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Wheelchair Users and Their Information Needs: Library in Rescue

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Abstract:

This study is aimed at examining the information needs of the wheelchair users in Oyo State Public Library, Ibadan, Nigeria. A Survey research design was adopted. Four objectives were set for the study and the interview was used to elicit information from respondents. Findings showed that (81%) were male while (19%) were female. Findings also reveal that the information needs of wheelchair users covered education (95%), recreational (86%), social/personal (72%), security/government policies programmes (70%), health (67%), politics (63%) and (21%) others information. The study revealed that Internet (79%) and (72%) library topped the highest ways of meeting the information needs. Also, (63%) wheelchair users visit the library every day while (16%) visit the library once in two days whereas (12%) visit the library about three times in a week and (9%) visit the library occasionally.

The study showed that (60%) found the information resources inadequate in meeting their needs. Problems confronting wheelchair user's information needs include, inadequate entrance (100%) and lack architectural design (95%), (74%) inadequate orientation/lack of chairs with sturdy armrests, (72%) inability to retrieve books/social discrimination, (67%) poor concentration/inadequate facilities, (51%) staff attitude is discouraging, (40%) inadequate

relevant materials and (7%) others. The paper concludes that the government of Nigeria need to articulate policies to remove the barriers faced by the less privileged among us. Recommendations were put forward to enhance adequate and relevant information by the wheelchair users in the library.

Keywords: Wheelchairs Users, Students, Information Needs, Services, Public Library

Introduction

The wheelchair users have the right to information and the right to gain satisfaction in productive activity, personal fulfilment and need assistance while in the library. Viney (2006) notes that they encounter limitations to physical access such as inability to retrieve books from the high shelves in the library. Hence, 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. Ugah (2008) opined that the more accessible information sources are, the more likely they are to be used. Popoola (2001) affirms that information availability does not mean accessibility and use. Therefore, public libraries should be committed to providing equal access to all library users, whether normal or challenged.

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’’.

Adesina (2005) identifies the information needs of the Physically Challenged as follows:

- ‘‘Information for educational development
- Information for social and personal
- Information for recreational purposes’’

Information for educational development is of paramount importance in public libraries, since public library is a library for all without discrimination. Moreover, the physically challenged or disabled can seek for information for social and personal development and thus place him/her in a position to function better in the society. Also the knowledge gained coupled with information on assistive devices and the acquisition of such devices give the physically challenged an added advantage in overcoming the limitations of his disability. More so, Sambo,

Rabiu & Shaba (2016), confirmed that problems confronting information needs of the physically challenged include, furniture in the library are not good for relaxing (100%), lack of infrastructural facility (82%), lack of information materials (76%), lack of architectural design (73%), staff attitude is discouraging (67%), library environment is not accommodating (61%), and others (41%).

In this regard, public libraries, stakeholders, government should be committed to providing equal access to all categories of students, whether normal or challenged; while libraries, Librarians, and information centres must ensure that the wheelchair users gain access to and are able to use information resources where they are located. Therefore this paper attempts to investigate information needs of the wheelchairs users in Oyo State Public Libraries in particular. (Students using wheelchair for mobility) to the library, in Dugbe, Ibadan and two branch libraries at Elekuro and also at the old Bodija estate and another two branch libraries at Oyo and Ogbomosho.

Oyo State Public Library, Nigeria

The Oyo State Library Board was formerly known as Western Regional Library when established in 1955 by then Western Region Government. The library became the Oyo State Library in 1976 when Oyo State was created. The present Oyo State Library Board was created with the enactment of edict 18 of August in 1988. It has its headquarters at Dugbe, Ibadan and has two branch libraries at Elekuro and also at the old Bodija estate and another two branch libraries at Oyo and Ogbomosho. The library board has been able to improve the reading culture of the populace through the provision of efficient and effective library services throughout the nooks and cranny of Oyo state. (<http://www.oyostate.gov.ng/ministries-departments-and-agencies/departments-and-agencies/library-board/>)

Statement of the Problems

Everybody should be able to use the libraries of a country without difficulties. The surroundings of the library, access to the information needs, the entrance, restrooms, stairs, elevators and special rooms should be accessible for persons with different kinds of disabilities. People with disabilities should be able to arrive at the site, approach the library building and enter the building easily and safely. If the main entrance cannot be made accessible, a secondary accessible entrance should be provided, equipped with automatic door opener, a ramp, and a telephone. Meanwhile, in the absence of the above, how do wheelchairs users gain access to information needs?

However, since the creation of Oyo State Public Library, in 1976, no single research has been conducted especially on the wheelchair users and their information needs: Library in rescue. Thus, the situation calls for a research. This study, however, intends to find out the information needs of the wheelchair users. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that this study investigates information needs of the wheelchair users at Oyo State Public Library, what services and resources are available in the library for meeting these needs, how do the wheelchair users meet such needs and what constraints are they faced with? These are the questions to which this study intends to answer.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To identify the information needs of the wheelchair users in Oyo State Public Library, Ibadan.
- ii. To identify how the library meet the information needs of wheelchair users and their preferred sources of information
- iii. To ascertain the adequacy and relevance of the library resources in meeting wheelchair users' needs
- iv. To establish the constraints militating against meeting these needs

Research Questions

The following are the questions to which the study will provide answers:

- i. What are the information needs of the wheelchair users in Oyo State Public Library
- ii. What services and resources are available in the library for meeting these needs?
- iii. Do wheelchair users make use of library resources and how relevant are these resources to their needs?
- iv. How adequate are the library resources?
- v. What are the constraints faced with by the wheelchair users in meeting their needs?

Review of Related Literature

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. Okoli

(2010), observed horrors of architectural buildings which have discouraged many challenged persons from having education. Okoye (2010) in a study conducted in a Nigerian university affirmed that many challenged students rely on their roommates, friends, and relations for their activities with insufficient institutional support mechanisms. Moreover, in their search for improved skills and achievement, they suffer social discrimination and cultural bias. These have negative impact on their information-seeking behaviour. Challenged people deserve to be given better treatment by government and society because they have fought for long and hard to make their plights known Amamgo, (2009) and Onyekwere (2009).

In a developing country like Nigeria, accessibility to information needs is limited for the wheelchair users because they have no access to the numerous public services being provided.

Lawal-solarin (2010), noted that the wheelchair users in Nigeria lack access to the banking halls due to the anti-metal cubicles at the entrances to banks in Nigeria. Likewise, Iyoro (2004) affirms accessibility as one of the pre-requisite of information use. Also, Hamzat and Dada (2005) affirmed that wheelchair users in Ibadan, which is Africa's second largest city, could only gain access to 20% of public buildings such as banks, schools, health centres, hospitals etc. Furthermore, the public transports available in Nigeria are not equipped for wheelchair entry. Wheelchair users cannot commute intra city or intercity without being accompanied (People's Daily, 2011). Collaborating Lawal-Solarin (2012), carry out a survey of library and information services to physically challenged students in academic libraries in Ogun State. Noted that 21 (87.5%) of the respondents use the library occasionally while the remaining 3 (12.5%) respondents use it regularly. Similarly, Sambo, Rabiou & Shaba (2016), carry out a survey of physically challenged students and their information needs in public library, Kwara State, Ilorin. Affirmed that (82%) used the library occasionally while (18%) regularly. The study showed that (65%) found the information resources inadequate in meeting their needs. From the foregoing, it is evident that persons with disabilities need information and therefore it is essential that providers and producers of information for persons with disabilities in Nigeria should establish their reading interest and information needs for improved service provision. This information needs will help these people with disabilities function and essentially improve their knowledge and well-being. 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').

Research Methodology

This study adopts a survey research design. The instrument used for data collection in this study was a structured interview and questionnaires by the researchers and three research assistants who were trained on how to distribute the questionnaires across the wheelchairs users at Dugbe, Ibadan (headquarters) and two branch libraries at Elekuro and also at the old Bodija estate and another two branch libraries in Oyo and Ogbomosho to the Wheelchair users. Personal discussions with heads of library, few staff and students. A total number of 45 questionnaires were filled and returned by the wheelchairs users at the Oyo State Public Library, Ibadan, Nigeria. Out of the 45 wheelchair users interviewed, the researchers were able to get the required information for analysis from 43 wheelchair users, thus, there was 96% response rate.

Table 1: population and Sample Size of the Study

Wheelchair Users	Frequency	Percentage
Dugbe headquarter	16	37%
Elekuro branch	5	12%
Old Bodija branch	4	9%
Oyo branch	7	16%
Ogbomosho branch	11	26%

Total	43	100%
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Source: Field data at Oyo State Public Library, Oyo Ibadan.

Research Findings and Discussion

Fig 1: Gender Distribution of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	35	81%
Female	8	19%
Total	43	100%

Fig. 1 shows that (81%) of the respondents were male while (19%) were female. This represents the gender distribution of wheel chair users in the survey. Population of the female may be as a result of physically challenged encounter by them.

Fig 2: Distribution of the Respondents by Age

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
10-15	2	5%
16-20	6	14%
21-30	23	53%
31-50	12	28%
Above 50	-	-
Total	43	100%

Fig. 2 shows the age range of respondents. 31 wheelchair users (72%) were between the ages 10 and 30 while 12 (28%) were 31 or above. This indicates that the majority of the wheelchair users of the libraries are youths.

Fig 3: Information Needs of the Wheelchair Users in the Library

Information Needs	Frequency	Percentage
Education development	41	95%
Information for recreational	37	86%
Information on health condition	29	67%

Information on politics	27	63%
Information on security	30	70%
Information on social/personal	31	72%
Information on government policies/programmes	30	70%
Others	9	21%

As indicated in **Fig 3**, 95% of wheelchair users needs education information, 86% information for recreational, 72% social/personal, 70% security/government policies programmes, 67% health, 63% politics, 21% other information needs. This finding is agreed with Adesina (2005) identifies the information needs of the Physically Challenged as follows: ‘‘Information for educational development, Information for social and personal and Information for recreational purposes’’.

Fig 4: Way of Meeting Wheelchair Users Information Needs in the Library

Sources	Frequency	Percentage
Library	31	72%
Internet	34	79%
Radio/Television broadcast	12	30%
Friend	29	67%
Colleague	21	49%
Neighbour	14	33 %
Mosque	29	67%
Church	13	30%
Conference/seminar	6	14%
Club and association	0	0

Fig 4, revealed that Internet and library 79% and 72% respectively featured in the response prominently, indicating that the library was equally popular just like the internet as means of satisfying wheelchairs users information needs. This was followed by friend and mosque 67%, 49% colleagues, 33% neighbour, 30% radio/television and church and 14% conference/seminar.

Fig 5: Library Resources Often Used

Library Resources often Used	Frequency	Percentage
Newspaper/magazine	21	49%
Electronic resources	17	40%
Journals	12	28%
Reference materials	15	35%
Textbooks	33	77%
Government publications	11	26%
Databases	9	21%
audio visuals	3	7%
Government reports	10	23%

As shown in **Fig 5**, the most consulted resources in the library were textbooks 77% follows by newspaper/magazine 49%, 40% electronic resources, 35% reference materials, 28% journals, 26% government publications, 23% government reports, 21% databases and 7% audio visuals. This further showed that other categories of users were very few in the library such as visually impaired, deaf, specialists, farmers, neo-literates, etc. who would have preferred other library resources rather than textbooks.

Fig 6: Frequent Use of the Library by Wheelchair Users

Use of the Library by the Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	4	9%
Once in two days	7	16%
1-3 times a week	5	12%
Occasionally	27	63%
Total	43	100%

Fig 6, shows that 63% of the wheelchair users visit the library occasionally. This could be due to inadequate entrance to the libraries and they needed to use the library to prepare for exams of different types while 16% visit the library once in two days whereas 12% visit the library about three times in a week and 9% visit the library daily. This finding is agreed with finding

of Lawal-Solarin (2012), carry out a survey of library and information services to physically challenged students in academic libraries in Ogun State. Noted that 21 (87.5%) of the respondents use the library occasionally while the remaining 3 (12.5%) respondents use it regularly.

Fig 7: Adequate of Library Resources

Adequate of Materials	Frequency	Percentage
Adequate	11	26%
Inadequate	26	60%
Indifferent	6	14%
Total	43	100%

Fig 7, shows that 60% wheelchair users found the information resources provided by the libraries inadequate, 26% found them adequate, and 14% remained indifferent in their opinions. This shows that the majority 60% of the wheelchair users found the library resources inadequate for meeting their information needs. . This could be due to lukewarm attitude of the library staff or negligence by the State Government in terms of funding for the library to procure the needed materials. This confirms the finding of Sambo, Rabiou & Shaba (2016), that (65%) found the information resources inadequate in meeting their needs.

Fig 8: Constraints Facing the Wheelchairs Users Information Needs in the Library

Constraints	Frequency	Percentage
Staff attitude is discouraging	22	51%
Inadequate relevant materials	22	51%
Inadequate orientation	32	74%
Poor concentration	29	67%
Lack of chairs with sturdy armrests	32	74%
Inadequate entrance	43	100%
Inadequate toilet facilities	29	67%
Social discrimination	31	72%
Inability to retrieve books	31	72%

Lack of architectural design	41	95%
Others	7	16%

From **Fig 8**, indicates that the major problems that hindered wheelchair user's information needs include inadequate entrance 100% and lack architectural design 95%, 74% inadequate orientation/lack of chairs with sturdy armrests, 72% inability to retrieve books/social discrimination, 67% poor concentration/inadequate facilities, 51% staff attitude is discouraging/ inadequate relevant materials and 7% others. This findings agreed with Okoli (2010), observed horrors of architectural buildings which have discouraged many challenged persons from having education.

Conclusion

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

The wheel chairs users were not adequately catered for in terms of materials, services, relationship, restroom and even in the architectural designs of the libraries. Meanwhile, as of the time of collecting data for this study Oyo State public library is far from what it should be. Having highlighted the situation of the library, there is need for both the state government to provide all the necessary funds required for the smooth operation and provision of necessary services to the physically-challenged in their quest to be educated. Moreover, the public and policy makers must adopt a human right approach in addressing issues of disability instead of treating disability as a charity or social welfare matter. Finally, public libraries should use strategies based upon the principles of universal design to ensure that library policy, resources and services meet the needs of all people.

Recommendations

- I. The architectural design of libraries should take cognisance of the needs of the wheelchair users. The Government should enact laws, which mandate accessibility on buildings and should ensure that the laws are strictly adhered to. The use of ramps, elevators, wide paths and doorways, or automatic door with card-swipe for access control both in and out of buildings, would assist the wheelchair users to move around and meet information needs.
- II. The State and Local Governments must be committed towards public library development. Adequate and timely release of funds is essential and necessary for the libraries to be comfortable in discharging their responsibilities to the society. Adequate

budgetary allocation is needed to stock library building with current and relevant materials and for staff capacity building.

- III. Public libraries should trained library staff to be employed to assist and monitor challenged students in the library. Adjustable chairs and tables specially made for wheelchair students are recommended for use in libraries. Training and re training of library staff on the handling of wheelchair users is essentials.
- IV. Public library should provide information materials that would carter for physically challenged students in the library and orientation should be given to them.

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