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A Survey of Library and Information Services to Physically-Challenged Students in Academic Libraries in Ogun State, Nigeria

[Esther Opeola Lawal-Solarin](#)

Centre for Learning Resources
Covenant University Library
Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Introduction

The importance of information to the success of any academic institution should not be underestimated. Ukpanah (2006) affirms that in an academic community, information is used for learning, teaching, research and leisure. Information according to Ajiboye and Tella (2007), is used primarily for academic purposes. These findings agree with Kakai et.al (2004), when they observed that students information-seeking behaviours promote academic excellence. Mabawonku (2005) highlights ways in which students seek for information, which include colleagues, the internet, library, friends, family members, etc. Furthermore, Akinade and Ogunyade (2002) and Onohwakpor (2007) asserted that valuable information to students determines to a very large extent their success and future development. Sequel to this, it is imperative for Academic libraries, which are attached to tertiary institutions to support the Teaching, Learning and Research processes in such institutions. Students, according to Adesina (2003), have been found to be majority of library users in an academic library. Hence, Popoola (2008) affirmed that the information resources and services available in institutional information systems must be capable of supporting research activities among students and faculty members. These students could be challenged or normal library users. The challenged students will need assistance while in the library but the normal students may need little or no assistance. Onifade and Sowole (2009) quoting Ojo rightly noted that, for libraries to add to the advancement of knowledge, they must not only provide resources but also ensure that the resources are effectively used. In this regard, academic libraries should be committed to providing equal access to all categories of students, whether normal or challenged. Therefore this paper attempts to look at information availability and services provided the physically challenged students (students using wheelchair, crutches, and braces for mobility) to the library, in eight academic libraries in Ogun state, Nigeria, their accessibility to the library and the problems they encountered.

Nigeria and the Challenged or Disabled

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that there are approximately 19million disabled people in Nigeria. Furthermore, Yeo,(2005); Barron and Amerena et.al (2007) affirms that disabled people constitute one of the poorest, socially excluded and marginalised groups within the Nigerian society. On 30th March, 2007 the Government of Nigeria signed the UN Convention on the rights of persons with Disabilities, yet, no disability discrimination legislation has been enacted within Nigeria despite the fact that two bills have been introduced into National Assembly. Also, the common view, held by policy makers and the

public at large, is that disabled people and disability issues are Charity and Welfare matters and not Human rights. (DFID 2008). Findings by Okoli (2005) also corroborated this and in his findings he revealed that disabled people in Nigeria are living in an environment that is hostile to their yearnings and aspirations.

Physically Challenged

Lawal-Solarin (2010) in an article titled Banks and the Physically Challenged quoted MSN Encarta Dictionary which defines physically challenged as an inability to perform some or all the tasks of daily life or a medically diagnosed condition that makes it difficult to engage in the activities of daily life. According to the World Book Encyclopaedia (2004), "some people are born with disabilities, while others develop them later in life. There are however, many types of challenges or disabilities; both physical and mental, and they vary greatly in causes, degrees and treatments. Common disabilities include blindness, deafness, and deformity, loss of limbs, mental illness, mental retardation, muscular, nervous and sensory disorders".

Literature Review

Okoye (2010) submitted that in situations where a challenged person is not able to cope, it results in stereotyping, derogatory labelling and depersonalization. This opinion was supported by Adesokan (2003) when he noted that most challenged persons suffer rejection, isolation, and maltreatment from other members of the society. He opined that challenged persons are shown negative attitudes and in the Traditional Yoruba society terms such as Abirun meaning handicap, Didinrin meaning imbecile, Abami meaning strange person, and Alawoku meaning mentally imbalance are used to refer to them. They are seen as objects of ridicule, shame and pity.

However, there is a great deal of disagreement as to what should be considered offensive or derogatory by people with or without disabilities, Wikipedia (2010) noted that views vary with geography and culture, over time, and among individuals. Furthermore, terms such as, "retarded" and "lame" are said to be deliberate insult. Also the term "wheelchair-bound" is inherently negative. Yet another term "Mongolism" is based on stereotypical ideas of certain groups of individuals with disabilities. The word "handicapped" is considered by some people to be derogatory, while others see it as a synonym for "a person with a disability", and it is still used by some people with disabilities. Certain people are offended by such terms, while others are offended by the replacement of such terms with what they consider to be euphemisms (e.g. 'differently able or 'special needs'). In addition, some insidious words such as retarded, invalid, sufferer, defect etc can cause harm to them. (DADHC Connections). Finally, Some people believe that terms should be avoided if they might offend people, while others hold the listener responsible for misinterpreting terms used in a non-offensive context.(Wikipedia 2010). In view of these, this study adopts the term physically challenged.

The physically challenged as students encountered barriers in their quest for education. Viney (2006) rightly notes that they encounter physical access limitations such as retrieving books from the library shelves. Okoli (2010), observed horrors of architectural buildings which have discouraged many challenged persons from having education. Bradley (2006) opined that challenged students start out with the same qualifications and aspiration as normal students, but because they encounter barriers, they perform poorer. Crisp (2002) affirms that, disability can lead to frustration in some cases, and can adversely degenerate to a level that an individual may not be able to actualize his aspirations. Moreover, the inability to cope portray them as helpless, mindless, suffering and deserving sympathy and alms. However, Babar et al.(2004), Elzubeir et al., (2010) concluded that factors such as age, gender, type of disability etc determine the coping strategy adopted by challenged individual.

Information Needs of Physically-Challenged Students

On the issues of coping with disability and relevance of Information to the physically challenged, Adesina (2003) itemised the under listed as the information needs of the physically challenged:

1. Information for educational development: This is of paramount importance. As a student, additional information would be needed to build on what was taught in the classroom.
2. Information for social and personal development: Information is needed on assistive devices that could aid mobility.
3. Information for recreational purposes: These may include materials for light reading.

Focus of the Study

Physically challenged students (PCS) who are using assistive devices such as the wheelchair, Crutches and Braces for mobility are the focus of this research. Eight Tertiary Institutions in Ogun State, South West, Nigeria were randomly selected and used as case study. These Institutions are Babcock University, Illisan (BABCOCK); Bells University of Technology,

Ota (Bellstech); Crescent University, Abeokuta (CUA) Covenant University, Ota (CU), Redeemer's University (RUN), University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (UNAAB), Moshood Abiola Polytechnic (MAPOLY), Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro (FEDPOLY).

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine information availability and services provided for the physically challenged students in the institutions under study.
2. To examine accessibility of the physically challenged students to the library and library resources in the institutions under study.
3. To identify problems confronting the physically challenged students in the academic libraries in Ogun state

Methodology

This researcher adopted the use of questionnaire and interview methods to elicit responses from physically challenged students in eight tertiary institutions in Ogun state, Nigeria. It is to be noted however, that four institutions, Bells university of Technology, Ota, Crescent University, Abeokuta, Moshood Abiola polytechnic, Abeokuta and Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro do not have physically challenged students amongst their student population.

Personal discussions with heads of Libraries, hall representatives, student affairs officers and the administrative officers in the eight institutions visited affirmed my findings. A total number of 24 questionnaires were filled and returned by the physically challenged students in the other four universities.

Findings

The Demographic Data are as follows:

Table 1 : DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY SEX

SEX	NO OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Male	23	95.8
Female	1	4.2
Total	24	100

Table 1 reveals that 23 (95.8%) of the respondents are male, while the remaining one (4.2%) respondent is female. This confirms the finding of Baron & Emeranel et.al (2007), that in Nigeria, the number of disabled children in school is desperately low as a result of insurmountable barriers they faced in their quest for education. Perhaps one may deduce that the female physically challenged do encounter greater challenges.

TABLE 2 : TYPES OF CHALLENGE AND NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

S/N	Type of Challenge	NO OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
1	Wheelchair	2	8.3
2	Crutches	19	79.2
3	Braces	3	12.5
TOTAL 24			100.0

The analysis of the above table 2 depicts that 2(8.3%) of the respondents are using wheelchairs for mobility, while 19(79.2%) of the respondents are on crutches and 3(12.5%) of the respondents are on braces.

The finding above confirms Bradley (2006) that all physically challenged students are not the same. So different solutions to the barriers they faced are needed.

TABLE 3 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTIONS OF RESPONDENTS BY INSTITUTION

S/N	INSTITUTION	NO OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
1	UNAB	16	66.7%
2	BU	3	12.5%
3	CU	3	12.5%
4	RUN	2	8.3%
5	BELLSTECH	Nil	Nil
6	CUA	Nil	Nil
7	MAPOLY	Nil	Nil
8	FEDPOLY	Nil	Nil
	TOTAL	24	100.0

Table 3 above shows the six academic libraries visited in Ogun State; 16 (66.7%) of the respondents are students at the University of Agriculture Abeokuta (UNAB). One of them is a female respondent in wheelchair while the remaining 15 male respondents use crutches. Babcock University (BU) has 3 (12.5%) of the respondents. One of them is a female respondent in wheelchair, while another is a male respondent using Crutches and the third one is a male respondent using Braces. Covenant University (CU) has 3 (12.5%) of the respondents, 2 male respondents use crutches while the remaining male respondent uses braces. Redeemer University (RUN) has 2 (12.5%) of the respondents. One is a male respondent using wheelchair while the other male respondent uses crutches. Bells University of Technology (BELLSTECH), Crescent University (CUA), Moshood Abiola Polytechnic (MAPOLY), and Federal Polytechnic (FEDPOLY) respectively do not have physically challenged students.

From this table 16 out of the 24 respondents are from UNAAB which is a federal institution while the remaining numbers are shared among 3 other institutions that are privately owned. One may wish to observe that this may have to do with the unwillingness of parents or guardians to invest much money in the training of the physically challenged as federal and public institutions are almost "free" in comparison with the private. Furthermore in my discussion with a female deputy-registrar at UNAAB, she disclosed that the University has a policy of giving preferential admission to physically-challenged students.

TABLE 4: RESPONDENTS USE OF LIBRARY

USAGE OF THE LIBRARY	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Occasionally	21	87.5%

Regularly	3	12.5%
Total	24	100.0

Table 4 shows that 21 (87.5%) of the respondents use the library occasionally while the remaining 3 (12.5%) respondents use it regularly. This may be due to the frustration encountered in using the library and its resources.

Access to Information Sources

The librarians in the four Universities with physically challenged students provided information on the type of information sources available in their libraries while the physically-challenged students rated the accessibility with the highest point of A and lowest E. Responses are shown below:

TABLE 5: ACCESS TO INFORMATION SOURCES

S/N	INFORMATION SOURCES	A Very Good	B Good	C Very Fair	D Fair	E Poor
1	Text books	3 12.5%	2 8.3%	1 4.2%	2 8.3%	16 66.7%
2	Journals	4 16.7%	3 12.5%	2 8.3%	3 12.5%	12 33.3%
3	Abstract & Indexes	2 8.3%	1 4.2%	1 4.2%	4 16.7%	16 66.7%
4	Theses/Dissertations	1 4.2%	2 8.3%	—	3 12.5%	18 75%
5	CD Rom	2 8.3%	—	2 8.3%	1 4.2%	19 79.2%
6	OPAC	3 12.5%	2 8.3%	1 4.2%	2 8.3%	16 66.7%
7	Online bibliographic sources	1 4.2%	4 16.7%	—	5 20.8%	14 58.3%
8	Audio – Visual Materials	2 8.3%	3 12.5%	2 8.3%	5 20.8%	12 50%

Table 5 above indicates the available information sources provided in the four institutions. .It was found out that the largest number of respondents 16 (66.7%) rated accessibility to textbooks to be poor while, the largest number 12(50%) of the respondents, found accessibility to Journals in their libraries to be poor. In the rating for Abstract and Indexes 16(66.7%) of the respondents found accessibility to Abstract and Indexes poor. At the same time, 18 (75%) rated accessibility to theses and dissertations poor. In addition, 19(79.2%)

16(66.7%), and 14(58.3%) rated accessibility to CD Rom, OPAC and online bibliographical sources as poor respectively while 12 (50%) of the respondents rated accessibility to audio-visual materials poor.

The inference drawn from the above data shows that accessibility to information sources available to respondents in the various libraries under study are poor. This explains while majority of the respondents 21 (87.5%) use the library occasionally while only 3 (12.5%) use it regularly as shown in table 4. The respondents are not adequately catered for. Thus, the conclusion drawn is that normal students are at greater advantage over the physically challenged. Though the library services provided in the four universities are useful for their studies, the respondents cannot make use of them because of their challenges.

Hence, the data collaborates the view of Popoola (2001) that information availability does not mean accessibility and use. Iyoro (2004) affirms accessibility as one of the pre-requisites of information use. Seth and Parida (2006), Ugwu (2008), Nnadozie et.al (2008) cautioned that availability of information resources and service does not automatically translate to information accessibility and use. Also, Ugah (2008) opined that the more accessible information sources are, the more likely they are to be used.

Information Services Provided

The librarian in the four universities with physically challenged students provided information on the type of services available in their libraries while the physically challenged students indicated the usage of the services as shown in the table below :

Table 6 : INFORMATION SERVICES PROVIDED

S/N	Information Services	Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Abstracting and Indexing	8	33.3
2	Binding services	10	41.7
3	Current Awareness Services	5	20.8
4	Computer Services	7	29.2
5	Internet Services	8	33.3
6	Interlibrary Loan Services	--	—
7	Lending	6	25
8	Photocopying Service	8	33.3
9	References	4	16.7
10	Reservation	5	20.8

On usage of the services provided 8(33.3%) of the respondents indicated the usage of Abstracting and indexing, while 10(41.7%) indicated binding services. 5(20.8%) indicated current awareness services and 7(29.2%) indicated computer services while 8(33.3%) indicated the usage of internet services. However, 6(25%) indicated lending, 8(33.3%) indicated photocopying service, 4(16.7%) indicated reference service and only 5(20.8) indicated reservation service.

There are staircases at the entrances and inside the libraries visited. The ramps leading to some library buildings do not lead to the main entrance of the library. The librarians consulted said, the ramps were for rolling the trolley of newly acquired books in and out of the library. Some of the respondents in 100, 200 and 300 levels said they have not visited the library since they have been on campus. They depend on friends, some lecturers, books acquired and their personal laptops. These findings agree with Okoli (2010), which states that people with disability face insurmountable barriers in their quest for education.

Table 7 : MOST IMPORTANT SERVICE NEEDED BY RESPONDENTS

The respondents were asked the most important service needed out of the services available in individual library.

S/N	MOST IMPORTANT SERVICE	TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE %	TOTAL FREQUENCY PERCENTAGE
1.	Internet	24	100%	24 100%
2.	Lending	18	75%	24 100%
3.	Retrieving Lib Materials	15	62.5%	24 100%
4.	Using Photocopier	20	83.3%	24 100%

5.	Reservation	21	87.5%	24%
				100%

Table 7 shows that all the 24 (100%) respondents have one challenge or the other in accessing the internet. 18 (75%) of the respondents found borrowing of library materials difficult. While 15(62.5%) of the respondents could not retrieve library materials from the shelves. Majority, 20 (83.3%) of the respondents have found the use of photocopier as challenge in their respective libraries This is because of the usually long queue of students waiting to be attended to. Finally, 21 (87.5%) respondents found reservation of library materials challenging.

Table 8: BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED

Table 8 shows that 20 (83.3%) of the respondents encounter Physical or Environmental barrier to gain access or use the library. 18 (75%) encounter Attitudinal Barrier while 24 (100%) of the respondents do encounter Technological Barrier. Accessibility according to Iyoro (2004) has been identified as one of the pre-requisites of information use. But all the libraries visited were designed essentially to cater for normal students rather than the challenged. There are no ramps, no elevators, Moreover, all the libraries extended to upper floors. Some are with bad railings. In addition, most of the libraries are not spacious for students on wheelchairs to move around. Redeemer University library has low shelves, others are with high shelves. Though the chairs and tables in almost all the libraries visited are comfortable for the challenged but University of Agriculture has plastic chairs and tables for library users. Ramps in front of the library buildings stop at the corridors.

Conclusion

Based on the above findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

The physically challenged students are not adequately taken care of in the institutions of higher learning. From their responses to questionnaires distributed to them it was evident that they suffer a lot of deprivation. Their interests were never taken into consideration even in the architectural designs of the libraries. Physical access is the success and the source of opportunity in Education. Hence, accessibility is a civil right for the challenged. The federal and state governments need to enunciate policies that address the barriers faced by the physically-challenged in their quest to be educated. Moreover, the government of Nigeria should have a human right approach rather than a charity or welfare approach to disability issues.

Recommendations

In order not to frustrate students on braces, crutches and wheelchair in their quests for academic pursuit, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. UN Convention on the rights and dignities of persons with disabilities are to be strictly adhered to. Government must ensure effective implementations.
2. The use of library Guide, ramp, elevator, good hand railings, pathway, low level light switches and sockets, are necessary to attract the students to use the library.
3. Good communication between the library staff and the challenged students.
4. Constructed Library shelves to be at wheelchair accessible height.
5. Suggestion box to be made available in the library for comment or question.
6. Specially trained library staff to be employed to assist and monitor challenged students in the library.
7. Adjustable chairs and tables specially made for wheel-chair and crutches are recommended for use in libraries to cater for the physically challenged Students.
8. The use of wide doorways and powered door with card – swipe for access control both in and out of the library is recommended.
9. Provision of intercom telephone, mobile or E-mail are recommended for use by the physically challenged, this is to enhance communication with the library staff and to make reservations when necessary. Through a request form they could ask the library to photocopy materials for them. Payment would be made when the materials are delivered.
10. Signage should be large, bright and mounted at a level that can be seen by students in wheelchair.
11. Wireless hotspots are recommended to be provided on campus to ease access to Internet usage.
12. Architecture of library buildings must take care of their needs.

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