

IQRA': Unlocking the Hidden Reading Potentials

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Abstrak: Tuntutan masyarakat kontemporari telah mewajibkan pelajar menguasai kemahiran literasi yang diperlukan untuk melakukan pelbagai tugas yang semakin kompleks. Kekurangan kemahiran membaca ialah salah satu penghalang mengoptimalkan potensi insan dan organisasi. Malahan, kajian menunjukkan bahawa hanya satu pertiga pelajar memiliki kemahiran asas literasi yang diperlukan untuk melakukan pelbagai jenis tugas pembelajaran dan vokasional yang kaya dengan kemahiran dan pengetahuan. Kekurangan ini telah membantutkan keupayaan pelajar untuk memperoleh pengetahuan dan mengoptimalkan keupayaan belajar dengan memaksimumkan potensi insan. Memandangkan situasi ini, kertas kerja ini mencadangkan pengamalan satu pendekatan alternatif untuk mengatasi kekurangan pembelajaran dalam kalangan pelajar tempatan. Pendekatan ini memberi tumpuan kepada perkembangan tabiat suka membaca yang akan mencungkil potensi yang masih terselindung. Pendekatan yang diberi nama IQRA' ini adalah hasil gabungan pendekatan konstruktivisme dan teori respons pembaca. Gabungan dua pendekatan ini adalah untuk menggalakkan penguasaan strategi dan kemahiran literasi peringkat tinggi yang berkait rapat dengan pembacaan dan pemikiran kritis untuk membolehkan pelajar menjadi penyumbang yang aktif dan membina perkembangan individu dan organisasi. Projek ini merangkumi rangka kerja pengajaran yang menitikberatkan pembelajaran secara bersama, kemudahan buku yang sesuai berdasarkan tahap kecekapan, perbincangan teks yang disarankan dan penyepaduan kemahiran membaca, penulisan, pendengaran dan pertuturan. Struktur dan kandungan tematik projek ini direka khas untuk membentuk kemahiran membaca berkualiti dengan memupuk kemahiran komunikasi yang efektif dan juga memberi peluang untuk interaksi antara perorangan, perkembangan diri, pembelajaran secara bermuafakat, pengoptimuman maksimum potensi sumber manusia dan perkembangan kemahiran pembelajaran. Projek ini juga bertujuan menggalakkan penguasaan strategi pembacaan dalam kalangan peserta pada tahap kognitif dan meta-kognitif untuk menggalakkan pembacaan sebagai aktiviti yang menyeronokkan dan dapat mengayakan pengetahuan. Selain itu, penguasaan bahasa sasaran dan perkembangan masyarakat berpengetahuan yang dapat mempertingkatkan perkembangan modal insaniah dan merangsang perkembangan masyarakat berpengetahuan selari dengan aspirasi nasional juga dibangunkan.

Abstract: *The demands of contemporary modern society have made it incumbent for learners to possess the necessary literacy skills and knowledge to tackle variegated tasks of increasing complexity. The lack of reading proficiency is one of the main impediments to the successful optimization of human and organizational potential. In fact, research indicates that only one third of learners possess the requisite fundamental literacy skills necessary to tackle the multifarious learning and vocational tasks that are both skill and knowledge-intensive. This shortcoming has stunted the capacity of learners to acquire knowledge and to optimize their learning capabilities in order to maximize their human potential. In view of this, this paper proposes the adoption of a novel approach to overcome learning deficiencies amongst local learners. The approach focuses on the development of quality reading habits that will serve to unlock hitherto hidden potential. Essentially the approach, codenamed IQRA', consists of a hybridization of the constructivist approach and reader response theory. This hybrid approach is designed to promote the acquisition of higher-end literacy skills and strategies associated with reading and critical thinking in order to enable learners to be active and constructive contributors toward both individual and organizational development. The project encompasses an instructional framework emphasizing collaborative learning, access to appropriate literature based on the relevant levels of competency, discussion of suggested text and the integration of reading, writing and verbal skills. Its structure and thematic content is customized to develop quality reading skills that will nurture effective communication skills as well as provide opportunities for interpersonal interaction, mutual self-development, collective empowerment, maximal optimization of human resource potentials and learning skills development. It also aims to inculcate effective reading strategies among participants at both cognitive and meta-cognitive levels in order to promote reading as an enjoyable and knowledge enriching activity. By doing so, it purports to foster target language acquisition and the development of knowledgeable reading communities that can further enhance human capital development and foster the development of a k-society in tandem with national aspirations.*

Keywords: **curricula, book club, cooperative learning, interpersonal interaction, reading theories, schematic theory, reader-response theory, k-society.**

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a prerequisite for information processing and the development of comprehensible output (Krashen 1982 & 1985). In fact, the need for reading in the development of functional literacy has been underscored by numerous researchers (Raphael (2001): Hammond & Raphael (1999) and Hiebert & Raphael (1998). The close linkage between reading and literacy development is particularly evident in cohorts where dysfunctional reading strategies often hinder the acquisition of knowledge and the development of critical thinking skills. The vital contribution that reading makes to the overall development of the other language skills and the further enhancement of cognitive capabilities have also been noted by researchers such as Goatley et.al (1992), Penning & Raphael (1992) and Englert, et al. (1992). The efficacy of reading within the literary classroom has also been attested by Raphael et al. (2002), Raphael, et al. (2001) and Raphael & Au (1998) while the entwined relationship between reading and writing has been extensively commented upon by Englert et al. (1989); Raphael et al. (1989); Raphael et al. (1988). Englert et al. (1988) and (1988) as well as by Fear, et al. (1987).

The lack of reading among adult and young Malaysians is a well-documented facet of Malaysian society (Pandian 2000 & 2006: Karim 2004). For instance, Pandian (2000) noted a distinct absence of the reading culture amongst Malaysians and cited that the majority of the reading was functional and instrumental in orientation. Cautioned about the growing phenomenon of "reading reluctance", a term he coined to underscore the inherent reluctance and lackadaisical attitude towards reading amongst Malaysians and

its negative implications for Malaysia in terms of competitiveness and future growth. A similar study conducted by the Malaysian National Library (2006) noted while overall literacy had declined by 1% and reading patterns had remained stagnant over a ten year period, there had been a sharp increase in computer literacy by almost 20% since 1995. The study concluded that the major impediment that encumbered the development of a reading polity was the lack of a reading culture.

The dearth of critical reading skills among local students (Pandian, 2005 & 2007) has given rise to a plethora of problems especially in developing a knowledge based economy (k-economy) as envisaged by the government. The correlation between the development of functional literacy and reading thus necessitates the need to reevaluate the skill of reading in Malaysian schools and amongst the public. In fact, such a review in terms of approaches to promoting reading is incumbent in view of the fact that research (Pandian, 2000) shows that most Malaysian do not read beyond their immediate needs. This problem is further exacerbated by the fact that reading within the exam-oriented Malaysian public school system is often perceived to be associated with the memorizing of teacher's notes, textbooks and reference books. At the work place, reading is often confined to work manuals, instructional material or documents while at home, the audiovisual and electronic media takes precedence over reading. Apart from the general lack of reading, there is also a distinct tendency amongst Malaysian readers to read materials that are trivial in context and nature (Star, 2009) and which does not nurture the development of critical thinking skills.

In light of the urgent need for an effective reading programme to address reading issues in Malaysia, the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation (SoLLaT) is proposing a alternative innovative approach that focuses on enhancing the quality of reading across all segments of Malaysian society. The proposed approach codenamed IQRA', an Innovative Quality Reading Approach, is designed to address quality issues pertaining to reading especially those that relate to the development of critical thought, analytical skills and the development of reading literacy that is vital in the development of a knowledgeable society capable of operating efficiently in k-economy paradigm.

This programme is based on the concept that effective reading and critical thinking skills are essential in an evolving global environment. It is premised on the assumption that there is an urgent need for a platform to inculcate reading habits among Malaysians that is capable of nurturing the exchange of critical insights and ideas which will be useful in enhancing work and study productivity as well as augmenting the overall quality of life through the maximization of human resource potentials. Moreover, there is the added incentive of developing a more knowledgeable society in tandem with the Malaysian government's policy of capitalizing on human capital to propel Malaysia's drive towards a k-economy (Ninth Malaysian Plan, 2006). IQRA' is an adaptation of the original Book Club model in the United States in recognition of the fact that the local cultural norms as well as prevailing belief systems that play a vital role in shaping reading habits are distinctive constructs in both countries. In cognizance of this fact, the model proposes to exploit the unique cultural and racial diversity of Malaysia to forge a united, knowledgeable and critical thinking society. Apart from this, IQRA' also aims to tap into the Sustainable Learning Environment concept as propounded by Universiti Sains Malaysia in order to generate a reading community that is not only highly knowledgeable but also one that valorizes traditional norms and values.

Basically, IQRA' will focus on developing critical reading literacy skills by synergizing existing lower-level reading skills and scaffolding on existing knowledge to provide new insights. IQRA' is designed to provide an opportunity for interpersonal language and communication skills development. In addition, it aims to inculcate the effective and

quality reading habits among participants in order to promote reading as an enjoyable, knowledge enriching activity.

The crux of the programme lies in the creation of a conducive reading environment that is suitable for the Malaysian context. The conceptualization of the reading environment took into account that reading is both a receptive and productive activity that is best conducted in an open-air environment that is an antithesis to the often stifling and claustrophobic environment associated with enclosed spaces and formal settings. Hence, the project proposes to use the traditional Malay gazebo-style architectural feature where readers can indulge in reading in an informal setting within a garden setting ala a contemplative communion with nature. The choice of the *Wakaf* structure as the nerve-centre of IQRA's activities is also predicated upon underlying local socio-cultural paradigms. Graham (1908) attests that the name *Wakaf* originally came from the latter definition i.e. "a place to stop", a point concurred to by Waterston (1991). Kahn (1994) in charting the development of urbanity amongst Malays emphasized the utilitarian value of *wakaf* in community development while Yusof in Abu Baker (2004) and Hilton (1992) describes the *wakaf* structure as an ubiquitous presence on the Malay rural landscape and was mainly used as rest-stop or a place of relaxation. Jamil (2004) describes the *wakaf* as essentially a rest-stop or a gathering place for visitors a traditional post and beam structure which is square-shaped or rectangular with its floor suspended 600 mm above the ground. The discerning features of the structure are its pyramid roof (*bumbung limas*) and the wood carvings inlaid in the structure. These observations clearly imply that the *wakaf* had an important role in the Malay socio-cultural context and its use in our proposed IQRA' project is a testimony to the valorisation of indigenous culture and traditions that has been long acknowledged in this country.

RATIONALE

The rationale for introducing IQRA' is basically premised on several enabling factors as well as several intrinsic qualities of the programme that will be briefly delineated in this section.

Firstly, IQRA' is designed to synergize on existing expertise and facilities found within the campus environment. The predilection towards establishing the IQRA' framework was basically motivated by the fact that it could draw upon the expertise of a diverse group of academicians who are specialists either in the field of literacy or in reading itself. Furthermore, the existence of contemporary research platforms in USM devoted entirely to analyzing, developing and evaluating contemporaneous and emerging literacy trends are eminently suitable to be utilized in developing reading literacy as envisaged by IQRA'. These facilitating aspects have hitherto been under-utilized in developing reading competencies and nurturing the development of a reading culture and it is opined that the introduction of IQRA' will propel the development of such a culture, which will then be propagated beyond the campus.

Besides the synergistic potentials inherent in existing platforms and facilities, the approach underpinning IQRA' is broadly compatible with the Sustainable Learning Environment initiative expounded by USM. In fact, an essential feature of IQRA' is its valorization of indigenous elements be it in the use of certain texts, the setting as well as the community-like approach in broaching the contents of a given text. It should be noted that sustainability is an act not merely confined to the preservation of the environment but also includes the perpetuation of indigenous lifestyles and cultural heritage. As such IQRA's use of the traditional Malay *wakaf*, the selection of the airy open doors as a setting, the servings of coffee and sumptuous local cakes, the dialogical nature of the

exchanges, the collaborative approach in text deconstruction ala a *gotong-royong* approach all resonate the convivial, communal cultural norms evident in many a traditional kampung or village.

Secondly, the innovative nature of IQRA' is especially pertinent as the unique local community with its attendant insularity and diversity by itself necessitates the development of a practical reading model that can cater to its particular idiosyncratic needs. In fact, it would be puerile to adopt, wholesale, reading approaches developed in other reading paradigms wherein the culture of reading has been firmly established and which were developed in essentially autochthonous settings. IQRA' aims to ameliorate the potentially debilitating effects of this dichotomy by developing an approach loosely premised on the American Book Club model but infused with local characteristics that take into account local needs and idiosyncrasies.

Apart from the above, the flexible nature of IQRA's conceptual framework allows it to be appropriately modified to meet the reading needs of the Target Reading Communities (TRCs). In other words, IQRA' can be suitably configured to fulfill the reading needs of diverse and eclectic target reading communities ranging from pre-school children to adults. Furthermore, this adaptability allows IQRA's framework to be appropriately modified to satisfy the needs of specific reading communities that form either the subset of the general populace or the local workforce. For instance, socially disenfranchised groups like single mothers can be empowered through reading materials that valorize independence, self sufficiency and creativity. Similarly, the vocational reading needs of factory operators can also be fulfilled via IQRA's highly adaptable model with texts that extol innovation. In other words, the enfranchisement of these diverse communities can be better effected via a reading paradigm whose procedural and practical mechanisms are synchronous with the needs of the TRC.

The socio-cultural utilitarian value of IQRA' is another incentive for the adoption of this innovative paradigm. This is particularly pertinent in view of realizing the aims of the 1Malaysia concept. For instance, the selection of texts that valorize and accentuate the cooperative and harmonious nature of Malaysia's multi-racial polity, for use in a reading community of diverse racial groups will serve to inculcate abstractions like unity, tolerance and cooperation within concrete settings. Indirectly, reading activities imbued with these features will foster unity and understanding between the various races and encourage the development of a tolerant, progressive and united society.

Finally, IQRA's package like feature is both cost and user friendly. The decentralized and autonomous nature embodied within IQRA's paradigm allow the Target Reading Community (TRCs) to determine the mode of local IQRA' operation and other ancillary needs such as location, reading protocols and the number and type of texts. This eliminates numerous procedural impediments associated with the use of fixed locations and standard texts. In other words, the informal, autonomous nature of IQRA' allows its participants to set the pace and nature of their reading.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

An effective reading programme is usually predicated on a sound theoretical framework that serves to infuse the principles and methods to be adopted by the programme. Within the context of reading, several reading theories have been propounded. From the linear approaches as expostulated by Gough (1968), reading theories have evolved with the advent of Cognitivism (Piaget, 1968) to embrace new approaches such as the Constructivist Approach which was essentially predicated on schema theory (Rumelhart

1978 Anderson : Schank : 1980). Subsequent to this, latter day paradigms devolving from Vygotsky's (1978) seminal work on socio-culturalism, in which he postulated that learning constitutes 2 elements namely *intermental learning and intramental dialogue* (Wilson, 1999, p. 172) further cemented the role of constructivism. These developments led to the theorization that reading is both interactive in the sense that learners must interact with sources of ideas and knowledge in social settings, as well as take an active part in reconstructing ideas and knowledge within their own minds. In other words, while schema theory foregrounds the role of individual cognitive processes, sociocultural theories provide significant insights into an individual's meaning-making processes. Cognition is seen as a "bio-social-cultural process" that is both public and private (Cole, 1996, p. 136) - a process that highlights the role of language as a mediational tool, the importance of social interactions, and the "situatedness" of language and social interactions within socio-cultural and historical systems (Vygotsky, 1978 & 1986; Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003; Wells, 1999).

Despite advances made in dissecting the nature of reading, constructivism was underpinned by an inherent bias towards the cognitive domain that resulted in the neglect of the affective processes underlying text comprehension and understanding. This dichotomy is especially discernible when applied to materials that are literary in nature. Hence, Stockwell (2002) regards the cognitive methods he imports as suitable for all purposes: since "there is nothing inherently different in the form of literary language, it is reasonable and safe to investigate the language of literature using approaches generated in the language system in general" (7). Similarly, Kintsch (1998) claims that "the comprehension processes, the basic strategies, the role of knowledge and experience, as well as the memory products generated, are the same for literary texts and simple narratives .The difference is in the 'what,' not the 'how'" (205). Such lopsided perspectives have been critiqued upon by several researchers. Sternberg (2003) averred that cognitivists have made the mistake of setting "cognition against (at least above) emotion" (2003; page 313). Similarly, Miall & Kuiken (2002) opine that feeling may be the vehicle for what is distinctively literary in literary response.

In IQRA', a novel hybrid approach incorporating the constructivism and Reader Response theory as proposed by Rosenblatt (1978) and developed by Fish (1980), and Miall & Kuiken (2002) is postulated. The rationale for the design of this hybrid approach is invariably premised upon two major factors. First, the hybrid approach proposes to mediate the gap between the cognitive and affective domains. This is vital as reading should not be construed as a cognition based activity that is independent of affective dimensions. In other words, only through the symbiosis of both the cognitive and affective can textual understanding materialize.

The second rationale for the adoption of the Reader Response theory is predicated upon the fact that the use of a variety of texts in the IQRA' project makes it imperative that the readers are not wholly dependent on the cognitively biased constructivist approach but are also afforded the opportunity of working within affective based domains as most texts also appeal to the affective senses as demonstrated by Miall & Kuiken (2002).

ADVANTAGES OF THE PROPOSED IQRA' PROGRAMME

Essentially, the strength of this programme resides in its inherent flexibility as IQRA' can be tailored according to the type of target reading community accessed, their specific reading needs and proclivities, and the socio-cultural setting of the TRC. Secondly, by devolving autonomy to the major constituents of IQRA', namely RAB and the READ, the empowering features of IQRA' that are valorized as readers are provided total control over their reading and the concomitant activities associated with the process. IQRA'

seeks to enfranchise the wider social community and thus expand the reach of reading programmes which hitherto has been based in formal and closed environments such as libraries, classrooms and homogenous and exclusivist reading clubs.

Thirdly, the decentralized nature of IQRA' is consistent with the principles of learner centered approaches wherein learners are independent in strategizing their own learning with the teacher being reduced to the role of facilitating the reading and learning process.

Fourthly, the social transformational aspect of IQRA' is intrinsically embedded in its informal framework that encourages the transactional exchange of ideas across class, racial and cultural divides. This, by itself, serves to bring down the invisible barricades nurtured by cultural and religious acculturation and in their place build bridges of mutual understanding, tolerance, empathy that in the long run will contribute to social harmony and, unity of purpose under the 1Malaysia umbrella.

Fifthly, the valorizing of indigenous culture is implicit in the setting chosen, as the *wakaf* itself constitutes a legacy of the rich indigenous cultural heritage. In tandem with this, the outdoor setting for IQRA's activities are essentially premised on the notion that the act of reading and contemplation is best effected within open, informal settings rather than in closed formal ones. Implicit in this notion, is the fact that the natural environment plays an immense yet often understated role of an incubator of innovative ideas and critical insights. This fact is attested to by history wherein philosophers and sages alike have often been portrayed as of being inspired and of being infused with epiphany during moments of close communion with nature. The programme's inclination towards the natural environment is also motivated by the USM's sustainable learning initiatives which posit Man as part of nature and not Man in his typical role as a confrontational and destructive being but, rather as a subset of an evolving and sustainable ecology. In fact, the gazebo in the garden succinctly epitomizes IQRA's close consanguinity with the "University in a Garden" concept as propounded by Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Finally, IQRA' is essentially a social empowering tool of economic mobility as it enables previously knowledge deficient communities to acquire new information, to scaffold it onto existing knowledge and to leverage on the synergies of the transactional and interactive features of the programme.

In addition, IQRA' is essentially a self-actualizing process for it constitutes a personal empowering tool as its theoretical paradigm allows for the flowering of a diversity of personal opinions, critical responses and the fostering of ideational creativity. In other words, the reader in the IQRA' programme is no longer constrained by external interpretations or instructor-centered delineations of the texts but rather through an evolving personal interaction with the text and through exchanges with peers, conceptualized and refined responses that are both critically insightful and percipient.

Finally, IQRA' outlines a divergently different and revolutionary approach as compared to the ones currently being applied in programmes such as NILAM (Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca, Ministry of Education Malaysia's Reading Programme in schools). Briefly, IQRA's emphasis focused on developing critical literacy skills such as analytical thoughts, innovative insights and perceptive observations through constructive and critical exchanges. This is a contrast from the class-based, log-book oriented NILAM approach where the reader is posited as an isolated unit who interacts minimally, exchanges ideas and transacts insights with others as well as being more concerned with the rudimentary elements of schema such as word recognition, understanding of syntax and basic comprehension. In other words, NILAM is more inclined towards encouraging the quantitative aspects of reading (i.e., the number of books read,

expansion of vocabulary etc.). In contrast, IQRA' is more skewed towards nurturing the qualitative aspect of reading (i.e. the development of critical reading, the utilization of the cognitive and affective aspect in analyzing texts and in formulating critical insights).

IQRA'S IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Initially, the target Reading Community selected for the program would be comprised of young adults. The first step involves the establishment of a Readers Advisory Board (RAB). This board will encompass a select group of Reader Advisors who will:

1. determine the objectives and goals of the proposed reading community. Such determination will be premised on the immediate socio-cultural and environmental factors.
2. based on the goals established in (1), devise a set of short and long term objectives that are both attainable and measurable.
3. select the relevant texts in tandem with the objectives outlined in (2). Texts selected should be tailored to the socio-cultural context and the reading needs of the target reading community.
4. devise Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that will serve to evaluate the objectives outlined in (2). These indicators will act as monitoring barometers that will constantly provide feedback for purposes of fine tuning and modifying the programme's goal where necessary, apart from collating valuable input for analysis and actions to be taken in the review stage.
5. delineate the general principles and parameters of the programme.
6. establish the Readers Activity Department (READ) and provide them with a general guideline to facilitate implementation purposes. READ should be wholly helmed by members of the target reading community who will operate within an autonomous framework.

The fulcrum of the proposed programme is the Reading Activity Division (READ). Essentially, READ serves to effect the parameters delineated within the implementation framework as devised by the Reader Advisory Board. As a wholly reader represented body, READ would be suitably empowered with the relevant sanctions to realize the broader goals delineated by the Reader Advisory Board (RAB). Basically, READ will be entrusted with the task of:

1. Selecting the relevant texts from the list provided by the RAB. This selection process be conducted by the READ members on a consultative basis wherein the consensus is.
2. Designing the relevant activities within the parameters set by the RAB in order to attain the desired objectives of the programme.
3. Implementing the relevant protocols of the programme , some of which are outlined as follows:
 - a. Deciding the requirements of the members of proposed IQRA' book club
 - b. Selecting a location
 - c. Drawing up a reading schedule for members
 - d. Planning a meeting schedule wherein members can interact regarding the text
 - e. Planning a series of activities related to the text.
4. Serving as a liaison body or intermediary between the Target Reading Community and RAB.

5. Expanding the READ programme through media-based promotional activities, community based outreach programme, social-networking, web-based networking and other forms of outreach activities.

Activities

IQRA's main activities would be conducted on a monthly basis. This is to give members the time to read the selected text and form the relevant responses to it. The fundamental activities revolving around IQRA' communities would be meetings wherein members can exchange their opinion on content, meaning, discourse patterns, socio-cultural contexts and other features related to the selected texts. In specific target reading communities, the text can function as an input of empowerment, enhancing productivity and developing job literacy skills. For instance, floor supervisors in a factory may read and discuss a text pertaining to the latest industrial innovation in their sector and come up with ways to use the innovation in their daily work in order to optimize the use of resources and maximize output.

Beyond TRC-based activities, other events such as forums, dialogues with managements, visits from speakers on selected topics and informal exchanges with selected guests can be arranged. Secondary activities can consist of a wide variety of events that the READ may want to sponsor depending on interests and funds. For instance, librarians will book-talk the various books available on a topic, technical expertise may be sought to illustrate the benefits of a method, movies, documentaries or community service projects will be offered wherever relevant and possible. READ may suggest competitions, tasks or projects that exploit the knowledge and critical insights gained from the text.

A sample of a typical IQRA' reading session for a teenage reading community is outlined as follows:

Topic: Family

Related Reading: The Return by K.S. Maniam.

IQRA' Forum Discussion Topics:

- Current relationships with parents.
- Childhood memories of time spent with grandparents and relationship with them
- Why relating to older adults might be difficult or easy.
- The consequences of cultural embedding and conservatism on relationships across generations.
- The role of contemporary social constructs that mediate such relationships.

Beyond IQRA' Interaction:

Sharing sessions: Invite older adults to share their experiences with young adults.

Cross-generational forum on how changing socio-cultural environment has impacted the traditional family structures.

Possible Activities:

- Create family trees using the help of grandparents, and historical documents in the library, display in library.
- Create grandparent timelines marking major events in their lives and connecting them to events in history, display in library and/or present to grandparents as a gift.
- Critical analysis session: teens would "research" a day in the life of one of their grandparents as a teenager and explore the nature of transformations between the past and the present.

Community Service Project Ideas:

Visits to local nursing homes, retired persons, community, or assisted living establishments to share experiences and exchange views on how evolving modern societies can accommodate the needs of the elderly.

Devise reading or similar interactive paraphernalia that could be used by the elderly and the young to better understand and mediate cross-generational conflicts.

Organize counseling clinics where teenagers with troubled relationships with their parents can seek advice or counsel.

FUTURE PLANS

Participation in reading communities is highly dependant on incentives whether tangible or intangible. Gardner (1988) in highlighting the intrinsic value of motivation noted that one of the key elements in fostering group motivation is through the provision of tangible rewards that serve to create a sense of ownership and nurture a feeling of empowerment as well heightened self-worth. In cognizance of this important aspect, IQRA' proposes to launch a membership scheme in which members of IQRA' communities will be provided with membership cards, an IQRA' mug and other paraphernalia that are designed to generate the initial motivation for participation. In the long term, it is envisaged that the IQRA' membership card would entitle members to enjoy discounts on a variety of services and items such as library membership, the price of books and access to interactive virtual forums.

In addition to the above, IQRA' proposes to develop a permanent infatuation for reading through a variety of innovative approaches that are facilitative in nature. The cornerstone of such an approach would be the IQRA' Book Exchange in which members can exchange books, conduct trades and loan books. Apart from this, the expansion of the existing collection can be augmented by incorporating activities like book drives via leveraging on the support of the corporate sphere and the public.

Promotional activities are another imperative that must be undertaken to ensure that the reading culture permeates all segments of society. Such promotional activities focusing initially on schools and institutions of higher learning can then be extended to percolate through the various segments of society through the use of community based liaison set-ups like the Village Development and Security Committee (JKKKK), district level National Unity units, the Welfare Department plus Non-governmental Organizations involved directly in Social Work. At industry and professional level, IQRA' proposes to tap into existing organizational frameworks like staff clubs, in-house unions or liaise directly with the respective management structures to facilitate IQRA's reach to the relevant target reading communities. It should be noted that these promotional activities

will be broad-based in methodology i.e., utilizing the extensive reach afforded by the electronic media (the internet, radio and television) as well as deploying traditional means (leaflets, brochures, pamphlets and the print media) to access specific target reading communities.

In line with our aim of creating a reading conducive environment, we have emphasized the need to utilize physical rather than virtual space as the center of our activities. The selection of the *wakaf* is in tandem with our aim of enabling reading in all situations and contexts as well as providing our readers with unobtrusive environment that will be both less stressful and claustrophobic. Indirectly, we aim to wean our readers away from the socially debilitating and psychologically addictive realm of cyberspace. This move is designed to facilitate real-time human interaction that will foster social cohesion, enhance the social communication capabilities as well as foster social cohesion and understanding amongst our young readers. In short, an environment that prepares our readers for their future critical interaction in more diverse and challenging social and vocational settings.

The reality of today's world is that although we lead highly digitalized lifestyles, there is an increasing awareness and appreciation that the social networking and interaction of yore can never be substituted by technology. Hence, argument for the extensive use of e-books and ICT in the reading environment flounders on the grounds that such use does not foster real-time interaction while at the same time distancing the reader from the immediacy of the reading text. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we propose to totally jettison the empowering capabilities of digital technology.

In conclusion, our challenge, then, is to design a reading space that is aesthetically pleasing, functional, and flexible enough to bring both paper and digital-based information services together in a complementary manner.

CONCLUSION

IQRA' is a continuation of the core values that USM cherishes, in that it epitomises the close linkage that USM has nurtured with industry and society. It is an educational project that considers education as a sustainable component which allows the building of knowledge and the understanding of issues, reflection on teaching methods and pedagogy, and reformation of outmoded practices. The active and participatory approach that IQRA' adopts will facilitate the exchange of viewpoints, promote empathy with other people and cultures, foster activities that call for critical inquiry, and encourage wider social participation. Ultimately, IQRA' is an empowering tool for through this proposed reading approach, previously disenfranchised and marginalized reading communities can be empowered through the acquisition of knowledge which hitherto has been accessible only to a privileged few.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the Book Club Development Team under the aegis of the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation (SoLLaT), Universiti Sains Malaysia, in conceptualizing the ideas contained herein.

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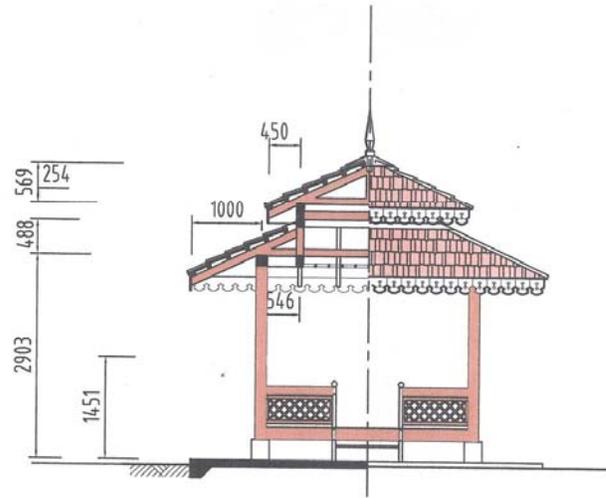
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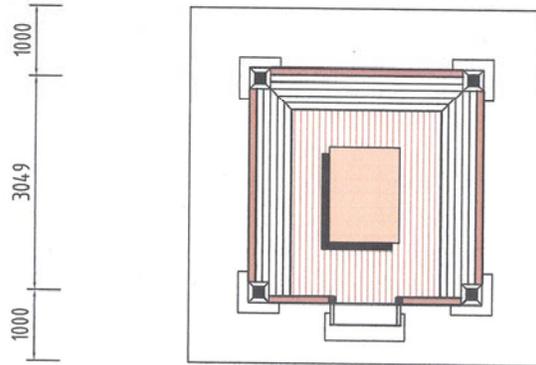
APPENDIX



Preview of Wakaf IQRA' at SoLLaT



TAMPAK SISI & KERATAN



PELAN LANTAI - WAKAF



Wakaf IQRA' Architectural Layout Plan