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July 2023

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# **Exploring the Vital Role of Quality Assurance in Ensuring Accessible Services and Resources in Academic Libraries in Nigeria**

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## **Introduction**

Academic libraries play a vital role in supporting the educational and research endeavors of students, faculty, and researchers. In Nigeria, where access to quality education and resources is a priority, academic libraries serve as crucial knowledge hubs. However, ensuring that these libraries provide accessible services and resources to all users, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities, remains a significant challenge. Quality service is a competitive necessity for business and service organizations. Librarians have tended to believe that libraries have no competitors because each locality, school, college or university, or business has only one library (though perhaps with multiple outlets), and the perception is that other libraries do not compete for their clientele. Afigbo (2006) assumed that quality assurance and standard should be placed on subject librarian services. Also Adegoke (2002) opined that standard, quality, relevance, excellence, validity, competence, efficiency, functionalism, are common concept issues relating to quality subject librarian services.

According to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), quality assurance refers to the systematic and continuous process of assessing and improving library services and resources to meet established standards and user needs. It involves implementing effective policies, procedures, and strategies to enhance the overall library experience for all users. In the context of academic libraries, quality assurance encompasses a broad range of aspects, including collection development, library infrastructure, technology integration, user services, and, crucially, accessibility.

Ensuring accessibility in academic libraries is essential to promote inclusivity and equal opportunities for all users, including students, researchers, and differently-abled individuals. Accessibility goes beyond physical considerations and encompasses factors such as information resources, digital technologies, assistive devices, and user-friendly services. By providing

accessible services and resources, academic libraries enable users to navigate the library environment, access information, conduct research, and enhance their learning experiences.

The successful implementation of quality assurance measures for accessibility in these academic libraries has yielded positive outcomes and impactful changes. The availability of alternative formats, assistive technologies, and inclusive design features has empowered users to independently access and utilize library materials, fostering a sense of inclusivity within the library environment. By providing accessible resources and support services, academic libraries have created an equitable learning environment, enabling students to actively engage in their studies, conduct research, and access relevant information. Consequently, students have experienced improved academic performance and increased opportunities for their personal and professional growth.

## **Understanding Quality Assurance in Academic Libraries**

Quality assurance plays a pivotal role in ensuring the provision of excellent services and resources in academic libraries. In the context of academic libraries, quality assurance refers to the systematic and continuous process of assessing and improving library services and resources to meet established standards and user needs (IFLA, 2016). It encompasses a range of aspects, including collection development, library infrastructure, technology integration, user services, and, significantly, accessibility. One authoritative source that provides insights into quality assurance in library services is the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). According to IFLA, quality assurance involves implementing effective policies, procedures, and strategies to enhance the overall library experience for users (IFLA, 2016). By establishing standards and benchmarks, academic libraries can evaluate their services and resources and continuously improve them to meet the evolving needs of their user community.

To achieve quality assurance in academic libraries, several key components come into play. First and foremost, comprehensive collection development policies are crucial. Academic libraries must ensure that their collections align with the curricular and research needs of their institution. This involves regularly evaluating and updating the collection to maintain its relevance and currency. Additionally, establishing effective mechanisms for selecting and acquiring resources, such as books, journals, databases, and multimedia materials, contributes to maintaining a high-quality collection (Smith & Johnson, 2022). Library infrastructure also plays a significant role in quality assurance. Adequate physical space, conducive seating arrangements, well-organized shelving systems, and appropriate lighting all contribute to a positive library experience. Furthermore, ensuring the availability and functionality of technology infrastructure, including computers, internet access, and online databases, is essential for seamless information access and research (Smith & Johnson, 2022).

User service is another critical component of quality assurance. Academic libraries should strive to provide personalized and efficient services to their users. This involves employing knowledgeable and skilled library staff who can assist users in locating resources, utilizing research tools, and accessing information. Training programs for library staff should be implemented to enhance their expertise and keep them abreast of the latest trends and technologies in library services (Arendrup, Engberg, & Carlsson, 2017). Accessibility is an integral aspect of quality assurance in academic libraries. Ensuring that library services and resources are accessible to all users, including individuals with disabilities, is of utmost importance. This involves adopting inclusive practices, such as providing alternative formats for print materials, implementing assistive technologies, and offering accessible workstations and study areas. Libraries should also consider the physical accessibility of their premises, with features such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms (Arendrup, Engberg, & Carlsson, 2017).

High quality staff can transform even the poorest library into an operation offering excellent service, since libraries are service organizations, and the quality in the context of a library is often treated as the quality of service; point out that service quality includes three areas: resources, organization and service delivered by subject librarian and other supporting staffs, (Ogunlana and Amusa, 2008). Librarians, through their education and relationship to the organization, evaluation and retrieval of information, are the best-equipped academic members of the parent institution to ensure that aspect of the student's preparation. Universities need to acknowledge this more openly than has hitherto been the case, so they can extract the most out of their libraries toward the educational process. Librarians are ideally positioned to serve as leaders who assist during this period of transformation, facilitating the introduction of new technologies for learning, teaching, and research. At the same time, the function of librarians is both changing and becoming more central; the works of other library staff will also alter grow in importance.

### **The Role of Quality Assurance in Ensuring Accessibility**

Quality assurance plays a crucial role in ensuring accessibility in academic libraries, aiming to provide inclusive services and resources for all users. By implementing robust quality assurance measures, libraries can effectively identify, address, and improve accessibility barriers, ultimately creating an inclusive environment for all. The following are the key role that quality assurance plays in ensuring accessibility in academic libraries.

1. **Compliance with Accessibility Standards and Guidelines:** Quality assurance in academic libraries involves ensuring compliance with accessibility standards and guidelines. These standards, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and the International Organization for Standardization's (ISO) accessibility standards, provide clear criteria and benchmarks for creating accessible digital content and services

(Owolabi & Akande, 2019). By adhering to these standards, libraries can enhance the accessibility of their websites, digital resources, and online platforms, ensuring that individuals with disabilities can effectively access and utilize these resources.

2. **Evaluation and Assessment of Accessibility:** Quality assurance involves conducting regular evaluations and assessments of accessibility within academic libraries. This includes conducting accessibility audits, usability testing, and user feedback mechanisms to identify barriers and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities (Holt et al., 2020). By systematically evaluating accessibility, libraries can gain insights into areas that need improvement and make informed decisions to enhance the accessibility of their services and resources.
3. **Collaboration with Stakeholders:** Quality assurance also involves collaboration with various stakeholders to ensure accessibility. This includes engaging with individuals with disabilities, disability service offices, library staff, and IT professionals to gain diverse perspectives and expertise in addressing accessibility challenges (Abbas et al., 2020). Collaboration facilitates the development of inclusive policies, the implementation of accessibility features, and the provision of support services that cater to the needs of diverse users.
4. **Training and Professional Development:** Quality assurance encompasses training and professional development initiatives for library staff. Ensuring accessibility requires staff members to be knowledgeable about accessibility principles, assistive technologies, and inclusive practices (Owolabi & Akande, 2019). Training programs can enhance staff competencies, enabling them to create and maintain accessible digital content, provide appropriate support to users with disabilities, and advocate for inclusive policies within the library.
5. **Continuous Improvement and Feedback Mechanisms:** Quality assurance fosters a culture of continuous improvement by establishing feedback mechanisms and incorporating user perspectives. Libraries can gather user feedback through surveys, focus groups, and usability testing to understand the experiences and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities (Abbas et al., 2020). This feedback informs iterative improvements, ensuring that accessibility measures are continuously refined and adjusted to meet the evolving needs of users.

### **The Significance of Accessible Services and Resources in Academic Libraries**

Accessible services and resources in academic libraries hold immense significance in promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities for all users. Academic libraries serve as critical knowledge hubs, supporting the educational and research endeavors of students, faculty, and researchers. By providing accessible services and resources, these libraries ensure that individuals from diverse backgrounds and abilities can fully participate in the learning and research process. Accessible services and resources involve provision of materials, technologies, and facilities that are designed to accommodate the needs of various user groups. By ensuring accessibility, academic

libraries remove barriers and enable all users to access and utilize library services and resources effectively.

One of the primary reasons for the significance of accessible services and resources is to ensure equitable access to information and educational opportunities. Academic libraries serve as crucial knowledge hubs, providing resources essential for research, learning, and intellectual growth. By offering accessible services and resources, libraries break down barriers that might otherwise hinder individuals from fully engaging in their academic pursuits. Accessible services and resources benefit various user groups within the academic community. Furthermore, accessible services and resources facilitate research endeavors and academic success. Research is a cornerstone of higher education, and academic libraries serve as vital repositories of scholarly materials. By ensuring accessibility, libraries empower researchers, enabling them to navigate and explore the extensive array of resources available. Accessible resources also enable researchers to extract, analyze, and synthesize information effectively, contributing to the advancement of knowledge and scholarship.

The significance of accessible services and resources extends beyond individual users. Institutions of higher education are increasingly recognizing the importance of diversity and inclusivity in their academic communities. By providing accessible services and resources, academic libraries align with institutional goals of fostering diversity and creating an inclusive environment for all students, faculty, and staff. The impact of accessible services and resources in academic libraries is profound. Accessibility promotes equitable access to information and knowledge. It ensures that users, regardless of their abilities, can independently navigate the library environment, access resources, and conduct research. Academic libraries serve as research centres, and by ensuring accessibility, they support the research needs of diverse scholars. The significance of accessible services and resources in academic libraries cannot be overstated. By ensuring equitable access to information, promoting inclusive learning environments, and meeting legal obligations, academic libraries play a crucial role in empowering individuals with diverse abilities to thrive academically. Through collaboration with stakeholders, the continuous enhancement of accessibility measures and adherence to international standards, academic libraries can truly serve as beacons of inclusivity in the pursuit of knowledge.

### **Challenges to Ensuring Accessible Services and Resources in Nigerian Academic Libraries**

Nigerian academic libraries face several challenges when it comes to ensuring accessible services and resources for all users. These challenges can hinder the goal of providing equal access to information and knowledge. Understanding and addressing these challenges is crucial in order to create an inclusive and equitable learning environment. One of the common challenges faced by academic libraries in Nigeria is the lack of adequate resources and infrastructure to support accessibility initiatives. Limited financial resources often result in insufficient assistive technologies, accessible formats, and physical modifications necessary to

accommodate users (Ojedokun & Adebayo, 2021). This resource gap can impede the provision of accessible services and hinder the full participation of individuals with disabilities in the academic community.

Academic libraries in Nigeria face several common challenges in their efforts to ensure accessible services and resources. One of the primary challenges is the limited financial resources allocated to libraries, which often hampers the implementation of comprehensive accessibility measures. Insufficient funding negatively impacts the acquisition of accessible resources and technologies, as well as the provision of necessary training for library staff. Nigerian academic libraries face numerous challenges in their efforts to ensure accessible services and resources, hindering the goal of providing equitable access to all users, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. Identifying and addressing these challenges is crucial for creating inclusive and supportive library environments. These challenges include the following:

1. **Limited financial resources and budget constraints:** One significant challenge is the limited financial resources allocated to academic libraries. Adequate funding is essential for acquiring accessible materials and technologies, as well as for implementing necessary infrastructure modifications. However, many Nigerian libraries face budget constraints that hinder their ability to invest in accessibility measures (Owolabi, 2019). This lack of financial support poses a barrier to achieving comprehensive accessibility in libraries.
2. **Inadequate infrastructure and physical barriers:** Another challenge is the lack of accessible infrastructure in Nigerian academic libraries. Many libraries struggle with inadequate physical spaces and facilities, such as ramps, elevators, and accessible study areas (Oseghale et al., 2020). These physical barriers limit the mobility and access of individuals with disabilities within the library environment, making it challenging for them to navigate and utilize library resources effectively.
3. **Limited availability of accessible formats:** The limited availability of accessible formats is a significant barrier to accessibility in Nigerian academic libraries. Printed materials are often the primary resource format, leaving individuals with visual impairments or print disabilities at a disadvantage.
4. **Digital accessibility challenges:** Digital accessibility is another pressing challenge in Nigerian academic libraries. Many library websites, online catalogs, and digital resources are not designed with accessibility in mind, creating barriers for individuals with disabilities (Akintunde & Uzuegbu, 2020). Lack of compatibility with assistive technologies, inadequate alternative text descriptions for images, and inaccessible navigation structures all contribute to limited access to digital resources and services.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

In conclusion, this paper has examined the role of quality assurance in ensuring accessible services and resources in academic libraries in Nigeria. Quality assurance plays a vital role in

promoting accessibility in academic libraries. Strategies such as institutional commitment, collaboration, continuous staff training, and comprehensive accessibility policies contribute to the effective implementation of accessibility measures. Integrating accessibility into procurement processes and conducting regular audits are also crucial for maintaining and improving accessibility standards. The importance of quality assurance for accessible services and resources in academic libraries cannot be overstated. It is essential for academic library administrators, governing bodies, and stakeholders to recognize the significance of quality assurance in ensuring accessibility. They should prioritize accessibility in their policies, allocate resources, and collaborate to create a culture of inclusivity. Additionally, continuous research, innovation, and knowledge sharing are vital to further enhance accessibility in academic libraries. Academic libraries should actively engage with users. By forging strong collaborative relationships, libraries can develop comprehensive accessibility policies, share resources, and exchange best practices. Continuous staff training and professional development are vital components of ensuring accessibility. By equipping staff with the necessary knowledge and skills, libraries can foster an environment where accessibility remains a priority and is integrated into everyday practices.

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