

Encourage production of Braille reading material

MORE efforts are needed to cater to the needs of visually impaired people, especially in seeking information and knowledge.

Traditionally, the Braille writing system is seen as the solution. But it may not be sufficient.

For one thing, publishing Braille-assisted reading materials is challenging due to copyright and the high cost.

In addition, a Bernama report in 2021 said that Braille literacy in Malaysia is very low. Only 30 per cent of the blind people registered with the Welfare Department are Braille literate.

Azmi Abdullah, a Malaysian Association for the Blind coach in a community-based rehabilitation programme says the Braille inscription itself is not easy to master.

“Those who are blind from birth or at a young age are normally sent to special classes that teach Braille. They have the advantage of being exposed to the writing system. However, those who are blind at a later stage of their life may not have that opportunity.”

Azmi says older adults may also have health problems that affect their ability to read the Braille inscription.

He believes audio materials are more suitable for adults with visual

impairment. There are also smartphone apps to help blind or visually impaired people.

Does this mean the Braille writing system is no longer relevant?

The answer is no. Audio materials and smartphone apps may not be that helpful to the blind who have hearing problems.

Furthermore, audio materials are not able to show the grammatical and syntactical aspects of a word or sentence.

Azmi says Braille is still needed mainly because it is the cheaper option for early education. It remains an effective way to teach the rules of grammar, which is indispensable for both reading comprehension and writing.

Reports show that despite the challenges that they face, quite a number of blind or visually impaired people have attained socio-economic, political and academic success. So, efforts to produce Braille reading materials should be encouraged.

AZMI ABDUL LATIFF

Senior Lecturer
Centre for Language Studies
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia



Braille literacy in Malaysia is very low.