTIVE

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This paper looks at the efforts of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei at reading promotion and reading programmes. It also looks at the more recent initiatives of the Brunei Government at empowering the nation to read through the Knowledge Convention, the Reading Culture Focus Group of PMO, the National Reading Programmes and the SPN21 to realize Brunei Darussalam Vision 2035.

Introduction

Brunei Darussalam is an ancient kingdom rich in cultural heritage and traditions. It is an Islamic nation which gained independence on 1 January 1984. It is a member of The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Conference, the Commonwealth and United Nations. Today it is a modern nation producing oil and gas and noted for its social and economic progress which adopts the Malay Islamic Monarchy concept with Malay as the official language.

I wish to start my presentation with a quote from

His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah's Royal Address at the Knowledge Convention with the theme 'Education shapes the Genuine identity of the people' on 26 July 2011 to mark His Majesty's 65th birthday said that:

"Orang berilmu ialah orang yang tidak habis menuntut, mendengar, melihat dan membaca bagi memperolehi ilmu"

People with knowledge are those who never stops to learn, listen, see and read to gain knowledge



He further said that:

...the reading culture is an important matter that has to be given priority in our national development programme”

‘we nurture the culture of gaining knowledge at home, religious halls, work places and so on, so that our next generation develop the reading habit and nurtures the culture of knowledge’ .

And His Majesty’s Royal Speech which he made during the Golden Jubilee

Celebration of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei on 17 September 2011 2

‘ I am appreciative of the efforts that have been implemented to uplift the status the Malay Language in Brunei Darussalam through various programmes, as well as activities to empower reading involving youths and the general community through libraries in this country”

Brunei Vision 2035

In 2008, the government formulated the national vision which among its aims is to enhance the competitiveness of its citizens in a knowledge-based economy.

In Knowledge has become the key element. With this came the new national educational system SPN21 to support nation building geared towards for 2035.

Key elements:

- **An education strategy** that will prepare our youth for employment and achievement in a world that is increasingly competitive and knowledge-based.



National educational system

Education in Brunei Darussalam has undergone several facets in its development since formal, modern education began in earnest in 1912. Since then, many developments in the field of education had taken place in keeping with the prevailing socio-economic condition and the changing needs of the society. With the achievement of full independence of the country in 1984, there was an ever increasing need to expand Brunei education system.

The SPNS21 is a new 21st century education policy which was introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2011 to further transform its education landscape in support of the nation's drive to realise its Brunei Vision 2035.

One of the main aims is to realise quality education through excellence in teaching and learning. To achieve this aim, SPN21 will provide the avenue to fulfil this vision and mission as well as to meet the social and economic challenges of the 21st century.

Implementation is done in stages which includes the provision of a suitable new curriculum and assessment framework, remedial and intervention programmes, effective teacher training programmes, effective leadership programmes, provision of adequate teaching and learning resources including ICT, adequate resources and an effective system for monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking.

Book trade, publishing and broadcasting

Publishing in Brunei started only in 1952, when its first newspaper 'Salam Seria' was published, followed by 'Borneo Bulletin' on 7 Nov 1953, 'Pelita Brunei' on 15 February 1956 and 'Brunei Times' on 1 July 2006.



Today Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei is a government agency and is the most active and the largest publisher of novels, children's books, poetry, biographies, and scholarly books in Malay and English. It is a member of the ASEAN Publishers Association and the Asia Pacific Publishers Association.

Its first publication in the form of two children's books namely ABC an alphabet picture book and Asas kira-kira bagi darjah permulaan both by Ahmad Kadi in 1963. Its first journal Bahan in June 1966, Beriga in May 1967 and Mekar in September 1967 and followed by Juara in January 1995, Bahasa in October 1995, Pangsura in January 1996 and Jurnal Undang-Undang Syariah in September 2001, Brunei Museum Journal was first issued in 1969.

Other active government publishers are the State Mufti Office, Pusat Dakwah Islamiah, Brunei Museums, Brunei History Centre and the Government Information Department. Private publishing is small.

The Books Preservation Act 1967 is a legal deposit act which requires all national imprints to be deposited in the Brunei Museums Library to be kept for prosperity and the National Archives Act on 2 January 1975.

Radio Brunei services began its first broadcast on 2 May 1957. During the early days radio was an essential disseminating tool to reach the mass. Many important announcements and news were broadcasted this way.

The development of libraries

Records showed that libraries existed in the early 1950s but little else is known about them. In 1951, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien College was established followed by Sekolah Tinggi Perempuan Raja Isteri in 1957. Both English medium schools already have well organised book collections with simple classification housed in a proper library



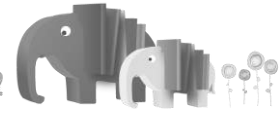
premises. In 1953, the Information Department opened a room in Kuala Belait and in Brunei Town in 1954, Bangar in 1957 and Seria in 1973, each manned by an attendant and was opened daily except on Sundays. It had some books, newspapers and magazines. The reading rooms very popular in those days.

Public library services was introduced when Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei in Jalan Elizabeth II in the capital opened on 29 September 29 1968 with the library opened to the public two months later. Its first mobile library service was launched in August 1970 to Kampung Sengkurong and later on to Tutong District. The mobile library services continued throughout the years to serve many communities throughout the country.

It was not until 1971 that books were lent to the public from the main library. Four former Reading Rooms of the Information Department were handed over to Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei and became its branch libraries. In 1975 Kuala Belait and Tutong libraries were opened, in 1976 in Seria and in 1978 in Bangar, Temburong. Under the 8th National Development Plan, four purpose built community libraries were built in Muara, Pandan, Lambak Kanan and Sengkurong.

Today, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei is responsible for language and literary development and propagation, cultural research and documentation and publication of local literary works besides providing library services to all over the country. Public library services are provided through its branch library, community libraries, mobile library service points, bulk loan systems, family libraries and reading corners nationwide.

In 1985 saw the establishment of our national university and 3 other universities in 2007,2008 and 2009. In 1997 saw the establishment of the Mindef Library and Information Centre which won the Best Library Award in the Ministry library category on 13 January 2011. Almost all government ministries and departments would have a library of varying



size collection and standard manned by at least one library staff. All Government educational institutions have libraries. 118 primary schools, 31 secondary schools, 3 junior colleges All private colleges and schools also have their own libraries. Small libraries can now be found in all mosques and prayer halls.

Instilling reading from young

Realising that reading is a learned skill and it has to be taught properly from the earliest stages, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei took a leading role in this matter. It works closely with the schools and gains their support in various book and library related activities to benefit from a young age.

In pre-schools children learn basic language, numbers, courteous behavior, basic Islamic religious knowledge, movement, self discipline and singing and development talents.

Even from this early age, children should already be familiar with books and be surrounded with books whether in school or at home. They should be made comfortable to be around books.

In primary schools the relevance and importance is placed upon the basic skills (3Rs).

- To emphasis development of creativity and basic skills in the 3Rs
- to reinforce these skills through the provision of learning situations such as will enable pupils to practice these skills.

However, reading is the first and the most important skill to be acquired. It is essential for developing the other basic as a foundation for more formal education. If the children do not learn to read well the rest of their education will be impaired. Without



reading the children cannot make much progress in their general education, because they cannot read facts and instructions. It is the teachers

Job to identify and pick out the child who fails to become an effective reader in primary school as he/she is the first in line of contact. As a consequence of a reading disability, the child is likely to become backward in almost every subject in school since academic success depends upon reading ability.

Remedies

- provision of reading materials
- materials must reach and read by the children
- ideal situation
- methods

Identify children with reading difficulties. Use the correct method to teach reading. Teacher/child relationship. 4 ways to teaching reading. Spelling, phonetic, alphabets, look and say.

Without appropriate interventions, there will be little hope for these slow learners, who will join the millions of adults who are barred from society's most powerful system for storing and conveying knowledge. It is our duty as educators to help as many children as possible so that they need not pay the price as illiterate adults.

The importance of understanding the effects of helping slow learners goes beyond pedagogical, technical or economic issues. If education is viewed as an entitlement for all children, then educators have an ethical responsibility to ensure that every child, whatever his ability, does learn.



Reading: the current scenario

The love of books and reading is still much desired. Not many people make the love of reading as a compulsory daily activity because they lack awareness on the benefits of reading. The benefits are enormous.

Bruneians in general do not read for pleasure. Brunei also has a long oral history tradition, so people prefer to chat rather than read and perhaps this is socialization to be valued. People who like to read are considered anti social. Many believe that reading should be done in private. The benefits and potential of reading as a key to success is not fully realized. To many people being literate is sufficient to make them succeed in life.

There also many other reasons why reading has not quite caught on.

- The price of books and reading material from overseas are high.
- Local books shops do not carry a wide selection of titles and new titles come late.
- Books and publications are subject to strict censorship for politically sensitive and religious reasons.
- Not many local titles are produced to meet all levels of reading needs
- Parents have other priorities and do not consider buying books for their children as necessary
- School libraries are not equipped to support and promote reading
- Many consider libraries are for children and students studying for exams.



- Young professionals and graduates when they leave universities feel they do not have a need to read anymore as their job do not call upon they to do so

Empowering the Reading Culture in Brunei Darussalam

Until recently reading campaigns did not get enough attention. Only recently the reading culture has become the centre of attention.

The promotion of reading and reading campaigns by libraries is not new. The fore runner in this matter must be the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei which since 1970s have already in place many activities and also the efforts of a few NGOs.

Initiatives by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei

Formed in 1962, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei's (DBP) aims is to promoting the use of our official language Malay through publishing and the provision of library services. Since then it has become the largest provider of public library services nationwide and acts as the National Library. Through its library services, it runs many library extension activities to promote reading, e.g. an annual storytelling competition, Children's and Young People's Library Clubs, a Taman Baturan Bergerak- theatre troupe that visits villages (for young children), Gerakan Budaya Membaca (for youths), book launches, poetry reading, workshops for parents on reading and book selection to name a few.

Brunei Book Fair

The book fair which began in 1984 is now organized annually by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei in conjunction with the National Day. Various activities are held including seminars, trainings, forums on reading, libraries and information.

Memperkasa Budaya Membaca (Reading Festival)



The Memperkasa Budaya Membaca, an annual event was first launched by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei in 2002 to encourage the public especially the youths to take up the reading habit as a good therapy to promote a healthy, creative and innovative mind to create and foster excellence in all levels of society. On 13 January 2012 at the launch of this year's Reading Festival and for the first time the Best Library Awards in five categories i.e. Ministry libraries, Mosques libraries, Reading Corners, Primary and secondary schools were presented.

Reading Month

Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei initiated the Reading month in 2007 as an annual project in the month of June each year to instill the reading habit among the young.

National Seminar on Strengthening the Reading Culture 2012

On 19 March 2012, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei organized the first Reading Seminar with the theme Membaca Nadi Kejayaan Bangsa.

World Book Day

The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei held a whole-day activities to mark World Book Day in all its branches nationwide on 23 April 2012. The theme "Books and Translation", marks the 80th anniversary of UNESCO's database of book translations, the Index Translationum.

The importance of celebrating UNESCO World Book Day is for encouraging reading in "all communities, especially youths, to read" as reading helps to develop the social and cultural development of a society.



Prime Minister's Office initiative

Majlis Ilmu/Knowledge Convention 2011

The Knowledge Convention was first held on 19-21 July 2004. Since then it has been held annually where scholars presented and shared their knowledge on subjects of national agenda.

National Survey on Reading Culture

The Focus Group on Reading Culture of the Prime Minister's Office launched a nationwide survey which will end 31 May 2012 to collect data on reading habits of the nation.

Educational institutions initiative

Universities also have their library clinics and Information Literacy programmes to promote reading and information seeking skills.

Schools have their own reading promotion activities regularly. The i SRDM (I See, I Remember, I Do, I am motivated) or Do It Yourself, is a project that provides a host of learning experiences and offers primary school children the most effective and engaging learning practice to support them to achieve their highest potential in line with SPN21. It involves vocabulary building, writing skills, self-confidence, competitiveness, independence, pro-activeness.

Private and Non Government Organisations (NGOS) initiative

Several NGOs also play their part at book and reading promotion. The Reading and Literacy Association was established in 1993.



The on-line community B: Read is facebook group of young book enthusiasts out to promote reading and book discussions in Brunei Darussalam and its first public book swap was in November 2011. Nollybooks.com is an on-line book store encouraging a greater reading culture in Brunei Darussalam

The Brunei Darussalam Library Association runs training programmes and career talks to recognize the importance of libraries and the role of librarians and the Brunei Language Teachers Association on the teaching of English in schools. The Parents Teachers Associations –PTA Outreach programme hold regular workshops on reading for parents.

The knowledge culture

An important component of the provision of quality education for all in the SPN21, is the emphasis on the developing individuals who are instilled with the desire to seek knowledge and new skills. We need to teach the children how and where to look for knowledge and how to go about extracting the relevant information. This is vital for the creation of a knowledge culture in society and is a prerequisite for the development of a successful and progressive nation..It is important to develop in the students a willingness and interest to read, think, learn and participate actively in discussions and write creatively.

As outlined in the Brunei Vision 2035, the new educational system gears towards producing citizens in a knowledge-base economy, who are educated, highly skilled and successful. With the recent boost in the reading culture, is a positive move towards realising this vision.



Observations and Recommendations

The culture of reading is a society's responsibility. It must be a collaboration and intervention of and between /inter-sectoral among agencies

To further enhance all the initiatives mentioned earlier these may be added:

- make reading culture a national agenda.
- ASEAN Publishers Association to make translated works by best ASEAN writers available.
- The National Book Development Council to be active in organizing book and reading related activities and provide forum to engage writers, illustrators tv producers, publishers, translators to interact
- Make comparative ASEAN literature a subject in schools and universities
- Bookshops should showcase books, magazines and works by local authors for easy access and publicity
- While reading is good, sharing what one has read is just important
- Excellent Village Award to incorporate an element of reading culture
- Improve existing and build more libraries with adequate budget for collection development
- Improve access to information and knowledge by harnessing ICT
- Produce more books and information of local content and enhance research activities towards this
- Improve importation of books



- Improve local book industry

- Engage parents and children to make reading and visiting libraries as a family agenda

I like to end this paper with a quote by Carol Burnett.

WORDS ONCE THEY ARE PRINTED, HAVE A LIFE OF THEIR OWN

This ends my presentation. Thank you for listening.

Wabillahi Taufik Walhidayah,

Assalamualaikum Warahmutullahi Wabarakatuh



