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No books or libraries, please

I READ with interest the Point Blank column "Why the book industry needs Oprah" by Johan Jaafar (NST, June 4). I am a university lecturer and it upsets me when I see that almost all university students do not read books; some are even quite hostile to books and libraries.

Sadly, this situation is not limited to students, extending even to working adult professionals earning good salaries. I have met professionals who told me that they do not even read newspapers (other than a quick scan of the headlines) because newspaper articles contain too many words that are arranged too densely on a single page.

I have even been told that reading fiction is strictly for "small boys" and buying books for children nowadays is a waste of money. I know of a young university lecturer who aims to be the "best of the best scientist in Malaysia" (his own expression) within the next 10 years. When asked about the books he reads, he retorts that reading books today is old-fashioned. A university lecturer who dislikes reading is like a singer who dislikes music.

There have been many reasons given why Malaysians generally do not read, such as busy time schedules and increasingly expensive books. But I believe the main reason why Malaysians do not read is we simply do not appreciate learning.

We do not have that mentality of lifelong learning. To most, learning stops when one leaves school, college or university. Learning is only to get that dream job and earn a good salary.

Even when professionals read, it is mostly about self-help topics related to their jobs (or their next jobs).

There is certainly nothing wrong with reading these self-help books, but it is very unfortunate when they limit themselves to these books. To them, learning is reduced to work-related topics; anything else is irrelevant.

It is mandatory that we cultivate a strong reading habit and read various genres of books: popular fiction, serious fiction, biographical, popular science, literature and non-fiction.

Yes, we all know that reading books increases our knowledge.

But most of us are perhaps unaware that a strong reading habit gradually overhauls our way of thinking for a better quality of life.

Reading changes a person from a naive, foolish being to one who is sophisticated and refined; from childish thinking to a mature and intelligent thinking; from a conservative to a liberal mind; from narrow-mindedness to open-mindedness; from ignorance to awareness and appreciation of new knowledge and skills; and from insensitivity to sensitivity to human feelings, experience, life and culture.

In short, a strong reading habit moulds and changes how we feel, think, see, speak and act — and yes, it even brings "economic value", as Johan Jaafar wrote, to our jobs and lives.

Although we all know that reading is a good thing, I fear my letter here will help little to change the reading culture of Malaysians.

In today's world of fast foods, we sadly become too impatient with books to absorb the nuances of books that simply cannot be obtained from movies.

Consequently, I have to agree with Johan Jaafar that we badly need celebrities like Oprah to tell us that we have to simply read "that" book.

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[Johan Jaafar's article](#)