INCLUSIVE LIBRARY SERVICES: AN IMPERATIVE FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
The paper explored the need for inclusive library services in the academic library in Nigeria. Students with disability attend institutions of higher learning and as such need library services just like other students. Although these library services are available to other students, students living with disability cannot easily access them. Hence this paper highlights the benefits of inclusive services in the library. It also discussed the resources needed for such services as well as challenges academic libraries encounter in trying to render inclusive services. The paper equally made recommendation on how to counter such challenges.

Keywords: **Inclusive Library Services, Academic libraries, Students with Disabilities**

Introduction

As the hospital is important to patients, so is the library important to students and researchers. A library is a collection of books and other forms of records and resources, housed, organized and interpreted to meet the broad varying needs of students, staff and others for information, recreation and inspiration (Adegoke in Sobalage & Ogunmodede, 2015). There are different types of library, of which the academic library is one of them. Academic libraries are libraries attached to tertiary institutions such as Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, Colleges of Agriculture, Colleges of Technology and research institutes (Akporhonor, 2005).
Academic library is the hallmark of every institution of learning. It is the knowledge power house that makes behavioral study life of students and lecturers perfect. Academic libraries as reservoir of information are the most reliable information reference center where users can seek information for building their profession. Singh and Kaur (2009) stated that preservation and access to knowledge and information is the main mandate of academic libraries alongside supporting the mission of their parent institutions which is teaching and research. Academic library according to Sobalage and Ogunmodede (2015) is a library that is established to take care of the information need of students, lectures, researchers and other community of scholar. In spite of the ever-growing realization of the need for effective library service provision to all students by the academic libraries, inclusive library services still suffer neglect.

Inclusion can mean different things to different people. An inclusive library is a vital community resource, addressing the diverse information needs of all members in the community (CLA in Moisey, 2007). According to Grassi (2013), inclusion is an approach to library service that involves patrons with disabilities in an equitable way. Grassi further stated that if the library does everything to meet the varied needs of patrons with special needs, they are truly being inclusive. Inclusive library service in this paper means the academic library having students living with disability in mind during the conceptualization of its services. This starts from the construction of the library building by adding some aids like lifts and flat

climbing steps for wheel chairs, acquisition of their information resources and employment of trained staff specifically for them. Promoting inclusion is the key for reducing or removing several barriers facing students with disabilities. Common disabilities include blindness, deafness, dumbness, retardation, muscular, nervous, and sensory disorders. According to Sambo (2016), the physically challenged students encounter barriers in their quest for education. Viney (2006) rightly pointed out that they encounter physical access limitation such as retrieving books from the library shelves. Okoli (2010) observed horrors of architectural buildings which have discouraged many challenged persons from visiting the library. Bradley cited in Sambo (2016) opined that challenged students start out with the same qualification and aspiration as normal students, but because they encounter barriers, they perform poorly.

Students with disabilities do not visit the library because they may not be able to access the information resources. Some of them require special tools or alternative forms of library materials to access information (Moisey, 2007). In this regard, academic libraries should be committed to providing equal access to all categories of students, whether normal or challenged users. As more people with disability attend institutions of higher learning, it is expedient for the library management to provide the same level of service to all its users without discrimination.

Benefits of Inclusion

According to Grassi (2013), inclusion has many benefits, some of which are:

1. Inclusion provides belonging, acceptance, and developmentally appropriate practices.
2. Inclusion teaches people with special needs typically developing skills.
3. Inclusion provides an opportunity for people with special needs to develop friendships.
4. Inclusion provides children with special needs an opportunity to develop positive attitudes towards themselves and others who are different from themselves.

Inclusive Services in Libraries

Academic libraries provide variety of services to support the teaching, learning and research of their parent institutions. There are so many inclusive services libraries provide to help meet the information needs of students with disabilities. Some of the services include:

1. Inclusive Circulation Services:

The circulation section of the academic library provides lending services of library materials to users. Libraries offering inclusive services should be able to provide library resources in different formats. Registration of library users is done at the circulation section. Libraries need to provide alternative registration forms such Braille application and application forms that can be completed using typewriters and some other measures. This can go a long way in giving the students with disabilities sense of belonging. Libraries should not create a separate section where the information resources for the handicapped are kept, as this will make them feel rejected. Their materials must be in the same hall with other information resources. This will encourage them to keep visiting the library with their colleagues. Provisions should be made for order of library materials through telephone, book reservations and renewals.

2. Inclusive Reference Services:

The reference section of the academic library is the information service unit where user's information needs are taken care of. In the words of Katherine, Gatenby and Chittenden (2008), when students with disabilities come into the library, reference staff should focus on their information needs and not be distracted by the disability. Ideally, the reference staff needs adequate sensitization on how to attend to the needs of these set of users in order not to scare them away from visiting the library. On the part of the

reference librarian, his services to students with disabilities need serious commitment so as to be able to meet with their information needs.

3. Inclusive Personnel Services:

Personnel service here is all about deployment of staff in the academic library to serve as helping hands to students with disabilities. Adina in Echezona *et al* (2011) talking from experience in Access and Syracuse University said that handicapped students show strong preferences for oral readings. For that reason, staff need to be deployed in academic libraries to serve as readers and helpers to students with disabilities.

4. Inclusive Internet Services:

This consists of using the World Wide Web to access information. For a functional inclusive library service, libraries needs to make published materials available in electronic form. Library computer desks need to be moderate and not high so that users on wheel chairs and clutches can browse comfortably just like every other student.

5. Inclusive Current Awareness Services:

This is more of keeping the users up to date in their areas of interest. As disabilities are of different types, so are their information resources. Some of them use Braille, talking books, screen reader, word board and so on. For inclusive current awareness service, different format has to be adopted to circulate the information.

Challenges Faced by Library Professionals in Inclusive Library Provision

The problems of inclusive library service as identified by Alemna (1995) are as follows.

1. Lack of skilled manpower to produce the material needed by the handicapped may result in poor production of the materials. This also affects operation and maintenance of equipment needed for inclusive library service.
2. Lack of properly trained library personnel. This problem originated from the library schools. The curricula of most library schools are geared towards conventional librarianship. Library staff are therefore often unable to attend to the needs of the blind.
3. Importation often poses the problem of obtaining materials that do not relate to the culture and background of the students.
4. Architectural barriers: Most of the older libraries especially University libraries were built before the era of inclusive education. Therefore, such barriers such as steps, high book shelves, narrow doorways and lack of elevators are still prevalent in some libraries. These obstacles can be extremely frustrating, if not impossible for the handicapped students to cope with.

Resources Needed for Inclusive Library Services

1. **For the visually impaired users:**

   The library should provide them with repackaged information materials that can be used into Braille format. Books can be repackaged into talking books, talking newspapers in the form of sound recordings. Eskay and Chima (2013) identified library and information resources for the blind and visually impaired to include:

   - Braille books: Braille is a system of reading and writing whereby raised dots are used to represent letters which are read by touch. Braille books are approximate for users who have both visual and hearing problems.
   - Talking books: These are audio versions of books that could be recorded on cassettes, CD Rom, DVD and the Internet as e-books. Talking books are preferred by the majority of the visually impaired.
   - Talking newspapers: These are Audio recordings of news articles in the dailies.

- Large printed materials: These are documents printed in large fonts for use by partially sighted users

A broad range of ICTs otherwise called adaptive or assistive technologies are now available to provide access to information in electronic database and on the Internet, giving blind users equal opportunity as the sighted (Eskay &Chima, 2013). These innovative technologies or assistive technology devices include:

- Screen Magnifier: This is a software that allow text or graphics on computer screen to be magnified up to sixteen times the original size.
- Screen Reader: A software that reads out the content of a document to the learner. It is a software programme that works in conjunction with a speech synthesizer to provide verbalization of everything on the screen including menus, text and punctuation. It gives persons with visual impairment direct access to the world of print. It helps a blind person to read freely at his own pace without assistance.
- Voice Recognition Software: This allows the user to input data into the computer by voice.
- Braille Translation Software: Translate text and formatting into appropriate Braille characters and format.
- Braille writing Equipment: Used for creation of paper Braille materials. It can be manual or electronic devices.
- Scan and read software: Reads books and other print materials aloud
- Jaws Screen Reader: A program that allows users to listen to the contents of the computer screen

2. **For the Hearing Impaired Users**

In the case of hearing impaired users of the library, the academic libraries should provide them with low teaching materials that relate to literature-based reading; book reviewing; story telling programmes; and teaching them library skills through signs. Other ways through which libraries can serve them is through organizing activities with parents in the form of finger spelling, lip reading, bliss symbolic, teaching videos, CD-ROMS with dictionaries, language stimulating materials (games like puzzles, chess), and providing induction loop (Ajogwu,2006).

3. **For the Physically Disabled Users**

In the case of building structure, established library building should be modernized with the needs of users with disabily in mind. Emerging buildings should include ramps and lifts for easy movement. There is the need for special adaptation of the environment at the libraries for all the physically challenged to access the library resources. Shelves should be of moderate size, offering access to all (Echezona, Osadebe & Asogwa, 2011). Libraries should also provide them with adjustable chairs and tables specially made for wheel chairs and crutches.

4. **For Speech Handicapped Users**

The library should provide them with communication devices used by people with difficulty in reading or talking for example. word board. A word board can be as simple as words written on a piece of paper which the user points to, to communicate. This set of users do not have much problem in making use of the library because they can always communicate through writing on a piece of paper.

Conclusion

Students living with disability have the same information needs as every other student in the academic environment, but they need a more convenient format to access that information from the library. Academic libraries should try and be inclusive in their provision of information resources and services as well, to make these set of students feel at home whenever they visit the library.

Recommendation

The following recommendations were made in view of the challenges so far highlighted:

- Professionals are need to convert the information resources to different formats to suit the varying needs of students living with disability.
- Qualified and experienced staff should be employed in academic libraries to provide required inclusive library services and also design appropriate training programme which is capable of preparing library staff to meet with the information needs of the students with disabilities.
- Academic libraries should be adequately funded to provide needed information resources and maintain them.
- There is need for public private partnership in academic libraries for easy procurement of inclusive library resources.
- The architectural barriers such as climbing steps, high book shelves, and narrow doorways in academic libraries can be amended by professional Engineers. What the library management needs to do is to employ their services.

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