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ENHANCING PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES: A FOCUS ON THERAPEUTIC LANDSCAPE QUALITY IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

The Public libraries in Malaysia are evolving into vital community hubs, offering access to information and social connections while supporting mental health and well-being. This research investigates the quality of therapeutic landscapes within Malaysian public libraries using a mixed-methods approach. It explores user perceptions of therapeutic environments and aims to develop strategies for enhancing these spaces. By integrating qualitative insights and quantitative assessments, the study seeks to understand the impact of therapeutic landscapes on user satisfaction and the overall library experience. Findings are expected to inform library management practices and contribute to societal well-being.

Keywords: Therapeutic landscapes, Well-being, Library therapeutic landscape, Library therapeutic landscape quality, Library therapeutic satisfaction, public libraries,

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, public libraries are becoming community hubs, providing access to information, fostering social connections, and supporting mental health and wellbeing. This research aims to evaluate and enhance the therapeutic landscape quality within these spaces through a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative insights and quantitative assessments. The study focuses on understanding user perceptions of therapeutic landscapes, including natural and built environments, social environments, and spiritual environments, and developing strategies for improvement. The research methodology employed is a sequential mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of public library therapeutic landscapes. Qualitative methods were used to gather contextual insights, while quantitative data collection techniques were used to quantify user perceptions of therapeutic landscape quality and its relationship with overall library satisfaction. The study seeks to develop a comprehensive quality measurement system tailored to public library settings. Surveys and structured questionnaires were administered to users, gathering data on their experiences, preferences, and perceived benefits of library engagement. The findings are anticipated to provide actionable insights for library management, foster improved user experiences, and contribute to societal well-being. Demographic factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status were found to influence perceptions of therapeutic landscape quality, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions to meet diverse user needs. In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the design, management, and enhancement of therapeutic landscapes within Malaysian public libraries, emphasizing the importance of creating supportive, inclusive, and engaging environments for accessing information and promoting mental health and wellbeing.

The Malaysian government has been dedicated to addressing socio-economic disparities and advancing the nation's knowledge in social, cultural, educational, and economic aspects since the 1990s. Public libraries are recognised as integral components of community life, serving as catalysts for societal transformation and individual empowerment (Zakaria et al., 2011). This study emphasises the pivotal role of public libraries in fostering social wellbeing and positions them as key providers of therapeutic landscapes aimed at nurturing the future wellbeing of the populace. Public libraries have long been recognised for their transformative impact on society, enhancing the quality of people's lives by providing access to knowledge, resources, and cultural enrichment (Brewster, 2014; Zakaria et al., 2011). However, with mounting pressures and pervasive feelings of stress and depression (World Health Organization, 2017; Malaysian National Library, 2006), there is a pressing need for proactive

interventions to support mental health and well-being. The concept of therapeutic landscapes emerges as a promising solution, offering a holistic approach to planning and developing library environments conducive to healing and restoration. This research seeks to elucidate best practices for leveraging public libraries as therapeutic landscapes, focusing on the incorporation of therapeutic elements within library environments that can improve users' overall well-being. It is based on Gesler's (1998) therapeutic landscape theory and builds upon Brewster's (2014) thematic categorization of public libraries as restorative and relaxing environments. The research aims to go beyond qualitative assessments by incorporating quantitative measures to evaluate the impact of therapeutic landscapes on user satisfaction. This was achieved through a survey-based research design involving 474 respondents, with data analyzed using descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and multiple regression to assess relationships between Library Therapeutic Landscape Quality (LTLQ) dimensions and user satisfaction. By embracing the idea of therapeutic landscapes, public libraries can become essential community hubs, enabling people to live healthier, more satisfying lives and supporting societal progress.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study focuses on the relationship between library therapeutic landscape quality and library services and facilities in Malaysian public libraries. The research paradigm is a pragmatic (sequential mixed method) approach, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. A discussion, interview, focus group session, and identification of the research problem came after a preliminary approach to identifying the components and dimensions of library therapeutic landscape criteria. Quantitative data was obtained to understand the views of library management and staff on how public libraries can contribute as a therapeutic landscape. The project aims to inspire satisfaction using library therapeutic landscape quality as a motivator towards well-being. However, there is a significant lack of data supporting this idea. To fill this gap, a four-tiered approach was taken: survey construction based on existing literature, exploratory study, survey and pilot testing, and running reliability and validity tests on the data. A literature review was conducted to identify categories of quality and the questions associated with each category. Three categories for therapeutic landscape quality were decided upon due to the original theory of therapeutic landscape. Four questions were generated for each item, with pre-testing carried out to identify any problems related to questions, format, style, terms, fonts, etc. The instrument was then submitted to experts for content validity review. To ensure the usefulness of the results, the assessment tool was tested for different forms of validity and reliability. Questions were designed to assess expectation and perception, with a diversity of questions to increase content validity. The questions were sorted based on response type, such as word response, pick one answer, or five-point Likert scales, and analysed using descriptive statistical techniques. The questions were arranged into "my expectation" and "my perception," which both contain all the questions in different orders and categories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research study aimed to identify the dimensions of a therapeutic landscape in a public library setting using a qualitative approach. It involved a literature review, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions with library professionals and users. The dependent variable was library therapeutic satisfaction, measured in terms of library user satisfaction. The independent variables were based on the therapeutic landscape theory by Gesler (1992), the service quality (ServQUAL) theory by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), and library quality (LibQUAL) by the Association of Research Libraries. The independent variables consisted of three dimensions: library natural/built environment, library social environment, and library spiritual environment. The findings of this study highlight the significant role of Library Therapeutic Landscape Quality (LTLQ) in enhancing user satisfaction. The dimensions of the natural/built environment, social environment, and spiritual environment were all positively correlated with therapeutic satisfaction, with the social environment showing the strongest influence ($\beta=0.27, p<0.05$). The small difference between what users expect and what they think about libraries shows that they meet or go beyond what users want. This is shown by the high mean scores for the natural/built environment (4.36 ± 0.39), the social environment (4.04 ± 0.38), and the spiritual environment (4.01 ± 0.59). These findings reinforce libraries' role as spaces of

restoration and well-being, emphasizing the importance of integrating therapeutic principles, such as strategic use of physical spaces, inclusive social interactions, and symbolic elements. These results align with previous research on therapeutic landscapes and provide a framework for further exploration in diverse library settings.

CONCLUSION

The study has sought to explore and define the dimensions and elements of the library therapeutic landscape (LTL) within Malaysian public libraries. Drawing from the foundational work of Gesler (1992), the researcher aimed to extend the understanding of LTL, particularly in the context of Malaysia, where little prior research exists on this topic. An extensive literature review revealed that while studies in the West have explored the concept of libraries as therapeutic landscapes, Malaysia has not conducted any such investigations. Moreover, there is a dearth of research discussing the model of library therapeutic landscape quality. Library Therapeutic Landscape Quality (LTLQ) emerges as a crucial criterion for library branding and the development of public libraries in Malaysia. Given the country's status as a developing nation, prioritizing LTLQ library services, facilities, and collections is imperative. Recognizing the significance of LTLQ not only enhances user experiences but also contributes to the broader economic prosperity of the nation. As Malaysia transitions toward a service-oriented economy characterized by rapid technological advancements, the importance of meeting user expectations and perceptions becomes increasingly vital. This necessitates a shift from traditional library service paradigms to ones measured by LTLQ, ensuring libraries remain relevant and competitive in the evolving landscape. Integrating the concept of therapeutic landscapes into library service frameworks can enhance service performance and overall library quality, ultimately contributing to the creation of a more robust and competitive society. By emphasizing culture and fostering healthy environments, public libraries can serve as crucial components for advancing societal development. Furthermore, this study can aid the government in promoting mental health awareness, particularly through public library services. The findings underscore the profound influence of affective therapeutic landscape experiences within libraries, reinforcing the importance of prioritizing LTLQ in library management and service provision. In conclusion, this research explores the concept of the therapeutic library landscape in Malaysian public libraries, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing its quality in library management practices. It emphasizes the need for further exploration and integration of LTLQ principles in library service frameworks to enhance user experiences and contribute to societal well-being. The findings underscore the profound influence of therapeutic landscape experiences within libraries and the need for further exploration and integration of these principles.

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