

# ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ • RESEARCHES

## Статья • Article



R. Hashim

## Publishing and Book Trade in Malaysia

**Abstract.** This article examines the current state of the publishing industry in Malaysia, focusing on key players such as major associations, prominent publishers, and independent initiatives. It explores the influence of Malaysia's linguistic and cultural diversity on the industry, alongside translation activities and the growing prominence of local authors and literature. Popular genres, including children's books, educational materials, fiction, and non-fiction, are discussed to highlight reading trends among Malaysian audiences. The role of foreign publishers and the adoption of digital, electronic, and virtual publishing trends are analysed, showcasing the industry's response to global advancements. The significance of book fairs and literary events in promoting Malaysian books and fostering a vibrant literary culture is also highlighted. Finally, the article reflects on the challenges and opportunities shaping the future of publishing and the book trade in Malaysia.

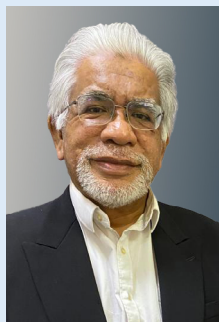
**Keywords:** Malaysian publishing industry, Book trade, Digital publishing trends, Local authors and literature, Cultural and linguistic diversity

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## Издательское дело и книжная торговля в Малайзии

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**Аннотация.** В статье представлено текущее состояние издательской индустрии в Малайзии с акцентом на ключевых игроках, таких как крупные ассоциации, известные издатели и независимые инициативы. Автор исследует влияние языкового и культурного разнообразия Малайзии на отрасль наряду с переводческой деятельностью и растущей известностью местных авторов и литературы. Популярные жанры, включая детские книги, образовательные материалы, художественную и научно-популярную литературу, обсуждаются для выявления тенденций чтения среди малазийской аудитории. Автор анализирует роль иностранных издателей и внедрение цифровых, электронных и виртуальных издательских тенденций, демонстрируя реакцию отрасли на глобальные достижения. В исследовании подчеркивается значение книжных ярмарок и литературных мероприятий в продвижении малазийских книг и содействии яркой книжной культуре. В статье автор рассматривает проблемы и возможности, формирующие будущее издательского дела и книжной торговли в Малайзии.

**Ключевые слова:** малазийская издательская индустрия, книжная торговля, тенденции в области цифровых издательств, малазийские авторы, малазийская литература, культурное и языковое разнообразие

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### Overview of the Malaysian Publishing Industry

The Malaysian publishing industry has a rich history reflecting the nation's cultural diversity and modernization. It began in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with religious and educational texts introduced by colonial administrations and missionaries, aimed at spreading teachings and facilitating education in English and Dutch (Md Sidin AI, 1992).

As independence approached, focus shifted to national identity and cultural preservation. Local authors and publishers produced works in Malay and other languages, shaping literary culture. The establishment of **Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP)** in 1956 was pivotal in regulating and nurturing Malay language and literature (DBP 2025)<sup>1</sup>.

After independence in 1957, publishing expanded rapidly alongside rising literacy rates and government support for education and local content. Educational publishing thrived, meeting the demands of the national curriculum.

In recent decades, technological advances and globalization transformed the industry. Digital publishing

introduced new platforms, changing how content is produced, distributed, and consumed. Malaysia's publishing sector now balances traditional print with growing digital influence, mirroring regional trends in Southeast Asia.

Historically, research has traced the development of Malaysian publishing. Hassan A. (1975) documented DBP's early programs, Hasrom H. (1994) predicted industry growth, and Ishak Ahmad (1992) examined publishing in Malaya and Singapore (1807–1949). More recent analyses, like Lingrad (2016) and V. E. Belenko (2023), highlight challenges such as declining readership, reduced print circulation, and the impact of electronic formats on reading habits.

Today, key players include major associations, prominent publishers, independent presses, and foreign publishers contributing to Malaysia's book trade. Translation activities, diverse literary genres, and the rise of local authors continue to shape the industry. Popular reading includes children's books, educational materials, fiction, and non-fiction.

Linguistic and cultural diversity plays a central role in publishing practices. Digital innovations, such as e-books and virtual publishing, further transform

<sup>1</sup> Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka : website. URL: <https://lamanweb.dbp.gov.my/> (accessed 20.03.2025).

the industry, while book fairs and literary events remain vital for promotion and engagement.

The Malaysian publishing industry continues to evolve, balancing heritage and innovation, and posing the question: what does the future hold for books, reading habits, and publishing in Malaysia?

### Current State of the Publishing Industry in Malaysia

The Malaysian publishing industry is undergoing significant changes, driven by digital media adoption, a trend accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Publishers increasingly embrace e-books and online content to meet evolving consumer preferences. Educational publishing remains a strong segment, fueled by curriculum updates and demand for textbooks and learning materials.

Reflecting Malaysia's multicultural society, the industry produces content in Malay, English, Chinese, and Tamil, offering opportunities but also challenges in market segmentation and reach. Government support, including grants and initiatives to promote local content, aids the sector, yet regulatory hurdles and competitive pressures from local and international publishers remain. Local publishers must innovate to stay competitive, while popular genres such as children's books, fantasy, and romance show growth potential.

As of 2023, Malaysia's publishing industry generates around USD 335 million annually, with nearly 15,000 new titles or editions published each year. The government aims to increase this to 30,000 new titles annually, reflecting a dynamic industry focused on fostering reading, literacy, and cultural engagement.

Overall, the industry balances traditional publishing values with digital innovation to meet market demands and capture new audiences.

### Major Players in the Malaysian Book Trade

Several key institutions and associations shape Malaysia's publishing industry, each contributing to its growth and sustainability:

National Book Council of Malaysia (MBKM) MBKM promotes reading culture, supports local publishers through grants and training, and organizes events like the Kuala Lumpur International Book Fair (KLIBF), while facilitating access to international markets<sup>2</sup>.

Perbadanan Kota Buku (PKB) PKB aims to make Malaysia a global book hub, enhancing competitiveness via digital innovation, supporting translation projects, and implementing literacy programs to boost digital engagement<sup>3</sup>.

Malaysian Book Publishers Association (MABOPA) MABOPA represents Malaysian publishers, advocating

<sup>2</sup> National Book Council of Malaysia (NBCM) : website. URL: <https://mbkm.my/> (accessed 20.03.2025).

<sup>3</sup> Perbadanan Kota Buku : website. URL: <https://kotabuku.com/> (accessed 20.03.2025).

for their interests nationally and internationally. It organizes book fairs, professional development programs, and liaises with government agencies on publishing matters<sup>4</sup>.

Malaysian Scholarly Publishing Council (MAPIM) MAPIM focuses on academic publishing, supporting dissemination of scholarly works and organizing seminars and workshops to maintain international standards and enhance Malaysia's academic reputation<sup>5</sup>.

Malaysian Booksellers Association (MBA) MBA advances bookselling by promoting sales, advocating for favourable policies, and providing training for members. It organizes trade shows and book fairs, negotiates with publishers, and contributes to literacy and cultural development in Malaysia<sup>6</sup>.

Together, these organizations strengthen Malaysia's publishing ecosystem, balancing industry growth, academic standards, and cultural promotion (Fig. 1).

### Major Book Publishers in Malaysia

Several key publishers shape Malaysia's literary and academic landscape, covering general, educational, and Islamic publications:

Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) or the Institute of Language and Literature established in 1956, DBP is the government body overseeing Malay language and literature. It publishes educational materials, dictionaries, and literary works, while setting linguistic standards, supporting schools, and promoting Malay literature through competitions and events<sup>7</sup>.

Karangkrak Group – Founded in 1978, Karangkrak publishes books, magazines, and newspapers, including educational and religious materials. The group



Fig. 1. Publishing brands of Malaysian book publishers  
Рис. 1. Издательские марки Малайзийских книгоиздательств

<sup>4</sup> Malaysian Book Publishers Association : website. URL: <https://www.mabopa.com.my/ms/selamat-datang/> (accessed 20.03.2025).

<sup>5</sup> Malaysian Scholarly Publishing Council (MAPIM) : website. URL: <https://mapim.my/> (accessed 20.03.2025).

<sup>6</sup> Malaysian Booksellers Association : website. URL: <https://booksellers.my/about/> (accessed 20.03.2025).

<sup>7</sup> Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka : website. URL: <https://lamanweb.dbp.gov.my/> (accessed 20.03.2025).

supports local authors, provides school resources, and has expanded into digital platforms<sup>8</sup>.

PTS Group – A leading private publisher since 1996, PTS offers fiction, non-fiction, educational, and self-help titles. Known for creative marketing, it engages readers via social media and innovative campaigns<sup>9</sup>.

Inisiatif Buku Darul Ehsan (IBDE) – Focuses on diverse titles including translations, academic works, and literary publications, supporting both established and emerging Malaysian authors<sup>10</sup>.

Other notable publishers – MPH, Gerak Budaya, Kanyin Publications, and Silverfish Books produce a range of fiction, non-fiction, children's books, and works on social, cultural, and business topics.

Islamic publishers – Dakwah Corner, Islamic Book Trust, Darul Fikir, and The Other Press specialize in Islamic literature, including Qur'anic studies, Hadith, Seerah, and contemporary religious issues. They distribute materials locally and internationally, provide bilingual publications, and engage the community through educational programs.

Collectively, these publishers sustain Malaysia's book trade, promote reading culture, and support both general and specialized literary needs.

### Translation Activities in Malaysia

The Malaysian Institute of Translation & Books (Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia – ITBM), established in 1993, plays a key role in Malaysia's translation and publishing sector. ITBM translates literary and non-literary works into and from Malay, making global literature accessible to Malaysians and promoting Malaysian works internationally. Its publications cover fiction, non-fiction, science, technology, and children's literature, fostering cultural exchange and broadening access to knowledge<sup>11</sup>.

Independent publishers also significantly contribute to Malaysia's literary landscape. They support emerging authors, take creative risks, and experiment with innovative formats, designs, and marketing strategies. By organizing book launches, readings, and workshops, they foster literary communities and dialogue. Independent publishers often challenge norms, promote freedom of expression, and ensure a vibrant, diverse, and dynamic literary culture that reflects Malaysia's multiplicity of voices.

<sup>8</sup> Karang kraf : website. URL: <https://www.karangkraf.com/> (accessed 20.03.2025).

<sup>9</sup> PTS Media Group : website. URL: <https://pts.com.my/> (accessed 20.03.2025).

<sup>10</sup> Inisiatif Buku Darul Ehsan : website. URL: [https://www.bukuibde.com/?rsrltid=AfmBOor8K21pNRYKTd\\_IJYiV1k2JlI5HnciBQri\\_qmBZvCw7HtTruqYn](https://www.bukuibde.com/?rsrltid=AfmBOor8K21pNRYKTd_IJYiV1k2JlI5HnciBQri_qmBZvCw7HtTruqYn) (accessed 20.03.2025).

<sup>11</sup> Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia (ITBM) : website. URL: <https://www.itbm.com.my/> (accessed 20.03.2025).

### Foreign Publishers in Malaysia

Foreign publishers play an important role in Malaysia, enriching the local book market with international bestsellers, educational materials, and diverse genres. Many collaborate with local publishers to produce translations and localized editions, catering to Malaysia's multilingual society. They provide textbooks, academic resources, and digital content, including e-books and online learning platforms, enhancing access to knowledge and education.

Prominent examples include Oxford Fajar, part of Oxford University Press, publishing about 400 titles annually in Malay, English, Chinese, and Tamil. Pearson Education adapts international textbooks for local curricula, Springer Nature focuses on scientific and technical works, while Macmillan offers both educational and fiction titles.

Foreign publishers contribute to cultural exchange, exposing Malaysian readers to global literature and scholarship. They stimulate the local economy through investments, employment, and partnerships, and help raise industry standards by introducing advanced publishing practices and training for local authors and editors. Their presence drives innovation, competition, and diversity in Malaysia's publishing industry while strengthening educational and cultural development.

### Genres and Popular Reads

Malaysian readership is diverse, reflecting the country's multicultural and multilingual society. Religious books, especially on Islam, remain consistently popular, covering Qur'anic studies, Hadith, history, and spiritual guidance. Academic materials, including textbooks and study guides, are in high demand for schools and universities.

Fiction exploring love, relationships, family drama, and crime stories attracts wide readership, while speculative fiction—fantasy and science fiction—appeals to younger readers, often incorporating Malaysian folklore. Young adult novels addressing coming-of-age, social challenges, and historical fiction exploring Malaysia's past are also popular.

Self-help and motivational books, along with cookbooks showcasing traditional and fusion cuisine, reflect readers' interests in personal development and cultural heritage. Collectively, these genres entertain, inform, and mirror Malaysia's cultural identity.

### Children's Books, Educational Materials, Fiction, and Non-Fiction

In Malaysia, children's books increasingly focus on inclusivity, multicultural characters, and cultural traditions, often incorporating interactive elements to engage young readers. Educational materials integrate digital tools and are tailored to local curricula, emphasizing both academic and social-emotional learning.

Fiction trends show growing interest in local settings, histories, and cross-cultural narratives, alongside

popular genres like romance, thriller, fantasy, and historical fiction. Non-fiction titles on health, wellness, self-improvement, current events, and professional skills are also rising, reflecting readers' evolving interests.

These trends highlight the dynamic preferences of Malaysian readers and the publishing industry's adaptation to meet them.

### The Rise of Local Authors and Literature

The rise of local authors in Malaysia highlights growing interest in indigenous voices and narratives reflecting Malaysian culture, traditions, and history. Their works explore themes like identity, multiculturalism, and societal complexities, creating a vibrant and diverse literary landscape.

Government and cultural institutions, such as Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and the National Book Council, support local literature through grants, awards, and festivals, while educational initiatives incorporate more local works to foster national identity. Independent publishers also provide platforms for experimental and alternative voices.

Malaysian authors are gaining international recognition, with writers like Tan Twan Eng, Tash Aw, Preeta Samarasan, Shih-Li Kow, Faisal Tehrani, Bernice Chauly, and Kamaladevi Aravindhan contributing unique narratives that enrich both national and global literature. Literary festivals further promote local authors and facilitate engagement with readers.

National Laureates ("Sasterawan Negara") such as A. Samad Said, Anwar Ridhwan, Baha Zain, Zurinah Hassan, Siti Zainon Ismail, and Rahman Shaari exemplify excellence in Malay literature. Their works address justice, identity, cultural heritage, modernization, and social issues, cementing their role in shaping Malaysia's literary and cultural landscape.

The rise of local literature strengthens Malaysia's cultural identity, nurtures diverse voices, and positions Malaysian writing prominently on the international stage.

### Language and Cultural Influence

Malaysia's publishing trends reflect its multilingual and multicultural society, with major languages being Malay, English, Chinese, and Tamil.

Malay publishing is robust, covering fiction, non-fiction, religious texts, self-help, romance, and historical fiction, with growing children's literature emphasizing moral lessons. English dominates academic, professional, and self-improvement titles, and English fiction by Malaysian authors often gains international attention, bridging local and global themes.

Chinese-language books cater to the Chinese Malaysian community, featuring historical dramas, romance, and educational materials. Tamil publishing focuses on culture, religion, education, poetry, and historical narratives, preserving the Tamil language and heritage.

Cultural diversity shapes content and publishing choices, promoting inclusive storytelling that reflects different ethnic, religious, and linguistic experiences. Religious texts serve Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and Chinese traditional practitioners, while educational materials incorporate multicultural elements to foster unity and understanding.

Cross-cultural, bilingual books are increasingly popular, promoting cultural exchange, language learning, and appreciation of Malaysian arts, crafts, and heritage. Overall, Malaysia's linguistic and cultural diversity drives a vibrant, inclusive, and dynamic publishing industry.

### Digital Publishing Trends

E-books and digital reading platforms in Malaysia have grown significantly, driven by technology, changing consumer habits, and educational policies. Widespread smartphones, tablets, and affordable devices make digital reading convenient, offering instant access to a vast range of titles at lower costs, appealing in a multilingual society.

The education sector's shift to digital learning has encouraged e-book adoption, supported by government initiatives to enhance digital literacy. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated online content consumption as physical stores closed. Environmental awareness also motivates some readers to prefer digital over print.

Regional digital platforms offer e-books, audiobooks, and multilingual content, often highlighting local authors. Subscription services provide unlimited access to diverse titles, especially in popular genres like romance, young adult fiction, and professional development.

Challenges include copyright issues, digital piracy, and balancing print and digital formats. Despite this, digital publishing continues to reshape how Malaysians access literature and educational content, with its role likely to expand further.

### Book Fairs and Literary Events

Malaysia hosts numerous book fairs and literary events that connect readers, writers, and publishers.

Kuala Lumpur International Book Fair (KLIBF) is a major annual event featuring local and international publishers, book launches, seminars, and workshops.

George Town Literary Festival in Penang offers readings, panels, and workshops with local and international authors, promoting world literature and cultural dialogue.

Big Bad Wolf Book Sale provides massive discounts on books across genres, running 24 hours a day for several days, attracting large crowds.

BookFest Malaysia at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre caters to multilingual audiences, featuring book signings, educational talks, and cultural performances.

Selangor International Book Fair (SIBF) in Shah Alam promotes reading, literacy, and education, serving book lovers, authors, and publishers (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Malaysian Book Fair Posters

Рис. 2. Афиши книжных ярмарок Малайзии

State-level book fairs across Malaysia further support literacy, local authors, and community engagement with literature.

### The Future of Publishing and Book Trade in Malaysia

The Malaysian publishing industry has a promising future but faces pressures from technology, changing consumer habits, and economic factors.

Digital formats like e-books and audiobooks will grow, with publishers investing in online sales, digital marketing, and social media to reach wider audiences. Local authors and culturally diverse content will gain emphasis, while innovative formats like interactive books and cross-media projects may attract younger readers.

Educational materials will increasingly go digital, with personalized content tailored to local needs. Improved logistics and distribution, combining physical and online channels, will expand reach, including remote areas.

Government policies, international collaborations, and translation of local works will enhance global visibility and revenue opportunities. Sustainable printing practices and community engagement through literacy programs will also shape the industry.

Overall, adaptability to technology, economic changes, and cultural trends will determine the growth and international success of Malaysia's publishing sector.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the publishing industry in Malaysia is a dynamic and evolving sector shaped by key players, including major associations, prominent publishers, and independent initiatives. The industry reflects Malaysia's linguistic and cultural diversity, with translation activities and local literature gaining increasing recognition alongside the contributions of renowned authors and emerging writers. Popular genres such as children's books, educational materials, fiction, and non-fiction continue to cater to diverse reader interests. The involvement of foreign publishers and the adoption of digital, electronic, and virtual publishing trends further drive the industry's transformation. Additionally, book fairs and literary events remain vital for promoting Malaysian books and fostering a robust literary culture. As the industry navigates these developments, the question remains: What lies ahead for the future of publishing and the book trade in Malaysia?

*The author has read and approved the final manuscript.*

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