

**PROVISION OF INCLUSIVE LIBRARY SERVICES FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING  
AMONG PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES:  
ISSUES AND WAY FORWARD**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to determine how inclusive academic library services are to the people living with disabilities. It also discussed the resources needed to render inclusive services which include provision of Braille books, talking books, large print materials and screen magnifier. Provision of these materials would support inclusive circulation service; inclusive reference services as well as inclusive internet services respectively. Academic libraries are facing challenges in rendering inclusive services as a result of library architectural design, absences of relevant reading materials, lack of experts to communicate with some of these physically challenged people, absence of relevant electronic devices which hinder provision of effective services to support their learning. The paper equally made some recommendations on how to counter such challenges by development of policies that will guide the provision of library services to people with disabilities, allocation of enough money in budget to procure relevant equipments and resources to support people with disabilities.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Library Services, Academic libraries, Users with Disabilities

**Introduction**

Information is crucial to all people and provision of library services to all users without discrimination is one of the main agenda of libraries in this 21<sup>st</sup> 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 center 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 disability is refer to any physical limitations of a person which inhibits him to carry out some functions independently. Common physical disabilities include blindness, deafness, dumbness, retardation, muscular, nervous, and sensory disorders. According to Abubakar (2020) define Physically 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. According to American Library Association (ALA) (1939) code of ethics, one of the ethical principles that guide the work of librarians is to provide “the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous response to all requests”.

In addition, 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 call 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 to providing equal access to all categories of students, whether normal or challenged users. As more people with disability attend institutions of higher learning, it is expedient for the library management to provide the same level of service to all its users without discrimination. On this note, therefore, it was the interest of this study to determine the need for provision of inclusive library services in academic libraries for effective learning among people living with disability.

### **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. Libraries need to provide alternative registration forms such as Braille application and application forms that can be completed using typewriters and some other measures. This can go a long way in giving the students with disabilities sense of belonging. Libraries should not create a separate section where the information resources for the handicapped are kept, as this will make them feel rejected. Their materials

must be in the same hall with other information resources. This will encourage them to keep visiting the library with their colleagues. Provisions should be made for order of library materials through telephone, book reservations and renewals.

*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. Ideally, the reference staff needs adequate sensitization on how to attend to the needs of these set of users in order not to scare them away from visiting the library. On the part of the reference librarian, his services to students with disabilities need serious commitment so as to be able to meet with their information needs.

*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 needs 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.

*5. 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 a 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.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made in view of the challenges so far highlighted:

- i. Provision of materials in different formats like Braille, large print materials and audio textbooks so that the visually and hearing impaired can use whenever they are using the library.
- ii. Provision of toilets that can accommodate physically challenged students especially the mobility impaired.
- iii. Provision of shelves, tables and chairs of good height especially for the mobility impaired and those with short height.
- iv. Development of policies that will guide the provision of library services to physically challenged students.
- v. Allocate enough money in the budgets for the procurement of equipment's and resources for the physically challenged students.

## **Conclusion**

Students living with disability have the same information needs as every other student in the academic environment, but they need a more convenient format to access that information from the library. Academic libraries should try and be inclusive in their provision of information resources and services as well, to make these set of students feel at home whenever they visit the library.

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