

**CHALLENGES OF INCLUSIVE LIBRARY SERVICES FOR EFFECTIVE
LEARNING AMONG PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES IN ACADEMIC
LIBRARIES IN ZAMFARA STATE NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This paper attempted to examine some challenges of inclusive library services for effective service delivery in academic libraries in Zamfara state, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was used for the study, the population of the study was 13 academic librarians in the colleges of education under study. Self-structured questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection from respondents, the instruments were validated by three experts who found the instrument valid for the study after making some corrections. The major findings of this study indicated that the libraries under study lack facilities and materials to render inclusive library services to people living with disabilities and the academic librarians under study have no relevant training on how to handle or provide the services. Recommendations includes: Provision access point/way for the people living with disabilities, provision of relevant leaning materials to support their education, training and retraining of academic librarians on how to provide inclusive services. The paper's originality lies in examine challenges facing inclusive library services for effective learning among people living with disabilities in academic libraries in Zamfara state Nigeria

Key words: *Inclusive library, academic libraries, people living with disabilities.*

Introduction

Information is very important to all people irrespective of status and provision of library services to all users without discrimination is one of the main agenda of libraries in 21st century. A library is a collection of books and other forms of records and resources (printed and non-printed), housed, organized and interpreted to meet the broad varying needs of students, staff and others for information, recreation and inspiration. There are different types of library, of which the academic library is one of them. According to Muazu (2020) Academic libraries are libraries located at tertiary institutions of learning such as Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges and research institutions that support teaching and research. Academic libraries facilitate students learning and support research.

Academic library is the nerve centre of every institution of learning. It is the knowledge power house that makes behavioral study life of students and lecturers perfect. Academic libraries as reservoir of information are the most reliable information reference centre where users can seek information for building their profession. According to Sobalage and Ogunmodede (2015) Academic library is a library established to cater for the information needs of students, lectures, researchers and other community of scholar. In spite of the ever-growing realization of the need for effective library service provision to all students by the academic libraries, inclusive library services still suffer neglect.

One of the most pleasant feelings a person can have is to feel free and included. To participate independently and sense that others value your participation and appreciate your contributions can create a feeling of belonging and promote positive mental health. As the central meeting space and often one of the largest spaces in a school, the school's library, Learning Commons, Center for Inquiry, Media Center, or whatever it may be called should be a place that promotes this sense of belonging. Academic library has many considerations for its students' needs, including lending policies, facilities, services, and resources (Foster, 2006). Access is the key. As academic librarians, it is a duty to be accessibility ambassadors and empower all students and staff who enter the doors. University, today are tremendously diverse and with this diversity comes individual differences in terms of norms, behaviors, and values. As such, this called for inclusive library services in academic libraries.

An inclusive library is a vital community resource, addressing the diverse information needs of all members in the community. According to Grassi (2013), inclusion is an approach to library service that involves patrons with disabilities in an equitable way. He further stated

that if the library does everything to meet the varied needs of patrons with special needs, they are truly being inclusive. Inclusive library service in this paper means the academic library having students living with disability in mind during the conceptualization of its services, building construction of the library should pay attention to adding some aids like lifts and flat climbing steps for wheel chairs, acquisition of their information resources and employment of trained staff specifically for them. Promoting inclusion is the key for reducing or removing several barriers facing people with physical disabilities.

Physical disabilities refer to any physical limitations of a person which inhibits him to carry out some functions independently. Common physical disabilities include blindness, deafness, dumbness, and retardation, muscular, nervous, and sensory disorders. According to Abubakar (2020) define physical disabled person as a person who is physically disabled in such a way that his/her mobility is seriously restricted and includes a person who uses a wheelchair, crutches, braces or other mobility assisting devices. There are different causes of physical disabilities which include inherited or genetic disorders, serious illnesses, and injury. Physical disabilities can happen as a result of one of the discussed causes. According to Sambo (2016), the people living with disabilities encounter barriers in their quest for education especially in the area of access to educational resources and some architectural buildings which have discouraged many physically challenged persons from visiting the library.

In addition, American Librarian Association (ALA) bill of rights states that “A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views” (ALA,1939). In response to this, libraries have been tasked to provide inclusive library services in order to accommodate all library users. This calls for libraries to ensure that physical structures, resources and services meet the needs of all users regardless of one’s condition and ability (Majinge & Stilwell, 2013). In this regard, academic libraries should be committed in providing equal access to all categories of students, whether normal or challenged users. This paper determine the challenges of inclusive library services for effective learning among people living with disabilities in academic libraries in Zamfara State Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Access to library services is right to all staff and students in an institutions of learning irrespective of the status (whether physically challenged or not). This would no doubt support teaching, learning and research, as such this provision becomes imperative.

The structure and services being provided in academic libraries is almost exclusive in nature without provision for people living disabilities, right from the materials (Collection

Development) these categories of people are not included, the architectural design of the academic libraries are not accessible to these type of people among others. These prevent them from having access to the varieties of information resources available in these libraries. This call for the need to provide inclusive service in academic libraries to people living with disabilities and challenges faces by the academic libraries in an attempt to provide such services.

Objective of the study

The main objective is to find out challenges of inclusive library services for effective learning among people living with disabilities in academic libraries in Zamfara state Nigeria. The specific objective is to:

1. Find out challenges facing inclusive library services for effective learning among people living with disabilities in academic libraries in North West Nigeria.

Inclusive Services in Academic Libraries

Academic libraries provide variety of services to support the teaching, learning and research of their parent institutions. There are so many inclusive services libraries should provide to help meet the information needs of students with disabilities. Some of the services include:

1. ***Inclusive Circulation Services:*** The circulation section of the academic library provides charging and discharging services of library materials to users. Libraries offering inclusive services should be able to provide library resources in different formats. Registration of library users is done at the circulation section.
2. ***Inclusive Reference Services:*** The reference section of the academic library is the information service unit where user's information needs are taken care of. In the words of Katherine, Gatenby and Chittenden (2008), when students with disabilities come into the library, reference staff should focus on their information needs and not be distracted by the disability.
3. ***Inclusive Personnel Services:*** Personnel service here is all about deployment of staff in the academic library to serve as helping hands to students with disabilities. Echezona, Osadebe and Asogwa (2021) talking from experience in Access and Syracuse University said that handicapped students show strong preferences for oral readings. For that reason, staff needs to be deployed in academic libraries to serve as readers and helpers to students with disabilities.

4. ***Inclusive Internet Services:*** This consists of using the World Wide Web to access information. For a functional inclusive library service, libraries need to make published materials available in electronic form. Library computer desks need to be moderate and not high so that users on wheel chairs and clutches can browse comfortably just like every other student.

Inclusive Current Awareness Services

This is more of keeping the users up to date in their areas of interest. As disabilities are of different types, so are their information resources. Some of them use Braille, talking books, screen reader, word board and so on. For inclusive current awareness service, different format has to be adopted to circulate the information.

Resources Needed for Inclusive Library Services

Inclusive library services require the use of special materials for people with physical disabilities; the following are some of the resources needed to support learning of people with disabilities such as.

1. ***For the visually impaired users:*** The library should provide them with repackaged information materials that can be used into Braille format. Books can be repackaged into talking books, talking newspapers in the form of sound recordings. Eskay and Chima (2013) identified library and information resources for the blind and visually impaired to include:

- Braille books:*** Braille is a system of reading and writing whereby raised dots are used to represent letters which are read by touch. Braille books are approximate for users who have both visual and hearing problems.

- Talking books:*** These are audio versions of books that could be recorded on cassettes, CD-Rom, DVD and the Internet as e-books. Talking books are preferred by the majority of the visually impaired.

- Talking newspapers:*** These are Audio recordings of news articles in the dailies. Library services provided to the disabled students in Nigeria universities are lending, referral, current awareness, document delivery, photocopying, bindery, translation, consultancy, online database searching, user education, current contents listing, provision of large print materials, Braille collections, Braille machines, provision of talk books, provision of walking stick slot, provision of reading loud machine, elevators, provision of ramps at the entrance, technical writing, selective dissemination of information and data processing. Provision of all these services to the disabled users at ease will motivate and encourage their patronage in the library

- Large printed materials: These are documents printed in large fonts for use by partially sighted users.

A broad range of ICTs otherwise called adaptive or assistive technologies are now available to provide access to information in electronic database and on the Internet, giving blind users equal opportunity as the sighted (Eskay & Chima, 2013). These innovative technologies or assistive technology devices include:

- Screen Magnifier: This is software that allow text or graphics on computer screen to be magnified up to sixteen times the original size.

- Screen Reader: A software that reads out the content of a document to the learner. It is a software programme that works in conjunction with a speech synthesizer to provide verbalization of everything on the screen including menus, text and punctuation. It gives persons with visual impairment direct access to the world of print. It helps a blind person to read freely at his own pace without assistance.

- Voice Recognition Software: This allows the user to input data into the computer by voice.

- Braille Translation Software: Translate text and formatting into appropriate Braille characters and format.

- Braille writing Equipment: Used for creation of paper Braille materials. It can be manual or electronic devices.

- Scan and read software: Reads books and other print materials aloud

- Jaws Screen Reader: A program that allows users to listen to the contents of the computer screen

2.For the Hearing Impaired Users: In the case of hearing impaired users of the library, the academic libraries should provide them with low teaching materials that relate to literature-based reading; book reviewing; story telling programmes; and teaching them library skills through signs. Other ways through which libraries can serve them is through organizing activities with parents in the form of finger spelling, lip reading, bliss symbolic, teaching videos, CD-ROMS with dictionaries, language stimulating materials (games like puzzles, chess), and providing induction loop (Ajogwu,2006).

3. For the Physically Disabled Users: In the case of building structure, established library building should be modernized with the needs of users with disability in mind. Emerging buildings should include ramps and lifts for easy movement. There is the need for special adaptation of the environment at the libraries for all the physically challenged to access the library resources. Shelves should be of moderate size, offering access to all Echezona et al, (2021). Libraries should also provide them with adjustable chairs and tables specially made for wheel chairs and crutches.

4.For Speech Handicapped Users: The library should provide them with communication devices used by people with difficulty in reading or talking for example word board. A word board can be as simple as words written on a piece of paper which the user points to, to communicate. This set of users do not have much problem in making use of the library because they can always communicate through writing on a piece of paper.

Benefits of Inclusive library services

Inclusive library services in academic libraries provide people living with disabilities a chance to have access to huge information resources available in academic libraries and support their learning. Inclusion has many benefits, some of which are:

1. Provision of inclusive library services ensure belonging, acceptance, and developmentally appropriate practices to the people with physical disabilities.
2. Inclusive academic library services teaches people with physical disabilities typically developing skills and give them chance to access available information resources in libraries.
3. It provides an opportunity for people with physical disabilities to feel a sense of belonging and develop friendships (Grassi, 2013).

Challenges Faced by Academic Library Professionals in Inclusive Library Provision

Academic libraries especially in Nigeria face a lot of hindrances in providing inclusive services to people living with disabilities. These problems of inclusive library service in academic libraries as identified by Grassi (2013) are as follows.

1. Lack of skilled manpower to produce the material needed by the handicapped may result in poor production of the materials. This also affects operation and maintenance of equipment needed for inclusive library service.
2. Lack of properly trained library personnel. This problem originated from the library schools. The curricula of most library schools are geared towards conventional librarianship. Library staff are therefore often unable to attend to the needs of the blind.
3. Importation often poses the problem of obtaining materials that do not relate to the culture and background of the students.
4. Architectural barriers: Most of the older libraries especially University libraries were built before the era of inclusive education. Therefore, such barriers such as steps, high book shelves, narrow doorways and lack of elevators are still prevalent in some libraries. These obstacles can be extremely frustrating, if not impossible for the handicapped students to cope with.

Research Method

Descriptive research design was used for the study. The population of the study would comprise 13 academic librarians, 09 academic librarians from FCET Gusau as well as 04 academic librarians from COE Maru, all in Zamfara state North West Nigeria. No sampling technique used because the population is manageable. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics by the use of percentage.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data collected from respondents through questionnaire from the survey. It also present its corresponding analysis and interpretations.

Research Question: What are the challenges facing inclusive library services for effective learning among people living with disabilities in academic libraries in North West Nigeria?

Instruction: Please tick the option you prefer guided by the key below:

SA: Strongly Agreed, A: Agree, Disagree, SD: Strongly Disagree

S/N	ITEMS STATEMENT	SA	A	SD	D
1.	Lack of skilled manpower to produce the material needed by the handicapped results in poor production of inclusive materials	09(69%)	04(31%)	-	-
2.	Lack of properly trained library personnel affect provision of inclusive library services	13(100%)	-	-	-
3.	Importation often poses the problem of obtaining materials that do not relate to the culture and background of the students	13(100%)	-	-	-
4.	Architectural design of libraries make it inaccessible by people living with disabilities	13 (100%)	-	-	-
5.	Lack of relevant materials for people living with disability	13(100%)		-	-
6.	Poor budget contribute to the challenges in provision of inclusive library services in academic libraries	12(92%)	01 (08%)	-	-
7.	No toilet accommodating people living with disabilities	13 (100%)	-	-	-
8.	Height of shelves	13 (100%)	-	-	-
9.	Height of tables	13 (100%)	-	-	-

10.	Lack of assistive technology	13 (100%)	-	-	-
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(Source: Filed survey, 2023)

Table above shows that 09 representing (69%) of the respondents strongly agreed that lack of skilled manpower to produce the material needed by the handicapped results in poor production of inclusive materials, 13 representing (100%) strongly agreed that importation often poses the problem of obtaining materials, 13 representing (100%) of the respondents made it clear that architectural design of libraries make it inaccessible by people living with disabilities, lack of relevant materials for people living with disability, poor budget contribute to the challenges in provision of inclusive library services in academic libraries, no toilet accommodating people living with disabilities, height of shelves and table and lack of assistive technology.

Conclusions

It is evidently clear from the findings of the study that the academic libraries under study faces a lots of challenges in provision of inclusive library services to people living with disabilities. Several obstacles were revealed that hinders provision of this service among which are architectural design of the libraries, poor training by library staff on how to provide inclusive services and absent of relevant materials to render inclusive services among others.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researechers forward the following recommendations:

- i. Provision access point/way for the people living with disabilities
- ii. Provision of relevant leaning materials to support their education

Training and retraining of academic librarians on how to provide inclusive services

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