

Addressing inaccessibility to Library services. Perspectives of students with visual impairment in a Nigerian University.

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The problem of access to library services for students with visual impairment in African countries has been noted by several authors (Ekwelem (2013), Ayoung, Baada & Baayel (2021) and Aubrey & Mapulanga, (2016)). In response to many of the problems people with visual impairment encounter in libraries, the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) in 2016 endorsed the Marrakesh treaty and encouraged other libraries to adopt it to minimize the key barriers to access to information experienced by people with visual impairment. In line with this, many academic libraries in Nigeria, notably, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library University of Nigeria, Nsukka modified existing services and introduced new ones to cater for the interest of students with visual impairment. However, since the introduction of the new services, there has not been any assessment of the new services to determine the extent to which the services have been able to meet the expectations of students with visual impairment or conform to the specifications by IFLA. This study is an attempt to address this issue.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study is to examine the services rendered at the Special Needs Section, (SNS) Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) in line with the IFLA guide for library services to patrons with visual disability. Specifically, the study will:

- a. Identify the resources available in the Special Needs Section, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- b. Identify the services available at the special Needs Section (SNS), Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria (UNN), Nsukka.
- c. Ascertain if the services of the SNS, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library are related to the IFLA guideline on Library services to people with print disabilities/visual impairment.
- d. Find out if the services of the SNS meet the expectations of students with visual impairment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

IFLA GUIDELING ON LIBRARY SERVICES TO PEOPLE WITH PRINT DISABILITIES

IFLA guide line on Library services to students with print disabilities. The IFLA access to Libraries for persons with disabilities stipulates various services which libraries can offer to persons with different disabilities. For students with visual impairment (print disabilities), the guideline recommended the following:

Physical access

- a. A person with disability (Visual impairment) can walk with a guide can or dog and find his way into the library without bumping into obstacles.
- b. People with disabilities (Visual impairment) should arrive at the library, approach the library building easily and safely.
- c. The access path to the library should be well lighted and unobstructed.
- d. The entrance to the library should be smooth and none slippery
- e. There should be railing at both sides of the ramp
- f. The library entrance should have glass doors marked to warn visually impaired persons
- g. Stairs and steps should be marked with contrasting colors
- h. Well lighted elevators with buttons ans signs in braille and synthetic speech.
- i. There should be no door steps. All doors should have automatic openers

Physical Library Space

- a. Chairs should have sturdy arm rest
- b. There should be visible and audible fire alarm
- c. The library should have trained staff to assist patrons in case of emergency
- d. The library should have at least one toilet dedicated to persons with disabilities
- e. The toilet should have mirror and wash hand basin
- f. Accessible self-service circulation desk

Materials in the library

- a. Talking books, newspapers, periodicals, easy to read books, E-books, Braille books, large print books and tactile picture books.
- b. Comfortable sitting area with bright lights
- c. A colored (yellow for visibility) tactile line leading to this special department
- d. Tape recorders
- e. CD Player
- f. Digital Audio Information System (DAISY) and other equipment to complement the audio-visual collection.
- g. Magnifying glass, illuminated magnifier, electronic reader or closed circuit television
- h. Computers with screen adopters and software designed for persons with reading and cognitive disabilities
- i. Accessible computers
- j. Designated computers equipped ith screen reading programs, enlargement and synthetic speech
- k. Staff capable of instructing customers in the use of computers
- l. Technical support for computers and adaptive equipment

Services and Communication

- a. Clear communication between staff and patrons.
- b. Patrons feel welcomed in the library
- c. Staff are knowledgeable in various types of disabilities
- d. Staff communicate directly with the person with disabilities and not with the care givers

- e. Emails are used to create awareness of new services to patrons
- f. Information about services to special groups are included in orientation package for new staff
- g. Library website is accessible to patrons with visual impairment

Special services to patrons with disabilities.

- a. Reading services for patrons with reading difficulties (E.g short texts, letters, instructions, articles on tapes or CD0 or scanning texts to make them accessible on a computer with screen reader.
- b. Regularly scheduled consultations for persons with disabilities
- c. Guided tours of the library for both individuals and groups of perosns with special needs in the library (IFLA, 2005).

NNAMDI AZIKIWE LIBRARY UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka was opened in 1960, the same year the University came into being. The library took off from two tiny rooms in the Faculty of Education. At inception, the library has about 12,000 books donated by the first Chancellor of the University, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe. Between 1964 and 1967, about 20,000 volumes were added to the collection annually. In 1977, the library moved to a newer purposely build accommodation (UNN, 1986). As the collection kept growing, the library moved to a more spacious gigantic purposely build accommodation in 2009. The new Library building is the largest in West Africa. It has three floors and a basement. It has links to other libraries. It also has internet connectivity and a dedicated stand by electric generating plant.

Currently, the library has 350,000 book titles, 5000 journals titles, 2500 computers located in three computer laboratories and 140 staff. 10 out of the 140 staff has PhD. The library subscribes to various databases such as HINARI, AGORA, Science direct etc (Eke-Okpala, Ekwelem and Anazodo, 2014). The Library's website is linked to various free on-line databases such as Z-Library, DOAJ, DOAB The library has eight divisions (Collection development, Technical Services, Public services, Special collection, bindery, Special IT, Institutional repository and physically challenged & branch libraries) and many sections for effective management of its services.

The Special needs section was one of the sections of the library in the branch libraries division. The section was created in the year 2016 by the then University Librarian, Prof. Chinwe Ezeani. The increasing number of people with disabilities in the university and the need to ensure that the information needs of every member of the University community is taken care of by the library necessitate the creation of the section.

LIBRARIES SERVING PATRONS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT.

There is dearth of Literature on Libraries serving patrons with disabilities as regards the objectives of this study. Below is available literature on the topic to the best of the researcher's knowledge

Library resources found in Libraries offering services to visually impaired patrons.

Various resources can be found in Libraries serving people with visual impairment. Among these resources are Web based resources. Tsaneva (2018) described Web based resources as electronic repositories of knowledge. Tsaneva opined that these electronic repositories of knowledge offer real time access to numerous digitized libraries that store valuable data from different aspects of human knowledge. Hadjerrouit (2010) identified Web based resources as internet resources which includes study materials in specific subjects and lessons, task-based activities and exercises, examples and assessment procedures. These resources continued Hadjerrouit, can be created to support learning at all levels.

Apart from Web based learning resources, there are other resources that can be found in libraries offering services to visually impaired people. Abdelrahman (2016) mentioned tape recorders, computers, braille embosser, scanners and magnifiers as some of the resources available at the Audio Library of the Blind, University of Khartoun, Sudan. Ayoung, Baada and Baayel included talking books, braille books and large print books among the resources that should be available in libraries serving people with visual impairment.

Library services available in Libraries serving people with visual impairment.

The following services were listed by Abdelrahman (2016) as services available in the Audio Library of the Blind Khartoun. Listening to audio tape cassettes which consist mainly of recorded academic material; reading of books and journals written in braille; recording of written lectures notes (which is carried out by volunteers); conducting of training courses in computer skills and braille; listening to talking books; browsing the internet and borrowing services, mainly of cassettes and material written in braille. Human support services such as staff helping patrons to access materials from the library was also mentioned as available.

RESEARCH METHOD.

This study is a qualitative study that employed descriptive design. Interview (Both focus group and one on one) and checklist were used to generate data. Students with visual impairment who are registered members of the library and library staff working at the Special Needs section of the University library served as respondents to interview questions. Three sets of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were held with the students while one on one interview was held with the four staff working in the Special Needs Section (SNS). Both the focus group interview and the one-on-one interview were based on interview guides prepared by the researcher. Invitation to participate in the FGD were sent to the students through the Association of Students with disabilities WhatsApp group platform. Out of the Seventy-six registered library users with visual impairment, fifty-six turned out for the FGD. The three sets of interviews were named Focus group interview group A, B and C. Participants were permitted to feature in only one group. Groups A and B have 20 students each as participants while group C has only 16 participants. The focus group participants were given coded names using Arabic numerals. Thus for Focus Group Discussion A (FGDA), there are participants 1,2,3,4,5,...20. The roman numerals are denoted in superscript numbers. Thus we have FGDA^{1,2,3,4,5,...20}, FGDB^{1,2,3,4,5,...20} and FGDC^{1,2,3,4,5,...16}. The interview spanned for three days. Each group used two hours within a day. The focus group discussions were held between the hours of 4:00 – 6:00 pm at the SNS.

One on one interview with staff of the SNS were held at the section too. The staff were notified of the interview through a text message by the researcher. Through phone text message, the interviewees informed the interviewer of the time and date of the interview. The interview was meant to elicit from staff, their skill in service delivery to people with disabilities, services available in the section and the nature of their relationship with the students. The IFLA guideline on Library Services for people with print disabilities forms the basis for the interview and assessment of the services of the SNS. The researcher read the guideline carefully, identified and sifted out all recommended services for people with print disabilities (Visual impairment). During the FGD, the research would read out a portion of the recommended services and give the students time to determine if such services exist in the Special needs' library.

Checklist was used to confirm the responses of the staff of the section on resources available for service delivery to students with print disabilities. Items on the checklist were derived from the IFLA guideline on Library Services to people with print disabilities.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS.

Demographic information of the respondents.

Among the 56 respondents that participated in the FGD,43 were males while 13 are females. 16 are in their fourth year of study, 18 in third year, 9 in second year and 13 in first year. 12 are in the faculty of education, 20 in the faculty of Arts and 24 in the social sciences. 8 are between the ages of 17 -21, 16 between the ages of 22 -26 age range, 20 between the ages of 27-31 and 12 between the ages of 32 and above. All the students acquired visual impairment after birth.

Among the 4 staff that were engaged in one-on-one interview, three were females and one male. One staff was between the ages of 35-40 years of age and three were between the ages of 55-60. One of the staff is visually impaired.

Resources available at the Special Needs Section, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Responses from the focus group discussion and one on one interview with staff on resources available in the SNS, show that the resources available include laptop computers, scanners, Perkins braille printers, braille embosser, braille books, laser printers, wheel chairs and guide canes. Checklist on the resources available also confirmed the availability of the aforementioned items. However, the checklist observed that braille books available in the section are more of religious books such as the bible and pleasure reading materials like novels. There are no braille books on the core subject areas of the students. Checklist observed also that though Perkins's printers are available in the library, braille papers to use the printers were not available. Commenting on available resources in the library, participant FGC⁶ noted that "though the library possesses dedicated computers, Laser and braille printers for students use, the students have to provide papers for themselves to use these equipment".

Services of the Special Needs Section.

Responses from Focus group discussion and one on one interview with staff show that the services available in the Special needs section for students with visual impairment are library in a box (collection of digitized core subject textbooks), learning materials search and retrieval from the library either through the shelves or download from the internet, digital literacy training, computer loan, printing services, guide cane loan, reading, recording and scanning services. The section also provides drinking water for the students, maintains clean and comfortable toilet services and helps the students to source and fill out scholarship forms. On several occasions too, the staff have to drive the students to bus terminals or their hostels after library hours especially on rainy days. Commenting on the services of the library, FGB² said, "the services of the section are good and encouraging". " FGB³ added "it is the services we receive in the library that made us to love coming to the library otherwise, some of our departments have reading room where we can read". However, continued FGB³ "there is no internet connectivity in the SNS, providing internet data for ourselves is eating deep into our pockets".

Relatedness of the services of the section to the recommendations of the IFLA guideline on Library Services to people with visual impairment.

Responses to this question show that some of the recommended services are available, some are not available while some are irrelevant. For instance, as recommended by IFLA, students with visual impairment can walk with a guide cane or dog and find their way into the library without bumping into any obstacle. Commenting on this, FGDC⁴ said "once I enter the library compound, I have no problem, I can find my way into the library with minimal assistance".

The library has trained, dedicated and knowledgeable staff in disabilities issues; comfortable furniture (tables and chairs) as recommended by IFLA. There are computers with screen readers, reading and scanning services are available. Information about new services is circulated to patrons through their personal emails. There are two neat toilets dedicated to students with disabilities. However, services such as glass doors marked to warn visually impaired persons that they are close to a door are lacking. There are no fire extinguishers, technical support for computer and other information systems uses, no orientation program for students and the students has no access to the library website. Services such as loan of CD and tape recorders are also lacking.

The services of braille books talking books, large print books, newspaper and periodicals are considered irrelevant. FGDA¹ said “at this level, I preferred reading materials in digital format. They are quite easy to move about with compared to braille books, even though accessing them is eating deep into my pocket”.

Interview with staff show that the University library has internet connectivity which was not extended to the SNS. Responses to interview questions show also that none of the four staff of the SNS has formal training on Library Services to students with visual impairment. Two of the staff who are PhD holders specialized in areas related to library services to students with disabilities. One of the staff, who holds Nigerian Certificate of Education (NCE) said, “I am here based on my interest to work with students with disabilities, it is my interest to be a force in modelling students with disabilities into independent human beings”.

Student perception of the services of the Special Needs Library

Responses on students’ perception of the services of the SNS differs based on library use background of the students. Some of the students who have had the opportunity of using other libraries meant for students with visual impairment felt that the services of the library are not very adequate. FGDC⁵ commented “this library is more of a comfortable reading room to us. We need internet to access materials but the library has no internet connectivity”. Lack of internet connectivity denies us access to the library portal and institutional repository” chirped in FGC⁹. This Library when compared to other special libraries such as the Special Library of the Blind at Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria cannot be said to be a special library. At the Special Library for the Blind Awka, reading materials are accessible in alternative format, there are railings at both sides of the ramp leading to the library and well lighted stairs with signs in braille and synthetic speech. Moreover, technical assistance in trouble shooting computers is readily available.

Others who probably, have not had the opportunity of using Digital Libraries for the Blind, the SNS is good and serves their purposes. Commenting on the services of the SNS, FGB⁴ said “apart from lack of internet, I have no problem in the library”.

Responses on the relationship between the patrons of the Special Needs Library and Students with visual impairment show that there is a cordial relationship between the two groups though at times misunderstanding eschew. FGA⁵ commented “the staff are good to us. They listen to

us and show us respect. They come to work early and leave late”. Corroborating the comments of FGA⁵, FGB¹¹ said, “I come to this school an illiterate in computer use. It is here at the SNS that I learnt how to manipulate the computer. The staff are always ready to teach and coach you”. Commenting still on the quality of the staff, FGC⁹ said “the attention the staff give us is over whelming, they help us retrieve reading materials from the library, scan it into our computers, read for us at the library and even at Computer Based Exams (CBE), they help us source out scholarship information and process scholarship forms.

However, some other responses show that not all the students are happy with the staff and their services. For instance, FGB⁸ had a different feeling. At times. commented FGB⁸, I do not like how the staff treat my friends especially when they feel that my friends are dressed in a non-conventional manner. They will shout on the person and ask the person to leave the SNS. I believe the staff mix religion with professionalism”.

Discussion.

Findings from the study show that resources available in the SNS for students with visual impairment include computers, scanners, braille printer, braille books, laser printer and braille embosser. Some of these resources are among the resources mentioned by Abdelrahman (2016) as available in the Audio Library for the blind, Khartoun, Sudan. However, braille embosser which is available at the SNS, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka is not available at the Audio Library of the blind, Khartoun. In the same vein, the internet facilities which users with visual impairment enjoyed at the Audio library of the blind is not available at the SNS, UNN. Commenting on the unavailability of internet resources in the library FGB³ said “there is no internet connectivity in the SNS, providing internet data for ourselves is eating deep into our pockets”.

Findings on the services available at the SNS, UNN show that services available include library in a box (a collection of digitized content on core text books in different disciplines), learning material search and retrieval from the library either through the shelves or download from the internet, digital literacy training, computer loan, printing services, guide cane loan etc. Many of these services are among the ones mentioned by Abdelrahman (2016) as available in Audio Library of the blind Khartoun.

Conclusion

Finding from this study show that the Special Needs Section, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka has learning resources such as computers, printers, scanners, guide canes etc. The services of the section include library in a box, reading, recording and scanning services. The section also offers digital literacy training sot students, maintains clean and comfortable toilet facilities and provides drinking water for students to mention but a few.

Some of the services recommended by IFLA guideline on Library Services to Students with visual impairment are available in the library. Such services include availability of trained and knowledgeable staff in disabilities issues, comfortable chairs, reading materials in alternative format. Some other services recommended for people with visual impairment such as glass door marked to warn students with visual impairment that they are close to a door are lacking. There are no fire extinguishers, technical support for computers and other information systems, no orientation program for fresh men with visual impairment. Recommended services such as Compact Disk (CD) and tape recorders loan are lacking too.

Some of the services recommended by IFLA were considered irrelevant by the students. These include provision of braille books, talking books, large print books and newspapers. The perception of the students on the services of the library differed based on their library use background. For those who are using the services of a library for the first time, the services of the library are adequate. But for some, who have had the privilege of visiting other digital libraries for the blind such as the one at Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria, the services of the library are not very much adequate.

Based on these findings, the research concludes that the services of the Special Needs Section, Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka are still evolving and are consistent with the IFLA guidelines on library services to people with visual impairment. The services of the library are still evolving because the library is still in its infancy stage having been opened in 2017. The students perceived the library as a place for learning enjoyment because of its service

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Results

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