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Effect Information Access and Equity to Students with Special Needs in Universities Libraries for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Accessibility is hitherto the incumbent of the technical conceptualization of Equity in regard to students with disability. Hence the concept does not require sympathy but empathy on exploring equal chances to the information regardless of gender or disabilities. Equity in this paper is elaborately means providing any means for information access to students with disabilities and a carefully monitoring for its sustainability. Students with disabilities are those who in any means cannot be educated without special setting, in special classroom, by special teacher/inclusiveness, with special materials as a result of their impairment or disability either physically or orthopedically, mentally, psychologically, emotionally and behaviorally. Among the challenges that prompted to carry out this study is the lack of information access students with disabilities encountering especially in library for their research and practice due the unconcern and consideration given to those students when thinking of libraries construction, poor socialization by staffs of library, insufficient of references textbooks specifically for the client and many more among others. However, this paper is categorically set to explore on the challenges and a way forward. In view of this, the concept of Accessibility, relevant information, equity and students with disabilities are dwells extensively.

Keywords: Information, Accessibility, Equity, Disability, Socialization

Introduction

There is often misunderstanding between the ideas of equality and equity. Equality aims to give everyone the same starting point, while equity seeks to ensure that everyone can reach the same endpoint by providing fair access to opportunities and benefits. Equity involves the fair distribution of resources, programs, and decision-making processes for both males and females with disabilities. It emphasizes that all individuals should have the chance to gain social, psychological, and physical advantages through participation and leadership in sports and physical activities (Dantata, 2011). However, equity does not necessarily mean offering identical programs or facilities to people with disabilities. Gender equity for individuals with special needs requires a variety of activities and programs tailored to their specific interests, needs, and experiences. Thus, while some activities may mirror those for non-disabled individuals, others might be modified or entirely unique. Human rights laws, such as the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, uphold the principle of equity and support affirmative action measures to remove disadvantages.

Accessibility

Accessibility in this context refers to both the digital and physical environments of libraries and information systems. Virtual accessibility involves the ability to reach and use online databases and websites, while physical accessibility pertains to enabling people with disabilities to navigate and utilize library spaces. The concept focuses specifically on access for persons with disabilities, though it is related to general usability (Musa, 2012). Accessibility encompasses both *reasonable accommodation*—necessary and appropriate modifications that do not create an undue burden to ensure equal rights and freedoms—and *universal design*, which promotes environments usable by all people without needing adaptation (United Nations, 2006).

Library

The term library originates from the Latin *libraria*, meaning “a place for books,” derived from *liber* meaning “book. According to Pierce Butler, a library is a social institution designed to transmit society’s accumulated knowledge and experiences to individuals through various media such as books, maps, charts, microfilms, and audio recordings (Prince, 2019). Essentially, a library is a public organization responsible for collecting, preserving, and providing access to records of human thought (Ranganathan, 2016). These records—whether manuscripts, periodicals, audiovisual materials, or other formats—are systematically arranged and maintained within a physical structure to ensure effective use by current and future users.

Disability

The United Nations (UN, 2019) describes disability as a broad concept encompassing long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, when combined with social and environmental barriers, restrict full participation in society. Modern perspectives increasingly view disability not just as a medical issue but as the result of interactions between individuals and their environments (Devlieger, 2015). Prince (2019) further notes that disability is a socially shaped, administratively managed, and politically debated phenomenon rather than a fixed condition. Catherine (2020) defines disability as any limitation or inability, stemming from an impairment, to perform activities typically considered normal for humans. While impairment refers to a disturbance at the organ level, disability concerns the limitation experienced at the activity level.

A number of points needs to be note about disability:

- a. Disability cannot be seen in a person (unlike impairment)
- b. It is not every instance of lack or restriction of ability that is called disability.
- c. Disability is not total or absolute likewise normality is not total or absolute.
- d. Everyone is disabled, the different is in the degree. Finally, disability set in when an individual cannot walk because of missing lower limbs, cannot see because of blindness, cannot hear because of deafness, cannot socialized because of maladjustment etc.

Section 8 of the national commission for persons with accessibilities says that:

- (1) Persons with disabilities are guaranteed access to public institutions and facilities.
- (2) All organs and agencies within the Federal Republic of Nigeria have the responsibility to ensure provisions for persons with disabilities, including:
 - (a) Access and adequate mobility within their facilities; and
 - (b) Appropriate and safe exits designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities.

Handicap: - refers to the disadvantages of having impairment or disability which prevent or hinder the child from living a normal life. It refers to the totality of all the difficulties, circumstances, inconveniences, disadvantages and social prejudices that an impaired or disabled person experience as he/she interact with school, society and environment (Musa, 2018). Out of the three terms, the concept handicap is bears a most negative impression. Handicap literally paints a picture of someone helpless. Examples of handicap are: (United Nations, 2009).

- ✓ Limited opportunities (disadvantage) Denied a job (discrimination) Negative labeling (social prejudice)
- ✓ Disappointment Refused admission in schools etc.

Exceptionality: - This refers to a notable deviation from the expected average in specific areas such as intellectual capacity, physical functioning, or physical characteristics.

A departure from this normal trend must be substantial for it to be regarded as exceptional. For instance, in an evaluation (test, exams etc.), students that score 98% and 10% are said to have deviated substantially from the presumed pass mark of 40%, these scores are exceptional (Abdullah, 2021).

Statement of the problems

Lack of access to information experience by Students with Disability especially in library for their research and practice due the unconcern and consideration of their peculiar needs, poor socialization by staffs of library, insufficient of references textbooks specifically for the client and many more among others prompted the researchers to conduct this study.

Research Questions

1. What are the prevalent of Disabilities clusters attending libraries for research and practice?
2. What are the libraries have access to information for students with Disabilities?

Hypothesis

H01: There is no significance difference in Accessibility and Equity among students with disabilities in access to information in the libraries for research and practice.

Methodology

Research Design

This study is descriptive in nature and utilizes a survey research design. According to Maiwada (2012), survey designs are quantitative research methods in which investigators distribute surveys to a sample or the entire population to assess and describe their attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics. In this approach, researchers gather numerical data through questionnaires and use statistical analysis to identify and explain trends in the participants' responses.

Population and Sample Size

The population of the study consisted of four (4) Clusters of students with Disabilities which comprises of Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Physically Challenged and Albinism from four (4) libraries which includes; Abdullahi Mahdi Library (Gombe State University), Bayero University Library, Kano, Dutinma and Dutse.

Table 1: Population Distribution of Students

S/N	Libraries	Population	Percentage
1	Bayero University Library, Kano (BUK)	44	38%
2	Abdullahi Mahdi Library (GSU)	25	27%
3	JD Amin Library (FUD)	18	19%
4	Federal University Library, Dutsin-Ma	17	16%
	Total	104	100%

Source: Libraries Record 2024

Table 2: Table of Sample Size

S/N	Disabilities Clusters	Population	Percentage
1	Visual Impairment	43	36%
2	Hearing Impairment	27	23%
3	Physically Challenged	66	18%
4	Albinism	20	10%
	Total	104	100%

Source: Libraries Record 2024

Sample size

The sample size for this study comprises of 44 students with disabilities from four (4) clusters attending Bayero University Library Kano.

Data Analysis

Presentation of Results

Research Question One: What are the prevalent rates of students Attending Bayero University Library, Kano?

Table 3: Table of Prevalence:

S/N	Disabilities Clusters	Males	Females	Total	%
1	Hearing Impairment	07	06	13	29%
2	Visual Impairment	11	09	20	40%
3	Physically Challenged	05	03	08	20%
4	Albinism	01	02	03	11%
	Total	24	20	44	100%

Table 3 above shows that, 7 males and 6 females which is equal to 13 students with Hearing impairment has 29% rate, the prevalent of those with visual Impairment, Physically Challenged and Albinism are 11, 05 and 01 males together with 09, 03 and 02 of females with the total of 20, 08 and 03 which are corresponded to 40%, 20% and 11% respectively.

Research Question Two: What are the libraries have access to information for students with Disabilities?

Table 4: Table of Library(s) with Accessibility:

S/N	Libraries	Provision	Accessibility	Percentage
1	Bayero University Library, Kano (BUK)	Special Needs Unit	Accessible	60%
2	Abdullahi Mahdi Library (GSU)	Disability Desk Officer	Free Barriers	30%
3	JD Amin Library (FUD)	Ramp	Less Accessible	05%
4	Federal University Library, Dutsin-Ma	Ramp	Less Accessible	05%
			Total	100%

Table 4 indicates that the Bayero University library established a Special Needs Unit which is rated as Accessible with 60%. Hence Abdullahi Mahdi Library at Gombe State University Appointed a Disability Desk Officer which assist Disabled from and Barrier in the Library and based on this table it has 30%, moreover, JD Amin Library at Federal University Dutse with Only One Ramp at the main Entrance and likewise Federal University Dutsin-Ma which has 5% both of them.

Hypothesis: There is no significance difference in Accessibility and Equity among students with disabilities in access to information in the libraries for research and practice.

Table 5: Table of Accessibility and Equity:

Group	N	X	SD	Df	t-Value	Cri-Value	Level of Significant	Decision
Accessibility	18	5.53	1.69					
Equity	18	4.23	3.16	17	13.35	2.11	0.05	Rejected

The table above indicated that there is Significant Difference between accessibility and Equality after carefully survey and Data collected, the calculated t-value is 13.35 and the critical t-value is 2.11 at the level of significance of 0.05, therefore the decision is rejected according to the degree of freedom. Hence this rejected the hypothesis that stated that there are no significant differences on the Accessibility and Equity among students with disabilities in access to information in the libraries for research and practice.

Discussion

1. The first finding revealed that there are four (4) Disabilities Clusters that are frequently attending selected libraries for Research and Practices. And this finding is not corresponding to the finding of the study conducted by Fahad (2021), who find that “there are only clusters of students with Disabilities Attending Libraries”.
2. The second findings show that, Bayero University Library, has 60% accessibility to Students with Disabilities because it established Special Needs Library Units with Disabilities staffing from difference clusters for easy Information Access. This finding is also oppose the study conducted by Alaska (2020) who identifies that “there are no any Special Unit Libraries in Nigeria Facilitate by Disabled Staff in Nigerian Libraries”.
3. The third findings indicate that, the hypothesis is Null since it the rejected the assumption which says that there is no significance difference in accessibility and equity among students with disabilities in access to information in the libraries for research and practice.

Conclusion

Providing accessible information in libraries represents a significant responsibility for librarians, who should establish dedicated units to ensure inclusivity for students with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are entitled to equal treatment with all other citizens of Nigeria in every respect. Therefore, it is the duty of government bodies, institutions, and individuals to adopt and promote policies that guarantee the full inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of society.

Recommendations

1. There should be Special Needs Unit in the Universities Libraries Colleges and Polytechnics; therefore, this study is recommending the librarians for the establishments of the Units purposely for Students with Disabilities.
2. Digital Accessibility in information and Equity should reign in the Universities libraries by employing staff with Disabilities.
3. Regular and special concern should be observed for ensuring sustainability of the existed Special Needs Units in the libraries.

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