

Accommodating Inclusive Education in LIS research: In the case of VICLIS conferences

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Abstract

As an important part of education, the library should accommodate Inclusive Education to ensure quality and equity. This paper examines ten (10) research abstracts and presentations presented at the Virtual International Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS) initiated by the SLTC Research University Sri Lanka, under the subtheme "Library Services for People with Special Needs" to explore the tendency of Library & Information science researchers to adapting the inclusive education in libraries. The sample included 25 papers submitted by LIS researchers from 08 countries to VICLIS conferences and after a review process, 10 papers selected from India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka were analyzed using the thematic analysis method. Findings indicated that themes such as accessibility to books, improving reading and writing skills in visually impaired students, challenges faced by differently-abled users, the role of libraries in supporting students with disabilities, repackaging of information individual needs, and availability of assistive technology devices in university libraries were dominant in LIS research. Findings imply that a new theme "Inclusive Library Service" should be incorporated into the library service. LIS researchers have recommended providing Braille books, addressing access to information issues, promoting accessibility in library buildings, implementing the Marrakesh Treaty to support visually impaired students, improving staff awareness and training,

and collaborating with relevant organizations. Libraries can play a vital role in empowering users with special needs. Future LIS research should concentrate on assistive technologies, information literacy for differently-abled people, collection development, and professional development needs in libraries to enhance inclusive education.

Keywords: Accessibility, Inclusive library services, Library services, Social inclusion, Special needs,

Introduction and research problem

Inclusive education, as defined by UNICEF, ensures that all children, including those with disabilities and speakers of minority languages, have equal opportunities to access and participate in education (UNICEF, n.d.). This principle is rooted in the belief that every individual has the right to be included and valued within the educational community, fostering social cohesion, promoting equality, and empowering individuals to reach their full potential.

The field of Library and Information Science (LIS) plays a vital role in supporting inclusive education (Moirangthem & Phuritsabam, 2022). LIS professionals have the responsibility of providing equitable access to information resources and services, ensuring that libraries and information centers are accessible to everyone, regardless of their background or abilities. By doing so, they contribute to the principles of inclusivity and equal opportunities in education.

Research in LIS holds significant value in addressing the challenges faced by diverse populations in accessing and utilizing information effectively (Ayoung, Baada, & Baayel, 2020). It examines the role of libraries and information centers in promoting inclusive education and aims to identify gaps, develop strategies, and create inclusive policies and practices that benefit all learners. By enhancing the effectiveness of library services, developing accessible technologies,

and designing user-centered information systems, inclusive education research in LIS contributes to fostering inclusive learning environments.

The Virtual International Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS) is an annual conference that brings together researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from around the world (VICLIS, 2021). It serves as a platform for knowledge exchange, networking opportunities, and advancements in research and practice within the LIS domain. VICLIS conferences covered various topics, including information organization, information retrieval, digital libraries, information literacy, information behavior, and technology's impact on information services and the library's role in inclusive education as well.

VICLIS conference is typically conducted online to allow participants join from diverse geographical locations and actively engage in conference activities (VICLIS, 2021.). It provides a valuable setting for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to remain updated on the latest developments, exchange insights, and contribute to the growth of LIS. Furthermore, VICLIS dedicates specific tracks to showcase research findings related to library services for people with special needs, highlighting the importance of inclusivity and accessibility within library services.

Many of LIS conferences in global level have contributed to investigate the role of libraries to enhance the inclusive education. However, in the Sri Lankan conferences it seems less attended (Perera, et al. 2012). As a Sri Lanka based global conference it is important to examine how VICLIS has addressed the Inclusive Education through its researches. This research aims to conduct a thematic analysis of research abstracts and oral presentations presented at VICLIS conferences, focusing on inclusive education in LIS research (VICLIS, n.d.). By examining these abstracts and presentations the study seeks to identify key themes, trends, and perspectives related to inclusive education from LIS field. The research aims to contribute to the advancement

of inclusive practices in LIS, promote equal access to information resources, and inform future research directions and practices.

Objectives of the study

1. Identify the key themes related to the inclusive education from the literature.
2. Identify the dominant themes related to inclusive education in the research papers presented at the Virtual International Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS).
3. Compare the contribution of VICLIS research with the themes extracted from literature .
4. Provide recommendations for improving LIS contribution to inclusive education

Scope and Significance of the Study

This study focuses on the examining the contribution of inclusive education in LIS. Although the study concentrates on global level LIS research on inclusive education, this study limited to examine the abstracts/presentations presented in VICLIS conferences. This study holds several significant implications for the field of Library and Information Science and the broader education sector: By analyzing the dominant themes in the research papers, the study highlights the importance of incorporating inclusive education in libraries. It emphasizes the need for libraries to provide equitable access to information and resources for individuals with special needs, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and accessible educational environment. The study's findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, library professionals, and educators. Recommendations such as providing Braille books, addressing access to information issues, promoting accessibility in library buildings, and implementing the Marrakesh Treaty offer

practical steps to improve library services for people with special needs. The study recognizes the vital role that libraries can play in empowering individuals with special needs. By focusing on assistive technologies, information literacy, collection development, and staff training, libraries can enhance their support for differently-abled users, facilitating their educational journey and social inclusion. The study identifies areas for future research, including the exploration of assistive technologies, information literacy for differently-abled individuals, collection development practices, and professional development needs in libraries. This guidance helps shape future studies and advancements in the field of inclusive education within libraries. Overall, the study contributes to the understanding of inclusive education in library settings and offers practical recommendations to enhance library services for people with special needs, fostering social inclusion and equitable access to information and education.

Review of the relevant literature

Inclusive education is a topic of growing interest in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS) research. This literature review aims to provide an overview of existing studies, articles, and publications that explore the role of libraries in accommodating inclusive education. It will discuss key concepts, theories, and frameworks related to inclusive education in the context of libraries, as well as highlight the challenges faced by differently-abled users in accessing library resources. Additionally, it will emphasize the importance of accessible books and technologies, the significance of staff awareness and training, and the themes covered in research abstracts from the Virtual International Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS) under the subtheme "Library Services for People with Special Needs."

Nandi, A. (2021) emphasizes that more than 21 million people in the globe face disability issues and libraries should cater this community by providing access their desired information using

numerous mechanisms. Number of studies have emphasized the importance of inclusive education in libraries. One key concept in this context is Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which proposes that educational materials and practices should be designed to meet the diverse needs of learners. UDL principles can be applied to library services, ensuring that resources and information are accessible to all users (Zhong, 2012). Zhong explores the implementation of UDL in libraries, highlighting the positive impact it has on inclusive education.

In the context of libraries, accessibility and inclusion play vital roles in ensuring equal access to information and resources for all users. Jaeger, Wentz, and Bertot (2015) emphasize the significance of accessible e-books in academic libraries, highlighting their potential to enhance accessibility and inclusion. Their work sheds light on the importance of incorporating accessible formats to accommodate diverse users' needs.

The use of assistive technologies in libraries plays a crucial role in facilitating access to information for differently-abled users. Odigie and Okube (2021) conducted a study that specifically examines the place of assistive technologies in the service delivery of special needs users in academic libraries of Kogi State, Nigeria. Their research findings provide valuable insights into how these technologies can enhance accessibility and inclusivity.

Library employees are very important in enhancing inclusive education. Staff awareness and training play a critical role in ensuring inclusive library services. Forrest (2005) conducted research on the impact of disability awareness training for library staff, emphasizing the positive outcomes it brings in terms of improved attitudes, knowledge, and practices. The study highlights the importance of equipping library staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide inclusive services to individuals with disabilities.

The need for librarians to develop cultural competence to better serve diverse user populations, including individuals with disabilities, has been highlighted in the study by Butler (2020). The research emphasizes the importance of improving cultural competence among librarians to reduce health disparities and provide inclusive services (Butler et al., 2016).

According to Twaambo et al (2022) it is a challenge for providing resources and services for the differently abled users in libraries. They assert that libraries have made impressive progress in some parts of the world but other parts remain lamentable to the extent. They outline resources and services for persons with disabilities that can be used as a standard for higher education libraries.

Despite the existing body of literature on inclusive education in LIS, some gaps and limitations remain. For a fact, many LIS literature has focused much on conceptual descriptions on inclusive education than empirical investigations (Nilholm, 2021). One significant gap is the lack of research focusing specifically on the thematic analysis of research abstracts presented at conferences.

Users with disabilities are considered as a vulnerable group who face discrimination and restrictions in accessing the library service. There barriers can be identified as inability to access to the available formats of materials and Web-Pages, inaccessible library buildings, and unavailability of trained library staff (Tinklin, & Hall, 1999; Banks, 2017; Wolf, 2001; Phukubje, & Ngoepe, 2017).

The paper by Lankathilaka and Perera (2021) explores the information services available for visually impaired undergraduates and the implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty. The study aims to examine the usage of different information sources by visually impaired students,

identify barriers they face in accessing information, and propose solutions using the Marrakesh Treaty. Findings of their study indicated that visually impaired undergraduates prefer audiobooks over printed materials and face challenges such as the lack of audiobooks and dependence on others for information search. The study highlights the need for implementing the Marrakesh Treaty in Sri Lanka to improve services for visually impaired students, recommending the enhancement of audiobook collections and the establishment of special mechanisms for providing information services to meet their needs (Lankathilaka & Perera, 2021).

Literature indicates the need for more research on the challenges faced by differently-abled users in accessing library resources. Although several studies have acknowledged the importance of accessibility, there is a need for further exploration of specific challenges and barriers encountered by different user groups.

Research Methodology

Thematic analysis is a flexible and systematic approach that enables the identification and interpretation of recurring themes, patterns, and concepts within qualitative data. It allows for a rich exploration of the research abstracts and provided insights into the key themes and perspectives related to inclusive education in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS). Therefore, this study employed the thematic analysis as the methodology for the investigation.

The study followed a purposive sampling process. Firstly, all the available research abstracts from the two VICLIS conferences held in 2021 and 2022 were collected and compiled. The research abstracts and presentations were then reviewed to determine their relevance to the topic of inclusive education in LIS. Only abstracts and presentations directly related to themes such as challenges, or strategies of inclusive education in libraries were selected as the sample (25) and

considered for further analysis. Each abstract and presentations were read and coded independently by multiple researchers to ensure reliability and reduce potential bias. Coding involved systematically identifying and labeling key ideas, concepts, and themes present in the abstracts. The researchers discussed and compared their coding to ensure consistency and addressed any discrepancies through consensus. This collaborative process enhanced the validity and reliability of the thematic analysis. After vigorous process of reviewing, 10 abstracts out of 25 presented at VICLIS 2021 and 2022 were analyzed and compared with a predefined list of themes representing inclusive education extracted from the literature review. The sample represented a variety of countries from different continents to provide a global perspective on inclusive education in LIS.

Analysis of Data

As an exploratory study, first through the literature review key areas to cover inclusive education by libraries were identified and described under dominant themes:

1. **Accessibility to books:** This theme highlights the importance of ensuring access to books for individuals with special needs. The research abstracts emphasize the need for libraries to provide accessible formats such as Braille books and address issues related to access to information.
2. **Improving reading and writing skills:** This theme explores strategies and interventions aimed at enhancing the reading and writing abilities of visually impaired students. The abstracts/presentations discuss approaches, technologies, and techniques that can be employed in libraries to support these students in their educational pursuits.
3. **Challenges faced by differently-abled users:** This theme focuses on identifying and addressing the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities when accessing library

services. The research abstracts and presentations highlight the barriers encountered by these users and propose solutions to improve their experience and ensure inclusivity.

4. Role of libraries in supporting students with disabilities: This theme underscores the role of libraries in providing support and resources to students with disabilities. The abstracts discuss the various ways in which libraries can contribute to the educational journey of these students, including offering specialized services, adaptive technologies, and inclusive learning environments.
5. Repackaging of information for individual needs: This theme highlights the importance of tailoring information and resources to meet the specific needs of users with disabilities. The abstracts/presentations explored strategies for repackaging information, making it more accessible, understandable, and suitable for diverse users.
6. Availability of assistive technology devices in university libraries: This theme emphasizes the significance of incorporating assistive technologies in university libraries to enhance accessibility and inclusivity. The abstracts discuss the importance of providing devices and technologies that can assist individuals with disabilities in accessing information and engaging with library resources.

These identified themes collectively demonstrate the focus of LIS research on the adaptation of inclusive education in libraries. Table 1 depicts the identified themes and coverage by VICLIS research abstracts.

Table 01- Comparison of Inclusive education themes of the LIS with VICLIS research

Themes/areas of inclusive education identified in relation to inclusive education from literature	Areas covered by VICLIS Papers	Areas not covered in literature
Accessibility in library services and facilities.	Accessibility to books and resources for all users.	Sensory and learning disabilities.
Diverse and representative collections in libraries.	The importance of diverse and representative collections in libraries.	Digital accessibility.
Inclusive programming for a diverse range of users.	Development of inclusive programming for a diverse range of users.	Social inclusion and community engagement.
Collaboration and partnerships among libraries, schools, educators, and community organizations.	Collaboration and partnership among libraries, schools, educators, and community organizations.	Universal design.
The user-centered approach in providing inclusive library services.	Adoption of a user-centered approach in library services.	Specific recommendations for information literacy and collection development.
The significance of accessible books and technologies in promoting inclusive education.	The provision of Braille books and addressing access to information issues.	
Staff awareness and training for providing inclusive services.	Promotion of accessibility in library buildings.	
The importance of cultural competence among librarians.	Implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty to support visually impaired students.	
Gaps and limitations in existing research on inclusive education in LIS.	Improvement of staff awareness and training.	
Thematic analysis of research abstracts from conferences on inclusive education.	Collaboration with relevant organizations.	
	The role of libraries in empowering users with special needs.	

Accordingly, VICLIS research abstracts have focused mainly on improving access to information for differently abled persons, addressing challenges face by them, and enhancing support for individuals with disabilities in library settings. These themes emphasize the role of libraries in promoting social inclusion, ensuring equity, and empowering users with special needs.

Findings and Discussion

Findings of the study reveal that research abstracts presented at VICLIS conferences have included a considerable number of researches on inclusive education themes. However, despite the presence of these themes, based on the literature review, there are certain gaps or areas of inclusive education seem to be lacking in the analyzed VICLIS papers. Some potential areas for further exploration and research are as follows:

1. Assistive technologies: Assistive technologies are very important for inclusive education in university libraries. Future researchers could be encouraged to investigate deeper into specific technologies related to providing information for differently abled individuals, their effectiveness, and their integration into library services.
2. Information literacy for differently-abled people: In VICLIC papers, some abstracts touch on the repackaging of information, but more attention could be given to information literacy programs designed specifically for individuals with disabilities, focusing on empowering them to navigate information resources effectively.
3. Collection development: The research abstracts presented to VICLIS have not sufficiently discussed about collection development strategies to ensure inclusive information service. Future research could explore how libraries can develop their resource collections to cater to the diverse needs and interests of differently abled individuals.
4. Professional development needs: Some abstracts briefly mentioned of the improving staff awareness and training, but more comprehensive research studies could explore the professional development needs of library staff in the context of inclusive education. This would help ensure that library professionals possess the necessary skills and knowledge to provide inclusive services.
5. Universal Design: Universal design principles in this context aim to create environments, services, and resources are accessible and usable by a number of individuals simultaneously easily. Integrating universal design concepts into library facilities,

services, and resource selection can promote inclusive information service for people with special needs.

Table 2 compares the coverage of different themes covered in Library and Information Science Literature, and proposes the possible themes not covered either LIS literature or VICLIS research papers. Accordingly future research in inclusive education should cover themes like sensory & learning disabilities, digital accessibility, social inclusion and community engagement, universal design, and Information literacy education. This indicates some research gaps related to inclusive education.

Table 2- Research gap in LIS literature on Inclusive education

Themes/Areas	Covered in Literature	Covered by VICLIS	Not Covered in Literature
Accessibility	Yes	Yes	Sensory and learning disabilities, Digital accessibility
Diverse and representative collections	Yes	Yes	N/A
Inclusive programming	Yes	Yes	Social inclusion and community engagement
Collaboration and partnerships	Yes	Yes	Universal design
User-centered approach	Yes	Yes	Specific recommendations for information literacy and collection development
Significance of accessible books and technolog	Yes	Yes	N/A
Staff awareness and training	Yes	Yes	N/A
Cultural competence among librarians	Yes	No	N/A
Gaps and limitations	Yes	No	N/A
Thematic analysis of research abstracts	Yes	Yes	N/A
Role of libraries in empowering users with spec	Yes	No	N/A

By addressing these gaps, future LIS research can further contribute to the adaptation of inclusive education in libraries and strengthen the support provided to individuals with disabilities.

Conclusions

The importance of providing inclusive library services and attending to the various needs of people with disabilities are emphasized by the theme analysis of the research papers and presentations. The topics that have been highlighted highlight important areas where libraries may support inclusive education. The conclusions drawn from the analysis serve as a roadmap for future study and actual application.

For libraries to guarantee equal access to books and information sources, improving accessibility is essential. Braille books, accessible digital resource forms, and the removal of physical barriers in library structures can all help with this. Libraries make it possible for people with disabilities to take full advantage of educational opportunities by putting accessibility first.

To fully understand the possibilities of assistive technologies in libraries, more research is required. This includes examining some technologies' efficacy, incorporating them into library services, and gauging how they affect disabled students' educational experiences. To empower users and foster inclusive learning environments, libraries should invest in a wide variety of assistive technology tools.

To give people with disabilities the capacity to efficiently explore and critically assess information, tailored information literacy programs are crucial. Libraries may play a significant role in supporting information literacy so that users with disabilities have better information-seeking skills.

Another crucial element is curating inclusive collections that take into account the various needs and interests of people with disabilities. In order to ensure that users with disabilities have access to pertinent and interesting resources, this includes taking into account a variety of forms, topics,

and viewpoints. Strategies for collection development should be inclusive and take into account the particular needs and preferences of these consumers.

Libraries must provide their staff with awareness and training on disability inclusion. Offering staff members training and professional development opportunities can help them better understand their roles, change their attitudes, and acquire the knowledge and abilities they need to deliver inclusive services. In order to create thorough training programs for library workers, cooperation with pertinent organizations and specialists is essential.

By putting these suggestions into practice, libraries can provide inclusive environments that promote equitable opportunity for people with disabilities. Libraries support social inclusion, empower users with special needs, and make ensuring that libraries are inviting spaces for everyone through embracing accessibility, assistive technologies, information literacy, inclusive collection development, and staff training.

Continued research and practice are necessary to explore specific strategies and interventions for enhancing inclusive library services. Empirical studies can investigate the effectiveness of different approaches in achieving inclusive education outcomes. Libraries play a pivotal role in promoting inclusive education and empowering individuals with disabilities to reach their full potential.

In the educational sector, inclusive education is crucial, and the discipline of library and information science is no exception. LIS professionals help to create equitable learning environments by promoting inclusive education and researching the issues. The VICLIS conferences offer a forum for debating and presenting research on inclusive education,

encouraging information sharing, and advancing inclusive practices in the LIS industry, ultimately proving beneficial to all students.

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Tables

Table 01- Comparison of Inclusive education themes of the LIS with VICLIS research

Table-02- Research gap in LIS literature on Inclusive education