

THE CONCERN OF UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA LIBRARY IN ENHANCING THE FACILITIES FOR THE SPECIAL DISABLES USERS

¹Mohd Faizal, H., ²Amir Hamzah, A. & ³Mohamad Rizar, M.
Librarian

University of Malaya Library
Lembah Pantai
50603 Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA.
¹faizal586@gmail.com, ²amirhamzah@um.edu.my ³rizar@um.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Special Disable Users (SDU) is one of the categories of users that use library in University of Malaya Library (UML). According to Act 658, persons with disabilities shall have the right to access to information, communication and technology on equal basis with persons without disabilities (Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, Act 685). The purpose of this article is to point out all the initiatives led by University of Malaya Library (UML) to improve the library services for the visually impaired and physically handicapped students and staffs registered as library members. This initiative was taken to support the mission and vision of the university to produce quality research and knowledgeable students. Special facilities and services should be developed to help these categories of users to use the library. A survey conducted by UML to identify the efficiency of each service provided to engage the library services with that specific group. The result of the survey will be a guideline for UML to improvise the library services to that particular user group. As a conclusion, it is important to make sure UML can provide special library services concerning the specific user group, thus ensuring "a library for everyone".

Keywords: University of Malaya; Library service; Impaired and physically handicapped students; Academic library.

Orang Kurang Upaya (OKU) adalah salah satu kategori pengguna yang menggunakan perpustakaan di Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya (UML). Merujuk kepada Akta 658, Orang kurang upaya hendaklah mempunyai hak untuk akses kepada maklumat, komunikasi dan teknologi atas asas kesetaraan dengan orang upaya (Akta Orang Kurang Upaya 2008). Tujuan artikel ini adalah untuk menunjukkan semua inisiatif yang dibuat oleh Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya (PUM) untuk meningkatkan perkhidmatan perpustakaan untuk pelajar cacat penglihatan, cacat fizikal dan kakitangan mendaftar sebagai ahli perpustakaan. Inisiatif ini dilakukan adalah untuk menyokong misi dan visi universiti untuk menghasilkan penyelidikan yang berkualiti dan pelajar yang berilmu. Kemudahan dan perkhidmatan khusus perlu dibangunkan untuk membantu pengguna kategori ini untuk menggunakan perpustakaan. Satu tinjauan yang dijalankan oleh UML untuk mengenal pasti keberkesanan setiap perkhidmatan yang dilakukan untuk menambahbaik khidmat perpustakaan dengan kumpulan tersebut. Hasil kajian ini akan menjadi garis panduan bagi UML untuk menambah baik perkhidmatan perpustakaan kepada kumpulan pengguna yang tersebut. Kesimpulannya, adalah penting untuk memastikan UML boleh menyediakan perkhidmatan perpustakaan khusus untuk kumpulan pengguna tersebut, untuk mewujudkan "perpustakaan untuk semua".

Katakunci: Universiti Malaya; Perpustakaan; Pelajar cacat penglihatan dan cacat fizikal; perpustakaan Akademik.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Persons with disabilities shall not be excluded from the general education system on the basis of disabilities, and children with disabilities shall not be excluded from pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education, on equal basis with persons or children without disabilities, including vocational training and lifelong learning”.

- Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 (Act 685)(Malaysia)

Equal opportunity in information access and information resources is one of the major concerns of University of Malaya Library (UML) to provide good services to University of Malaya residences. Throughout the year UML has improved several facilities for special disabled users (SDU) to make sure they can use library to access information. Babalola and YT. Haliso,Y (2011) **share that** libraries and librarians provide access to essential information that people need to participate in the emerging information society. Therefore, they have a moral obligation to make information available to all categories of users regardless of their gender, age, race, political affiliation or disability.

1.1 UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA LIBRARY

The University of Malaya Library (UML) is one of the oldest academic libraries in Malaysia. Established in 1959 and now UML is headed by Dr. Nor Edzan Che Nasir, Chief Librarian. The Main Library sits in the middle of the University Campus which is easy to access by University of Malaya residents. It is a four storey building with a floor space of 17,372 square meters. UML has a total collection of more than a million titles. Playing very crucial role in supporting research, teaching and learning in the campus, UML also acts as a place to disseminate/preserve research output (eprints.um.edu.my) especially local content based research done by University of Malaya researchers. As equal opportunity in information access and information resources is one of the major concerns, UML also provides several facilities to cater SDU that use the library. It is important to make sure that UML can support the mission and vision of the university.

2. OBJECTIVES

SDU is one of the categories of users that use both academic libraries and public libraries. The library industry should be more sensitive to these categories in order to bring up “a library for everyone”. Special facilities and services should be developed to help these categories of users to use the library. According to Nagata, H., & Klopfer, L. (2011), in order to assess library services and activities while avoiding incorrect or excessive use of performance indicators, the first step is to confirm beforehand what quality and effectiveness of library services are demanded by the community (customers). Benchmarking and evaluation of existing services need to be conducted to make sure the services and facilities provided by the library are suitable and appropriate for that category of users. The purpose of this study is to measure the best practice for University of Malaya Library to cater to the needs of SDU and the practical ways in which organizations can make library resources more accessible to them. This study also aims to collect the feedback from SDU as a consideration for future improvement for the library.

3. METHODOLOGY

The data was collected using general questionnaires which were distributed among the SDU in University of Malaya. Questionnaire is the most frequently used method to collect information and data because it is a less costly way to reach more people, but in this study the researchers faced some difficulty collecting the data due to the limitation (disability) of the candidates. To solve this limitation the researchers had to read the questionnaires to SDU especially for visual impaired.

Apart from that this study records some personal feedback from the candidates. This personal experience is evidence based for UML to improve the services and facilities in future. The entire candidates were students. These researches focused on students because they are used the library more often compared to staffs. There are 26 students registered as a library member. The researchers manage to get 16 candidates to answer the questionnaires and general interview.

4. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN INFORMATION ACCESS

Everybody should be able to use the libraries not only public libraries but also academic libraries. So many considerations need to be highlighted during library development or planning stages of building a library. According to Todaro (2001) as cited by Todaro, A. J. (2005) it is already established that access to information is one of the most important human rights: it allows the individual to develop himself/herself, and participate actively within a democratic society, fully exercising his/her rights and duties. The layout and the design of the library need to be user friendly for different kinds of disabilities. People with physical disabilities have the same needs and desires for information to conduct their daily lives as those who are without disability (Bonnici, L. J., Maatta, S. L. & Wells, M.K. 2009). The awareness of SDU facilities and services in academic libraries in Malaysia are increasing year by year. The surroundings of the library, track to the library, parking, entrance, restrooms, lift, stairs and special service should be accessible for any kinds of disabilities.

What is SDU or handicapped, according to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (2003) although handicapped is widely used in both law and everyday speech to refer to people having physical or mental disabilities, those described by the word tend to prefer the expressions disabled or people with disabilities. Disability also can be defined as a physical or mental condition that prohibits an individual from the use of his or her body (partially, completely and with ease) to perform daily tasks (Todaro, A. J., 2005).

The type of handicap has significant bearing on how a student may use a library (Needham, W.L. 1977). Specific facilities need to be provided to cater this group of user in order to support equal opportunity of information access. The awareness of SDU facilities in the library industry is still growing. Equal opportunity in information access and information resources is one of the issues that we need to highlight. Originally UML building is not SDU friendly, but throughout the year UML has upgraded several facilities to suit the minimum standard for SDU to use the library. It is important to make sure the library can support the mission and vision of the university. UM is one of the top universities in Malaysia. Students with disability of vision need special requirements, such as Braille lift, special track and others. Compared to students with physical disabilities, they might need more space for wheel chairs and special flooring. Further study regarding this issues need to be highlighted to make sure the accessibility of SDU in academic libraries. Development of SDU facilities and services need to be identified and enhanced according to its necessity because it will involve cost, space and time.

5. FACILITIES FOR SPECIAL DISABLED USERS

UML provides a number of special services and facilities to ensure access to library collections and services for students and staffs with physical disabilities. Throughout the year, there are a lot of improvement of facilities and services for SDU in UML. UML is very committed in making SDU get equal information access and information resources. Special committees have been set up by the library management to cater to the issues related to SDU. Table 1 shows the total number of SDU in UM. Total users registered as library members are 26 persons.

Table 1: Total of special disable users in University of Malaya (last update: 3/8/2012 – MRM)

NO	CATEGORY	DETAILS	TOTAL
1	Staff	Academic Staff – 10 persons	20
		Professional & Management – 3 persons	
		Support Staff – 7 persons	
2	Students	Postgraduate – 6	41
		Undergraduate - 35	

In UML there are several privileges for SDU if they register as library members. They can borrow up to 20 items at one time. The ordinary loan books may be borrowed up to 30 days. A part from that, SDUs can borrow theses and dissertation in the library. Table 2 shows the loan service provided in UML. The library will communicate with all SDU by email to notify them they overdue date of the items.

Table 2: Loan service at UML

CATEGORY OF MEMBER	OPEN SHELF BOOKS	ACADEMIC RESERVE COLLECTION	FREE RANGE READING COLLECTION	CURRENT/BOUND JOURNALS
Under graduate	10 items / 14 days	1 item / 3 days	2 items / 14 days	Reference only
Postgraduates – Master and PhD	20 items / 30 days	1 item / 3 days	2 items / 14 days	Reference only

UML also conduct special class for this category of users which is information skills classes. The aim of the classes are to improve the ability of students (undergraduate and postgraduate) to make effective use of the services, facilities, electronic resources and collections in UML. This class is very useful whereby students will learn how to search for information, learning how to access UML's database, teach them how to evaluate accurate information and write proper citation and references. Information skills are essential to their life-long learning. This class is compulsory for all undergraduate and for those special disable students there is a compulsory credit hour for them too but more flexible.

5.1 RESERVED CARREL

Reserved carrel is one of the facilities provided by UML to support SDU especially students. UML has more than 30 carrels for them to use for the whole of their study in UM. Basic facilities are provided in the carrel such as table, chair, electrical connector and free wifi. Figure 1 shows the level of satisfaction among SDU (students) towards this facility. The result below indicates that most of the candidates are satisfied with the carrel. Out of 16 candidates, 9 users agreed that carrel room facility is very good and 4 users rated good.

These facilities provide them a convenient space to study. This facility is free for them as long as the students register with the library. Based from the interview on the satisfaction of this facility some of them are really thankful because UML provides this carrel for them. They can bring their "reader" (person to read) in their carrel. They also can put their personal things such as books, printer and etc. Most of the SDU recommend UML to continue these facilities in future.



Picture 1: Reserved carrel for special disable user

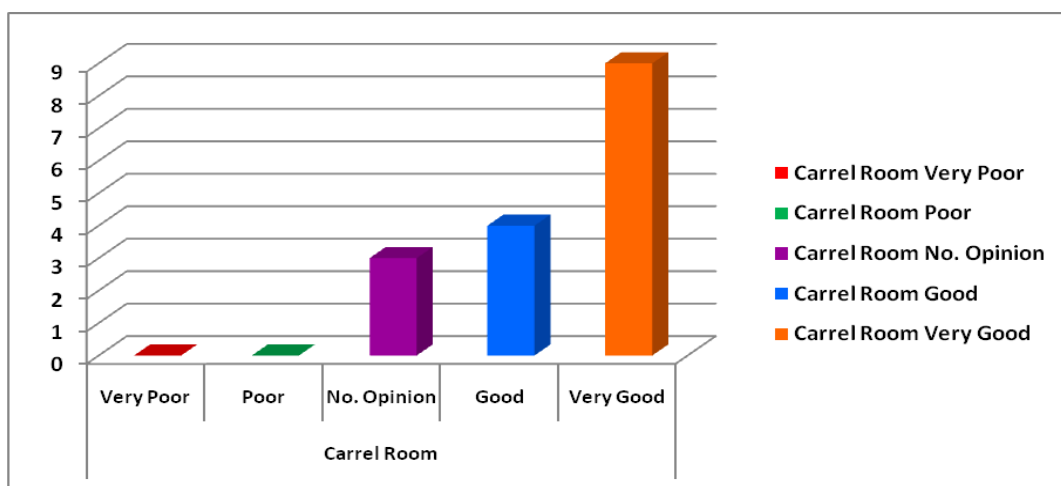


Figure 1: Level of satisfaction among SDU towards carrel room facility

5.2 BRAILLE LIFT

Lift is very important especially for those who are physically handicapped. UML is committed to making sure that the lift is accessible for both SDU (Physically handicapped and visually impaired) by upgrading the lift with Braille buttons. Braille lift is a basic facility that public building needs to provide to cater to all categories of users. Voice system is one of the important elements that are needed by visual impaired users. The automatic voice system for each floor helps SDU especially visual impaired to identify which level they wanted to go.

Renovation for bigger space for wheel chair users in lift might involve cost, as result of that UML is planning to put big mirror to help SDU to physically move out from the lift as they can see their back. Figure 2 shows level of satisfaction among SDU towards Braille lift facility. 10 out of 16 users indicated that the facilities are good, 2 users indicate as very good and the rest chose to answer no opinion.



Picture 2 :Braille buttons in the lift

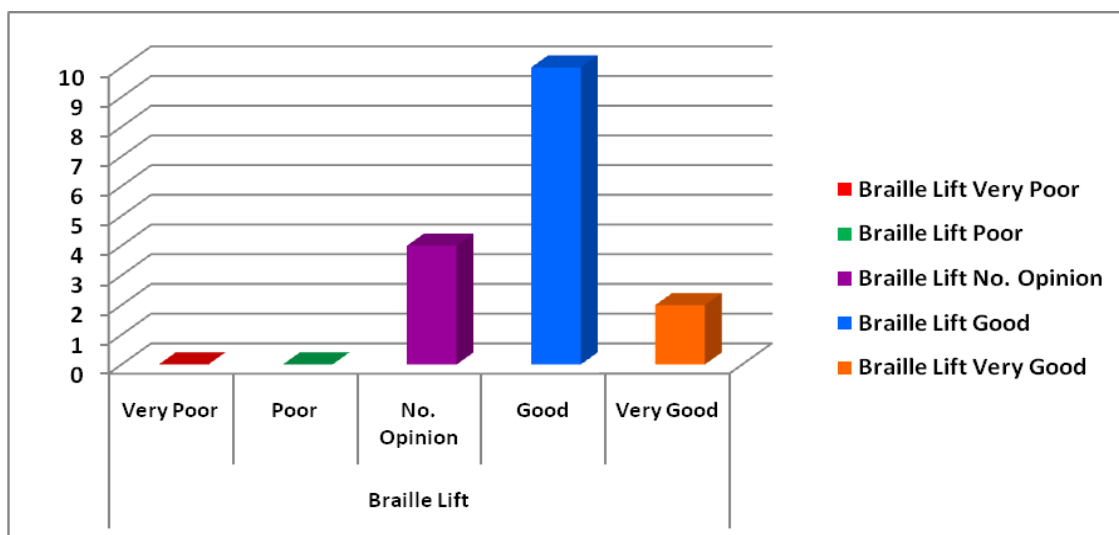


Figure 2 : Level of satisfaction among SDU towards Braille lift facility

5.3 COMPUTER LAB S – DISABLED USERS

A special lab is provided for SDU to access the internet in library. UML has upgraded this lab to make sure SDU have easy access to the internet. This facility is free and easy to be accessed by both physically handicapped and visually impaired users because the location of the computer lab is at level 1 in main library. UML has provided braille embosser for visually impaired users to use it.

In addition to that, computers in Lab S include Jaws software. Jaws software is a special software use by visual impaired users to access the computer. UML also has trained selected librarians on how to utilize the software. SDU can bring their laptop or tablets to use in this lab. Librarians also use this lab to teach Information Skill classes for SDU undergraduate and postgraduate students. UML management recently upgraded the lab to make sure SDU are more comfortable and easy to access. Previously Lab S was located at level 3 in main library building.



Picture 3 : Computer Lab S for special disable users

Figure 3 shows the level of satisfaction towards computer lab for SDU in UML. The figures indicated that most of the SDU are satisfied with the service provided by UML. Based from the interview, some of the SDU students suggested that UML should allocate few CCTV in the computer lab as a security purpose.

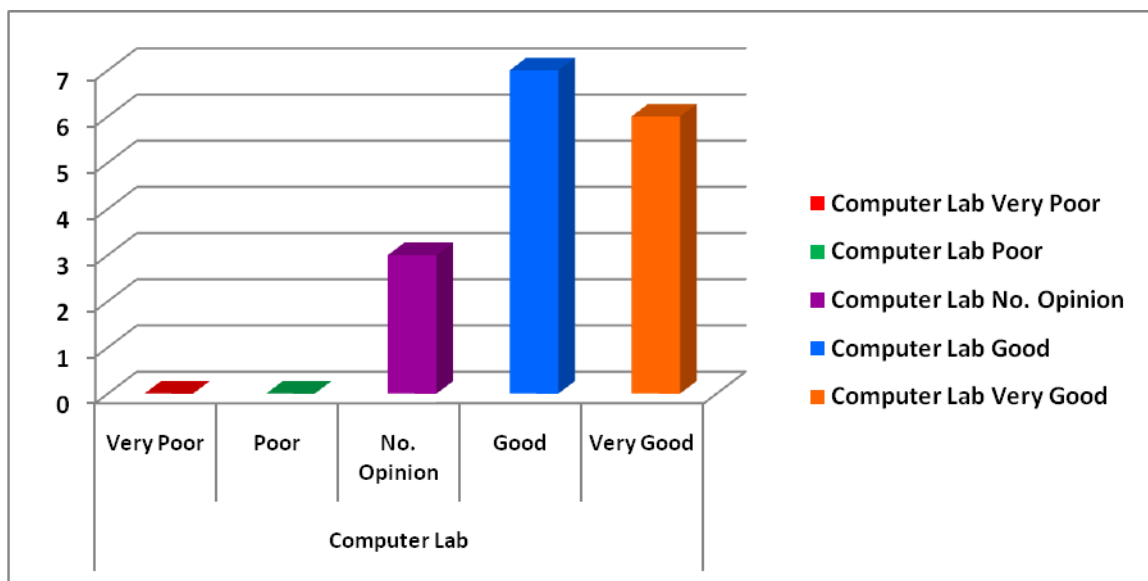


Figure 3 : Level of satisfaction towards computer lab for SDU in UML

5.4 ACCESS TO LIBRARY

UML is planning to create disabled routes and access, this map is very important for SDU to give them better understanding of UML building. map is very important for SDU to give them better understanding of UML building. The purpose of this map is to give SDU direction to corners which are SDU friendly. Basically library is easy to find. Located at the heart of UM, UML is a standalone building. Currently there is a ramp for wheel chair user to enter the library. There is also a guide block from 7th college to Main Library. Most of the special disabled students are staying at 7th college. This guide block helps SDU especially those who visually impaired students. Unfortunately there is no guide block in the building, UML are looking forward to provide this facility in future.

Figure 4 indicates the level of satisfaction of track and ramp in UML. Based on the results, it is clear that UML needs to upgrade the track (guide block) and ramp in UML building. There is no guide block inside the building and at this time not all corners are fully accessible for wheel chair users. Out of 16 candidates, four users indicate the facilities are very poor, two users chose poor and 3 users preferred to be neutral.



Picture 4 : Special ramps for wheel chair users. Picture 5 : Guide block from 7th college.

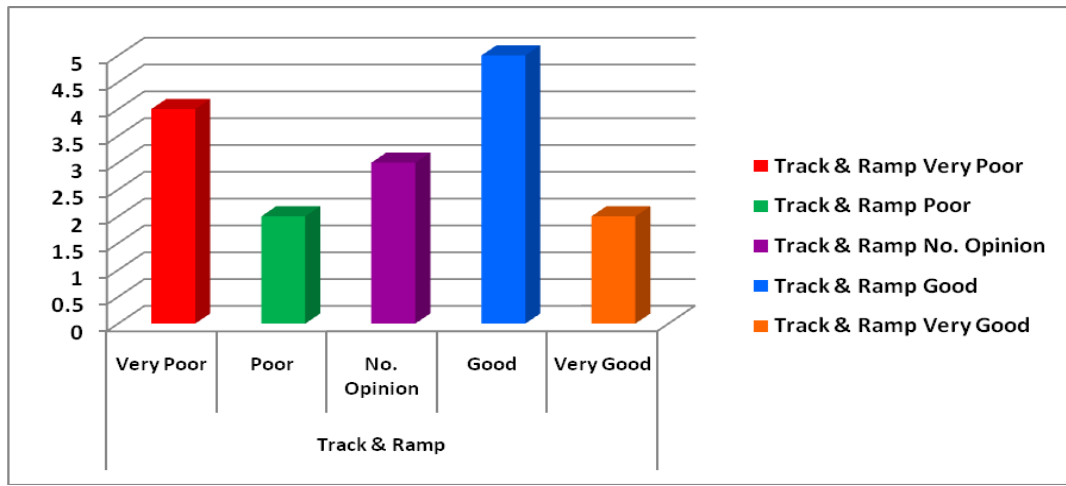


Figure 4 shows the level of satisfaction toward track and ramp in UML.

5.5 ACCESSIBLE TOILET

Accessible toilet is a special toilet designed to accommodate people with physical disabilities (Wikipedia, 2013). There are established standard needs to be followed as guideline to design accessible toilet for SDU. The toilet should cater physical disability and visual impaired users. In any building where public toilet facilities are provided, these must include the provision of a wheelchair accessible toilet. There are accessible toilets in level one in the main library designated for special disable students and users to use.



Figure 5 : Level of satisfaction of accessible toilet in UML

Figure 5 shows the level of satisfaction of accessibility to the toilet in UML. Based from the questionnaire distributed, four users indicated it was very good and no opinion, seven users chose good and one user rated poor. Currently UML have only one accessible toilet for SDU, the management is planning to develop more in every level in the library which have at least one accessible toilet for them in the future.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PLANING

The objective of this survey is to highlight UML's initiatives towards SDUs. The results of the library survey show that in general, SDUs are satisfied with the facilities provided by UML. The awareness of SDU facilities and services in University of Malaya environment are rising. Number of students and staffs are increasing. In order to be a world class university, UML need to provide better information centre for the special ones. Since 2012 there are 41 students join University of Malaya (postgraduate and undergraduate) but only 26 of them are registered as library members. Special study and investigation need to be conducted to study why they are not registered as library members. UML need to promote the membership benefits to SDU not only for students but also staffs in UM.

Even though there are basic facilities provided in UML building, in future UML should consider developing audio catalogues, audio library guide and audio technology such for online catalogues with voiced responses to be embedded in library service. There are several facilities that UML can improve in future such as provide more accessible toilet in UML. Develop accessibility map for SDUs and upgrading tracks and ramps with standard specification at accessible building for SDU and providing guide block in UML building. UML also should promote and encourage UML users to be Volunteer Reader to assist SDUs.

However, from the interview feedback and survey results, there is an urgent need to upgrade some of these facilities to better serve the SDUs. The toilet facilities could be improved for wheelchair-bound users by making the sinks lower. The Braille lift should be widened to give more space for wheelchairs. In particular, the track and ramp facilities should be enhanced and expanded to provide additional and more user-friendly routes in and outside the library to help SDUs with their mobility.

Besides the above suggestions, UML management could consider some new services for the SDUs to further enhance their ease and convenience when using the library. Special parking facilities, Map accessibility for SDU, Accessible Lift for all categories with disabled and some other services that can add value to the current condition. On the whole, UML has shown that it cares for its SDUs. UML management should therefore consider this survey as a guideline to improve the efficiency of the services and facilities already is being provided as well as adding new ones in the coming future. This is to ensure that UML truly becomes a library for everyone.

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