

# **BOTTLE NECK TO THE EFFECTIVE USE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARY AMONG STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN TERTIARY INSTITUTION IN OYO STATE**

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## **Abstract**

*Over the years, academic libraries have contributed in no small measure to the paradigm shift in Nigeria higher institution of learning from being teaching-centered to learning-centered. It is regarded as the centre of information reservoir, knowledge, skills and adds values to users. The effective utilisation of academic libraries by students with visual impairment was observed to be fundamental so as to bridge all the gaps that exist between students with visual impairment and the academic library. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine bottlenecks to effective use of academic library among students with visual impairment using tertiary institutions in Oyo state as case study. The finding reveals that library environment, library physical structure is the major factors that affect library effective utilisation among visually impaired in the study. It was also discovered that students with visual impairment are confronted with lots of challenges in accessing and using the academic library services. The result also shows that library personnel serve as impediment to effective utilisation of library by students with visual impairment. The study therefore recommends that academic libraries should be well equipped with information resources which are in Braille and large print as well as assistive equipment which enables students with visual impairments to access information independently.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Bottle Neck, Academic, Visual Impairment, Library*

## **Introduction**

Information seeking behaviour describes how people search for information in different contexts such as the workplace, school and everyday living (Olutoyosi and Abodunrin, 2019). Information is essential to all human beings and every library's aim is to provide the right information at the right time and in the right format to its patrons regardless of race, religion, age, nationality and language (Majinge, 2014). This core function includes the provision of information to people with disabilities. Bagandanshwa (2006a) emphasizes that all persons have a right to information regardless of disability. He further stresses that information is power because it is the source of knowledge and facts. The American Library Association (2001) insists that libraries must not discriminate against individuals on the basis of disability and should ensure that every learner and/or patron has equal access to library resources. In the same vein the international library body, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the Public Library Manifesto (1994) emphasize that, libraries

must not discriminate on the basis of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social condition. Every library must also provide proper services for those who do not have easy access to them, such as the mentally and physically disabled, the ill and the imprisoned.

The South African Community Library and Information Services Bill (2010) asserts that

- Library and information services must be provided on the basis of equal access for all regardless of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, consciences, belief, culture, language or birth;
- Special measures must be taken to ensure equitable access to library and information services, including measures to ensure access to library and information services by people with disabilities and other categories of persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination;
- Library and information services must be provided in a manner that is accessible by the public and that complies with the principles of administration service delivery as stipulated in section 195(1) of the constitution;
- Library and information services must facilitate and promote the development of information literacy and electronic communication and technology skills of library users, especially people with disabilities, women and young children;
- Library and information services must promote awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievements, innovations, inter-cultural dialogue and cultural diversity.

Throughout the world people with disabilities face numerous difficulties as they seek to assert their position in a modern, complex and competitive world dominated by able-bodied individuals. People with disabilities are often excluded from social activities and are not treated in the same way as their able-bodied equals. The fact is that in one way or another, their physical state means that they live a life that is perceived to be different from that of able-bodied people (Ochoggia 2003a:307). Valleman (1990 cited in Ochoggia 2003a:307) highlights this point stating that, “how one looks often influences how one is treated”. In the same vein Mandesi (2007) states that people with disabilities face numerous challenges to opportunities equal to those of their peers in day to day life. Environmental, physical, legal and institutional barriers are found throughout society, and people’s negative attitudes to persons with disabilities often cause social exclusion and are the hardest to overcome. Persons with disabilities are often assigned a low social status and in some cases are considered worthless; viewed by those around them with feelings of shame, fear and rejection. There is also the common belief that people with disabilities are cursed or may place a curse on others (Mandesi 2007). Mandesi further insisted that for people with disabilities to be treated equally, physical barriers to accessing resources and attitudes need to change.

Academic libraries, as the providers of information and the heart of higher learning institutions, should be at the forefront in removing all the barriers hindering access to information. In addition the social model of disability of Oliver (1990) requires society to provide equal services by removing barriers which hinder access to education, employment, transport, health, information and so on. In line with this statement, Lee (2007:105) insisted that libraries are an important part of society and

reflect social trends. Anti-discrimination acts in many countries require mainstream library services to be accessible to people with disabilities. Libraries must be designed to be universally accessible and to accommodate individuals with disabilities (Burgstahler 2002:421), with this being the norm rather than an add-on to existing services. Libraries should have equipment in place that facilitates both easy mobility and easier intellectual access for those that are challenged by visual impairments and are in wheelchairs. Such provision would enable all users to get the maximum benefit from the library's materials and services (Deines-Jones 2007: 145).

The libraries have transformed drastically from the storehouses for books and journals to the powerhouses of knowledge and information since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The information and communication technology, which is responsible for this revolution has drastically changed the organization, management and functioning of modern libraries. Modern libraries are increasingly being redefined as places to get unrestricted access to information in many formats and from many sources. In addition to providing materials, they also provide the services of specialists, librarians, who are experts at finding and organizing information and at interpreting information needs. More recently, libraries are understood as extending beyond the physical walls of a building, by including material accessible by electronic means, and by providing the assistance of librarians in navigating and analyzing tremendous amounts of knowledge with a variety of digital tools. The term "library" has itself acquired a secondary meaning: "a collection (Anis, 2017).

Despite the availability of library and information services in University and other higher institution libraries, the services are not accessible and optimally utilized and benefited to students with visual impairment. This is because the typical library still works best for able-bodied patrons. Students with visual impairment still encounter problems (Rumsey, 2002).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to:

1. Examine how academic library physical structure serves as bottleneck to effective use of library among tertiary students with visual impairment
2. Identify some challenges faced by students with visual impairments in accessing and using academic library services
3. Examine how library personnel serve as impediment to effective utilisation of library by students with visual impairment.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions guide the study:

- (i) How does the physical structure of the institution library affect its effective utilisation as a visually impaired?
- (ii) What challenges do students with visual impairments face in accessing and using academic library services?

(iii) Does the library personnel serves as impediment to effective utilisation of library by students with visual impairment?

**Methodology**

This study utilises survey research design of *Ex post facto* type. The population of this study consists of male and female student who have visual impairment which ranges from totally blind and low vision in tertiary institutions in Oyo state. 70 students were purposively selected from the target population. Self made questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentages, mean and standard deviation was used to analysing the data collected for the study.

**Results**

**Research question one:** How does the physical structure of the institution library affect its effective utilisation as a visually impaired?

S/N	Physical structure	SD	D	U	A	SA	$\bar{x}$	S.D
1	The library environment does not add to my discomfort whenever I want to make use of the library	14 20.0%	16 22.9%	5 7.1%	25 35.7%	10 14.3%	3.01	1.41
2	The library physical structure accommodate all my learning needs as a student with visual impairment	21 30.0%	29 41.4%	-	11 15.7%	9 12.9%	2.40	1.39
3	Effective utilization of the library by me as a visually impaired was aided by the library physical structure	25 35.7%	30 42.9%	3 4.3%	7 10.0%	5 7.1%	2.10	1.21
4	The structural design of the library make it easy for me to move independently	23 32.9%	40 57.1%	1 1.4%	4 5.7%	2 2.9%	1.89	0.91
5	I was able to navigate through all sections in the library as a student with visual impairment	29 41.4%	35 50.0%	-	4 5.7%	2 2.9%	1.79	0.93
<b>Weighted Mean =2.24</b>								

Table 1 shows how physical structure of the institution library affects its effective utilisation as a visually impaired. “The library environment does not add to my discomfort whenever I want to make use of the library” ( $\bar{x}$  =3.01) was rated highest by the mean score rating and was followed by “The library physical structure accommodates all my learning needs as a student with visual impairment” ( $\bar{x}$  =2.40), “Effective utilization of the library by me as a visually impaired was aided by the library physical structure” ( $\bar{x}$  =2.10), “The structural design of the library makes it easy for me to move independently” ( $\bar{x}$  =1.89), and lastly by “I was able to navigate through all sections in the library as a student with visual impairment” ( $\bar{x}$  =1.79) respectively.

Inference to be deduced from the expression above is that library environment, library physical structure are the major physical structures that affect library effective utilisation positively among visually impaired in the study.

**Research question two:** What challenges do people with visual impairments face in accessing and using academic library services?

S/N	Challenges	SD	D	U	A	SA	$\bar{x}$	S.D
1	Most of the materials are in printed form	2 2.9%	5 7.1%	1 1.4%	30 42.9%	32 45.7%	4.21	0.99
2	The library attendants are able to provide for my instructional needs	14 20.0%	11 15.7%	7 10.0%	19 27.1%	19 27.1%	3.26	1.51
3	Using my institution library as a student with visual impairment is like putting myself in another problem	18 25.7%	12 17.1%	9 12.9%	12 17.1%	19 27.1%	3.03	1.57
4	I can assess any information I need in my institution library without being helped	40 57.1%	25 35.7%	2 2.9%	2 2.9%	1 1.4%	1.56	0.81
5	All books in my institution library were brailed	40 57.1%	25 35.7%	5 7.1%	-	-	1.50	0.63
<b>Weighted Mean = 2.71</b>								

Table 2 shows the challenges encountered by visually impaired when accessing and using academic library services. “Most of the materials are in printed form” ( $\bar{x}$  =4.21) was rated highest by the mean score as the major challenges encountered by the visually impaired, and was followed by “The library attendants are able to provide for my instructional needs” ( $\bar{x}$  =3.26), “Using my institution library as a student with visual impairment is like putting myself in another problem” ( $\bar{x}$  =3.03), “I can assess any information I need in my institution library without being helped” ( $\bar{x}$  =1.56), and lastly by “All books in my institution library were brailed” ( $\bar{x}$  =1.50) respectively.

**Research question three:** Does the library personnel serve as impediment to effective utilisation of library by students with visual impairment?

S/N	Statements	SD	D	U	A	SA	$\bar{x}$	S.D
1	The library personnel does not know how to handle students with special need	12 17.1%	16 22.9%	2 2.9%	16 22.9%	24 34.3%	3.34	1.55
2	The library personnel are specially trained	20 28.6%	22 31.4%	3 4.3%	15 21.4%	10 14.3%	2.61	1.45
3	I am always at loggerheads with the library personnel due to their attitude	16 22.9%	32 45.7%	-	16 22.9%	6 8.6%	2.49	1.31
4	The library personnel always pay less attention to my instructional needs	20 28.6%	35 50.0%	4 5.7%	6 8.6%	5 7.1%	2.16	1.15
5	I received unfair treatment from the library	40 57.1%	24 34.3%	1 1.4%	3 4.3%	2 2.9%	1.61	0.93
<b>Weighted Mean =2.44</b>								

Table 3 shows library personnel status as impediment to effective utilisation of library by students with visual impairment. “The library personnel does not know how to handle students with special need” ( $\bar{x}$  =3.34) was ranked highest by the mean score rating and was followed by “The library personnel are specially trained” ( $\bar{x}$  =2.61), “I am always at loggerheads with the library personnel due to their attitude” ( $\bar{x}$  =2.49), “The library personnel always pay less attention to my instructional needs” ( $\bar{x}$  =2.16), and lastly by “I received unfair treatment from the library” ( $\bar{x}$  =1.61) respectively.

Inference to be deduced from the expression above is that library personnel serve as impediment to effective utilisation of library by students with visual impairment via their attitude, inexperience, paying less attention to the needs of the student’s

**Discussion of findings**

The finding reveals that library environment, library physical structure is the major factors that affect library effective utilisation among visually impaired in the study. This was in line with Oliver (1990) who requires society to provide equal services by removing barriers which hinder access to education, employment, transport, health, information and so on. In line with this statement, Lee (2007:105) insisted that libraries are an important part of society and reflect social trends. Anti-discrimination acts in many countries require mainstream library services to be accessible to people with disabilities. Libraries must be designed to be universally accessible and to accommodate individuals with disabilities (Burgstahler 2002:421).

The finding also shows that, students with visual impairment are confronted with a lots of challenge in accessing and using the academic library services. These challenges include inability to access information without being helped due to the facilities on ground that are not in adapted form and at the same time most of the library attendants are unable to meet their request together with non-availability of the textbooks in Braille or audio form. This was in line with the view of Bagandanshwa

(2006a) who emphasizes that all persons have a right to information regardless of disability. He further stresses that information is power because it is the source of knowledge and facts. The American Library Association (2001) insists that libraries must not discriminate against individuals on the basis of disability and should ensure that every learner and/or patron has equal access to library resources. In the same vein the international library body, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the Public Library Manifesto (1994) emphasize that, libraries must not discriminate on the basis of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social condition. Every library must also provide proper services for those who do not have easy access to them, such as the mentally and physically disabled, the ill and the imprisoned.

The result also shows that library personnel serve as impediment to effective utilisation of library by students with visual impairment through their attitude, inexperience, paying less attention to the needs of the students etc. This was also supported by Mandesi (2007) who opined that people with disabilities face numerous challenges to opportunities equal to those of their peers in day to day life. Environmental, physical, legal and institutional barriers are found throughout society, and people's negative attitudes to persons with disabilities often cause social exclusion and are the hardest to overcome. Persons with disabilities are often assigned a low social status and in some cases are considered worthless; viewed by those around them with feelings of shame, fear and rejection. There is also the common belief that people with disabilities are cursed or may place a curse on others (Mandesi 2007). Mandesi further insisted that for people with disabilities to be treated equally, physical barriers to accessing resources and attitudes need to change.

## **Conclusion**

Academic libraries plays indispensable roles in the education students with or without disability. They are the important section in the higher institution of learning that assist students irrespective of their condition in exercising their right to information meeting the needs of students with visual impairment must form part of the deliberation when designing an academic library. This will facilitate their incorporation into the school activities as a student.

## **Recommendation**

The study therefore recommends that:

- It should be noted that, student with visual impairment are also part of the school community that needs to be taken care of. Hence, the library physical structures must be designed and constructed in a way that will integrate students with visual impairment into the learning environment that is devoid of isolation, rejection but full of acceptability and recognition.
- The institution management must have a robust plan that provide solutions to all challenges that students with visual impairment are likely to face in making use of their academic library.
- The library personnel must be trained in a way that will increase their professional knowledge and experiences on student with disability, their needs and how such needs can be met.

- Academic libraries should be well equipped with information resources which are in Braille and large print as well as assistive equipment which enables students with visual impairments to access information independently.

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