

Collaboration of School Teachers and Teacher-Librarians: A Study of Teachers' Perceptions

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Abstract

This paper discusses the results of a study being carried out in four selected MARA Junior Science College (MJSC) in Kedah. It focuses on teachers' perception on the collaboration between school teachers and teacher-librarians. From 200 questionnaires distributed, 157 questionnaires were returned. Classroom teachers believed that working with teacher-librarians would improve students' enjoyment of learning and interestingly perception of teachers in term of collaboration received the highest responses by working with teacher-librarians would improve teachers' teaching skills. In order to develop effective collaboration with classroom teachers, teacher-librarians must become part of the instructional process. It must be used by all teachers to increase the quality of learning in the classroom to benefit all students.

Keywords: Teacher-Librarians; School resource centers; Collaboration; Malaysia

Introduction

In Malaysia, beginning 2006, the government has started entrusting qualified teachers as a teacher-librarian in every school (Abrizah & Zainab, 2008). The roles of teacher-librarians are very important in every school. This is the way they can help in developing information literate person. They are also information experts who help in developing information literacy skills among school students by cooperating with other school teachers to make sure learning become more effective and efficient including cooperating in administrative operation. The Association of Teacher-Librarianship of Canada (1998) point out that the role of the teacher-librarians in the 21st Century is to provide leadership in collaborative program planning and teaching to make sure both physical and intellectual access to information and commitment to voluntarily reading. The roles of teacher-librarians do not only focus on students but are also responsible in helping school teachers in the learning process and lesson planning. School teachers cannot limit their sources of information such as textbooks only. An innovative approach, termed "resource-based learning," was introduced into school resources center literature that instruction must provide access to a variety of media formats and technologies (Hurray, 2000). There are many sources that can be as lesson tools either paper or electronic format. Lesson planning involves teachers in interpreting and transforming a significant range of information to specify learning exercises, schedules, teaching and learning resources, means to control the class, and learning objectives (Tanni, 2008). Therefore, the teacher-librarian has to assist teachers in achieving all of these. However, are teacher-librarians capable and competence to perform their roles towards information literacy? Do all school teachers realize and understand about the roles of teacher-librarians? What are the teachers' perceptions towards the role of teacher-librarians?

Collaboration between School Teachers and Teacher-Librarian

Collaboration is working with others and can be a key theme in building partnerships for learning (American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998). Winer and Ray (1994) defined collaboration as "a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve results they are more likely

to achieve together than alone” and compared collaboration to a journey that comprises three levels of progression: co-operation, co-ordination, and true collaboration. Lance, Rodney and Hamilton-Pennell (2001) from the State of Oregon stated that the value of collaboration between school teachers and a teacher-librarian as a successful teacher librarian is one who works with a classroom teacher to identify materials that best support and enrich an instructional unit as teacher of essential information literacy skills to students. It supported by Mohammad Fazli, Mohd Sharif and Fuziah (2011) that one aspect that was deemed to be characteristic of a strong library media program was that of school teachers and teacher-librarian collaboration. Nevertheless, students succeed where the teacher-librarian is a consultant to, and a colleague with other teachers (Lance, Rodney & Hamilton-Pennell, 2001).

Some research explores the benefits of collaboration, not only to students, but to teacher colleagues as well. When working on units that are cooperatively planned by teachers and teacher-librarians, students exhibit higher levels of commitment not shown in other non-collaborative tasks. Students also benefit by having two adult professionals present and able to assist them (Sweeney, 1996). In addition, Sweeney (1996) mentioned that teachers also benefit as a result of engaging in cooperative planning. These benefits include improved personal relationships among colleagues, increased energy and sense of well being, increased satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment, an exciting sense of synergy stemming from combining and building on creative ideas, and a commitment and a desire to improve as professionals. Russel (2002) supported that teacher-librarians must work in collaboration with other school teachers and school administrators to see that information skills are integrated into all parts of the curriculum. This statement was also agreed by Intan Azura and Shaheen (2006) by saying that the teachers and librarian co-operate because they need to share information to achieve their own goals. At this level, significant joint planning or teaching does not occur. In their study “An explanatory study of the collaborative relationship between teachers and librarians in Singapore primary and secondary school”, twenty-three (34.8%) of the respondents agreed that working closely with the school librarian to plan lessons would make their lessons more interesting, effective and enriching (Intan Azura & Shaheen, 2006).

Background and Methodology

Maktab Rendah Sains MARA or MARA Junior Science Colleges (MJSC) are boarding schools built by the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) in almost every state in Malaysia. MARA is a statutory body with its own financial system to help ensure the success of education and the development of Bumiputeras. The first MJSC was established in 1966 in Seremban as an effort to achieve the goal of MARA in training and education. There are 42 MJSC nationwide. 38 in peninsular while the remaining four are in Sabah and Sarawak. In this study, four MJSC had been selected and they are MJSC Merbok, MJSC Pendang, MJSC Kulim and MJSC Kubang Pasu. MJSC prides itself in innovative curricular experimentation drawn from best practice of schools, particularly those of the United States. Each school is well endowed with state of the art classrooms, laboratories and school resource centers. This research was limited to a sample of school teachers from selected MARA Science Junior College (MJSC) in Kedah only. Each MJSC are divided into four departments that are: -

1. Department of Social Science
2. Department of Science
3. Department of Language
4. Department of Mathematic.

A questionnaire was developed with the aim of collecting data The questionnaire was designed by adapting questionnaires developed by Council on Teacher Education (C.O.T.E) (2003) and several previous researches relates to this topic. Among them was the questionnaire developed by McDonald (2006) in his research on “The Role of Technology in Interactions between Secondary School Library Media Specialists and Teachers”. The questionnaire was modified in order to suit to this study.

The questionnaire consisted of 6 pages in 4 sections. They are: Section A: Roles of Teacher-Librarians; Section B: Practices of Information Literacy; Section C: Collaboration of Teachers and Teacher-Librarians and section D: Demographics. A pilot study has been conducted and the questionnaire was distributed to fifteen teachers at secondary school in Kedah. Finally, the questionnaire had been distributed to the 200 (N = 200) respondents from four selected MJSC. However only 157 (n = 157) were returned and processed. Analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17.0 for Windows.

Findings and Discussion

From 157 respondents, 43 (27.4 %) of the respondents were from MJSC Pendang and MJSC Kubang Pasu. 41 (26.1%) from MJSC Kulim followed by MJSC Merbok which comprised 30 (19.1%). The majority of respondents 92 (58.6%) are female teachers and 65 (41.4%) are male. In this study also indicates that the majority of respondents 153 (97.5%) have a Bachelor's Degree while, 4 respondents (2.5%) possesses Master's Degree. Majority of teachers 77 (49%) are below 29 years old, followed by 56 respondents (35.7%) are between 30 to 39 years, while 24 respondents (15.3%) are between 40 to 49 years. 18 (11.5%) of respondents teaches physics, followed by chemistry and general science 17 (10.8%). English teachers are 16 (10.2%) of respondents, followed by 15 (9.6%) of respondents are teaching Islamic Education, while 14 (8.9%) respondents are teaching Mathematic and the lowest number were art teachers 9 (5.7%).

Table 1: Demographic of respondents

Demographic	Number	%
Name of School		
MRSM Merbok	30	19.1
MRSM Pendang	43	27.4
MRSM Kulim	41	26.1
MRSM Kubang Pasu	43	27.4
TOTAL	157	100
Gender		
Male	65	41.4
Female	92	58.6
Age		
Below 29 years	77	49
30 to 39 years	56	35.7
40 to 49 years	24	15.3
Level of Education		
Bachelor's Degree	153	97.5
Master's Degree	4	2.5
TOTAL	157	100%

Collaboration of Teacher-Librarians and School Teachers

The set of questions has been designed to know the collaboration between teachers and teacher-librarians and how effective is the collaboration. This section consisted of ten questions including what teacher-librarians do in order to develop collaboration with teachers; encourage want by principal for teachers in order to plan with teacher-librarians and the important questions were related to teachers' perception about this collaboration such as working with teacher-librarians to improve students' achievement, students' enjoyment of learning and teachers' teaching skills.

The result found that 79 (50.3%) of respondents agreed that teacher-librarians is part of the instructional team for the class. Respondents that believed working with teacher-librarians would improve students' achievement. Furthermore, they believed (agree) that working with teacher-librarians would improve students' enjoyment of learning. It is important in order to attract students' interest to give full attention during lesson process in the class. Interestingly, in this study, researcher found that perception of teachers in term of collaboration received the highest responses showing that 71 (45.2%) do agree that working with teacher-librarians would improve teachers' teaching skills.

The result also found that 58 (36.9%) respondents agreed that teacher-librarian has important place on the agenda of staff meetings. Furthermore, some respondents 50 (31.8%) agreed that the principal encourage teachers to plan with the teacher-librarians. This finding supported by previous studies by Kadala (2008) and Lindsay (2000) when they reported that principal were satisfied with teacher-librarians and use direct communication to get service by teacher-librarians.

In this study, it was also found that some of respondents 55 (35%) agreed that teacher-librarians encourages teachers to use a range of resources beyond textbooks. This is supported by previous research by Lindsay (2000) where the principal encourage teachers to use range of resources beyond the textbook in their instruction in order supported the idea for planning sessions with the teacher-librarians. However, the finding shows that some of the respondents 50 (31.8%) were not sure (neither agree nor disagree) that they always consults with teacher-librarians about incorporating information materials and skill into the classroom curriculum. However some respondents 42 (26.8%) agreed that they often plan lesson with teacher-librarians. The data showed in Table 2. SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Not Sure, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree.

Table 2: Collaboration of Teacher-Librarians and School Teachers

STATEMENTS	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. Teacher-librarians part of method instructional team.	16 (10.2%)	50 (31.8%)	46 (29.3%)	35 (22.3%)	10 (6.4%)
2. Working with teacher-librarians improves students' achievement.	24 (15.3%)	79 (50.3%)	36 (22.9%)	10 (6.4%)	8 (5.1%)
3. Working with teacher-librarians improves students' enjoyment of learning.	35 (22.3%)	64 (40.8%)	37 (23.6%)	13 (8.3%)	8 (5.1%)
4. Working with teacher-librarians improves teachers' teaching skills.	33 (21%)	71 (45.2%)	29 (18.5%)	18 (11.5%)	6 (3.8%)
5. Teacher-librarians has important place on the agenda of staff meetings.	25 (15.9%)	58 (36.9%)	44 (28%)	18 (11.5%)	12 (7.6%)
6. Principal encourages teachers to plan with the teacher-librarians.	18 (11.5%)	50 (31.8%)	47 (29.9%)	32 (20.4%)	10 (6.4%)
7. Teacher-librarians encourage teachers to use a range of resources beyond the textbook.	23 (14.6%)	55 (35%)	44 (28%)	26 (16.6%)	9 (5.7%)
8. Develops appropriate services for teachers according to goals and objectives of teaching.	19 (12.1%)	56 (35.7%)	47 (29.9%)	22 (14%)	13 (8.3%)
9. Often plan lesson with teacher-librarians.	13 (8.3%)	42 (26.8%)	38 (24.2%)	37 (23.6%)	27 (17.2%)
10. Consults with teachers incorporating information materials and skills into the classroom curriculum.	12 (7.6%)	48 (30.6%)	50 (31.8%)	33 (21%)	14 (8.9%)

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings, although many of the respondents admitted that teacher-librarians have been performing the roles, there are some of them who are not sure of the roles of the teacher-librarians. The role of teacher-librarians should be informed to all teachers to ensure that these roles can be implemented. Teachers should know the role of teacher-librarians. Teacher-librarians must carry out research in order to understand and know the interest of teachers and to find ways on how to attract them to use teacher-librarians services. According to Abrizah (1998), research into the experiences of individual teacher-librarians would be valuable. A closer examination of teacher librarians' views of themselves in relation to their roles and responsibilities will be of great inside. Collaboration with teachers, teacher-librarians should examine the various aspects of learning process in order to come out with better collaboration that are more effective. Another approach that could be taken up by the school management, in particular the school principal is to pave the way for more dynamic collaborative educational partnerships to take place between the teachers and teacher-librarians and for the reform of the school library programs (Hartzell, 2002; Pharr, 2002). For instance, teachers could be given less teaching periods in a week so that they could use that time to meet with the teacher-librarians to synergize and develop comprehensive, interesting, and dynamic lessons and other academic activities. There must be an increase in Information Literacy programs for the teachers. This will improve teachers' understanding on Information literacy skills needed at this present time where there is too much information and makes it difficult for teachers and students to identify which are more authoritative for academic purposes. Information literacy training is also important to the teacher-librarians in enhancing their skills.

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