A Case Study on Rural Senior Citizens' Reading Materials

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Abstract. Senior citizens play an important role in the development of future societies. It is anticipated that the elderly population in Malaysia will increase by 15 percent to 5.6 million by 2030 due to the progressive advancement in healthcare facilities over the last 50 years, hence leading to longer life expectancy. In line with the development of knowledge networks, literary materials have become more diverse for senior citizens to choose from in order to improve their quality of life. This article aims to identify and analyse the different types of literature reading material and its contents, as well as to propose other literary materials especially for the necessity of the rural libraries in Kelantan. This study uses a quantitative approach: a field study using a questionnaire distributed to 300 senior citizens in Kelantan and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Findings showed that the senior citizens chose religious literature as their preferred reading materials. In conclusion, the choice of reading materials by senior citizens in rural areas should be considered by the library management and publishing companies to ensure that they can gain better benefits.
Keywords: information technology, reading materials, senior citizen, rural library

1   Introduction

The library is an important place as a hub to obtain information within a community. Both public and local libraries, in general, provide various information that can be retrieved in the forms of books, magazines, research articles, microfilms, databases and others (Mohd Ismail Abidin et al., 2013). The public library is capable of acting as the main role in the restructuring of the societal community. Its function is to be a

synergy partner in developing the local economy besides promoting life-long learning to all of its community members (Salbiah and Rosham, 2014). With a more detailed focus towards a community, the local library is able to carry its function as a place to encourage reading habits among members of rural, to provide suitable educational reading materials for varying age groups as well as to arrange activities appropriate for its community (Zainab, Abrizah & Nor Badrul, 2004).

According to the statistic released by the National Library of Malaysia in 2017, as many as 1,121 rural libraries were built throughout the country. Based on the same statistics, Sabah and Sarawak recorded the highest number of rural libraries compared to other states which are 124 and 212 libraries in both Sabah and Sarawak respectively (refer to Table 1). This is accurate with the size of the states which is huge and has more rural areas which consequently requiring more rural libraries to be built. Kelantan is selected as the research state and it has 37 rural libraries with three of them situated within the Tumpat district. Based on the Current Population Estimates released by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, it was found that the population of Malaysian citizens in 2019 is recorded as a total of 32.6 million, an increase from 32.4 million compared to 2018. Meanwhile, the population of the elderly aged above 65 years old is expected to increase from 6.5% in 2018 to 6.7% in 2019. The increase of 79,352 senior citizens from 2018 makes the expectation of the elderly citizen population in 2019 to be as many as 1,968,252 people. From this statistic, it can be concluded that senior citizens will need a beneficial activity as a platform to fill their spare time so that they can increase their quality of life. Parallel to the advancement in the network of knowledge and information technology, the library should provide services of better quality to solve the issues of the increasing number of senior citizens in the future.

Table 1. Number of Rural libraries in Malaysia

State	Number of Rural Libraries
Johor	89
Kedah	96
Kelantan	37
Melaka	55
Negeri Sembilan	75
Pahang	64
Perak	85
Perlis	37
Pulau Pinang	83
Sabah	124
Sarawak	212
Selangor	71
Terengganu	90
WP Labuan	3
Total	**1,121**

Source: Zawiyah Baba ed. (2017). *Libraries in Malaysia: towards transformation and community outreach*. Kuala Lumpur: Librarians Association of Malaysia: pg. 41.

Based on the classifications of elements in the quality of library services conducted by McDonald and Micikas (1994), the element of reading sources is a significant element referring to the overall resources available in a rural library. Meanwhile, the element of reading sources including the number of activities and books allocated is important to fulfil the reading requirements of the local citizens. Thus, Omar et al (2012) underlined that the contents of reading materials offered in the libraries must always be updated to attract more visitors. Omar also emphasized the dire importance of sufficient reading sources in the libraries in order to guarantee quality services can be provided to the visitors. To solve this problem, the article is aimed to identify the types of literary reading materials for senior citizens in rural libraries of Tumpat, Kelantan as well as analysing the contents of literary reading materials preferred. This article is also intended to suggest literary reading materials needed for senior citizens visiting the rural libraries.

2 Literature Review

In 2030, Malaysia is expected to be categorized as an 'aging nation' when the population of the citizen aged 60 years and older hit 15% or more (Ezatul, 2018). Therefore, the issues of senior citizens must be handled accordingly including the quality of their time. Informative materials of good quality must be provided by information centres which indirectly would act as a one-stop-centre in order to manage the needs of senior citizens in continuing with their lives. As of current, there have yet to be any specific studies conducted related to rural libraries especially involving selected literary materials for senior citizens in rural areas. However, there are several series of studies discussing issues involving libraries covering various aspects.

A study conducted by Samsul et al. (2016) was about the pattern of rural library usage among teenagers in Malaysia. Researchers found that housewives and school students are the main visitors of rural libraries whereas the teenage groups were identified to be more attracted to visit the library due to the excellent internet services. Results also found that magazine (71.3%) recorded highest usage, followed by novels (69.8%), newspapers (62.3%), cooking books (51.5%) and educational reading materials (48.3%). This shows that rural libraries stay relevant for rural communities and are suitable to be used as lifelong learning centres. Although this study focuses on the rural communities, the main focuses of the study, the teenage group and the reading materials, are too general. In contrast, the current study conducted aims the senior citizens as the research target, hence their reading materials can be observed more specifically.

Siti Zobidah et al. (2016) studied the quality of service provided by rural libraries in Malaysia by concentrating on the youth and adult as the research target. Research

results found that there are few arising problems affecting the foundation of needs for a library such as insufficient current educational materials, unsatisfactory internet services and lack of interests among the youth towards library usage. However, her research is more focused on youth and adult groups whereas this research emphasizes elderly groups as the research target.

The following research was conducted by Wan et al. (2017) which analysed reading attitudes of secondary school students towards academic achievements. The research found that there was a lack of awareness on the importance of reading among secondary school students as well as insufficient educational materials in school libraries besides untrained teachers in resource management of school libraries causing it harder for the students to find the available reference materials. However, the above research is seen to be centred on the school students' achievement despite including educational reading materials in school libraries. On the contrary, the current study will discuss the literary reading materials besides observing reading patterns specifically among elderly groups.

Research about the roles and challenges faced by Malaysian libraries in the effort of strengthening and promoting literacy among children and teenagers in Malaysia was conducted by Alimah and Mohd Sharif (2001). By focusing on public libraries such as national, state and mobile libraries, the study found that the publication of literary materials for children and teenagers in Malaysia is too few especially for works in the Malay language. At the same time, library management has no choice but to purchase any kind of literary materials published since there are abundant materials in English compared to the Malay language in the markets. Nonetheless, it is observed that the research focused more on the libraries located in the urban areas despite still focusing on the aspect of literary materials. Therefore, the current research will move to the rural areas by making the rural libraries as the research location in order to identify literary reading materials preferred by the readers.

The research conducted by Mohd Ismail, Hazlin and Siti Haidah (2013) was about the transformation of services in public libraries and its acceptance among the teenage groups through the proposal of Web 2.0 application. This study focuses on the teenage groups from the aspect of the library's preparation in the effort to increase reading rates among teenage groups. Based on the observation towards the content offered by Web 2.0 application, it appears that the application is still in its early stage and a lot of libraries have plans to enhance usage in order to increase service quality. The study also shows that there is no clear policy or guideline in developing the application. Meanwhile, through the questionnaire employed, the data displayed that Malaysian teenagers lack the awareness regarding the existence of Web 2.0 application services provided by the public library management despite having strongly agreed for the application to be launched by library management in the future. Therefore, this study will at least assist the researchers to identify the ability of senior citizens in using the provided application.

Next, a study about the roles and requirements of the library for the future generation by focusing on the rural libraries was conducted by Samsul (2013). The main objective of this study is to know the factors influencing the use of rural library services among the youth. The discussions were based on related past studies and document analysis. Several roles and requirements of rural libraries such as facilities and activities were identified. Other than that, among discussed are the roles of

librarians as well as suggestions for improvements in overcoming current challenges to provide better and more comfortable services to the rural communities. Nevertheless, this study is indeed general in discussing issues occurring within the aspect of rural libraries and only focusing on the youth groups only. In contrast, the current research will focus on the elderly group which has not been discussed by other researchers within the area of study.

The effectiveness of the use of rural libraries was conducted by Fatimah Abdillah (1999). The study found that a group of students and children are frequent visitors of rural libraries. The existence of rural libraries opens the opportunities for those living in rural areas to enjoy the benefits gained from library services apart from encouraging reading habits among rural communities. Besides that, several suggestions were proposed such as hosting reading and storytelling competitions for children and adding service hours to the library. However, the study conducted was only concentrating on the target groups which are children and teenagers. Hence, the current research aims the senior citizens as a group that must also be given focus in reading activities specifically for the selection of literary materials in rural libraries.

Based on the above discussions, it can be concluded that various studies about reading attitudes have been employed yet many of which still concentrated on the group of school students. The rural areas were also studied to observe the reading attitude of school students only. Thus, there still has no specific research related to the type of reading materials preferred by the senior citizens especially in rural areas, with the main focus directed to rural libraries as the knowledge resource centre. Hence, the current research is a study conducted on the group of senior citizens who will continue their lives so that their spare time can be filled with beneficial activities. This group must be studied and provided with the right facilities parallel to the needs of their pension days.

3   Methodology

This research was conducted in four libraries in the district of Tumpat, Kelantan; Perpustakaan Awam Cawangan Tumpat (Public Library Tumpat Branch), Perpustakaan Desa Kampung Ketil (Kampung Ketil Rural Library), Perpustakaan Desa Kampung Bunohan (Kampung Bunohan Rural Library) and Perpustakaan Desa Telaga Bata (Telaga Bata Rural Library). It focuses on the types of literary materials provided in the mentioned libraries. The libraries were chosen because the areas are away from large towns and cities in the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Other than that, these areas have diverse races and religions due to the location being near to the Malaysia-Thailand international border.

The research employed a quantitative approach by using a questionnaire as the main medium of the data collection process. The process of obtaining research data was performed in four libraries in the Tumpat district: Perpustakaan Awam Tumpat, Perpustakaan Telaga Bata, Perpustakaan Kampung Bunohan and Perpustakaan Kuala Ketil. As many as 110 respondents were involved in the effort of data collection to fulfil the requirements to perform statistical analysis. The duration needed to collect the data was four months from April until July 2019. The effort of data collection was

performed by the enumerators assigned for all libraries in the Tumpat district. Then, the collected data analysed using SPSS software. The descriptive analysis method performed covering the average, frequency, and percentage to gain comprehensive research results.

4   Results

Table 2 shows the result of demographic data for each respondent in the four selected libraries within the Tumpat district which are Perpustakaan Awam Tumpat, Perpustakaan Telaga Bata, Perpustakaan Kampung Bunohan and Perpustakaan Kuala Ketil. The table displays 58.1% of respondents are male whereas 41.9% are female visitors. The projected differences between the genders of elderly males and females are closely related to the results of their job types which are presented in the respondents' type of jobs below. On the other hand, the results of the previous study conducted by Samsul et al. (2016) found that female youths are frequent visitors of rural libraries compared to male youths. Nonetheless, the current research found that male senior citizens are more inclined to visit rural libraries compared to females.

In relation to the classification according to race, the majority of the respondents involved in the study are Malays with 89.5%, followed by the Chinese with 5.7%, and other races with 3.8% and the Indians with 1%. Based on religions, on the other hand, as many as 91.4% of respondents are Muslims, 7.6% are Buddhists and 1% are the Sikhs. This is due to the average population of East Coast areas are Bumiputera Malays. It is supported by the statistics released from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2018): Bumiputera ethnics which are Malay Muslims and the Kelantanese aborigines recorded highest population of 96.0%, followed by the Chinese (3.1%), Indians (0.3%) and other races (0.6%). Thus, it is clear that the results of racial demographics are accurate to the statistics and reality of the community in the Tumpat district.

If observed from the educational aspect, the respondents with SPM qualifications recorded the highest percentage with 36.5% , followed by 24% who successfully completed primary school, 19.2% who received formal education until SRP level, 9.6% respondents have STP/STPM/Diploma qualifications, 5.8% who did not attend schools and 4.8% with a degree. This is accurate with the report released by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2013) which stated the Kelantanese literacy rate for those between 10 until 64 years old has increased from 90.4% to 95.7% from the year 2000 to 2010. From the data collected, it can be clearly observed that they still received proper education in their teenage years and the literacy rates are not at the worrying level.

From the aspect of job types, the respondents in the Tumpat district prefer to be self-employed with the recorded percentage of 38.1%, unemployed respondents of 29.5%, pensioners of 21.9%, public servants of 7.6%, and private sectors employees of 2.9%. The reason is that most of them are more comfortable managing their own enterprises such as doing business. Therefore, they have more time to visit the closest libraries for beneficial activities. For the unemployed respondents, they recorded the

second-highest value, which must be clarified that the huge part of the group consisted of full-time housewives. Even so, they still visit the libraries in their spare time or at least, borrow books to be read at home.

By observing the frequency of respondents visiting the library, it was found that the highest percentage identified are respondents who rarely visit the library (38.1%), followed by those who frequently visit the library (26.7%), never previously visit the library (16.2%), very rarely (13.3%) and very frequently (5.7%). From the collected data, it was found that the frequency pattern of senior citizens is rarely due to the majority of them are responsible as the breadwinners of the family, or at least, for themselves. For those who frequently visit the library, most of them are unemployed and pensioners. This allows them to visit the library at any time possible since they are not tied to living commitments.

Table 2. Demographic data

Demographic Aspects	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Average
Gender			
Male	61	58.1	-
Female	44	41.9	-
Age			
55-60	50	47.6	-
61-65	36	34.3	-
66-70	11	10.5	-
71 and above	8	7.6	-
Religion			
Islam	96	91.4	-
Buddhism	8	7.6	-
Hindu	-	-	-
Christian	-	-	-
Sikh	1	1.0	-
Lain-lain	-	-	-
Race			
Malay	94	89.5	-
Chinese	6	5.7	-
Indian	1	1.0	-
Others	4	3.8	-
Education Level			
No formal education	6	5.8	-
Primary school	25	24.0	-
SRP	20	19.2	-
SPM	38	36.5	-
STP/STPM/Diplo	10	9.6	-

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Degree	5	4.8	-
Others	-	-	-
Jobs			
Public sector	8	7.6	-
Private sector	3	2.9	-
Pensioner	23	21.9	-
Self-employed	40	38.1	-
Unemployed	31	29.5	-
Frequency of Library Visits			
Never	17	16.2	-
Very rarely	14	13.3	-
Rarely	40	38.1	-
Frequently	28	26.7	-
Very frequently	6	5.7	-

Next, the findings for the types of literary reading materials preferred by the visitors of the four libraries in Tumpat district as stated in Table 3. The table stated the rate of their preferred reading materials of which most favour Traditional Malay Literature (76.0%) compared to Modern Malay Literature (24.0%).

If seen from the aspect preferred type of Traditional Malay Literature reading materials, huge portion of the respondents selected reading materials with religious elements such as scripture/religious literature (35.0%) and stories of prophets and companions (27.5%), followed by folklores (12.5%), historical literature (7.5%), traditional poetry (*syair*, *gurindam*, *seloka*) and epic literature (3.8%), legends and depictions including verses (*pantun, mantera*) (2.5%) and legal literature (penal code) and myths (1.3%). This is accurate with the study by Abd Majid et al (2017) which revealed that one of the golden-agers' activities is appreciating religious knowledge such as *tajwid*, *akidah*, *fiqh*, and al-Quran. Additionally, the senior citizens also are interested in *tasawwuf* awareness because some of them feel that the *tasawwuf* knowledge learned also covers other religious knowledge. Meanwhile, senior citizens are also taught *wirid* (prayer citations) guidelines as side practices in their lives. The current research is further supported by the number of madrasah centres in Kelantan released by MAMPU (2017) stating that there are 15 madrasah centres registered as members of Pondok Studies Development Centre and 15 unregistered madrasah centres. Five of these centres are located in the Tumpat district. This situation illustrates that senior citizens need religious books in the libraries to allow them to borrow and then use the books to study religious knowledge in suraus, mosques or any religious education centres within their residential areas.

For the aspect of preferred Modern Malay Literature reading materials, the majority of visitors are inclined to choose novels (41.7%) as main reading materials, followed by poetry (20.8%), drama (16.7%), and short stories (12.5%) and, essays and critics (8.3%). This is due to the senior citizens' lack of interest in educational

reading materials compared to relaxed and entertaining reading materials. These findings further supported by the study by Ishak, Yusoff and A Manaf (2000) which revealed as many as 83.4% of total respondents favoured novels as modern literary reading materials. Moreover, there are among respondents who reread the same novel up until five times. According to Irwan Abu Bakar (2007) who classified novels into two categories which are serious novels and popular novels, stated that the differences between the two are based on several main characteristics such as their philosophical and thoughts nobility, the knowledge conveyed by the author and aesthetical quality portrayed in the written works. He further added among other main characteristics is its capability of directing readers towards the greater good and away from evil deeds. However, novels with popular concepts do not have such characteristics. On the contrary, novels of populist traits are solely embedded with themes of youthful love. Apart from that, popular novels that are actively published are also based on adults' tales and main marital issues. Through the evidence above, it can be seen that the novel category with populist traits is still firmly popular among the community consequently supporting the market relevance, including among the golden-agers who favour novel genres compared to other genres in the category of modern published works.

Table 3. Types of preferred literary reading materials

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Types of preferred literary reading materials		
Traditional Malay Literature	79	76.0
Modern Malay Literature	25	24.0
Preferred Traditional Malay Literature		
Myths	1	1.3
Legends	2	2.5
Folklores	10	12.5
Historical literature	6	7.5
Traditional poetry (*syair, gurindam, seloka*)	3	3.8
Poetry (*pantun, mantera*)	2	2.5
Hikayat literature	2	2.5
Epic literature	3	3.8
Legal works (penal code)	1	1.3
Religious literature/scriptures	28	35.0
Panji literature (*hikayat panji*)	-	-
Tales of the prophets and companions	22	27.5
Preferred Modern Malay		

Literature

Novels	10	41.7
Short stories	3	12.5
Dramas	4	16.7
Poetries	5	20.8
Essays and Critics	2	8.3

Based on the Table 4 displaying the content of literary reading materials, almost half of the respondents (49.5%) are inclined towards literary reading materials with religious themes and followed by community themes (28.6%), education (10.5%), political (6.7%) and environmental (4.8%). Similarly to the selected values in literary reading, around 36.2% respondents are inclined towards values of divinity, 22.9% are inclined to familial values, 15.2% self-identity value, 7.6% neighbourhood values, 6.7% environmental well-being values, 4.8% health and economic stability values and 1.9% security values. This is parallel with Moberg's study (2005) which stated that the spiritual elements would be more prominent when the human's life is nearing towards its end. It is further supported by a study by Koenig (2006) who argued that the spiritual capacity of human will increase correspondingly with age increment especially related to self-integrity and acceptance.

Table 4. Contents of Literary Reading Materials

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Preferred themes in literary reading materials		
Religious	52	49.5
Community	30	28.6
Futuristic	-	-
Education	11	10.5
Environment	5	4.8
Economy	-	-
Politics	7	6.7
Preferred values in literary reading materials		
Divinity	38	36.2
Self-Identity	16	15.2
Health	5	4.8
Neighbourhood	8	7.6
Familial	24	22.9

Security	2	1.9
Environmental well-being	7	6.7
Economic stability	5	4.8

Table 5 shows the findings related to the suggestions for literary reading materials for libraries in the Tumpat district and it can be observed that the tales of prophets and companions recorded the highest proposed literary reading materials (24.0%). Other than that, literary reading materials suggested by the respondents are religious literature/scriptures (20.2%), historical literature (16.3%), traditional poetries (*syair, gurindam, seloka*), novels and folklores (6.7%), short stories (5.8%), legal literature (penal code) (4.8%), poetries (*pantun, mantera*) and hikayat literature (2.9%) and *panji* literature (*hikayat panji*), drama and *sajak* (1%). Besides, literary materials that should be published with religious themes recorded the highest percentage (46.7%), followed by community themes (21.9%), education (13.3%), political and economy (5.7%), environment (4.8%) and futuristic (1.9%). This is suitable with the suggestions in the study by Baharuddin and Ismail (2013) that senior citizens must enhance their strong religious knowledge in the aspects such as *akidah* which covers the belief in Allah, *fiqh* such as the correct way of praying, learning *Sirah* such as stories of the prophets and improving *akhlak* with *tasawwuf* knowledge. The integration of this religious knowledge can only be achieved when they are earnestly learnt. Other than that, there is a need to build a religiously-embedded special module for senior citizens to increase their understanding and awareness of the purpose of life in this world.

Table 5. Suggestions for Literary Reading Materials in the Library

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Suggestions for types of literary materials should be available at visited libraries		
Myths	-	-
Legends	-	-
Folklores	7	6.7
Historical literature	17	16.3
Traditional poetry (*syair, gurindam, seloka*)	7	6.7
Poetry (*pantun, mantera*)	3	2.9
Hikayat literature	3	2.9
Epic literature	-	-
Legal literature (penal code)	5	4.8
Religious literature/scriptures	21	20.2
Panji literature (*hikayat panji*)	1	1.0
Stories of prophets and com-	25	24.0

panions

Novels	7	6.7
Short stories	6	5.8
Drama	1	1.0
Sajak	1	1.0
Essays and critics	-	-
Suggestions of literary themes materials that should be published		
Spiritual	49	46.7
Community	23	21.9
Education	14	13.3
Environment	5	4.8
Politics	6	5.7
Futuristic	2	1.9
Economy	6	5.7

5   Summary

To summarize the reading tendency of senior citizens from rural areas as users of four libraries in the Tumpat district, it was found that they choose Traditional Malay Literature, focusing on the literary reading materials with religious elements such as religious literature/scriptures and stories of prophets and companions as main choices when visiting the library. Meanwhile, the senior citizens from the rural areas also are interested in Modern Malay Literature in the form of novels as their reading choices in their effort to diversify their types of literary reading materials.

Additionally, the senior citizens from rural areas who were involved as research respondents are also inclined to choose religious themes and divinity values as the main foundation in choosing literary reading materials. If observed closely, other themes and values which are not preferred by the rural senior citizens are also indirectly the reading materials that are not of religion and divinity related. However, the religious theme and divinity values favoured by the senior citizens are due to the choices being convenient for them to feel closer to God, apart from increasing the values of *tawhid* (belief in God) within themselves.

Following that, the identified proposal from the rural senior citizens are the literary reading materials of the religious literature/scriptures and stories of prophets and companions types should be updated in numbers so that it is suitable with the current demand in order to fulfil their needs besides the demand to learn basic religious knowledge from the books available in the libraries. Religious themes are also suggested by them to be increased in publication so it will be convenient for them to appreciate the good religious elements, hence easier for them to practice and cascade to others around them.

From the findings of the above study, it is clear that the role of libraries in rural areas is the heart of the surrounding communities to gain knowledge and information. To summarize this research, the vital function of a library from rural areas is its role as a centre to nurture local development from various aspects of life. Besides that, it can be concluded that the use of rural libraries is still relevant for senior citizens and able to positively impact community development.

6   Suggestions

Based on the study conducted, various steps and suggestions can be considered by the management of rural libraries to maximize the use of the library by the local community. Among suggestions that should be studied is to update the collections of books available in the rural libraries to suit the reading requirements, not only for the senior citizens but also to all levels of age so that they stay relevant to the current trend. Aside from that, the availability of reading materials in the library must also consider the main themes and values suitable according to the levels of age so that the materials provided do not simply sit idly on the racks.

As for the publishing companies, they need to be smart in identifying the types of reading materials required by the current community to fulfil the readers' palate who yearn for knowledge. Without the correct strategy, publishing companies may face loss if they continue publishing books that do not meet current needs, hence impacting the number of rural libraries' visitors. Consequently, rural libraries are not utilized optimally by the local community and this will cause all knowledge facilities provided would end up wasted. In the long run, the process of cultivation and awareness towards the utmost importance of knowledge will be disturbed, simply due to the mistakes in choosing the type of materials to be published.

Finally, among the main limitation of this research is the difficulty to obtain a uniform number of respondents from each location of rural libraries studied. However, it can be suggested that the qualitative result from such a study can be a catalyst for future researches by choosing other rural locations, be it within the state of Kelantan or other Malaysian states using suitable sampling and techniques.

Acknowledgements

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