

# My carrel, my second home: Inclusion and the sense of belonging among visually impaired students in an academic library

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores visually impaired persons' (VIPs) sense of belonging in a university library context. It focuses on their perceptions of and experiences with study carrels located in the university library. Data were collected during interviews and focus group discussions. Participants consisted of five female and thirteen male students between the ages of 20 and 37 years. Participants considered their carrels as second homes where they felt safe, comfortable, and accepted. The carrels gave them a sense of belonging. The carrels also served as social places where the VIPs could interact with peers, volunteer readers, and other sighted students. The VIPs viewed their carrels as quiet havens where they could study and learn. They felt they belonged to the library community and were proud to be accepted as students at the university. The findings may increase library managements' awareness of the need to include these types of spaces in future design.*

**Keywords:** Visually handicapped; Blind; Library services to special groups; Sense of belonging; Academic libraries; Inclusion in libraries.

## INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of individuals with disabilities, especially visually impaired persons (VIPs) in libraries has been enabled through legislation passed in a number of countries. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990 (American with Disabilities Act, 1990) and amended in 2008 (US Congress 2008). ADA specifies that library programmes and services must be made available to individuals with disabilities. Section 508 of the ADA requires agencies to provide accessible information resources to disabled individuals. A number of studies focused on ADA have assessed the status of application and compliance during the provision of services for the blind and the visually impaired persons (Wiler and Lomax 2000; Schmetzke 2001). In the UK, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001 (SENDA) was examined in similar studies that assessed the status of the provision of services for VIPs (Harris and Oppenheim 2003; Kinnel and Creaser 2001). In Malaysia, the Persons with Disabilities Act (PDA 2008) requires the registration of individuals with disabilities. The PDA outlines disabled individuals' right to use and access public services and information. A report by the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia (Ministry of Higher Education 2011) revealed that the number of people with disabilities registered in

Malaysian universities increased from 979 in 2009 to 1,115 in 2010. Therefore, universities and university libraries must consider the educational needs of students with disabilities and provide inclusive programmes in general and library programmes in particular.

This study examines the views of visually impaired students enrolled in a research university. It aims to discover how they perceived the study carrels provided by the university library to support their academic and social needs. It hopes to explain how this service helped foster students' feelings of inclusion as members of the university society and, subsequently, helped foster students' sense of belonging in the library.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Visually Impaired, Inclusion, and the Sense of Belonging**

To provide accessible library services for the visually impaired students, libraries must formulate social inclusion policies. This means that libraries must consciously make allocations that will allow the provision of a larger number of resources in alternative formats. Libraries must also establish cooperative relationships to encourage national inter-lending of alternative resources among libraries. Hicken (2004) outlined the UK government's policy on social inclusion. He suggested useful practices, such as focusing on the varied needs of socially excluded groups, forming partnerships to address resource and funding shortages, and providing staff training to increase awareness and motivation. Inclusion means more than physical integration. It should include the provision of a supportive system, a welcoming culture, and an atmosphere of acceptance (Peters 2007; Symeonidou and Phtiaka 2009). Indeed, inclusion occurs when people connect with other peers or individuals in the community. Burchardt (1999) described inclusion and exclusion as processes in which individuals may voluntarily or involuntarily include or exclude themselves from society or their communities. Individuals' beliefs about, experiences with, and perceptions of policies and the environments in which they live will impact their decisions to remain in those environments (Oxoby 2009). Konecni-Upton (2010) observed the effects of a sense of belonging on individuals' abilities to achieve positive self-worth and their abilities to fit into society.

Wilhelmus (1996) reviewed the ADA and emphasized the need for academic libraries to remove all physical barriers that hinder access to library buildings, services, and resources. He observed that effective compliance with ADA would only occur when libraries accept the fact that persons who are visually impaired are competent to perform their jobs as staffs and have special needs as users of the library. In other words, the situation cannot change without drastic adjustments in attitude and significant increases in awareness.

Libraries can use guidelines, such as the International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) checklist, to assess the implementation of services and facilities for the visually impaired persons (Forest 2006). McCaskill and Goulding (2001) compared UK public libraries' compliance with SENDA. They discovered that physical accessibility played an important role in motivating the disabled to visit libraries. In Argentina, Todaro (2005) compared public libraries' performances in the provision of appropriate environments for the visually impaired with the American Library Association guidelines. He discovered that the main barrier to disabled individuals' access to libraries was lack of funding.

Although physical access to library buildings, easy access to transportation, and accessible internal library spaces are important for students who are visually impaired, supportive social dimensions, such as community members' positive attitudes, are also essential. Attitudinal barriers are caused by a lack of awareness of disabilities. This may result in staff members' inability to communicate with the visually impaired students and create misunderstandings related to their special needs in library environments. Significant advances have occurred in the areas of assistive technology, emerging digital resources, and digital libraries, which library staffs need to be aware of in order to increase accessibility to web contents in library websites or weblogs for those who are visually impaired. Birdi, Wilson and Cocker (2005) stressed the need to change librarians' attitudes and increase their awareness of the needs of the visually impaired during the design of appropriate services. In a survey that examined equality of services for visually impaired users of the National Library of Denmark, Vitzansky (1994) discovered that the main problem was insufficient availability of resources in special formats. He learned that librarians believed the demand was not sufficient to warrant a special allocation in the main library budget. Browell (1998) expressed the need to increase librarians' awareness and competencies by providing training and by improving the quality and availability of teaching and reading materials created specifically for the visually impaired students in university libraries. Bonnici, Maatta and Wells (2009) suggested the inclusion of courses focused on disabled users and their special needs in Library and Information Science (LIS) curricula to increase awareness.

Access to electronic information resources is becoming the key issue for inclusion programmes for the visually impaired and closely tied to the provision of assistive tools. In a comparison of the accessibility of information resources based on a review of 24 university library websites and 24 Library Schools' websites, Schmetzke (2001) found that the degree of accessibility based on Bobby3.1.1 software was higher for university libraries (59% approved accessibility) in comparison to the library schools websites (23%). This means that university libraries could further their website designs to increase accessibility of information for both visually impaired and sighted users. During his explorations of the experiences of the visually impaired persons, Lewis (2004) found correlations existed between the visually impaireds' personal preferences for information resources and their familiarity with tools to access those services. Craven (2003) compared the searching and browsing behavior of 20 sighted individuals and 20 visually impaired students who were given tasks to perform on a variety of online resources. He found that the visually impaired took longer to search sites when they encountered pages that contained too much information and too many links. The length of time taken for searches depended on VIPs' experience with assistive technologies. This finding implies that web designers must consider the needs of VIPs when they design web pages.

A recent study by Samson (2011) described best practices for the provision of services for students with disabilities based on information gathered from visits made to eight state universities located in the USA. He interviewed librarians assigned to provide services for students with disabilities. All of the eight libraries selected for study have attempted to comply with the ADA. Samson proposed that, rather than relying on a reactive service model, libraries must continue to focus on best practices for inclusion and on the universal design of technological support. Most studies focused on the disabled and libraries have been very library/librarian-oriented and very few studies have documented the experiences and reactions of disabled individuals.

VIPs are at risk of feeling excluded and isolated in some environments. Research conducted for the Royal National Institute for the Blind in London indicated that the visually impaired persons who were interviewed expressed feelings of loneliness and isolation. They expressed the need to feel that they are members of a community (Moore 2000). Osterman (2000) and Abedin (2010) described the sense of belonging as the feeling of being part of a group. The sense of belonging is a fundamental factor in the creation and sustenance of a community. Sedgwick and Yonge (2008) found that students who possessed a higher sense of belonging reported feeling more comfortable and secure. Konecni-Upton (2010) indicated that the disabled assigned higher values to social engagement and their lack of social engagement decreased their satisfaction with their environments.

In summary, studies that focused on the sense of belonging can assist in the identification of areas that need improvement. They can also aid in the removal of barriers to psychological well-being, especially in educational systems. In the context of this study that examined the visually impaired students in an academic library setting, we will explore the provision of an inclusive service (study carrels) and examine how the provision of this service fosters visually impaired students' sense of well-being and feelings of belonging in the library.

### **Studies Focused on Malaysian Disabled Individuals and Libraries**

Only a limited number of published studies have examined Malaysian disabled library users. Most of these studies focused on achievement of the integration of disabled users with non-disabled users by the improvement of library buildings, equipment, and service accessibility. Pak (2007) examined the status of eighteen public libraries in Malaysia in the provision of resources, services, and equipment for visually impaired students. Pak noted that only three of the eighteen libraries kept statistics on their visually impaired users. Pak discovered that barriers that hampered libraries from the provision of appropriate services included lack of funds, lack of awareness of the total number of visually impaired who used the library, limited motivation among libraries to share resources, and poor support from library governance.

Mohamad (1994), as well as Devatason and Mariam (1996), reported on the lack of reliable statistics from Malaysian libraries related to their disabled users. This limited the credibility of libraries when they requested for larger budgets or attempted to justify plans for the provision of appropriate sources and services. Abrizah and Ruslina (2010) examined inclusive programmes provided for disabled users by Malaysian school libraries. They discovered that physical environments, formats of sources, school curricula, and regulations, as well as attitudes, were the main barriers that hampered the creation of inclusive environments. Yaacob (1994) and Wang (1994) found visually impaired users' lack of awareness of library facilities was the main factor that caused their disinterest to visit and use the library.

In summary, available Malaysian studies mainly emphasized the integration of disabled users with non-disabled users. These studies failed to consider the psychological and technological aspects during the design of special library services. None of the studies examined these issues from the visually impaired persons' perspectives. This paper bases its foundation on some of the findings derived from a larger study that explored the perceptions and experiences of visually impaired students who used study carrels. Study carrels are a facility especially provided by university libraries. The larger study explored

how this facility affected visually impaired students' attitudes towards libraries and demonstrated how this facility can foster a sense of belonging. This paper asks, "In what ways do VIPs use their study carrels?" and "How does carrel usage promote or enhance visually impaired students' sense of belonging in the library?" We hope to demonstrate how the provision of carrels helps VIPs feel included as legitimate members of the university library community.

## **METHOD AND MATERIALS**

A review of LIS literature revealed a notable lack of data related to disabled users' perceptions of libraries and their psychological feelings in library environments. This study adopts the qualitative approach to understand the visually impaired students' feelings and attitudes towards university library usage. The qualitative approach explores the lived experiences of visually impaired students. It can help researchers understand the feelings group members ascribe to an environment and reveal the essence of their experiences. We employed this method to identify feelings and attitudes that trigger positive attitudes toward the library that, in turn, foster visually impair students' sense of belonging. This study collected qualitative data by the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The participants consisted of 18 visually impaired students registered as carrel users. This group of users comprised five females and 13 males who ranged in age between 20 and 37 years. The library has allocated 15 carrels for the visually impaired students' use on the first floor and an additional five carrels on the library's second floor. Nine of the participants were postgraduate students (three doctoral level students and six Masters level students) and nine were undergraduates. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The focus group was divided into four groups that were agreed upon by respondents. Each focus group discussion lasted between an hour and 45 minutes and two hours. All interviews and focus groups were recorded with a digital audio recorder.

This paper is based on seven months of work performed between November 2011 and June 2012. The selected students were visually impaired and were registered members of the library at a research-intensive university in Kuala Lumpur. This university was purposely chosen as the case setting because both the researchers are affiliated to the university, as a doctoral student and faculty respectively. In addition, the university has been designated as an institution to which, disabled students should apply by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. Being the oldest university in the country, its library boasts the longest experience with the provision of special services, especially services for visually impaired students. According to study participants, the university was their first choice to pursue their tertiary education. They stated that the university is the preferred destination for visually impaired students in Malaysia.

Using a list provided by the library, we personally approached participants, explained the objectives of her research, and requested their email addresses and phone numbers. All of the visually impaired students possessed screen reader software, such as Jaws or Window eye, which enabled them to use computers and the Internet. We emailed information sheets that described the aim of the research, our expectations during interviews, and how collected information would be managed. We read the contents of the consent form to each participant. Each participant was required to sign a consent form prior to the initiation of the interview session. Participants were assured that their anonymity would be preserved in research findings.

During a seven-month period, we contacted each participant in their library carrel, their residence hall on campus, and in the special laboratory for disabled student in their residential colleges. In the beginning, the VIPs were shy and formal. Some showed limited interest because they were uncomfortable providing details of their experiences. As the interviews progressed, the VIPs became more comfortable, especially when they learned that we had met and become familiar with their friends. Because the first researcher is an Iranian, participants were curious to know why she had chosen this topic. They asked whether she had special reasons, whether she had any type of disability, or whether she had a family member who was disabled. The participants also asked about the circumstances of the visually impaired, who live in Iran, about barriers that Iranian visually impaired persons face in Iran during their daily lives, and about their educational and employment status. These discussions provided a good foundation for the researchers and participants to share knowledge and experiences. The interviews provided rich depictions of participants' experiences. The focus group discussions provided details related to participants' attitudes towards and beliefs about the research topic.

Data collection and analysis were carried out concurrently. To ensure trustworthiness, transcribed data were subjected to member checking and external audits. For member checking, transcriptions and analyses were provided to participants so they could verify the accuracy and correctness of interpretations. Two senior lecturers who are experienced qualitative researchers audited the transcriptions and analyses. The following sections describe three emerging themes related to VIPs' use of and feelings about library carrels.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Carrels as Second Homes**

The main library is a four-story, detached building situated at the centre of the university campus. The library was established in 1959 (it originated on the Singapore campus and was moved to Kuala Lumpur in 1962). It maintains a collection of over one million titles. Its floor space totals 17,372 square meters. Its full seating capacity accommodates 1,608 users. The library provides 53 carrels. Of that total, 21 are reserved for visually impaired students. The front of the building faces the main road (a one-way road) that courses through the 750-acre campus. Student parking is located alongside the building. The campus bus stands are located at the rear of the building, where university buses stop as they travel their routes along the campus road. This means that the library is very accessible to all students from various faculties and hall of residences located at various points along the campus road. Participants in this study were provided with carrels by the library. The carrels allowed them to make regular visits because they were always assured of places to sit.

A number of students described their carrels as their second homes. Dobel (2010) defined home as "Koi-m/kei," which can be translated to mean "a safe place." In this context, a home can be considered a place to which an individual belongs, where he/she feels secure and safe. The visually impaired students in this study referred to their carrels as second homes that provided them with comfort and a safe place to study and store their belongings. As a result, they reflected positive thoughts about the library.

### ***My Carrel, My Second Home: Inclusion and the Sense of Belonging in an Academic Library***

Amir (male, 31 years old) explained,

*The carrel is like my second home. I always go there to study. When I compare it to my bedroom at the hostel, it is more comfortable! I can store my books, my reading materials, and laptop so I can study and do my assignments. The carrel provides an environment that makes me think and feel positively about the library.*

Freud (2003) described the home as an individual's safe place that is familiar to and trusted. Privacy, intimacy, and relationships are factors valued in the home. Therefore, the home carries both physical and psychological connotations. Hadi and Zahid, like most visually impaired students interviewed, claimed that their carrels were like second homes. They were comfortable there. They were relieved and grateful that, whenever they had to visit the library, they were assured of their places. They felt that the carrels symbolized their acceptance by the library. They were happy to leave their reading materials and other belongings inside the carrels.

Hadi (male, 22 years old) stated,

*... I think I am accepted in this library. Yes, because I was given a carrel ... This means that, whenever I am in the library, I am assured of a place. I know that every time I go to the library, I can come here. It is my place. I can come here, store my things, store my stuff here, and do my work, assignments, everything. I put all the necessary belongings in the carrel, such as my laptop. This means I don't need to carry my study materials wherever I go within the campus.*

Zahid (male, 38 years old) stated,

*... Because I live outside the campus, the provision of a carrel gives me a place to meet my blind friends or normal friends. In my carrel, it is like my second home.... I think the carrel is like a second home for all visually impaired students. Even when we go back home or to college, the carrel is always the second place where we can go.*

Laila and Nasir further explained how they obtained the carrels that provided privacy. Laila (female, 23 years old) stated, "If we register, it means we can come here any time we want and we can put anything here." Nasir (male, 21 years old) stated, "I have this carrel. It is like my small office. I have my own privacy here."

Dekkers (2011) made a distinction between a home and a house. The term, house, is used in relation to a geographical object that is tangible and visible. The term, home, has a psychological connotation related to the social norms of members who live in the house. Therefore, a house becomes a home when it shapes values and attitudes. When a person says, "I feel at home," he/she is expressing his/her comfort, security, and sense of belonging to a place where s/he lives. In this study, Atifah and Zahid expressed their feelings of being accepted and respected. Atifah (female, 22 years old) stated, "I think the library demonstrates its respect and acceptance towards visually impaired students by providing study carrels as a facility."

Zahid (male, 38 years old) stated,

*... The carrel makes me feel welcomed by the library; it helps me feel comfortable.... I have my privacy here. Indeed, this privacy motivates me to come to the library because I feel I am a member just like other students. I use the carrel for various activities, such as counseling. Some students come and ask me for counseling, so I use the carrel. It is like my office.*

The VIPs use the carrels as secondary places to connect spiritually in a manner similar to their rooms in their halls of residence. The visually impaired students, who are all Muslims, used their carrels to perform their prayers at various times of the day. Rather than returning to their halls or visiting the prayer room located on the third floor of the library, they preferred to remain and pray in their carrels. Students stated that travelling to a common prayer room that was difficult to access and sharing facilities with other students was disorienting. For example, items in the prayer room were frequently moved around. Hence, the students preferred to remain in their own carrels because they knew the exact locations of their various belongings. They felt more comfortable, peaceful, and less distracted.

Laila (female, 23 years old) explained,

*... I went to the surau [prayer room] once. Now I just pray inside my carrel ... My carrel isn't far from the WC [Toilet and hand washing]. I know the location of all the things inside my carrel. However, sometimes, other students change the location of certain things in the surau such as prayer mats. This causes difficulties for me. The surau is also used by many people.... Thus, it is difficult for me.*

Sedigh and Mostafa also expressed preferences for their carrels as locations for prayer. Sedigh (female, 29 years old) stated, *"I prefer to pray in my carrel. You know, the surau is on the third floor. It is not easily accessible. I feel more comfortable praying here."* Mostafa (male, 24 years old) stated, *"I prefer to pray in my own carrel. It is more convenient ... The surau is not easily accessible and I am afraid to go there. I don't feel comfortable in the surau."*

Shams explained that the quiet and peace of the carrels made them suitable places for prayer. He stated, *"Previously, the prayer room was big and it was located on the first level. However, they changed the location, and I get too distracted there.... Now, I prefer to pray in my own carrel."* (Shams, male, 29 years old)

McAndrew (1998) noted the important role of the physical environment in the creation of a sense of belonging and its effects on an individual's personal identity. The carrels served as special places for the visually impaired students because they evoked feelings of acceptance as real members of the library system. The visually impaired students had a familiar and safe place located in the library. The visually impaired students felt that the library authorities considered their needs and this made them feel grateful and reinforced their beliefs that they belonged in the library.

### **Carrels as Social Places**

Kidd and Evan (2011) studied 180 homeless youth who resided in Toronto and 100 homeless youth who resided in New York. They discovered that the homeless youth believed that homes provided comfort. Homes were places where they felt a sense of belonging and could connect with friends. Sjostrom (2008) explored the feelings and



experiences of people with psychiatric disabilities during changes in their residences. He found that these individuals considered homes as places to perform activities, to establish relationships, and to maintain control over whom to meet and whom to exclude. In this study, visually impaired students considered their carrels as a social place where they could meet their friends and student helpers. The carrels provided opportunities to interact with non-disabled students. This helped improve their social skills.

Amir (male, 31 years old) described his carrel as a social space,

*... When we have our reading sessions, the volunteer readers come here. It is easier and better for me to meet them in this carrel because it is easily accessible. This is my personal space ... My visually impaired friends also come to meet me here. I also go to their carrels to chat.... I don't have any problems with friends visiting, especially those whom I already know. However, I prefer to meet strangers first outside my carrel.*

Louvee, Hadi, and Nasir expressed a sense of control over their own carrel spaces. Louvee (male, 28 years old) stated, "Sometimes, my friends come to my carrel to help me as readers. Sometimes, if they say they want to visit me, they just come to the library to see me. This is more convenient for them." Hadi (male, 22 years old) noted, "*Sometimes I bring my friends to my carrel to discuss assignments or topics from the course.*" Nasir (male, 21 years old) noted, "*When I want to host a small discussion group, we meet in my carrel.*"

Farhad and Zahid explained how this ability to interact socially made them think positively about the library and increase their motivation to visit it. Farhad (male, 22 years old) stated, "*I think the positive thing that this library has done is to give us these carrels because they are convenient places to meet our readers ... This is a good service.*"

Zahid (male, 38 years old) stated,

*"... I see my blind friends or normal friends who live on campus in my carrel ... In fact, this facility motivates me to come to library ... I can also see my volunteer readers. You know, the readers' roles are important in my academic life ... Also, the carrel gives us opportunities to form friendships with other students and extend our social networks."*

The visually impaired students expressed views that imply that the VIPs used carrels to maintain social connections and to maintain contact with their own community.

### **Carrels as Safe and Quiet Havens**

Rovai et al. (2004) and Salend (2004) discovered that students who feel they belong to a system are more likely to continue and achieve success in their studies. The sense of belonging to a system is dependent on the satisfaction the individual experiences in the environment. The students in this study stated that they could concentrate and complete their assignments peacefully in their carrels. Shams, Zahid, Atifah, and Mostafa indicated that they were satisfied with the carrels. They experienced the carrels as quiet spaces that were conducive to studying and reading.

Shams (male, 29 years old) noted,

*... My carrel provides me with a safe and quiet place for my reading sessions ... It is a quiet place where I can do my own work and study. I study here because there are no distractions. In addition, it is important for me to*

*have a safe place because I have to listen to recordings of my books. If I attempt this outside my carrel, it would cause distractions. It can be noisy for other users. The sound would be distracting.*

Zahid (male, 38 years old) noted,

*... Having this carrel means I don't need to bring all my Braille or printed books and my Braille machine each time I visit the library ... It helps me concentrate on my studies. You know, in comparison with sighted students, we have to work harder and we need this type of place to concentrate.*

Atifah (male, 22 years old) stated,

*... I feel comfortable in the carrel. It is very quiet. I am in my senior year. I always advise my juniors to come to the library and use carrels because they are conducive to studying compared with studying at the faculty or dormitory. In addition, we have air conditioning here.*

Mostafa (male, 24 years old) stated,

*"The carrels play an important role in the lives of visually impaired students. We spend a lot of our time in our carrels. The atmosphere in the carrels are very comfortable and quiet."*

According to Dobel (2010), feeling secure in a place is an essential factor that can help individuals feel at home. When individuals believe they have safe places, these perceptions help promote feelings of closeness, productivity, privacy, and cordiality with members of their homes. Consequently, when individuals feel at home they tend to feel a sense of pride in and a sense of belonging to those places and to the society that provides those places. Firooz and Laila expressed pride in being students of the university, and a sense of ownership of their quiet carrels that provide them with much needed privacy. They also noted that the carrels prevent their being disruptive to other library users when they use their Braille machines.

Firooz (male, 23 years old), a first year student stated,

*"I just called my friends in secondary school and told them that my university has given me a carrel in the library ... They were surprised and have begun to show interest in attending this university."*

Laila (male, 21 years old) stated,

*"I like to stay in my carrel because I have my privacy. You know what, in here, nobody can interrupt me."*

Maryam (male, 21 years old) indicated,

*"Every time I come to the library, I need to use my Braille machine to type my reading material. It can be quite difficult if I want to type outside my carrel, because it will produce a lot of noise."*

Table 1 summarizes the visually impaired students' feelings of acceptance and sense of belonging to the library community that was triggered by their use of carrels.

Table 1: Visually Impaired Students’ Feelings of Inclusion and Sense of Belonging Triggered by their Use of Library Carrels

Themes Related to Carrels	Types of Space	Types of Feeling	Triggers of Sense of Belonging
Carrels as second homes	Safe space	Protected/secure/safe	Positive attitude towards the library Accepted /respected as a member of the library Sense of belonging to the library Sense of being included/considered by the library
	Assured place	Relieved	
	Study/learning space	Comforted	
	Spiritual Space	Fulfilled Grateful Convenient	
Carrels as Social Places	Personal space to see anyone.	At ease Comfortable	Motivated to go to the library Happy to be part of the campus community Form friendships and extend social networks Improve social skills Regard carrels as a good service Sense of belonging
	Meeting space to chat with peers, meet, discuss, and visit.	Cosy Connected In control	
	Interactive space for meetings with student volunteers to discuss, study, read, type, and listen to audio resources.	Convenient	
	A convenient space		
Carrels as Safe and Quiet Havens	Quiet and safe space	Satisfied	Proud to belong to the library. Proud to be a student at UM Able to study Able to concentrate Feels like home Sense of ownership.
	Conducive space	Happy	
	Comfortable space	Grateful	
	Work space	Appreciated Comfortable	
		Cared for Proud	

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper highlighted visually impaired students’ feelings related to carrels allocated to them by the university library. It explored students’ feelings about this facility. Students stated that they felt the library cared about their needs. Students felt they belonged in the library. The findings indicated the importance of carrels to the visually impaired students. They felt privileged and grateful to be provided with this facility because they could study and complete their assignments in familiar and safe places. By providing carrels, the library helped visually impaired students feel that they belonged within the university’s educational setting. This focus on the provision of a physical amenity within an educational environment that can trigger a sense of belonging has received limited attention in recent educational research and in studies focused on sense of belonging measurement scales (Cemalcilar 2010).

The feeling of belonging to the library was emphasized by visually impaired students’ use of the term, “second home,” to describe the carrels. This “home” provided each student with physical shelters. They then attached emotional ties to these shelters because of the feelings of comfort, security, and sense of belonging they provided (Fox 2002). The carrels allocated to visually impaired students by the university library caused them to feel that

their needs were being attended to. The provision of carrels also made students feel that they belonged as members of the library. The findings indicated the importance of the provision of carrels to the visually impaired students. They felt privileged and grateful to be provided with this facility because they could study and complete their assignments in familiar and safe places. Carrels provided these students with special spaces that helped them feel at home. Oldenburg (1991) established that the first place in an individual's life is the house or home, the second is his/her place of work, and the third is a space where the individual feels relaxed and where he/she can foster social interactions. The carrels in this study were used by the students as "second places" (according to Oldenburg, a place of work) where the students could study and complete their assignments, as well as "third places" (according to Oldenburg, a place for social interactions), where they could congregate to meet old friends, new peers, and their readers within their own timeframes. The carrels represented spaces where experiences were shared and conversations were exchanged in a relaxed and happy ambience. Therefore, the reference to the carrels as "second homes" is accurate. The term bears connotations of new places within the context of these students' lives.

For visually impaired students, the carrels seemed similar to their homes. The carrels met their physical, academic, and social needs. In their second homes, these students felt safe and they believed their belongings were secure. They had privacy and experienced comfort. The carrels were quiet places where they could study, read, pray, and conveniently meet friends. The students felt grateful to the library for providing this service. They felt that the library considered their needs and cared for them. As a result, they felt they belonged in the library, just like other sighted students. They were proud to be students of the case university. They stated they would recommend that future students choose the university as a place to study.

The visually impaired students felt that the carrels were quiet, convenient, and comfortable enough to be used as places to interact with their student volunteers, who recorded, read, and scanned their reading materials. They also felt the carrels were appropriate places to use their Braille machines. The carrels were conducive to the arrangement of conferences and discussions with peers that would not disturb other library users. Although library budgets have increased, purchasing power has been reduced. The library has made a conscious commitment to provide carrels for the disabled. The responses from this study highlight the appreciation felt by visually impaired students. It is possible that library staff and governance could use these responses to justify future expansion proposals to university management.

According to Heidegger (1971), the expression "I feel at home" implies that a home contains a psychological dimension. Other expressions naturally follow, including "comfort, safety, well-being, and belonging." The visually impaired students participated in this study were proud of their ownership of carrels in a manner similar to homeowners' pride in ownership. The students felt they possessed their own personal keys to access the spaces. The students considered the carrels places that connected them with others and with the outside world. They also felt better able to control their private and social lives in these spaces. They could control whom they met in their carrels. They considered carrels their work places, second homes, and social spaces. They felt they belonged in the library as student members. Therefore, they felt valued and connected to the library and to their peers and other sighted students. Thus, the policy that required the provision carrels acted as a catalyst that helped the visually impaired students feel a sense of belonging in the library environment. As a result, this helped improve their personal identities in relation to

society and assured that they were valued in ways similar to any other library users. The visually impaired students felt proud to be members of the library and of the university community. They then relayed these positive feelings to their friends outside campus.

These efforts to understand visually impaired students' feelings in relation to their carrels offer an approach that might be employed to study disabled individuals as library users. Previous studies tended to focus on libraries' effectiveness in the delivery of services and facilities. Some studies benchmarked service delivery against laws and legislation enacted to address the needs of the disabled. However, several areas remain unexplored. How do the visually impaired feel about other services and facilities provided by libraries? Based on their viewpoints, how can the visually impaired benefit from these services? What improvements are required? How do VIPs obtain books and resources required for the preparation of course assignments and reports? What types of information-seeking behaviors do VIPs engage in during library activities? How can disabled individuals be included in library decision-making related to the provision of appropriate services? What types of inclusion programmes need to be initiated? Can libraries serve as "third places?" What roles do student volunteers play in libraries? Future research should focus on the needs of disabled individuals. Based on the responses obtained in this study, visually impaired students will readily "open up" once trust has been established. They are eager to voice their opinions when they are given opportunities to do so.

If they listen to the voices of the disabled, libraries will feel assured that the services and facilities they provide are truly beneficial. In this study, visually impaired students who use the library were very grateful to the library for the provision of carrels. They sang the praises of this service. Therefore, the provision of this facility should not be compromised. One of the study participants mentioned that, in all likelihood, the library may ask them to share carrels in an effort to cope with the increasing numbers of disabled students who enroll each year. These findings indicate that sharing should be a last resort. Rather, the library should use these findings to justify plans for the expansion or conversion of available space to provide additional carrels. The VIPs in this study were very aware that their presence in the library largely depended on the library staff's feelings of goodwill and willingness to assist them. Perhaps policies could be formalized to obligate a unit or group of staff members to address all matters related to their visually impaired users. The library should also commit to increasing staff members' awareness of the needs of disabled users. Pinder (2005) and Katsiyannis (2009) emphasised the role of library staff members who encouraged the creation of accessible and friendly environments for the disabled. Library staff members who become aware and who become familiar with different types of disabled individuals and their needs will, in all likelihood, be more able to address and serve the needs of the visually impaired (Taylor 2005). Based on this study, visually impaired students can serve as the best teachers. They can instruct us on how to help them. During this study, the first researcher participated in several social outings with participants. She observed that, when the visually impaired asked for assistance, they would instruct her on what to observe so she could inform them. They performed these activities with patience and eagerness. They sometimes explained why she was not adequately assisting them. Therefore, it might be helpful for libraries to invite disabled individuals to facilitate awareness dialogues or information sessions.

This study is part of a larger study that examined visually impaired students' experiences of and attitudes towards a whole range of library facilities, services, and collections. However, the results of this study only hold true for participants in the present study. They cannot be generalised. Yet, they provide insight into visually impaired students feelings related to a

facility provided by the library. If this facility can be carefully designed, it can provide truly useful spaces for the visually impaired students.

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