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Provision of Library Services for Users in Wheelchairs at Ardhi University and University of Dar es Salaam Libraries

Abstract

This paper investigated the provision of library services for people in wheelchairs in two university libraries in Tanzania. The paper studied access to the information materials collected in the libraries and the building structure of the two university libraries. At a wider aspect the paper looked at significance of access to library information as the basic right, specifically in higher learning institutions. The study used pragmatism paradigm which is a mixed method approach. Statistical package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 was used to analyze quantitative data while thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. The results revealed that the two academic libraries are not complying with library universal services to users in wheelchairs. The study therefore suggested that the libraries should strive to offer services that are inclusive to all users including those in wheelchairs. It was also recommended that the two libraries should formulate policies that would cover issues on the provision of library services for physically challenged users. In addition, it was suggested that library buildings should be modified to accommodate users with developmental disabilities, particularly, those in wheelchairs to access housed resources.

Keywords: Readers with disabilities, People with disabilities, Accessibility of library buildings, Library resources, Provision of library services to users in wheelchairs, Academic libraries

Introduction

Access to information is one of fundamental human rights which is incorporated in the freedom of expressions in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR). Library as one of institutions responsible for acquisition, processing and dissemination of information are supposed to provide its services to patrons without any form of discrimination. Information is vital to all human beings regardless of their religion, race, nationality, tribe, and age (Majinge and Stilwell, 2013). This also includes providing information to people with disabilities. Provision of information to persons with disabilities is further emphasized by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that came into play in 2015 after the completion of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In 2015, countries adopted the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development together with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2017). Goal number 4 is about ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning and its 8th target is to "build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all" (United Nations, 2017).

Phukubje and Ngoepe (2017) noted that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) of 2006 is one of the legally binding instruments that address the rights of persons with disabilities to inclusive education. In this convention, article 24 focused on access of persons with disabilities to the general education system and aimed at eliminating disability based discrimination in educational settings together with providing inclusive education at all levels. The United Republic of Tanzania has two major Laws on disability. The Persons with Disabilities (Rights and Privileges) Act Number 9 of 2006 of Zanzibar and the Persons with Disabilities Act Number 9 of 2010 of Tanzania mainland. Both laws give emphasis to accessibility of persons with disabilities to buildings and information as

a basic requirement. Employers and owners of institutions and schools should take into account the special needs of persons with disabilities.

Accessibility of library services to students and library users with disabilities cannot be overstressed. Provision of library services for students and other users with disabilities is an ever-increasing phenomenon speeded up by innovative community as well as the day to day advances of new technologies. Information professionals are supposed to have moral responsibility by making sure that information resources in their libraries are available to all patrons regardless of their disability, age and gender (Eskay and Chima, 2013). In the similar vein, Majinge and Stillwell (2013) insisted that libraries should not offer discriminatory services against patrons on grounds of disability and should make sure that every patron has equal access to library information materials. However, according to personal experience, services that are not discriminatory still remains an ideal rather than the norm to some of libraries as some patrons with disabilities are still underserved in terms of access to library information resources. Environmental, physical, legal and institutional barriers are some of the factors that limit people with disabilities from social inclusion and these together with negative attitudes are the hardest to overcome. In order for people with disabilities to receive equal treatment these barriers and factors need to be removed and this should go hand in hand with a change in attitudes.

Objectives of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to examine the provision of access to information to persons with disabilities particularly those in wheelchairs in Ardhi University and University of Dar es Salaam Libraries.

The specific objectives were;

1. To identify the services offered to students with disabilities at the two identified universities in Tanzania;
2. To determine the physical access to the two libraries and the availability of the facilities that aid access to persons with disabilities at the Ardhi University and UDSM in Tanzania;
3. To identify challenges faced by students with disabilities when accessing information in Ardhi and University of Dar es Salaam libraries in Tanzania.

Structure of the study

This article is organized in five sections. Section one is introduction and background information with a highlight on the purpose of the study and its objectives. Section two is on the literature review to meet the purpose of the study and linking this study to status of academic libraries in Tanzania together with the previous studies and the model used by the study. Section three discusses the research methods used in the study. Section four presents the findings of the study and is finally followed by the last section five that discusses the main findings, practical conclusion of the study and the new knowledge developed by the study.

Literature review

The study was based on a model developed in the 1970s by activists in the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in Great Britain. This model was primarily a result of society's response to persons with disabilities but also of their experience of the health and welfare system which made them feel socially isolated and demoralized (Carson,

2004). This model looks at disability as a consequence of the environmental, social and attitudinal barriers that slow down people from maximizing their potential (Lang, 2007). In addition, Hodkinson and Vickerman (2009) described it as to turn the attention away from identifying people with disabilities to identifying and addressing the barriers in society that restrict their full participation in everyday life. Thus, from this perspective, disability can be understood by focusing on the relationship between persons with impairment and the society or environment. The strength of this model is the emphasis it puts on the societies in which the disabled people live instead on the people themselves.

Despite the fact that right of access to information is a fundamental right to any human being including those with disabilities, most library buildings in Africa are not accessible to users on wheelchairs and other movements impaired. Eskay and China (2013) and Ponera (2015) observed that architectural barriers are often the problem of most library buildings. Libraries were built before the libraries ever considered providing services for the physical impaired users on wheelchairs. These buildings have steps, high book shelves, narrow doorways and lack elevators. The study by Carson (2009) revealed that one of the barriers that people with disabilities face in libraries, especially wheelchair-users is that they cannot climb stairs, and then a ramp or a stair lift should be fitted. Irvall and Nielsen (2005) and Majinge and Stilwell (2013) suggested that libraries, as providers of information and the heart of higher learning institutions should be at the forefront in removing challenges that hinder access to information to all users who come and need services in library without segregation; and specifically, users with disabilities should be able use library buildings easily.

The provision of services for users with disabilities is an obstacle within libraries in most countries in Africa. Users on wheelchairs are uncomfortable to access information materials in most of African libraries (Hadjikakou & Hartas, 2007). Omekwu and Nwafor (2014) indicated that in Africa especially in Tanzanian universities there is hardly any provision of ramps or any electronic devices that assist wheelchair users either to gain entry into the library and/or maneuver movements within the library. University libraries are established to support teaching, learning and research in universities. However, a great problem arises as many university libraries' buildings and other infrastructure were built without putting into consideration the ability of the users in wheelchairs to have adequate passage and movement when entering the library and accessing information materials in the library (Akolade et al., 2015). Further, there no attendants trained and prepared to assist users on wheelchair to get access to the libraries. In providing appropriate library buildings for all people there should be no architectural barriers which create challenges for users with physical impaired. For instance, Todaro (2005) points out that "most library buildings consists many challenges such as too many steps, stairways that are narrow, steps at the entrance of the building and lack of suitable ramps". Furthermore, Irvall and Nielsen (2005) advised that there should be no raised doorsteps and all doors should have automatic openers, and shelves should be reachable from a wheelchair. Therefore, University library buildings must be designed to provide users with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from all services.

A study by Ponera (2015) and Lawal-Solarin (2013) disclosed that libraries lack facilities for students with disabilities such as mobile facility, adjustable shelves, chairs, audio visual and multimedia services, translation services, and shelves that are not friendly to users on wheelchairs. Libraries should have facilities which support users on wheelchairs and other movement impaired to meet and access information materials. The facilities include wheelchair ramps which were supposed to lead to the entrances of libraries, and the ramps

should be moderate and permanent; elevators, some libraries need to ensure that elevators in individual libraries are functioning and comfortable enough to accommodate users with disabilities. Wheelchair users depend on furniture/facilities which are available in the libraries. Libraries should make sure that the information/materials in their custody are accessible to all users and this should be done by creating an enabling user-friendly environment (Majinge & Stilwell, 2013). The environment of the library, the entrance, restrooms, elevators and special rooms should be accessible for persons with different kinds of disabilities. A person in a wheelchair should be able to reach all places and should be able to access information resources from the shelves easily (Irvall & Nielsen, 2005). Despite the rapid change in information technology, still there are problems of accessing information needed physically among users on wheelchair within libraries in Africa.

Provision of library services to patrons with disability does not only stop at having a well structured library building but it is of vital importance to have well trained library staff to provide these services to patrons. Librarians should be having skills in handling all types of users; they should always be willing to give assistance to the users with disabilities while in the library. The physically challenged or wheelchair users will need more help compared to the non-disabled patrons in the library. According to the study undertaken by Ochoggia (2003) it was discovered that librarians had no specialized skills on serving visually and wheelchair users to access their information needs. It is therefore very crucial that all staff be knowledgeable on how best they could assist patrons with disability. In addition, some libraries have improved provision of services to users with disability by acquiring alternative format materials, including talking books, video with subtitles or sign language, Braille books, and other materials, to satisfy the information needs of individuals with disabilities (Hadjikakou & Hartas, 2007).

Ndumbaro (2009) noted that library and information services in Tanzania were planned without bearing in mind the needs of persons with disabilities. With this provision of services in libraries, one may believe that persons with disabilities who need library services do not exist in Tanzania. In addition to that, the United Republic of Tanzania's National Policy on Disability (2004) states explicitly that the education system in Tanzania does not allow equal access for persons with disabilities, therefore roughly all services at all levels are physically inaccessible for those with disabilities. Therefore with these scenarios it is vividly seen that there is still a gap to people with disabilities especially those using wheelchairs and with visual impaired in accessing information resources from libraries and other information centres. These can be seen through the available poor infrastructure, in adequacy of facilities/equipment for library services provision and lack of national as well as library policy that favor provision of library services to users with disabilities.

The status of academic libraries in Tanzania

Ochogwu, (2007) divided information providers into three groups, namely; the passive information providers, who are not really concerned by their users and show little or no concern when they serve these users. The second group is the reactive group that provides services to users only when they come to ask for library information services and the last group is the proactive group who analyze the information needs of their users and delivers appropriate information to suit their needs. He observed that many librarians belong to the first and second group. This is no exception when it comes to information providers in Tanzania. In terms of the availability and provision of library and information services for users with disability in Tanzania, it is grossly inadequate. For universities, academic libraries

should play a fundamental role in supporting students with disabilities to gain equal access to information by ensuring that they are able to access information at the right time and in the right format without any impediments.

General research problem

Education cannot be equitable, equal and inclusive for all if and when people with disabilities are segregated. Much as the CRPD article 24 clearly emphasizes the need to ensure that persons with disabilities are not excluded, isolated and marginalized from formal education at all levels, this is usually not the case as seen in most Tanzanian education institutions. Most public buildings and facilities in Tanzania are not accessible to people with disabilities despite that the Government has laws and policies in place that strictly instruct how these buildings and facilities should be. This study therefore seeks to investigate the provision of library services to people with disabilities in Ardhi University and UDSM libraries in order to ensure equal access to library information by the users especially users with disabilities.

Methodology

This study applied the mixed method approach that included both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. The study specifically covered the Ardhi University and UDSM University main libraries. These two libraries were selected since it was believed that they are among the libraries which serve most of users with disability in Tanzania. Purposive sampling was used to select the two academic libraries. The total number of population study was 40 respondents that included library staff and students in wheelchairs. The study population was small because the number of students in wheelchairs in these universities stood at seventeen (17) in totals for both. These Universities does not enroll a big number of students with disabilities.

Simple random technique was used to select library staff while census sampling technique was used to select all the students from the two academic libraries since the population study was small. Simple random technique was used to select library staff as it provides opportunities for each case in the population to have an equal chance of being incorporated in the sample (Bell, 2003). Data was collected through document review, questionnaires and interviews. Documents reviewed included the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), The United Republic of Tanzania two major Laws on disability which are The Persons with Disabilities (rights and Privileges) Act Number 9 of 2006 of Zanzibar and Persons with Disabilities act Number 9 of 2010 of Tanzania Mainland and the Ardhi and UDSM Library rules. These documents were reviewed to determine how explicit they were with regard to access of information to people with disabilities. The Ardhi and UDSM Libraries' physical features were also observed through the use of observation checklist. A pre-test was done on the interview guide and questionnaires ensure that were effectiveness and respondents' understanding of the questions before they were used for the study. The researchers administered the questionnaires and conducted the interviews with library staff and students in their specific university libraries. Qualitative data was collected through interviews and quantitative data was obtained through questionnaires.

Results

Biographic data of the respondents

The results are presented according to the objectives of the study. Of 40 respondents, the majority of students 12 (70.6%) who participated in the study were from UDSM library while majority of library staff 12 (52.3%) were from Ardhi University library. Of the 12 students from UDSM 13 (47.1%) were males. Majority of the library staff were female 16 (70.0%) out of all the 23 library staff respondents. This is shown below.

Table 1: Gender of the respondents (N=40)

Distribution of Students by gender	Responses		Distribution of library staff by gender	Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	percentage
Male	13	76.5%	Male	7	30.0%
Female	4	23.5%	Female	16	70.0%
Total	17	100%	Total	23	100%

Services offered to students with disabilities at the two identified universities in Tanzania

The first objective of this study was to identify library services offered to students with disabilities. The respondents were asked whether they visited the library to receive any library services offered to them.

Table 2: Library services to library users on wheelchairs (N=17)

Do you visit the library for your information needs?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	4	24.0
No	13	76.0
Total	17	100

As shown in Table 1, 13 (76.0%) indicated not visiting the library for their information needs while 4 (24.0%) said they did visit the library. When asked why they did not visit the library, majority said that they did not receive training on how to use the library and how to access information in the library.

Physical access to the library to students with disabilities

The second objective of this study was to determine the physical access to the two libraries and the availability of the facilities that aid access to persons with disabilities at the Ardhi University and UDSM in Tanzania. It is essential that all library services should be adequately tailored to meet the special needs of users with disabilities and that these libraries should become physically accessible to all users. The researchers visited the Ardhi University and UDSM libraries and to their astonishment realised that both these libraries are not friendly to users on wheelchairs. There are no ramps, lifts or elevators to support users on wheelchairs. The entrances into the library buildings have staircases and for Ardhi University library the road towards the library is elevated in that if a user on a wheelchair does not have someone to push them up the road, would not even be able to make it to the entrance of the library. On entering the UDSM library, the first point is the security check point that has a turnstile that automatically prevents users on wheelchairs from accessing the library. Right after that check point is a set of stairs leading you to the first floor of the library which among other things hosts a circulation desk. Both these library buildings have more than one floor and the only way to get to the next floor is through climbing a set of stairs. These libraries host library information on high shelves that are inaccessible to users on wheelchairs.

When user respondents were asked as to why they did not visit the library, they all said that they did not visit the library because the physical infrastructure was not conducive for them to access the information collected in the library. The director of ARDHI University library was asked in an interview to indicate whether their library infrastructure was user friendly to wheelchair users. The response was as follows;

...“Infrastructures which are available in Ardhi university library are not friendly for use to students or users on wheelchairs, because when they built the library building, students with disabilities were not expected to join into our university due to the nature and philosophy of the university”.

A similar question was asked when interviewing the head of special unit department in UDSM Library. And he responded;

...“despite the lack of good infrastructures for students on wheelchairs, the library has a special unit for helping any student or user with a disability to access library resources”.

Library staff were also asked to indicate whether these libraries had special places for serving library users on wheelchairs regardless of the unfriendly library building infrastructure and all 23 (100%) said there was no such a place. And they even went further to explain that it is not only a place that is needed for serving users with disabilities but also trained and skilled staff. One respondent indicated that they had never heard of any university in Tanzania offering such services to users with disabilities. According to Ponera (2015), lack of professional library staff to serve library users with disabilities is another chief area that created a bottleneck in providing library services to. It is a fact that library staff should be professional in handling all types of users. They should have trainings on handling special needs for users with disabilities.

Technological Challenges faced by students with disabilities when accessing information

The last objective of the study was to identify challenges faced by students with disabilities when accessing information in Ardhi and University of Dar es Salaam libraries in Tanzania. The variable observed were among others include: existence of elevators, special pavement for wheelchairs users, standby library staff to assist such users, toilet facilities for wheelchair users, automatic doors, heights of the shelves.

Table 3: Observation checklist

Observation Checklist				
s/n	Observed Variables	University		Remarks
		UDSM	Ardhi	
1.	Existence of Special section for users on wheelchair	Available	Not available	The UDSM special section is too small compared to the available users. Ardhi University has no special section there is a dare need for creation of a section
2	Elevators	Not available	Not available	The buildings have floors and only way to get to an upper floor is by climbing stairs and users are unable to access reading materials in such areas
3	Special pavement for wheelchairs users	Not available	Not available	Both library building do not have special pavements for wheelchair users
4	Standby library staff to assist such users	Not available	Not available	There are no dedicated library staff to assist users in wheelchairs gain access to information that they cannot reach in their capabilities
5	Toilet facilities for wheel chair users	Not existing	Not existing	Both these libraries do not have special toilet facilities for users in wheelchairs
6	Automatic doors	Not existing	Not existing	Both these libraries do not have automatic doors that easily let users in wheelchairs gain access into buildings
7	Low shelves that host library collections	Not available	Not available	The shelves that host library collections in these library building are too high for users in wheelchairs.

Discussion of the findings

The social model of disability turns the attention away from identifying people with disabilities to identifying and addressing the barriers in society that restrict their full participation in everyday life Hodkinson and Vickerman (2009). Thus, from this perspective, disability can be understood by focusing on the relationship between persons with impairment and the society or environment. The strength of this model is the emphasis it puts on the societies in which the disabled people live instead on the people themselves. The environment in this aspect was the Ardhi and UDSM libraries. It is evident from the research findings that the environment does not favour users in wheelchairs to easily access information in these specific libraries. The absence of technological aids that enable users on wheelchairs to move from one place to another within these libraries segregates them from fully utilising the library and information services provided in these libraries. Lack of trained and dedicated staff to cater to the information needs of users with disabilities in the libraries brings a hindrance to users on wheelchairs when accessing information from these libraries.

The presence of well established laws on access to information by people with disabilities in Tanzania and the application of SDGs ensure that people with disabilities are not excluded from access to information. However these libraries have not adhered to the United Republic of Tanzania Laws on disability which are; the Persons with Disabilities (Rights and Privileges) Act Number 9 of 2006 of Zanzibar and Persons with Disabilities Act Number 9 of 2010 of Tanzania Mainland which both give emphasis to accessibility of persons with disabilities to buildings and information as a basic requirement.

Conclusion and recommendations

It is clear from the findings that students with disabilities are not satisfied with the library services they receive. The services provided by these libraries were not suitable for people in wheelchairs. Guided by the social model of disability, the study found that Ardhi and UDSM libraries provided services to users in wheelchairs which were neither inclusive nor universal. The findings also revealed that there were no trained staff who were experienced in providing services to users in wheelchairs. Library services greatly impact the academic achievement of students in general and should be at the forefront in eliminating barriers to the use of library services to students with disabilities.

Therefore, this study makes the following recommendations to the libraries;

- There should be a special training to students in wheelchairs that is conducted twice per semester. This training should be well thought through to simplify the usage of these services. And further this training should be extended to one or two friends of each student in a wheelchair with the aim of helping them access information whenever they cannot.
- The library staff members should be trained in how to deal with students with disabilities and specifically be sensitive to the needs of persons with disabilities. This will create a friendly environment for those who seek help
- The library should consider mounting technological equipments that enable users in wheelchairs to maneuver through the library buildings. This will alleviate some obstacles that make access to information difficult for users in whee

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