

Creating a Responsive and Responsible Learning Environment: Bookopolis@UiTM Malaysia

Norshiha Saidin

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6290-5118>

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Nur Hidayah Md Yazid

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Sakinatul Ain Jelani

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Leele Susana Jamian

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New ideas about learning spaces offer a significant opportunity for higher education to transform learning. The creation of a reading-friendly space and a book exchange program, 'Bookopolis', offered UiTM Foundation Centre an opportunity to encourage active learning and create a responsive learning environment. 'Bookopolis' fulfilled the reading needs of the students in an economic and innovative way. Creativity and necessity provided the impetus to transform a non-functional space into an accessible and exciting area for reading and discussions. A flexible system of self-check in and out inculcates the values of trust and integrity, thus heightening a sense of responsibility. The redesigned learning space optimizes the current learning theory to support and extend students' learning environment. This chapter shares the journey and experience in creating a responsive learning space, encouraging a reading culture and literacy skills in a demanding one-year foundation program.

INTRODUCTION

“I love borrowing the books from Bookopolis because there’s such a wide variety of books available and we are also not restricted to a set timeframe to borrow the books. And the space provided at Bookopolis itself has helped me and my friends a lot because we see that we can have group discussions and we can have revisions at the space. By having better facilities, we see that it would greatly help us to have a more comfortable study period.”

- Asasi TESL Student, Female, 18 years old

“Bookopolis is Your Space”

Effective learning occurs when learners take the initiative and are proactive in taking charge of their own learning. This includes seeking for external sources and personalising their learning goals. Responsive learners are capable of organising their own learning, applying new knowledge to wider contexts, overcoming challenges, and are open to growth and change. Furthermore, they possess self-confidence and awareness, an eagerness to learn, are able to use a variety of learning strategies, and are aware of their own learning preferences, interests, and talents (Rawson, 2000; Giese, 2006; Fredriksson and Hoskins, 2007; Hofmann, 2008, as cited in Tekkol and Demirel, 2018).

Bookopolis@UiTM Malaysia was conceived with the aim of improving the learning environment in the new campus. Realizing that there were limited resources and books on the new campus and the dire need to encourage self – directed and responsive learning, the Asasi TESL department initiated the creation of the learning space in 2015. We were a new campus housing nearly 4000 students, the library had just been set up and the number of books were dismal. Bright young minds in an environment with limited books and restricted Internet connectivity. Bookopolis began modestly with little money and with used books donated by lecturers and friends. Soon after its launch, Bookopolis became more than just a place to read, borrow and donate books, it became a popular space for discussions, poetry recitations, public speaking, busking and many other students-initiated activities. Truly achieving its aim of extending the students learning environment.

SETTING UP THE SPACE

In response to the ever-changing requirements of behaviour and learning needs among Generation Z and the networked society, the idea of learning spaces and the ways it accelerates their participation and activates thoughts of knowledge and outlook have been and should always be reconceptualized (Evans & Kersh, 2014). Additionally, living in a Covid-19 pandemic and subsequently endemic situations, the instructors have been pushed to tweak the curriculum to ensure that students become responsive and responsible learners since it has not been easy to meet face-to-face. A group of lecturers initiated this intervention project as we wished to extend the learning experience beyond the confines of the classroom, and create a space that promoted collaboration, rather than isolation of learners, providing mobility and flexibility in grouping.

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