

Full Length Research

Academic Library Provision of Services For Special Students.

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This paper is on Academic Library Provision of Services For Special Students. They are a set of people that academic libraries in Nigeria have not been providing effective services to over the years despite the equal opportunities provided for in educational services by law. This is what motivated the researchers to want to explore some of the services, information resources and Smart Assistive Technology Devices (SATD) that are essential to special needs users in Academic Libraries and the challenges facing them and also discuss possible improvements to the provision of library service in the academic community. The focus of the article is to discuss library services to users with special needs with emphasis on: access to academic library buildings; academic library services and information resources for differently abled users. The question in the researchers' mind is: Do Nigerian academic libraries provide adequate services for differently abled users? To answer the above question properly, the aforementioned concepts and variables were discussed in this paper and possible solutions to problems facing special needs users in academic libraries in Nigeria were suggested.

Keywords: Academic Library Services, Special Needs Users, Access, University, and Information Resource.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic Libraries play a crucial role in providing an atmosphere that enables people to acquire knowledge, information and education. Like the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of disabled persons focused on inclusion, equality and non-discrimination, access to library facilities is also a right of differently abled persons. Academic libraries are vital service institutions, and they provide their users with different kinds of resources of benefit to them and satisfy their information needs. Besides, users are of different types with different requirements and needs for information, and the academic libraries have to meet all of their

obligations to achieve user satisfaction goals. This is particularly valid for individuals with challenges who have limited access to acquiring information resources through traditional means due to numerous barriers including lack of physical access to shops, lack of availability of books in accessible formats such as Braille, etc. Depending on their special needs, these persons have varying degrees of problems in accessing libraries and the material available in them. Since most of the buildings themselves are not easily accessible, they cannot access the premises of libraries. People who have low vision cannot access reading materials in academic libraries since the reading materials are not in accessible formats, like braille.

UNESCO (2016, 2019) and IFLA (2019) have issued guidelines for providing equal access to library facilities and services to all, including persons with special needs (differently abled users). The government of Nigeria has also issued guidelines in this regard (National Policy on Special Needs Education in Nigeria, 2015.). However, despite provisions in the Nigeria National Policy on Education, less than 0.2% of books are available in the formats that are accessible by people who have low vision. It is therefore essential that academic libraries in Nigeria become inclusive by becoming accessible to persons with special needs. In order to do this, it is essential to look at the physical state of library facilities in order to provide equal access to people with special needs, as well as libraries services and programmes that will facilitate usage by persons with special needs. It is quite distressing that persons with special needs are some of the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized persons in the Nigeria academic environment.

Constitutions guarantee human rights to all persons without discrimination. Although in recent years, there have been profound and positive changes in the perception of society toward persons with disabilities or challenges, their situation continues to be unfavorable and unequal. An adequate response to this problem does not yet exist in Nigeria. Persons with special needs face numerous challenges when they come to use the library. In academic libraries, issue of access to services by those with special needs has not been extensively discussed due to lack of adequate provisions to support policy by government. The academic library generally is a system with other sub-systems in the higher institution and must operate within the policy of the institution, hence the poor provision for Person with Disabilities (PWDs).

The paper x-rays library services to users with special needs (differently abled users) in the academic environment. The terms **“Users with Special needs”**, **“Differently abled Users”** or **“Challenged Users”** will be used interchangeably in this chapter: The focus of the paper is as follows: Concept of the challenged user/ user with special needs or differently abled user and their needs; Access to academic library buildings by users with special needs; Academic library services and information resources provision for differently abled users; Facilities needed by libraries will also be discussed. The question in the researchers' mind is: Do Nigerian academic libraries provide adequate services for differently abled users? To answer the above question properly, the aforementioned concepts and variables will be discussed in this chapter.

Concept of Challenged User

Discrimination against any person based on disability is

discouraged; all persons are guaranteed equal and effective protection from discrimination (Chaputula and Mapulanga, 2016; Chilemba, 2013). The World Health Organization (2012: 3) describes disability as a ‘physical or mental characteristic labelled or perceived as an impairment or dysfunction’ and some personal or social limitation associated with that impairment’. Moreover, Cassner, Maxey-Harris and Anaya (2011: 34) define disability as a ‘physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such an individual; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment’. The question of who is considered disabled is one that has often been clouded with ambiguity (Smart, 2009). Scholars argue that the definition of disability is highly contentious because, in the past, the term ‘disability’ was often used as a synonym for a distinct class of people who had limitations legally imposed on their rights and powers (Kaplan, 2008; Wasserman Asch, Blustein 2013). Presently the term used for these people in the 21st century are *“people with challenges or people with special needs.”*

In librarianship, these people are termed **“Challenged Users”**, **“Use with special needs”** or **“Differently Abled Users”**. Access to technology coupled with relevant ICT skill is required to put the 21st century library to good use. Like the library, users have also evolved as have the criteria for defining who a library user is. In the traditional library setting, library users are easily identifiable because they appear in the library physically most of the time. A challenged user is also easily visible. In the online environment, it is not easy to identify users by their physical characteristics. However, people are identifiable by their ICT skills irrespective of their age or challenges.

Traditionally, library users have been classified into groups. Whitakers (1993) classified them into general readers, subject readers, special readers, and non-reading users. Similarly, Nwalo (2003) grouped them into specialists, students, disadvantaged majority, and the indisposed. In addition, Aina (2004) grouped users into children, pupils, students, adults, professionals, researchers, policy-makers, artisans, hearing and visually handicapped, and physically handicapped. In this paper skills can also be used as a basis for categorizing library users, but the paper focuses basically on the user with special needs or the challenged user.

User Needs

It is universally agreed that every individual whether literate, challenged or not, has information needs. People use the library for various reasons and to satisfy different needs. Some use the virtual academic library specifically to read, others use it for research, and some others use it to communicate and share information. No matter what

you are using the academic library for, the fundamental truth is that it is information related. Aina (2004) opined that the most important information need is the information that will enable the individual to resolve uncertainties or problems, or that will help in making sound decisions. It is very important to state here that there is outrageous quantity and quality of different levels of information available to users of the 21st century academic library. Accessibility is however the responsibility of the user to a large extent. The 21st century library users need information for the following reasons:

- Personal-self-development: People need information to enrich themselves and remain relevant to their society, career, organization, etc.
- Health: Library users need information on how to stay healthy and how to understand medical conditions they or their families have.
- Government: People seek information to know what is going on in their government and in their country. They want to keep abreast with government policies and plans and know how it affects them.
- How-to-do-it: People require knowledge or information in order to know what to do at any point in time. Every problem at hand, requires information as the solution.
- Work/ occupation/ career: Every professional requires up-to-date knowledge in his chosen profession, information relating to better jobs etc. Students (whose occupation is schooling) need information to do assignments, pass their exams, and write projects.

Access to Academic Library Buildings by the User with Special Needs

Academic library building design/architects' brief must also include plans for differently abled users from the beginning. The concept and knowledge of library building is now one of the most important responsibilities of the librarians who want to ensure that the planning of the library building and equipping is their sole responsibility (Urhiewhu, Nzewi&Prisa, 2019). The subject of library buildings is broad and complicated. The issues of library buildings standard in Nigeria can be traced to proceedings of a seminar on **Standards of Practice for West Africa Libraries** organized in 1967 by the Institute of Librarianship at the University of Ibadan. The nature, development and application of library standards generally, were discussed and specific problems associated with the creation of standards for each type of library were examined with particular reference to the requirements of West African Libraries. This standard has a lot of faults in terms of formulas due to poor empirical

data relating to African University Libraries. In the 1978 Nigerian Library Association Conference held in Ilorin, the theme was on library standards in Nigeria in the post military era. At the end, the recommendations were not a great improvement on the Ibadan seminar of 1967(Awala-Ale,.(2012)

The lack of aposit plan for the library building results in the description of most academic library building as: **Inherited, Converted/Refurbished and Extension buildings**. It is unfortunate that over 70% of academic libraries buildings in Nigeria are not built specifically as libraries, therefore, issues of planning for the user with special needs during construction is not in place (Urhiewhu, Nzewi&Prisa, 2019).A survey of 20 university libraries in Nigeria, conducted by Lawal-Solarin (2012), reveals that although the majority of the libraries were in high-rise buildings, they lacked elevators and wheelchair ramps. Amongst some of the problems observed about these library buildings in this study is the fact that the door ways in some of them were not even large enough to facilitate entrance by people using wheelchairs, while others also had high shelves and narrow passages between the book shelves.

Services Available to Users with Special Needs

Web Pages

Libraries are continuously increasing their use of electronic resources such as online catalogues, full text newspapers, journal and periodical articles, CD-ROMs, and multi-media reference publications such as encyclopedias and dictionaries. Additionally, libraries are also designing their own web pages that provide links to these electronic resources, promote and encourage the use of the library's services and collections, and provide tutorials on utilizing these resources. Accessing these resources can be difficult for users with special needs. According to the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (2004), three general categories of limitations that create difficulties for those accessing web pages can be identified as follows:

- **Sensory Limitations.** Screen readers, large type or high contrast text and background combinations can accommodate blindness or low vision. Web designers can use descriptive tags to explain images and tables.
- **Physical Limitations.** People who are unable to use a standard keyboard can use onscreen keyboards or other assistive technologies. People who are unable to use a standard mouse can use keyboard shortcuts or other assistive technologies.
- **Cognitive Limitations.** People who have difficulty

processing visually can use screen magnification tools. Pages with simple colour schemes and limited animation also help people with cognitive special needs. Library webmasters are continuously trying to make library web sites more user-friendly to individuals with disabilities. However, there is a constant demand for multimedia presentations, interactive applications, and information-rich web sites that conflict with this goal.

Staff Training

A critical component of providing equitable access service is the interaction between students with special needs and library staff. A survey of students with special needs at Northern Illinois University was conducted to find out what elements of the library's services for Student with Disabilities were most useful to them; what the students really wanted and needed; and, how the program should be changed or developed" (Curry, 1991: 479). Eighty-five percent of the respondents "felt that the people who help them at the library were more useful to them than any other part of the program" (Curry, 1991: 480). One student at the University of Missouri-Kansas City noted, "the attitudes of those [library staff] interacting with them [students with disabilities] were often more important than their actual words" (Graubart, 1996, 39). DeCandido (1999) reported that one student at another university, who is blind, said, "staff attitudes 'totally make all the difference' in ease of library use...she would often spend more than 12 hours a day in the library, scanning material she needed. She stressed that one bad experience in the library can turn a person with disabilities away permanently" (p. 27). Library staff may feel uncomfortable and self-conscious when assisting those with special needs. They may have "preconceptions and misconceptions about persons with certain disabilities and may be unaware that some disabilities are invisible and not readily apparent to others" (MillerGatenby & Chittendon, 2000:319). It is only through adequate training that staff can be "sensitized to the special needs of people with special needs and help them feel more comfortable interacting with them" (Applin, 1999: 140)

The first step when implementing such a training program is to assess the need for and the scope of the sessions. According to Deines-Jones (1999), "training needs are often determined without consulting staff members or patrons to find out not only what staff members do not know, but also what they should know. When training needs are defined and staff members know why the training is important, they will be more willing to participate and more likely to retain and use information" (p. 148). For example, if most staff members are comfortable assisting patrons in using adaptive technology, this type of training could become a lower

priority than the training needed to improve awareness and sensitivity in assisting those with learning disabilities. Deines-Jones (1999) classified training into four general categories:

- Attitudinal training designed to improve awareness of and sensitivity to special needs/disability related issues;
- Facility training: people are trained to use equipment or make physical facilities accessible
- Service training aimed at teaching staff to design programs and services which are accessible to all;
- Legal training that explains the letter and requirements of the law, whether the ADA or other legislation. (Deines-Jones , 1999:153)

Smart Assistive Technology Devices (SATD) Special needs Users in Academic Libraries

The Assistive Technology Industry Association classifies Assistive Technology (ATs) as any item or piece of hardware, software, or product system that can increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities. ATs can be as low-tech as fuzzy felt on a surface of as high-tech as special-purpose electronics. AT devices help people who have difficulty speaking, typing, writing, seeing, hearing, learning, walking, and more. For people with disabilities, smart assistive technology can help them connect and engage with their environments. Smart-connected devices and the Internet of Things create opportunities for humans to engage with their environment where it was previously thought to be impossible. For people with disabilities, it provides them the ability to connect them to their surroundings and develop new ways to interact with the world. The following are Smart Assistive Technologies (SATs) devices that helping people with disabilities connect and engage with the world.

Tact Plus Printer: One of the lightest and most portable braille printers on the market, the Tact Plus is a graphic tactile printer to help the visually impaired learn and print braille at any time. The printer weighs only 11 pounds, making it a perfect on-the-go solution. The Tact Plus differs from other braille printers because it is also a 3D imaging printer. It uses thermal printing technology to create raised images on paper. The fine thermal foamed capsule paper is heated as it goes through the printer, creating braille and graphics in one step. Educators can print pages for picture books or textbooks for teaching visually impaired children. Users can print on demand, and it can be utilized by institutions like banks, hospitals, and department stores to service the visually impaired community.

Oticon More Hearing Aids: A CES Innovation 2021

award winner, the [Oticon](#) hearing aids use artificial intelligence to help users better analyze the world. In our brains, two subsystems are working in unison to decipher sound. The orient subsystem is continuously scanning your surroundings to create a full overview of the sound scene. The focus subsystem helps filter out irrelevant sounds to focus your attention on essential sounds. The brain starts to become disoriented for people with hearing impairments, loses focus, and cognitive decline accelerates. The patented brain hearing technology is the world's first hearing aid with a Deep Neural Network (DNN) embedded in the chip. The hearing aid aims to use AI to deliver up to 30 percent more surrounding sound and increase speech understanding by 15 percent. The DNN is trained on 12 million real-life sounds to decipher inputs and enhance those to the wearer. By providing a richer sound profile to the wear, the user can maintain healthy brain activity.

GoodMaps Explore: Navigating the indoors and outdoors safely is challenging for anyone, but more so for the visually impaired. GoodMaps Explore is an accessible navigation application that offers navigation inside buildings and public venues via your smartphone. The Explore app builds upon GoodMaps Studio, which allows venue owners to update and customize indoor maps. The Explore app then uses the smartphone's camera and LiDAR sensor to recognize the user's surroundings and identify where they are on the map. The app then provides the location and descriptions of the environment via the speaker or headset.

The Mantis Q40: The braille display is located at the bottom of the keyboard, of the Mantis Q40 which presents the written information to complement a computer's screen reader. The small and portable keyboard builds upon Big Tech's initiatives to increase accessibility functions. The Mantis is the first device to use Apple's new Braille HID protocol. If the Voice Over screen reader function is not running, the keyboard will also control the Apple device, providing easier navigation control. The QWERTY is a keyboard layout for Latin-script alphabets. The name comes from the order of the first six keys on the top left letter row of the keyboard (QWERTY). The QWERTY design is based on a layout created for the Sholes and Glidden typewriter and sold to E. Remington and Sons in 1873. It became popular with the success of the Remington of 1878, and remains in ubiquitous use.

With the QWERTY keyboards on the market which are the corn rational keyboard for the visually impaired, there is needs to include limited functionality to also serve as braille devices. A user will often have to use a traditional Bluetooth keyboard and a separate braille device to fully control their computer. American Printing House's Mantis Q40 Bluetooth keyboard differs by offering a full-size

QWERTY laptop-style keyboard and built-in 40-cell refreshable braille display.

Challenges of Special Library Services in Academic libraries

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1949, the United Nations General Assembly Charter in 1959, and the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child in 1989 recognise education as a human issue. This means that all children have a right to receive the kind of education that does not discriminate on the basis of language, ethnicity, disability, gender, religion, etc. In addition the 1959 charter states that "the children who are physically, mentally and socially handicapped shall be given special treatment and care required of their particular condition". All these should be influencing the provision of educational services to children with challenges in Nigeria as stated in the National Policy of Education (NPE).

However, tertiary institutions are yet to make these children after adequate provisions to assimilate their pre or post primary education. This in turn has affected the academic libraries service provision all over Africa and particular in Nigeria. In a 2013 study conducted at the Ovidius University of Constanța and University of Bucharest in Romania, Hill looked into the primary impediments to and enablers of accessibility and engagement for people with impairments. According to the survey, there were a number of significant obstacles at both campuses, including a lack of ramps, accessible restrooms, and the difficulty of moving between buildings, particularly for practical work. Likewise, in his research. Momodu (2013) set out to explore the relevant facilities for physically challenged persons in Nigerian libraries. The findings from his study reveal that library facilities for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) were insufficient. Amongst the plethora of problems identified in his study were architectural issues and a lack of emergency facilities for DAU/ PWDs .Furthermore, Lawal-Solarin (2012), revealed that although the majority of the libraries were in high-rise buildings, they lacked elevators and wheelchair ramps. Amongst some of the problems observed about these library buildings in her study were the fact that some of their entrance doors were not even large enough to facilitate entrance by people using wheelchairs, while others also had high shelves and narrow doors. In his study, Ayiah (2007) revealed that although the management of a university library was aware of technological developments for visually challenged persons, access to such technologies and equipment was lacking. The physically challenged students encountered challenges in physical access to the building and physical limitations such as retrieving books from the library shelves (Okoli, 2010).

Rumsey (2002) states that many PWDs still encounter

problems accessing library services because the typical library still works best for able-bodied patrons. Interestingly, enough, even public transport laws don't facilitate modification of Public Service Vehicles and they are less accessible to persons with physical impairments (Ingstad, 2007). Pivik, McComas, and Laflamme (2002) indicated that the major problem experienced by PWDs, especially those with mobility problem are barriers in the physical environment which includes the surroundings of the school library, the entrance, stairs, elevators or ramp etc. A study carried out by Anambo(2007) at Kenyatta Memorial of the University of Nairobi indicated that provision of library services within JKML to PWDs is largely characterized by a combination of structural inadequacies, staff incapacity, and absence of internally formulated compliance with national and international policy frameworks. In particular, the study revealed that the library had no facilities, resources and equipment such as the lifts, spacious ramps, Braille materials, hearing, aids etc , required by students with disabilities. The attitude of staff towards students with disabilities was also found to be unfavorable (Anambo, 2007).

The way forward for Special Library Services in Academic Libraries

From the empirical reviewed above the researchers suggest that the library should:

1. Collect proper feedbacks from the users with special needs in identifying their requirements and potential use of special services for establishing priorities for implementing improved services.
2. Arrange training/orientation for students with challenges for the effective use of library services.
3. Implement guidelines designed by IFLA and UNESCO regarding access to library services for differently abled users
4. Offer differently abled users Dropbox facility, home delivery and SMS/ email services.
5. Empower users with special needs with modern assistive technology support.
6. Ensure proper facilities like ramps, secure and accessible pathways, evident symbols and signs for locations, accessible elevators and accessible section/reading rooms and prescribed library materials in convenient formats.
7. Arrange additional funds and allocate a separate budget for developing modern assistive technologies and library collections in convenient format for users with special needs.

CONCLUSION

In this paper the researchers dealt with library services

for special users in Nigerian academic libraries. The review of secondary information showed that the African continent still lags behind in the area of Special Education. Nigeria in particular, Special Education is 0.01% of government commitment. The paper has exploited the concept of challenged users/special users or differently abled users and their needs; access to academic library buildings for users with special needs; academic library services and information resources provision to differently abled users, as well as facilities, for these special library users. Difficulties occur because of the unavailability of required library materials in convenient formats, lack of modern assistive technologies or equipment to support access to library resources and services, unsatisfactory assistance by trained library staff and inadequate library use training or orientation to users with special needs in how to use library resources and services.

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