

ACCESSIBILITY TO BLIND AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED VISITOR AT THE PROCLAMATION INDEPENDENCE MEMORIAL, MELAKA

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Abstract

The Proclamation Independence Memorial is a tourist attraction in Melaka, a must visit place to get information on the events leading up to Malaysia's Independence Day. The memorabilia and records in the Proclamation of Independence Memorial symbolize the indomitable spirit and courage of local Malays and other ethnic groups of Malaysia (formerly known as Malaya) in their fight for the country's independence. Accessing Independence Memorial has been difficult for people who are blind and partially sighted, often due to objects being placed in glass cases and no texts or write up braille creating a barrier to access. They do not provide an equivalent experience to that which is available to the sighted audience. As a result the population who is blind and partially sighted has been significantly under served with respects to exhibits and their intellectual content. The main objective of this research is to provide an experience to blind and partially sighted visitor to get information through the braille write up and audio guide provided. To obtain relevant information, interviews were conducted with blind visitor and staffs of The Proclamation Independence Memorial at Banda Hilir Melaka. The respondent highlighted issues related to factors which restricted their accessibility to the Independence Memorial such as no write up braille and audio guided. The respondents agreed that write up braille and audio guide can attract blind partially sighted visitor to Memorial Melaka.

Keyword: *blind and partially sighted, accessibility, write up braille, audio guided*

INTRODUCTION

In 2008, United Nation for Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared Melaka a World Heritage Site due to its exceptional example of a multi-cultural trading town and the fact that the town is a living testimony to multi-cultural heritage. Melaka reflects a mixture of architecture, culture and townscape that demonstrates a wide range of buildings that show multiple types and stages of development. In view of the culture and the heritage, Melaka is now a famous tourist attraction from all over the world. There are many tourist attractions at Banda Hilir Melaka such as A Famosa Fort, Museums, Galleries, St. Paul's Church and Stadthuys and Proclamation of Independence Memorial. The memorial presents historical documents covering the Melaka Malay sultanate until independence in 1957.

The exhibits here include collection of manuscripts, videotapes and other audio and visual collections. However, difficult for blind and partially sighted to read the texts or write up and materials displayed because there are no facility for them. Accessibility for visitor who are blind and partially sighted should be fully welcome and accommodate.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The Proclamation of Independence Memorial was set up and officiated by the first and former Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj on 31 August 1985; exactly 38 years after our country achieve its independence. The existence of this memorial not only to recall the history of struggling moments to achieve independence but also to teach the present and future generations to understand the history of the nation's struggle to demand the independence of the nation in its true perspective. In

this way the younger generation will be able to appreciate, respect and emulate the sacrifice of their grandparents in the struggle to liberate the state. It can foster nationalism, respect and love for the country. However, The Proclamation of Independence Memorial not providing accessibility for blind and partially sighted visitor.

World Health Organization (WHO) in 2010 has estimated that there are 39 million blind people, and 246 million with low vision. The principal causes of visual impairment (low vision) are uncorrected refractive errors (43%), cataract (33%), glaucoma 2%, age related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, trachoma, corneal opacities (1% each), and undetermined (18%). The causes of blindness are cataract 51%, glaucoma 8%, childhood blindness and corneal opacities (4% each), uncorrected refractive errors and trachoma (3% each), diabetic retinopathy 1%, and undetermined (21%). Regarding Department of Statistics Malaysia, total population in 2016 is estimated at 31.7 million persons Bumiputra 68.6%, Chinese (23.4%), Indians (7%) and others (1%). The percentage of non-malaysian citizens was 10.3% out of total population. (Sagili, 2017). National Eye Survey II conducted in 2014 found that 413,000 people in the country over the age of 50 have vision problems, said Ministry of Health's Division of Medical Development Division Dr Azman Abu Bakar. He said of the total, 113,000 people were blinded with 43,000 of them identified as cataracts.

People with vision impairments have the right to participate fully in the community and enjoy the same quality of life as people without disabilities. However, they are not travelling at the same rate as people without disabilities. The reasons for such low participation rates are not yet clear. But one of the reasons could be the difficulty and sometimes harrowing nightmare to travel in unfamiliar environments (Espinosa, Ungar, Ochaita, Blades, & Spencer, 1998). Although they are a minority, they also deserve the same recognition as everyone else and to consider it as our social responsibility to create awareness among the public about the difficulties the visually disabled face in general and then help to increase the independence level among them. This is possible only when the experiences of such travellers are identified and addressed properly (Vinayaraj 2014).

People with disabilities have the same expectations, dreams and wishes as people without such health related limitations. They too wish to enjoy life, have a good time, learn, travel and fulfil their dreams. Among the most common motivation of disabled people's travelling there are learning new things, recreation, health, prevention or healing, religious motivation, and shopping (Indrová et al., 2008, pg. 38).

Thus, many museums are trying to be more accessible to people with disabilities with a variety of facilities and services according to disability but there are many differences among museums and countries since it seems that there is a great attention to physical access and less to sensory access (Sandell & Dodd, 2010)

Regarding Geerat (2009), what really set this great museum apart, however, was the widespread use of Braille labels, illustrations, and text. Throughout the museum, clear Braille signs identified objects and accompanied detailed raised illustrations and produced on thick plastic stock. The page with the illustration could be lifted up, revealing some twenty lines of Braille text describing the illustration and placing it in the context of the overall display. Everything in this museum the self-guided audio tour, the abundance of touchable objects, and the raised illustrations and Braille text spoke volumes about the expectation that all visitors, notably including the blind, can profit from the cultural heritage that is so beautifully on display. Therefore the objective of this research is to provide braille writing texts or write up and audio guide at Independence Memorial, Melaka. The accessibility can attract and increase the number of blind and partially sighted visitor at Independence Memorial Melaka.

LITERATURE

Visual Impairment

A visual impairment is a generic term which covers a range of difficulties with vision and includes the following. There are four categories such as blind, legally blind, partially sighted, and low vision. Partially sighted indicates some type of visual problem has resulted in a need for special education. Low vision generally refers to a severe visual impairment, not necessarily limited to distance vision.

Low vision applies to all individuals with sight who are unable to read the newspaper at a normal viewing distance, even with the aid of eyeglasses or contact lenses. They use a combination of vision and other senses to learn, although they may require adaptations in lighting or the size of print, and, sometimes Braille. Legally blind indicates that a person has less than 20/200 vision in the better eye or a very limited field of vision(20 degrees at its widest point).Totally blind students learn via Braille or other non-visual media

The student with visual impairment is one whose visual acuity is not sufficient to participate with ease in everyday activities. The impairment interferes with optimal learning and achievement and can result in a substantial educational disadvantage, unless adaptations are made in the methods of presenting learning opportunities, the nature of the materials used and/or the learning environment. It is not intended to include students described as having visual perceptual difficulties (i.e. dyslexia) unless they also have a vision loss as described above.

Most students with visual impairment require specialized equipment (e.g., Braille's, closed-circuit televisions, cassette recorders, optical aids) and adapted learning resources (e.g., Braille texts, enlarged print books, tapes). These tend to be very bulky.

Braille

Braille is a system of reading and writing by touch used by the blind. It consists of arrangements of dots which make up letters of the alphabet, numbers, and punctuation marks. The basic Braille symbol, called the Braille cell, consists of six dots arranged in the formation of a rectangle, three dots high and two across. Braille was first developed in the late 1820's by a young Frenchman named Louis Braille. He created Braille by modifying a system of night writing which was intended for military use. He did this work as a very young man and had it complete by the time he was about eighteen. He and his friends spend time at the school for the blind and found that reading and writing dots was much faster than reading raised print letters, which could not be written by hand at all. The development of this system by young Louis Braille is now recognized as the most important single development in making it possible for the blind to get a good education. Braille is essential for note-taking and helpful for studying such things as math, spelling, and foreign languages.

Writing Texts or Write up

The written word is one of the key means that museums have to share stories about collections with visitors. But are we doing enough to ensure that the text on labels, gallery panels and interactives is earning its place? What do different audiences need from what they read in museums? And how can we use the written word in playful or experimental ways to encourage a deeper connection with objects? (Lucy, 2015)

Exhibition text and labels are one of many parts of the total exhibition. Each element contributes to an overall visitor experience that accounts for the interaction between the audiences' interests and the messages to be conveyed in order to enhance the visitor learning experience.

Text and labels must work in conjunction with all forms of interpretation such as objects, graphics, photographs, video and computer and other interactives, as well as with live interpretation such as performances, lectures, and floor staff. Design is a critical contributor to the overall success of an exhibition. Exhibitions are an enormous investment, both financially and physically. Exhibit planners are accountable for this investment and must ensure that the optimum visitor experience is achieved.

Audio Guide

The Audio Guide has shown itself to be the perfect conduit for conveying this deeper sort of engagement by delivering stories full of emotion, excitement, and character; it helps to foster a more intimate connection between the Museum and the visitor by becoming a unique voice for the

institution. The value of the Audio Guide lies in its ability to excite, enthuse, and engross visitors during their visit. (Grace, 2015)

It's always tempting to think of an Audio Guide as an old-fashioned product that visitors can hold onto and carry with them throughout the Museum if they feel like it, but this perspective is simply too limited. Instead, the Audio Guide should be seen as a service that is a crucial part of the museum experience and one that combines both the digital and non-digital within the physical space of the Museum. This perspective, popularly known as "service design," is a way of creating and improving experiences (instead of stand-alone products) in order to better meet visitor needs within a specific context. It requires an understanding of the user's full experience (also known as the "user journey") in a robust way—from initial awareness of the offer to the full impact of the offer. (Grace 2015)

METHODOLOGY

Regarding Perzim General Manager, Datuk Khamis Abas, a total of 673,436 local and foreign visitors visited 24 museums and galleries operated by the Melaka Museum Corporation (PERZIM) in 2016. Among the museums visited are the Stadhuys Museum Complex, the Samudera Museum, the People's Museum, the Palace of Culture Museum, the Independence Proclamation Memorial, the Melaka Islamic Museum and the Submarine Museum. (Norizzah, 2017). However, there is no blind and partially sighted visitor were recorded the museums by PERZIM.

For this study, researcher used qualitative method to get the data. Qualitative research is design to reveal a target audience's range of behaviour and the perceptions that drive it with reference to specific topic or issues. It uses in depth studies of small groups of people to guide and support the construction of hypotheses. The result of qualitative research is descriptive rather than predictive. (Catherine & Gretchen 2006).

13 respondents were selected to sharing their experiences and expressed their interest in to this study. 10 respondents, 4 men and 6 women, participated voluntarily in the study and they were all blind and partially sighted. Their age ranged from 20 to 60 years. Another 3 respondent were staff at Independence Declaration Memorial. All interviews were conducted at the memorial and around Banda Hilir, Melaka. The respondent were informed about the purpose of the survey before were interviewed.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The data were obtained via face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The researcher developed the interview guide based on the research questions of the study. The interview guide included open-ended questions so that the researcher could obtain in-depth information about the respondent insights toward memorial. The question of the interviews consists of 2 section, first section is about demographic i.e gender, age, race and occupation. Section B, the question divided into 3 elements. The first was accessibility provided such as braille signage, write up and audio guided. The second was the feeling of blind and partially sighted when visiting the memorial. The third was the suggestions to improve the accessibility.

RESULTS

The result of the study showed that only 4 respondents had visited the memorial. They mention that they had never visited the memorial by themselves, they went with their families and friends. While another 6 respondents never entered this place however they very interested to visit memorial if there are accessibility provided for people like them. Here are the results according to the main elements.

Accessibility

All respondent underlined the importance of write up braille to them. Through the write up they can get the information about the history of the struggle of the nation demands national independence. Some respondent excerpts are provided:

- Yes, I can read the write up by myself (R1)
- Yes, good suggestion, so my friends no need to read for me (R4)
- Yes, very interested. I will go there and learn about the history of independence (R5)
- Yes, I can get the information about the history national independence (R6)
- Yes, because it will be the only places in Malaysia that provided the system for blind people like me (R9)

Interviews with their staff also showed that they agreed if memorial can provide the write up braille. Some respondent excerpts are provided:

- Yes, I fully support if the memorial can provide write up braille. So, it can attract disable people such as blind and schools which is have blind students to come here. (R11)
- Yes, I strongly agreed to implement this project because in directly we can promote our place to the others with new facilities. (R12)
- Yes, I agreed because it's can improve the facilities especially for blind tourist and also can increase the number of blind tourist. (R13)

Emotion towards accessibility

Most of the respondent choose memorial as a one of the attractive place to visit with their families. However, they had negative feelings attributed to the lack of accessibility. Some respondent excerpts are provided:

- Feeling sad because there is lack of accessibility for people like us, only route for disable people provided. (R1)
 - I feel so frustrated because I can't being able to read the history of independence provided (R2)
 - I'm not excited to visit memorial because I cannot read the write up (R3)
 - I feel like being ignored because there are no facilities for blind people just like normal people (R4)
 - Sad because of having to wait for friends or family to read the information provided (R5)
- Here are the results of interviews with memorial staff to their feelings on blind visitors.
- I feel sorry for them because they cannot read the exhibit provided (R11)
 - I also feel sad because I cannot provide them with ease (R12)
 - I feel sorry for them, they look bored here (R13)

Suggestions for improving accessibility

The respondents suggestions aimed to improved their participation to memorial. This suggestion referred to access through write up braille and audio guided.

Write up braille

All respondents, as already mentioned, perceived that reading the write up was a greatest value of a memorial tour. It also can attract and increase the number of visitor.

- I suggest memorial provided write up braille (R1)
- Write up braille, because it can help blind visitors to get information about the history of independence (R3)
- For me write up braille because very helpful for people like us (R5)

Audio Guided

The respondents also stated that the audio guided can make blind visitor understand the history of national independence much better.

—I also suggest audio guided (R1)

—Audio guided, with the presence of this audio can give clearer picture of history of independence (R4)

—I suggest audio guided, so we can hear clearly (R5)

CONCLUSION

Based on the survey conducted, respondents are of the opinion that braille writing should be provided to tourists for them to obtain information at the museum. There are respondents expressing agony as they cannot learn and appreciate the process and history of independence because of the absence of braille writing that they can read repeatedly.

Those with visual impairments are also part of a citizen who has the right to know about the history and culture of their own country.

Today's awareness of disabled people is simply providing the special route for them, but they actually need more than that. Developing interpretation materials in the museum by lifting the use of braille writing and audio guided, is something that is justified, disabled-friendly, and even provides a value and uniqueness to the tourism sector especially in Melaka with so many museums under the management of PERZIM.

Braille and audio guided need to be promoted and can be introduced at this Independence Proclamation Memorial. In addition to being a requirement, it also has a demand among tourists who have vision problems that come with family to gain knowledge like other people.

Such facilities if developed can make this memorial a place for visually impaired students to deepen their knowledge, understanding, foster nationalism, respect and love for the country comprehensively as the history is something contained in the national education curriculum.

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