



TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE SERVICES PROVISION FOR THE VISUALLY-IMPAIRED STUDENTS IN NIGERIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

By

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Abstract

This study explored library services provided for students who are visually impaired in six University Libraries in Nigeria to determine their access to facilities and establish their level of satisfaction with the services they received. Survey designs were employed on purposively selected 104 students. Questionnaire was used for data collection, and data from the questionnaire were analysed using frequency counts and percentages. The researchers found out that majority of the visually-impaired students do not have access at all to many of the facilities and services but were satisfied with the librarians' attitude. However, a large number of students were not satisfied with the services and skill of the librarians in providing services for their research and academic work. The study recommended, amongst others, that the library administrators should ensure increased and sustainable access to all relevant facilities to promote and provide an inclusive and equitable library and information services to the visually-impaired students in Nigeria University Libraries.

Keywords: Provision, library Services, visually-impaired students, university libraries

Introduction

The increasing growth in the enrolment of visually-impaired students (VIS) in tertiary institutions has generated concern over equitable and inclusive education. Provision of library services for the VIS who are able to continue their education to the university level is one such way of ensuring an equal and inclusive educational growth as well as a critical component of educational inclusion. When this is not the case, it has a negative impact on their ability to perform at the same capacity as their sighted counterparts. The United Nations depository for global statistics in the field of Education, Science and Technology, Culture and Communication, adopted the Sustainable Development Goals 4 (SDG 4) on education, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning

opportunities for all (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017).

Zaid (2018) pointed out that inclusive practices can only be achieved at all levels of education if they become more included. Despite this, students with disabilities continue to face various types of exclusion, which vary based on their impairment, residence, and cultural or social status. In Nigeria, however, inclusive library practices for the visually impaired seem not to have been implemented since the national policy on education document has not clearly defined the requirements for staffing, library resources, and services to be offered. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA (2015) stated that "the development of collections should be based on the principle of access for all and include access to formats appropriate to specific client group,



for example braille and talking books for blind people. This guideline underscores the significance of inclusive services provision for the visually-impaired by all types of libraries. Studies have shown that the provision of library services for visually-impaired students could increase their thinking capacity to remember facts, enhance their academic pursuit and increase their reasoning skills (Megan, 2015; Kumar & Rajmma, 2016). Therefore, providing library services for the visually-impaired students in an appropriate format gives them convenient access to all learning resources.

Furthermore, the transformations in the world of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have shifted the content of libraries' resources from printed information to electronic information resources (Israel & Edesire, 2016), which are changing the landscape of information provision by university libraries to different categories of users, including the visually-impaired. Libraries have also formed cooperation with one another to enhance resource sharing (Yebowaah & Plockey, 2017). Solanki and Mandaliya (2016) highlighted the special equipment, infrastructure and services that the libraries are expected to provide for the visually-impaired. According to the authors, the actual services that are required for the provision of services to the visually-impaired students include but are not limited to assistive technology/alternative formats like computer files of text, talking books, Braille and other tactile materials as well as audio-descriptive video.

However, when the library system is put in place, little or no consideration is made for this category of students, especially in developing countries. Unfortunately, many university libraries are not seen to be proactive enough in providing equal access to information for every user irrespective of their status. Thus, there exists a very huge gap in terms of library and information services being enjoyed by the visually-impaired students and their sighted counterparts.

Research Objective

This study investigated visually-impaired students' access to facilities and established their

level of satisfaction with the services being provided by the staff, while the specific objectives were to:

- i. identify the types of services and facilities accessed by the visually-impaired students in the university libraries;
- ii. Examine the level of students' satisfaction with the attitude, skills and services provided by the staff.

Research Questions

- i. What are the types of services and facilities that the visually-impaired access in Nigerian university libraries?
- ii. What is the level of students' satisfaction with library staff attitude, skills and services provision?

Literature Review

Persons who cannot access library services because of their physical, mental or cognitive conditions are collectively called disabled persons. Categories of disabilities or people with special needs include, but not limited to the visually-impaired (VI) also known as people with vision impairment or vision loss, which is the focus of this study. Efforts have been made by many individuals and organizations to define the term in various ways. Visually impaired is a general term used to describe people who are partially-sighted or completely blind and are unable to see. In other words, when a person is blind to the extent that he must devise alternative techniques to do efficiently those things he would do with sight if he had normal vision is referred to as visually-impaired. As of 2014, 285 million people were estimated to be visually impaired worldwide, out of which 39 million (about 13.7%) are irreversibly visually-impaired or blind, and 246 have low vision (WHO, International Mediacentre Factsheets, 2015). Furthermore, it is estimated that a total of 4.25 million people in Nigeria suffer from moderate or severe visual impairment or blindness. In addition, over 1,000,000 adults are irreversibly blind, and another 3,000,000 are visually impaired. Overall, the percentage of VI people is not much when compared to the total population of people. More so, it is reported that the number of VI people as a result of infectious diseases has decreased since the early estimates in the 1990s due to various factors. The fact, however, remains that there are still a number of



those who are irreversibly blind for the rest of their lives and who need visual rehabilitation interventions for a full psychological, educational and personal development. They have the fundamental human right to be educated and be treated the same way as their sighted counterparts. One such means of educational development is the provision of library services for those who can further their education to the university level.

Visually impaired students cannot read conventional books, magazines or websites; they need special facilities to be able to access information. Specialized services and facilities required to provide services for the visually-impaired in Nigerian universities are the use of assistive technology such as screen reader, screen magnifier, voice recognition software, braille embosser and scanners, braille translation software, talking books, talking magazines, talking newspapers, talking journals, books on tape, large print books, large print magazines, key labels, closed-circuit television (CCTV), braille writing equipment, braille books, educational radio and TV programmes, videos and DVD books, tactile picture books, Braille-in-print and DAISY reading software. However, less than 5% of materials are published in accessible formats and less than 20% of websites are accessible to them. According to Abdussalam, Aina, Issa and Fajonyomi (2023) the provision of library services for visually-impaired students in university libraries is made available through the medium of sound and touch. In Nigeria, library services and facilities for this category of students are not many and most of the available ones are not actually accessible to them.

In a study which investigated what influences the accessibility for visually-impaired VoiceOver users to successfully partake on audio chat platforms and which guidelines could be devised to assist in designing such platforms, Liljestrom, Bern and Ferati (2024) found that clear labelling, audio communication, a limited focus on images and videos, as well as a limited scope of features enhance accessibility for the visually impaired users. The findings further showed that too few features can lead to user-

workaround behaviour, negatively influencing accessibility. Audio chat platforms have the potential to be highly accessible and make visually impaired users feel independent and included. The study proposes that accessibility can be enhanced by focusing on the user experience perspective in addition to following principles like WCAG. Alabi and Okiki (2023) investigated the assistive technology preference of students with visual disabilities in four public universities in Nigeria by using a quantitative research method. The researchers revealed that the students' most preferred assistive technologies in the hardware category are handheld scanners and braille keyboards while the student's preferred COBRA, ZoomText, Supernova and Dragon Naturally Speaking in the software category.

In their study, Kiruki and Mutula (2023) examined how ICTs such as internet, e-resources and e-databases were being used to provide access to information by visually and physically impaired persons. The result indicated that visually impaired persons could not access information due to lack of the necessary assistive technologies and weak institutional support and framework. Therefore, the researchers suggested factors that would enhance services to the visually impaired to include improvement of assistive technology infrastructure, embracing new assistive technologies such as telepresence robots and virtual realities and putting in place capacity building programmes for library staff to enable them to provide services to this category of students. Golubova, Starke, Crossland and Wolffsohn (2021) explored Low Vision Aids (LVAs) requirements through a structured debrief interview following a real-world self-recording study. The researchers wanted to define the actual needs of those living with sight loss so that low vision services can better address them in future. The results reported a lack of consistency in the responses, which illustrated potentially different user clusters with divergent design needs. The study concluded that there is a substantial opportunity for new LVAs to address visual needs that traditional devices and coping strategies cannot support.



In addition, Phukubje (2016) evaluated the convenience and accessibility of library services for students with disabilities at the University of Limpopo in South Africa. According to the researcher, access to library services by students with disabilities is not yet fully available despite the special needs requirements. The study established that students with disabilities were not adequately satisfied with the library services they received as very few library materials had been transcribed into accessible formats. Also, only one librarian was assigned to manage and run the library services for the disabled. In the same vein, Jegbefumea, Soro and Ibrahim (2020) examined the information resources and services available to the visually impaired. The challenges militating against effective information service delivery for the visually impaired were architectural barriers, limited financial and human resources, accessibility, and utilization of information. Training and retraining of staff and use of library guide, among others, were recommended.

Namugenyi and Wamea (2021) investigated the effects of information-seeking behaviour on the accessibility of library services by students with visual impairment at Hamu Mukasa Library of Uganda Christian University (UCU), Mukono. The results showed that the library staff has inadequate skills to allow them to understand the needs and information-seeking behaviours of the students. The study recommended that non-government organizations and other agencies serving the visually impaired people should work together on strategies to improve library facilities and information services for the visually impaired students. Osadebe, Onuigbo and Ewa (2019) explored library services provided for students with visual impairment in six Nigerian federal universities to determine their needs and establish their level of satisfaction with the services they are receiving. The researchers found that library policy and technical and personnel factors affect library services delivery to students with visual impairment. The study recommended, amongst others those university libraries' expectations. All in all, the computerization of information

enables an increasing number of these resources to be captured by a variety of special output devices and "read" to the library patron with visual and learning disabilities. Hence, the patron with difficulty manipulating printed texts due to orthopedic disability can take advantage of computerized information to access it with a wide range of computer input devices.

Methodology:

The research is descriptive in nature that employs semi-structured method of survey type. A Likert scale structured questionnaire is the instrument for data collection; hence data for the study is quantitative. The main purpose of the study is to examine the kind of services accessed by the visually-impaired students and their level of satisfaction with the services provided in the university libraries. The population comprised of the six university libraries namely, Kashim Ibrahim Library, University of Lagos Library, Nnamdi Azikwe Library, University of Calabar Library, Kenneth Dike University Library and Gombe State University Library. These six university libraries were purposively selected because they are providing services for the VIS. The study included 104 visually-impaired students and the census of this was used. The questionnaire was distributed in the six university libraries that provide services for the visually-impaired in Nigeria as at the time of this study. The questionnaire was administered by the researchers and research assistants who read the questions to the students and effected their responses directly on the questionnaire based on the choices made by the students. A total of all the 104 usable copies of questionnaires was retrieved and analysed. Institutional distribution of the respondents are Kashim Ibrahim Library, (ABU) 18 (17.3%), University of Lagos Library (UNILAG) 20 (19.2%), Nnamdi Azikwe Library, Nsukka (UNN) 14 (13.5%), University of Calabar Library (UNICAL) 10 (9.6%), Kenneth Dike University Library (UI) 17 (16.3%) and Gombe State University Library (GST) 25 (24%). Frequency counts, percentages, mean, were used to analyse the quantitative data.



RESULTS:

RQ 1: What were the types of services and facilities that the visually-impaired students accessed in the Nigerian university libraries?

Details of the types of facilities and services that the students have access to are as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Access to Library Services and Facilities by Visually-impaired Students (n=104)

Aspects	Not at all		Rarely		Occasionally		Regularly		All the time		Mean
	fre q	%	fre q	%	fre q	%	Fre q	%	fre q	%	
Scheduled/personalized consultations with patrons	90	86.54	-	-	11	10.58	2	1.92	1	0.96	1.31±0.15
Media Room/Recording Studio Service	91	87.50	-	-	12	11.54	-	-	1	0.96	1.26±0.13
Transcription Service	91	87.50	-	-	12	11.54	-	-	1	0.96	1.27±0.14
Inter-Library Loan Service	91	87.50	-	-	12	11.54	1	0.96	-	-	1.26±0.13
Recording of materials on tape, CD, DVD	91	87.50	-	-	12	11.54	1	0.96	-	-	1.26±0.13
Reading Service for Short Print Materials	91	87.50	-	-	12	11.54	1	0.96	-	-	1.26±0.13
Guided tours/familiarization for patrons	91	87.50	-	-	12	11.54	-	-	1	0.96	1.27±0.14
Reference/SDI service	91	87.50	-	-	11	10.58	1	0.96	1	0.96	1.28±0.15
Current Awareness Service	91	87.50	-	-	11	10.58	1	0.96	1	0.96	1.28±0.15
Reserve Collections Service	91	87.50	-	-	12	11.54	1	0.96	-	-	1.26±0.13
Braille Production Service	91	87.50	-	-	12	11.54	1	0.96	-	-	1.26±0.13
Bindery Service	91	87.50	-	-	11	10.58	2	1.92	-	-	1.27±0.14
Indexing and Abstracting Service	91	87.50	-	-	11	10.58	1	0.96	1	0.96	1.28±0.14
Serials Service	91	87.50	1	0.96	10	9.62	2	1.92	-	-	1.26±0.13



Material Delivery Service (Positing, e-mail, fax etc)	91	87.5 0	1	0.9 6	10	9.62	2	1.9 2	-	-	1.26±0.13
Guidance and Counseling Service	91	87.5 0	-	-	12	11.5 4	1	0.9 6	-	-	1.26±0.13
Computer services	90	86.5 4	1	0.9 6	11	10.5 8	1	0.9 6	1	0.9 6	1.29±0.14
Internet services/WWW	90	86.5 4	1	0.9 6	10	9.62	2	1.9 2	1	0.9 6	1.30±0.15
Screen reader	92	88.4 6	-	-	10	9.62	2	1.9 2	-	-	1.25±0.13
Screen magnifier	92	88.4 6	-	-	12	11.5 4	-	-	-	-	1.24±0.12
Voice recognition software	92	88.4 6	-	-	11	10.5 8	1	0.9 6	-	-	1.24±0.12
Braille embosser & scanners	92	88.4 6	-	-	11	10.5 8	1	0.9 6	-	-	1.25±0.13
Braille translation software	92	88.4 6	-	-	10	9.62	2	1.9 2	-	-	1.25±0.13
Braille books	92	88.4 6	-	-	10	9.62	2	1.9 2	-	-	1.24±0.12
Educational radio / TV programmes	92	88.4 6	0	0	11	10.5 8	1	0.9 6	-	-	1.25±0.13
Videos / DVD books	91	87.5 0	1	0.9 6	11	10.5 8	1	0.9 6	-	-	1.24±0.12
Tactile picture books	91	87.5 0	-	-	12	11.5 4	1	0.9 6	-	-	1.25±0.13
Braille – in – print	91	87.5 0	1	0.9 6	11	10.5 8	1	0.9 6	-	-	1.26±0.13
Talking books, magazines/ newspapers, journals/ books on tape	91	87.5 0	1	0.9 6	10	9.62	2	1.9 2	-	-	1.27±0.14
Large print books/magazines/keys labels	91	87.5 0	1	0.9 6	10	9.62	1	0.9 6	1	0.9 6	1.27±0.14
Network service	91	87.5 0	1	0.9 6	10	9.62	1	0.9 6	1	0.9 6	1.26±0.13
OPAC service	91	87.5 0	1	0.9 6	11	10.5 8	-	-	1	0.9 6	1.23±0.12
Closed-Circuit Television	92	88.4 6	1	0.9 6	10	9.62	1	0.9 6	-	-	1.23±0.12
Braille writing equipment	92	88.4 6	1	0.9 6	10	9.62	1	0.9 6	-	-	1.23±0.12
DAISY reading software /materials	93	89.4 2	-	-	10	9.62	1	0.9 6	-	-	1.22±0.12

Source: Field Survey, 2025



Distribution of respondents by frequency of their access to facilities and services shows that majority 92% of the respondents do not have access at all to many of the facilities and services. The analysis of the data on Table 1 further shows that only 0.96% of the respondents rarely have access to all the required facilities, between 10 to 11% of the respondents indicated that all the facilities are accessed by them occasionally. Also, only 1.92% of the respondents regularly

have access to all the facilities while only 0.96% accesses all the facilities all the time. The next sub-section presents the results of the level of satisfaction of the students with issues that relate to attitude, skills and services provision by the librarians. Details of the distribution of the students relating to their satisfaction with issues that border on services provision are as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of the Students Satisfaction with the Attitude, Skill and Services Provision by the Librarians (n=104)

Students Satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
Librarians Attitude		
Don't Know	13	12.50
No	9	8.65
Yes	82	78.85
Skill Demonstrated by Librarians		
Don't know	5	4.81
No	95	91.35
Yes	4	3.85
Services provision		
Don't know	5	4.81
Not satisfied	53	50.96
Partially satisfied	43	41.35
Satisfied	3	2.88

Source: Field Survey 2025

The result in Table 2 revealed the level of the students' satisfaction with the attitude, skill and services provision of librarians. Majority of the respondents 78.85% specified that they were satisfied with the attitude of the librarians in the provision of services for the visually-impaired. 12.50% of the respondents indicated that they did not know, while the remaining 8.65% specified that they were not satisfied with the librarians' attitudes. This implies that, since only very few students were not satisfied with the attitude of the librarians regarding the services provision for the visually-impaired in Nigerian university libraries, librarians had a good attitude towards the visually-impaired students in providing services.

On the other hand, the table also showed that majority 91.35% of the respondents indicated that they were not satisfied with the skill of librarians in the use of facilities to provide services for them. While 4.81% of the respondents indicated that they do not know, very few 3.85% respondents indicated that they were satisfied. As regards the respondents' satisfaction with the services provided, more than half 51% of the respondents indicated they were not satisfied, while 43.23% indicated they were satisfied or partially satisfied. All in all, this implies that a large number of the respondents were not satisfied with the services and skill of the librarians in



providing services for their research and academic work.

Discussions and Findings

Library Services Accessed by the Visually-impaired Students

Findings regarding the library services and facilities accessed by the visually-impaired students indicated a very low level. Majority of the students considered all the listed services as not being accessible to them.

This claim by the students was corroborated by the researcher's personal observation indicating that out of the six university libraries providing services to the visually-impaired in Nigeria, only two university libraries have braille machine/embosser that can convert both handwritten notes and printed materials to braille. However, the librarians in one of the two university libraries were not yet trained to operate the machine which made it usage impossible.

The result revealed that majority of the students in all the Nigeria University libraries have a positive perception about the librarians' attitudes towards services provision to the visually-impaired. Considering these findings, the accessibility to facilities in Nigerian university libraries did not tilt more towards the most important or needed facilities and services. This finding is not encouraging as recent and new ICT facilities that could enhance the provision of services to the visually-impaired should not only be provided but be made accessible for the use of the students.

Menzi-Cetin, Alemdag, Tuzun and Yildiz (2017) finding is in conformity with this result as it showed that the information that the students required most time is not accessible on the website. Findings by Phukubje (2016) supported this study as it established that students with disabilities were not satisfied with the library services they received, as very few library materials had been transcribed into accessible formats. In addition, scholars like Solanki and Mandaliya (2016) further

revealed that accessibility to services by the visually-impaired users in academic libraries is generally poor and that access through electronic resources like assistive technology are lacking

Summary of the major findings

Visually-impaired students in Nigerian university libraries do not have access at all to many of the major required facilities and services. The visually-impaired students were not satisfied with the inappropriate skills of the librarians. The level of majority of students' satisfaction with the librarians' skill in Nigerian university libraries was generally low. Majority of the students have positive perception about the librarians' attitudes towards services provision.

Recommendation

Alternative formats and insufficient assistive technology are barriers to effective services provision, university libraries must prioritize investing in them so that their librarians can use them properly and the visually-impaired users can in turn, benefit from the wealth of resources available on the World Wide Web. All librarians should be properly enlightened and educated to have the appropriate skills required for serving this group of users. This may be achieved through regular seminars and interaction between the librarians and the library management. The library administrators should ensure increased and sustainable access to all relevant facilities to promote and provide an inclusive and equitable library and information service to the visually-impaired as IT facilities is being provided for their sighted counterparts.

Conclusion

The study concluded that, visually-impaired students in Nigerian university libraries do not have access at all to many of the major required facilities and services. The visually-impaired students were not satisfied with the inappropriate skills of the librarians. Furthermore, the level of satisfaction with the librarians' skill by majority of the student in Nigerian university libraries was generally low.



Majority of the students have positive perception about the librarians' attitudes towards services provision.

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