

## AVAILABILITY AND USE OF LIBRARY RESOURCES BY THE PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED STUDENTS FOR IMPROVED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SELECTED SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN ABUJA

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### Abstract

This study investigated the availability and use of library resources by the physically challenged students for improved academic performance in selected special schools in Abuja. The study answered four research questions. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the research. The populations of the study were all the identified students with mobility, hearing and visual impairments. The total number of physically challenged students was 120 from where a sample of 80 was taken. Questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The collected data was analyzed using simple percentages. Findings revealed that information resources in the library under study are grossly inadequate. It is also revealed that the available information resources in the library understudy were not accessible. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that money should be made available for the procurement of library materials, provision of computers and internet facilities in the library, while proper awareness should be created by the library on the information resources they have. There should be employment of more qualified library staff; while information retrieval tools such as catalogue, abstracts, etc. should be prepared to ease accessibility and organization of intensive user education programme to teach students how to use library materials. The study concluded that information resources should be made available and access should be created to enable students utilize the resources effectively.

**Keywords:** Academic Performance, Availability, Use, Library Resources, and Physically Challenged

### Introduction

Availability and use of information are fundamental human right issues as contained in articles 19 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). In this information age, there is the need, now more than ever, to equip people with skill and means to become information literate and to enable them locate, access and evaluate information without discrimination. This is in line with the major objectives of inclusive education, equality of education, education for all and library and information

service for all, which are all enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and National Policy on Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The knowledge society also demands that all citizens, including the physically challenged, should have access to full information. This is the basis for enabling people, especially the physically challenged, to participate as active citizens since they need to make informed choices and decisions and to act on them. Availability and use of relevant, accurate and current library resources and services by the physically challenged are veritable means of developing human resources and accentuating sustainable self-reliance and national development.

Human resources are most valuable resources and vital elements in the development of a country. They are the resources that can be developed, and education must be used as the most important process in building people's knowledge, experiences, skills, high moral and ethics. They all help to prepare the individuals for service and sharpen their ability to pursue a profession or trade. Education and use of information are human rights issues and they stimulate the growth in knowledge (Ritchie and Ortiz-Ospina, 2018). According to Ritchie and Ortiz-Ospina, (2018) the constant flow and exchange of knowledge through education and information is an essential ingredient for skill acquisition, behavioural change and awareness enhancement. This agrees with article one of Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and is also in line with the basic tenets of democracy, which is characterized by principle of equality, freedom of information and expression (Ayoung, Baada, and Baayel, 2021). However, there are some groups of people that seem not to have these rights and equal opportunity due to their physical, mental and social condition. These people include the physically challenged persons who are also labelled handicapped, disadvantaged or disabled.

Ponera (2015) defines physically challenged persons as people who have substantial, adverse and long term effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities. It is also seen as any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity considered normal for able-bodied persons. He also said that often

the terms ‘challenged’, ‘impairment’, ‘handicapped’ and ‘disabled’ are interchangeably used. The author anchored his definition on the World Health Organisation’s definition of disability is restriction or lack of ability to perform an activities in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. Physically challenged persons are individuals with physical or mental disabilities that have substantial adverse and long term effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities. The term “physically challenged” will be used also to refer to the WHO concepts of “impairment”, “handicap”, “disability” or a combination of disability and handicapped.

Disabilities are many including visual, hearing, mobility, cognitive and language, and speech disabilities. The ones covered in this work, which were selected because according to Chukwueke & Onuoha (2018) they are more prevalent in regular tertiary institutions, are physical and mobility impairment, visual impairment (total blindness) and hearing impairment (deaf and dumb). Physical and mobility impairment include crippling disabilities, wheel chair bound, students with crutches, amputees, students with artificial hand(s) and or leg(s) and dwarfs. The problems they encounter in the library include navigating through the library and its environment, picking books from the shelves, using other general facilities that may be designed for the able-bodied ones. The hearing impaired on their own part cannot recognise spoken words. Their characteristics include lack of response to spoken words, indifference to sounds and noise. The visually impaired on their part have visual disabilities in reading coupled with general navigation problems. Visually impaired persons may need someone to read for them. They may also have difficulty in coping with reading small print materials, especially, if impairment is partial. This category of people cannot read the conventional print materials. They need to be provided with reading materials in alternative formats, which they can read at their own, pace and time. Library services for this category of physically challenged persons require extensive resources and well-trained

staff. Visually impaired persons may depend on Braille books, talking books, sonic guide, mowart sensor etc for reading and movement around the library since movement may also pose serious challenges.

Libraries in the special schools are involved in research, teaching and learning processes. Thus, the library in special schools is set to help achieve the broad aims and objective of the institution. It is therefore imperative that every educational institution, including special schools, should have a functional library manned by a professional librarian. The student or researcher who has access to good and functional school library can learn and be judged on his skill in clarifying a problem, collecting information relative to its solution and coming up with conclusions. Such student will have acquired the basic foundation for independent learning. All these are true of all students, including the physically challenged ones. Libraries in the special schools owe it as a duty to provide special library services to persons with disabilities who like everyone else, have to be provided with relevant opportunities necessary to make them participate actively and become productive members of the society. Librarians in academic institutions must be aware of the Nigerians with Disability Decree (NWDD) which places statutory duties on organizations, including libraries, to make reasonable adjustment in the form of special library services to meet the needs of the disabled people.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The physically challenged students in special schools need library and information resources like their able-bodied counterparts. These students need to have equal access to library and information resources to meet with their academic work and other information needs. If the physically challenged students in special schools do not have equal access to and use of library and information resources, it will result in poor educational outcomes and general poor quality of life on their part. Provision and effective

use of library and information resources and services enhance the rights of the physically challenged to participate equally in societal development.

Information received during the pre-research discussion with some professional colleagues indicates that students' population in the special schools is becoming more diverse with an increasing number of physically challenged students and that school libraries do not show enough commitment to providing resources and services that will meet the needs of the students with disabilities. This fact is corroborated by the researcher's observation that the physically challenged students are not put into consideration in programme planning. Besides, few researches have been carried out on the physically challenged and library programme planning in terms of architectural designs, resources and provision of services, accessibility and utilization and there is also not much on the information services for the physically challenged special schools students. The problem of this study in question form is therefore what could be the impact of availability and use of library resources by physically challenged students for improved academic performance in selected special schools in Abuja.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the types of library resources available to the visually, mobility and hearing challenged school students in Abuja?
2. What is the extent of use of library resources by the visually, mobility and hearing challenged special school students in Abuja?
3. What are the problems encountered by these students in using library resources in the special schools under study?
4. What are the strategies to be used to alleviate the problems encountered by these visually impaired, mobility and hard to hear students in the schools under study?

## **Literature Review**

### ***Library Resources and Services***

Library resources relate to a variety of published and unpublished information materials in various forms, readable with naked eye or with an aid, usually found kept in a library for the sake of dissemination (Eze, 2014). The entire information items in the library are acquired for the provision of general information as well as research service to library users. Books, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, patents, maps, bibliographies, indexes, slides, and all other information bearing materials that can be found in a modern library which are provided in response to the information needs of users are called library resources (Eze, 2014). The quantity, nature and diversity of library resources will vary according to the size, purpose, and programme of the institution. Library resources for the physically challenged are usually made available in specialized format to suit them. In this work, library resources for the physically challenged are all information sources including the ones produced in specialized format for use by the physically challenged polytechnic students. These resources may be in print or electronic format.

Library services as defined by Eze (2014) are all those intangible offers given by a library to her clientele to ensure the full exploitation of the resources of the library in meeting their full information needs. Library service is also defined as any facility provided by a library to enhance the use of library resources and dissemination of information (Sijuola, and Davidova, 2022). According to Eze (2014) service relates to any assistance or help offered to a person to enable him or her use or take advantage or benefit from something. In this work, library services for the physically challenged relate to any assistance or help offered to the physically challenged students to enable him or her use the polytechnic library resources and facilities. The entire human and material resources in a library are put in place at considerable expense for the overall purpose of providing effective services to the library users (Eze,

2014). Library services are of paramount importance in any library programme. Ogbuehi (2012) noted that the effectiveness and efficiency of library services would to a large extent represent what the patrons perceive of the library.

### ***Physically Challenged Students***

The physically challenged students are extremely varied group of people. The disabilities may be below normal, normal or above normal. They may have a single disability or a combination of impairment. The physically challenged students are students who have substantial adverse and long-term effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities (Omede, 2015). Long term is taken to be a year or more. This definition corresponds with the definition of disability as defined by Chaputula and Mapulanga (2016), which describes disability in the following terms: “a person has a disability if he has physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”. Majinge and Stilwell (2013) also defines physically challenged persons as individuals who have any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity considered to be normal for able-bodied persons. This definition was drawn from the World Health Organization’s viewpoint. World Health Organisation (WHO) views disability using the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH), as any restriction or lack resulting from an impairment of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. The World Health Organisation sees impairment as a loss or abnormality of physiological, psychological or anatomical structure or function.

In terms of classification of disabilities, Adigun, (2018) in separate studies on people with disabilities categorized disabilities into the following.

- 1 Visual impairments (moderate, severe, blindness)

- 2 Hearing impairments (moderate, severe, deafness)
- 3 Physical or Mobility impairments (moderate, severe, cripple)
- 4 Cognitive and language impairments (moderate, severe, illiteracy)
- 5 Speech impairment (moderate, severe, dumbness)

Adigun, (2018) categorized disabled persons from the public health point of view to include the blind, the partially sighted, the deaf, hard – of – hearing, educationally subnormal, epileptics, maladjusted persons, orthopedically impaired person, person with speech defects, mentally retarded persons, persons with tuberculosis and persons with leprosy. For purpose of clarity and simplicity, the researcher will adopt the classification as proposed by (Adigun, 2018).

**Visual impairment:** Visual impairment describes the reduced function of the eye; its performance is measured by specific visual tests such as those for visual acuity, visual field, and colour vision and near vision. Visual impairment leads to visual disabilities in reading, mobility and daily living skills. There will of course be wide variability in performance in such tasks depending on degree of visual acuity and on psychological factors. Perhaps, that is why Adigun, (2018) opined that students with visual impairment pose different set of problems to the libraries and librarians. They will need good light, all their work in the library may even need individual reading lamp, may need someone to read for them; such students may also have difficulty in coping with duplicated worksheets or reading books with small prints. A further important point is to familiarize them with the library environment and layout so that they would be able to find their way about.

**Hearing impairment:** Some people cannot hear or distinguish different beeps or recognize spoken words. Such people may require a program to prompt them in different manner (Bakpo, 2014). Hearing impaired students may have some difficulty in integrating into the mainstream libraries. Much depends on the



severity of the handicap and the degree to which the student is able to follow normal speech, which also extends to how much he has learnt to cope with the hearing community. Some of the characteristics of hearing impairments include lack of response to spoken words, indifference to sounds, and lack of response to noise etc.

Olajide and Yusuf, (2009) noted that inclusion, integration or mainstreaming is a better way of providing for the deaf and involves reforming and restructuring the library to create equal access to participate in the information world. The ability of librarians to deal with hearing impaired students and other readers depended a good deal on how much they know about the problems of deafness. Librarians working with hearing impaired should also know that a student who has hard- of- hearing problem from birth might also have speech problems. These may involve not only difficulties in producing speech but also limitations in vocabulary and sentence structure.

**Physical and mobility impairment:** Physical and Mobility impairment according to Olajide, and Yusuf, (2009) are the easiest of all handicaps to recognize and physically handicapped students may have more difficulty than others in persuading people to treat them in a normal way. The very fact that someone is in a wheel chair when everybody else is standing creates a difference, which many physically handicapped people have to work hard to overcome. It is therefore important to create situations in the library for these students, which are as near to the normal as possible for them to be able to use the library. Stairs will be a problem even where a lift is installed and the library will need to consider what such students do in the event of fire outbreak if they are not on the ground floor.

### **Availability and Utilization of Library and Information Resources and Services by Physically Challenged Students**

One of the primary objectives of any library is creating access to information resources to all, including the disabled (Eze, 2014). “There is always the tendency for staff members and some library

administrators to think that their libraries do not have any user with disability because they do not see any in library; the truth of the matter is that people with disabilities live and learn everywhere” (Eskay and Chima, 2013).

Ekwelem (2013) advocated for inclusiveness and special services to provide and create access to library materials for persons with disabilities. They noted that persons with disabilities are disadvantaged and they seek for varied information on how to cope with the disabilities, educational opportunities, job and career development, bibliotherapy, social, cultural, economic and political information including sports like the able-bodied persons. Lawal-Solarin (2012) noted that information needs of persons with disabilities are by far greater than those of the able-bodied persons. They deserve to be served in a conducive, challenging and non- exclusionary environment in spite of disabilities.

Accessibility and utilization of library resources and services are key issues in library services. Equality of access and utilization of information enhance the rights of persons with disabilities to participate equally in societal development, especially with the increasing number of persons with disabilities in the society. Ilayaraja and Manoharan, (2012) reported that in a comparative analysis of census and surveys from 55 countries, the United Nations found the level of disability to be between 0.2 and 20.9 percent. Eskay and Chima (2013) also supported the case for increasing population of disabled persons when he stated that nearly 10% of the population suffers from one or more disabilities- mental, physical, hearing or visual. Ilayaraja and Manoharan, (2012) reported an estimation of about 5 to 14 percent of the population being disabled in the US by 1994 and that sums up to about 13.4 million persons who are deformed. In Nigeria, the National Population Commission (2006) in their population and housing census 2006 indicated an increasing population of disabled persons to the tune of approximately 3.48 million Nigerians. In spite of the increasing population of disabled persons, libraries seem not to be

serious about providing resources and services for the disabled patrons, perhaps because they look at them as not too important to be considered.

## **Research Method**

The design of the study is descriptive survey, which is a type of research design with the aim of collecting information or data to describe existing conditions, characteristics or phenomena using a sample of the population (Oyundoyin, 2013). This design is considered appropriate for this work because there is the need to collect data on conditions as they exist since the entire population will not be studied. This is because the population will be too large to be studied in depth and it involves a study of independent and non-manipulative variables. This also means that results from the sample will be used to generalize to the entire population. The researcher assumes that all the disabled respondents are both users and potential users of the libraries under study.

The area of study is Abuja, Nigeria. There are two special schools in the area at the time of this study. They are both owned by the government. The sample for the study was 80 physically challenged students. The data collected were analysed and presented in tables. The responses were tabulated using frequency tables and were treated by calculating simple percentages.

## **Results and Discussions of the Findings**

### **Library materials available for the visually impaired, mobility and hard at hearing students.**

**Table 1: Responses on the library materials available for visually impaired, mobility and hard at hearing students.**

S/N	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	Books	35	43.8
2	Journals	10	12.5
3	Encyclopedia	12	15

4	Talking Books	11	13.8
5	Dictionary	0	0
6	Braille Books	72	90
7	Manuals	0	0
8	Reports	0	0
9	Atlases/maps	0	0
10	Directories	0	0
11	Biographies	0	0
12	Bibliographies	0	0
13	Almanacs	0	0
14	Computers	0	0
15	Gazettes	0	0
16	Abstracts/indexes	0	0
17	Internet facilities	0	0
18	CD-ROM technology	0	0

**Source: Field Survey, 2023**

Table 1 above revealed the types of information resources available in School of the blind library. The table revealed the availability of braille books (90%), books (43.7%), Encyclopedia (15%), Talking Books (13.8%) and journals (12.5%). This implies that the information resources in the library are inadequate. In this information age the library does not have computer and internet facilities.

**Extent of use of Library resources by the visually impaired, mobility and hard at hearing students.**

**Table 2: Responses on the extent of use of library responses by the visually impaired, mobility and hard at hearing students.**

S/N	Items	VEA	EA	A	NA
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		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Braille Books	-	-	-	-	-	-	50	62.5
2	Journals	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	25
3	Encyclopedia	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	16.3
4	Talking Books	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	20
5	Dictionary	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
6	Newspaper/Magazine	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
7	Manuals	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
8	Reports	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
9	Atlases/maps	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
10	Directories	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
11	Biographies	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
12	Bibliographies	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
13	Almanacs	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
14	Computers	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
15	Gazettes	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
16	Abstracts/Indexes	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
17	Internet facilities	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
18	CD-Rom technology	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0

### Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 reveals the student's responses on accessibility of information resources available in the library. The table revealed that the available information resources in the library are not accessible with the following percentages: braille books (62.5%), journals (25%), talking books (20%) and encyclopedia (16.3%). This implies that if at all the students are using the library, they might be bringing their books to come and read. This means the students only use the library as reading room because the library's little available resources are not accessible.

### Problems encountered by these students in using library resources and services

**Table 3: Responses on problems encountered by these students in using library resources and services**

S/N	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	Lack of money to acquire library resources	32	40
2	Inadequate information materials in the library	80	100
3	Lack of qualified library staff	15	18.8
4	I don't know how to make use of some library materials like Talking Books	25	31.3
5	No library catalogue in the library	74	92.5
6	I am not aware of the information materials available in the library	80	100
7	Lack of internet facilities	80	100

**Source: Field Survey, 2023**

Table 3 above showed the students response to problems of availability and accessibility of information resources. The table indicates that the students attests to inadequate information materials in the library (100%), lack of awareness of the information materials available in the library (100%), lack of internet facilities (100%), no library catalogue in the library (92.5%), lack of money to acquire library resources (40%), lack of knowledge on how to use some information materials (31.3%), and lack of qualified library staff (18.8%).

### Strategies to alleviate the problems encountered by these visually impaired, mobility and hard to hear students

**Table 4: Responses on Strategies to alleviate the problems encountered by these visually impaired, mobility and hard to hear students**

S/N	Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1	Funds should be made available	80	100

2	Employment of more qualified library staff	32	40
3	Organization of intensive user education programme to teach Students how to use library materials	25	31.3
4	Information retrieval tools such as catalogue, abstracts, etc should be prepared to ease accessibility	74	92.5
5	Proper awareness should be created by the library on the information resources they have	80	100
6	Provision of computers and internet facilities	80	100

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**Source: Field Survey, 2023**

Table 4 above shows responses on the strategies to overcome the problems to availability and accessibility of information resources. The table reveals that the respondents attested the following strategies, funds should be made available for the procurement of library materials (100%), provision of computers and internet facilities (100%), proper awareness should be created by the library on the information resources they have (92.5%), information retrieval tools such as catalogue, abstracts, etc. should be prepared to ease accessibility (92.5%) and organization of intensive user education programme to teach students how to use library materials (31.3%).

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The library should ensure proper organization of library materials and adequate preparation of retrieval tools such as catalogue, and abstracting services, etc. capable of locating each resource available in the library.

2. The library should organize user education programme to inculcate information utilization skills into students. This should focus on how to make effective use of library materials in the library, how to use the library catalogue, and how to locate a book on the shelves as well as how to use the internet.
3. Library services require professionally competent staff to meet the needs of the community. Greater emphasis should be laid on the appointment of trained staff, training and re-training of the staff to build on the knowledge acquired to meet with their duty.

## Conclusion

Students require quality information resources in order to learn effectively and undertake research. The global growth of information resources in print and electronic formats means that students also need quality information resources that could help them identify, access and use the required information resources. Libraries are expected to provide such resources which when used effectively by students would translate into improve learning effectiveness and quality products. Therefore, information resources should be made available and access should be created to enable students utilize the resources effectively.

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