



## INCLUSIVENESS AND ACCESSIBILITY IN THE PROVISION OF INFORMATION SERVICES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN SOUTHWEST, NIGERIA.

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### Abstract:

*Digital inclusion and accessibility are approaches deployed to ensure that the web and other digital technologies are barrier-free for everyone. The essence of digital inclusiveness and accessibility is to guarantee that those with learning disabilities have equal access to information and services. It is imperative that learning disabilities should be considered during digital design process to ensure digital inclusion and accessibility for the community. This brings us to the need of inclusive designs in the design of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) System that will accommodate people with disabilities so they will not encounter barriers when accessing or interacting with the online environment. The mix methods research design was used for the study and the population included four academic libraries in Southwest Nigeria. The questionnaire and interview guide were the research instruments and results showed that 3 out of the 4 academic libraries have most of the general assistive technologies for people with disabilities. Results also shows negligence around providing assistive software and hardware for the deaf/hearing impaired and locomotive impaired in the academic libraries. It was recommended that academic libraries should give*

*all forms of disabilities equal attention in the provision of assistive technology and information should be provided in alternative formats to enable them access needed information resources freely.*

**Keywords:** Digital accessibility; Inclusion; Learning disabilities; ICT systems

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## Introduction

The advent of Information and Communication Technology has revolutionised the activities and services of academic libraries to support the provision of services that encourage digital inclusion and accessibility of people with disability. Digital inclusion and accessibility are an approach deployed to ensure that the web and other digital technologies are barrier-free for everyone. The essence of digital inclusiveness and accessibility is to guarantee that those with learning disabilities (a broad term used to describe several specific diagnoses due to genetic and/or neurobiological factors that affect brain functioning in a way that alter cognitive processes related to learning) have equal access to information and services. In most cases, especially in developing countries people with disabilities face digital divide because most academic libraries fail to plan and provide services that will benefit people with disability. According to IDEIA (2004)<sup>1</sup>, disability can include visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech and/or language impairment, emotional disturbance, cognitive developmental delays including learning disabilities, Autism/Pervasive Development Disorder (PDD), Asperger's Syndrome, orthopedic impairment, musculoskeletal impairment, and traumatic brain injury.

Library resources and facilities should be designed to accommodate people with disabilities. This is possible with the use of information and communication technology that will make available assistive technologies (ATs) to enable information resources accessible to students with disabilities in an equitable way. According to Small, Myhill and Herring-Harrington (2015)<sup>2</sup> accessibility and inclusion are at the very core of what libraries are all about and libraries and librarians have an essential and catalytic role to play in facilitating the full participation of people with disabilities in society. Consequently, academic libraries should endeavour to make information resources accessible to all users by deploying assistive tools and technologies.

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<sup>1</sup> Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEIA) (2004). Retrieved September 7, 2024, from: <https://ncbegin.org.policy.indivi>

<sup>2</sup> Small, R.V., Myhill, W.N. and Herring-Harrington, L. (2015). Developing accessible libraries and inclusive Librarians in the 21st Century: Examples from practice. In *Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities and the Inclusive Future of Libraries*. Retrieved July 18, 2024, from: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1108/S0065-283020150000040013>

## Research Objectives

1. Investigate digital accessibility and inclusion in academic libraries in Southwest Nigeria
2. Find out the availability of assistive technologies in academic libraries in Southwest Nigeria
3. Ascertain the challenges of implementing digital accessibility and inclusion in Southwest Nigeria.

## Literature Review

The library is designed to provide information services to all categories of users without discrimination. The responsibility of academic libraries is extended to include the provision of information to support the university education, students, researchers, lecturers, and other scholars. According to Sobalage and Ogunmodede (2015)<sup>3</sup> the duties of the academic libraries are to take care of the information need of students, lectures, researchers and other community of scholars. These responsibilities of academic libraries can only be achieved through equitable provision of information resources to all categories of users who need the library services and by also making information resources available in alternative formats to include individuals with disabilities since they are exposed to same opportunities in education.

It is therefore imperative that different kinds of disabilities need to be identified and catered for by academic libraries in the provision of information services. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2023)<sup>4</sup> 1.3 billion people experience significant disability, and this represents 16% of the world population. In the same vein the World Bank (WB) (2023)<sup>5</sup> in their disability inclusion report states that one billion people or 15% of the world's population, experience some form of disabilities and disabilities prevalence is higher for developing countries. While report on disability in Nigeria by Lulu (2023)<sup>6</sup> the executive secretary, National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD), asserts that about 35.1 million Nigerians are currently living with disabilities according to a report by the WHO. It is palpable that these 35.1 disabled

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<sup>3</sup> Sobalage, A.J., and Ogunmodede, T.A. (2015). Roles of academic libraries in the national and economic development of Nigeria. *Greener Journal of Social Sciences* 5(2) 36-41. Retrieved June 2, 2024, from: <https://www.scirp.org/reference>

<sup>4</sup> WHO. 2023. Disabilities. Retrieved June 11, 2024, from: <https://www.who.int/detail>

<sup>5</sup> World Bank. 2023. Disability inclusion overview. Retrieved from: July 22, 2024, <https://www.worldbank.org/topic>

<sup>6</sup> Lulu, J. 2023. 35.1 million Nigerians living with disabilities. Retrieve July 18, 2024, from: <https://www.vanguard.ngr.com/2023/12/35-1m-nigerians-living-with-disabilities-commission/>

Nigerians are prone to experience adverse educational and socio-economic outcomes than their abled counterpart.

Academic libraries, therefore, ought to have it at the back of their mind that people with disability cannot fully benefit from the usual information resources available in the library and therefore, need to provide information resources in formats that could be readable by them, but the information needs of those with disability seems to be neglected when academic libraries are planning for their services. According to Sambo (2016)<sup>7</sup>, the physically challenged students encounter barriers in their quest for education. This is one of the major problems people with disability face in Nigeria universities, access to information that will help them achieve their academic goals are lacking. Though this problem is not peculiar to Nigeria academic libraries, the study conducted by Rowland (2008)<sup>8</sup> noted that of all the countries in Africa, only South Africa has a well-developed, functional library for the visually impaired even though there are nearly 7 million blind people on the continent. Visual impairment is just one out of the existing disabilities given attention in some libraries, others like deafness/hearing impairment, locomotive impaired seems to be left out in the provision of information services.

Therefore, the need for all-inclusive and accessible academic library cannot be overemphasized, this is the only way to ensure equitable information resources to the heterogenous users served by the library and ensure they are satisfied. However, most academic libraries in Nigeria have continued to be inaccessible and non-inclusive, probably academic libraries have not taken time to study and understand the diverse needs of these special group of users.

According to the Nigeria Institute of Advance Legal Studies (NILS) (2010)<sup>9</sup> out of every 10 persons living with disability in Nigeria, 9 live below the poverty level. All those living with disability in Nigeria depend on academic library for their information needs, since they cannot afford the special tools needed to access information in the library. The onus is on the academic library to provide equal services to users without discrimination by establishing inclusive libraries to meet the need of heterogeneous users. It is only by meeting the special needs of varied users, that academic libraries can be said to be truly inclusive.

There is a law in Nigerian mandating the provision of information resources in alternative formats using assistive devices to aid those with learning disabilities, but academic libraries fail to adhere to this law. The Nigerian Discrimination Against

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<sup>7</sup> Sambo, A.S. (2016) Physically challenged students and their information needs. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. Retrieved July 10, 2024, from: <http://www.digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1461>

<sup>8</sup> Rowland, J. I. (2008). Library and information services for the blind: an African perspective. Retrieved September 2024, from: <https://www.researchgate.net.249>

<sup>9</sup> Nigeria Institute of Advance Legal Studies, Lagos (NILS). (2010). Communique on unserved handicapped. Retrieved July 30, 2024, from: <https://www.nials-nigeria.org.PDF>

Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, (2018)<sup>10</sup>, part v (17) (3) stated that commission shall provide educational assistive devices for people with disabilities, but this law seems to be neglected by academic libraries in Nigeria.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for this anomaly of non-inclusiveness and inaccessibility in academic libraries by people with disabilities, especially in the developing countries to be corrected to enable users' equal access to existing products and services, so as not to truncate their education, career and dreams of being employed, occupying important positions and contributing their own quota in the growth and development of the country. This could be achieved by providing Assistive Technologies (ATs) designed for diverse form of disabilities in academic libraries to guarantee accessibility and ensure inclusiveness of people with disabilities and make them level with their peers.

### **Assistive technologies for different kinds of disabilities**

In the academic libraries there are several assistive technologies that can be provided to make the traditional library resources accessible and usable by people with disabilities. Some of the software and hardware for ATs will be listed below.

#### **General ATs**

Braille Books, Braille Machine, Braille Embosser, Talking Books, Tape Recorders, Playback Machine, Magnifying Glass/Sheet, Text to Speech (TTS) Reader, Epub, Single Handed Keyboard

#### **Blind/sight impaired**

##### Software

SAFA Software, JAWS Software, Window – Eye Software, Zoom – Text Magnifier, Zoom – Text Magnifier, Document Readers Software, Kurxweil Software, Multilingual/Bilingual OCR, Duxbury Software, Screen Enlargement Software.

Hardware: Scanner/Reader, Talking Calculator, Voice Recorder/CD Player, Braille Printer/Embosser, Printer/Embosser, Tactile Image Enhancer, Speech Synthesiser, Magnifying Glasses.

#### **The deaf/ hearing impaired**

##### Software

TTY Emulating Software, Dragon Dictate or Convert Software, TTY Emulating Software, Dragon Dictate or Convert Software, Big Mac Software, Cheap talker Software, I Communicator, Video Captioning Software, Dragon Natural Speaking, Voice Recognition, On Screen Keyboard, Word Predictor, Abbreviation Expansion, I-Learn

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<sup>10</sup> Nigerian Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act. (2018). Retrieved July 22, 2024, from: <https://ncpwd.gov.ng/pdfs.PDF>

Hardware

TTY/TTD, Portable Speech Synthesizer, Assistive Listening Systems, Alarming Devices/Signal Systems, Closed Captioned Decoders, Hearing Aids/Cochlear Implants.

### **Locomotive Impaired**

Adaptive Keyboards, Speech Input Devices, Cursor – Control Devices, Prosthetic and Orthotic Devices, Simple/Electric Wheels, Walking Frames/Rotators. Television/Projection Tricycle, Cervical Collar.

### **Benefits Digital Accessibility and Inclusion**

Inclusiveness and accessibility are pivotal in removing barriers in library services and this could be achieved using ATs. Adopting ATs in academic libraries will improve the use of library by people with disabilities to level with their peers without disabilities and bridge the gap of digital divide. Majinge and Stilwell (2013)<sup>11</sup> averred that ATs also facilitates library services' provision to persons with disabilities by making it possible to provide information resources to them easily and in formats that are suitable for them. There are other benefits that could be derived from digital inclusion and accessibility in academic libraries like:

- Digital inclusion and accessibility in academic libraries will enhance increased academic participation of people with disability, reduce frustration and exclusion faced by people with disability.
- It will encourage exchange of ideas, interaction and bridge gap between people with disability and people without disabilities.
- Digital inclusion and accessibility will help people with disabilities overcome difficulty in learning.
- Digital inclusion and accessibility in academic libraries will help students with disabilities in their educational accomplishments.
- Digital inclusion and accessibility will engender spirit of self-belonging and improve communication between the disabled and the abled people and even among the disables.
- Digital inclusion and accessibility will create the needed opportunities for people with disabilities to participate more in the society, enhance their independence and improve their quality of life.

### **Challenges of Accessible and Inclusive Services in the Library**

People with disability encounter a lot of difficulties in their search for information in libraries. These challenges ranges from accessing the building, information resources due to lack or inadequate assistive devices to help them gain access to existing information resources in the library. There are also the problems of lack of professionally trained librarians to guide them as well as fund not being available to purchase suitable equipment to meet their specific information needs. On the other

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<sup>11</sup> Majinge and Stilwell (2013) Library service provision for people with visual impairment. Retrieved June 23, 2024, from: <https://www.researchgate.net.268>

hand, libraries face plenty challenges in trying to run all-inclusive services, chiefly because of paucity of fund to ensure library facilities suites all categories of users and the financial strength to get the ATs necessary to meet the different needs of heterogeneous users. This is a big challenge people with disabilities face because these assistive devices are very expensive to provide individually, and they resort to the libraries for their provision.

Another big challenge is lack of professionally trained personnel to handle information requirements of people with disabilities. Preliminary observations by the researchers shows that there is no training on information services to the disabled in the curriculum of library schools in the Southwest, Nigeria. Akolade et al, (2015)<sup>12</sup> in their study also stated that the information needs of physically challenged undergraduates in various higher institutions were not met due to lack of training of the library staff.

Lack of knowledge of how to use assistive technologies and how to handle people with disabilities. A study by Majinge and Stilwell (2013)<sup>13</sup> revealed that persons with disabilities are discouraged from using library because some library staff display negative attitudes towards them.

Failure to consult directly with people with disability when planning the design and services of libraries to ascertain their needs and how to best serve them. Finding out their needs is critical to meeting their information need.

Lack of technological ICT literacy by library staff in academic libraries in Nigeria will hinder inclusive services since most of the assistive devices are computer based. In line with this, Anyira (2011)<sup>14</sup> posits that librarians who do not have advanced ICT skills cannot provide effective services. Stressing the importance of ICT literacy in libraries.

There are other problems associated to assistive technologies, like ATs being so expensive and difficult to afford by those with limited incomes (Dobransky and Hargittai, 2006)<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Akolade, Y.L., Tella, A., Akanbi-Ademolake, H.B. and Adisa, M.Y. (2015). Physically challenged undergraduates' satisfaction with library and information services in Kwara State higher institutions. *Journal of Balkan Libraries Union*, 3(1):1-14. 81. Retrieved July 22, 2024, from: <https://balkanlibraries.org...PDF>

<sup>13</sup> Majinge and Stilwell (2013) Library service provision for people with visual impairment. Retrieved June 23, 2024, from: <https://www.researchgate.net.268>

<sup>14</sup> Anyira, E. I. (2011). One among the twelve: how library professionals constitute a serious challenge to provision of library services in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Library philosophy and practice* 12 (14) 121-132. Retrieved August 29, 2024, from: <https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/-mbolin/anyira-twelve.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Dobransky, K., and Hargittai, E. (2006). The disability divide in Internet access and use. *Information, Communication and Society* 9 (3), 313–334. Retrieved , May 30 2024, from: <https://www.researchgate.net.224>

## **Research methodology**

The study investigated digital inclusion and accessibility of information resources in academic libraries. This study adopted mix methods research design as it employed survey and in-depth interview. The study covered four academic libraries in Southwest Nigeria. Questionnaires and interview guides were used as data collection instruments. Both instruments were pretested at the University of Ibadan, to determine their effectiveness before they were used for the study. The researchers administered the questionnaires and conducted interviews to students with disabilities (mobility impaired users, deaf, hard hearing users, blind and visually impaired users) and some librarians in the selected academic libraries. Open-ended questions allowed the interviewer, to probe deeper into the initial responses of the respondent to gain a more detailed answer to the questions.

## **Results and discussion**

**Table 1: General Assistive Technologies Available for People with Disabilities in Academic Libraries in the Southwest, Nigeria**

S/N	NAME LIBRARY	Braille Books	Braille Machine	Braille Embosser	Talking Books	Tape Recorder	Playback Machine	Magnifying Glass/sheet	Text to Speech (TTS) Reader	Epub	Single Handed Keyboard
1	University of Lagos	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
2	Obafemi Awolowo University	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
3	University of Ibadan	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
	Ajayi Crowther University	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

Table 1: Shows that 3 out of the 4 libraries surveyed have Braille Books, Braille Machine, Braille Embosser and Text to Speech (TTS) Reader. Only 1 library has Talking Books and Tape Recorder. 2 of the libraries have Playback Machine. 1 library has Single Handed Keyboard. None of the libraries have Epub. While none of the libraries does not have any general Ats for people with disabilities.

**Table 2: Assistive Software available for the Blind/Sight Impaired in Academic Libraries in Southwest, Nigeria**

S/N	NAME OF LIBRARY	SAFA Software	JAWS Software	Window – Eye Software	Zoom – Text Magnifier	Document Readers Software	Kurxweil Software	Multilingual/Bilingual OCR	Duxbury Software	Screen Enlargement Software
1	University of Lagos	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO
2	Obafemi Awolowo University	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
3	University of Ibadan	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
4	Ajayi Crowther University	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

Table 2: Shows that 3 of the libraries have JAWS Software, Zoom – Text Magnifier, Document Readers Software, and Multilingual/Bilingual OCR. 2 libraries have Duxbury Software and Screen Enlargement Software. None of these libraries have SAFA Software, Window – Eye Software and Kurxweil Software.

**Table 3: Assistive Technologies Software available for the Deaf/Hearing Impaired in Academic Libraries in Southwest, Nigeria**

S/N	NAME OF LIBRARY	TTY Emulating Software	Dragon Dictate or Convert Software	Big Mac Software	Cheap Talker Software	I Communicator	Video Captioning Software	Dragon Natural Speaking	Voice Recognition	On Screen Keyboard	Word Predictor	Abbreviation Expansion	I-Learn
1	University of Lagos	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
2	Obafemi Awolowo University	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO
3	University of Ibadan	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
4	Ajayi Crowther University	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

Table 3: Shows that 2 of the 4 libraries surveyed have Video Captioning Software and On-Screen Keyboard. 1 of the 4 libraries has Dragon Dictate or Convert Software, Big Mac Software, Cheap Talker Software, Dragon Natural Speaking, Voice Recognition and Word Predictor. While none of the libraries have I-Learn, TTY Emulating Software and I Communicator.

**Table 4: Assistive Technologies Hardware Available for the Blind/Sight Impaired in Academic Libraries in Southwest, Nigeria**

S/N	NAME OF LIBRARY	Scanner/Reader	Talking Calculator	Voice Recorder/CD Player	Braille Printer/Embosseser	Tactile Image Enhancer	Speech Synthesizer	Magnifying Glasses
1	University of Lagos	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
2	Obafemi Awolowo University	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
3	University of Ibadan	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
4	Ajayi Crowther University	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

Table 4: 3 of the libraries Scanner/Reader and Braille Printer/Embosseser. 1 of the libraries has Talking Calculator, Voice Recorder/CD Player, Tactile Image Enhancer, Speech Synthesizer and Magnifying Glasses. One of the libraries does not have any.

**Table 5: Assistive Technologies Hardware Available for the Deaf/Hearing Impaired in Academic Libraries in Southwest, Nigeria**

S/N	NAME OF LIBRARY	TTY/TTD	Portable Speech Synthesiser	Assistive Listening Systems	Alarming Devices/Signal Systems	Closed Captioned Decoders	Hearing Aids/Cochlear Implants
1	University of Lagos	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
2	Obafemi Awolowo University	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
3	University of Ibadan	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
4	Ajayi Crowther University	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO

Table: 2 of the libraries surveyed have Assistive Listening Systems. 2 of the libraries have Alarming Devices/Signal System

**Table 6: Assistive Technologies Hardware Available for the Locomotive Impaired in Academic Libraries in Southwest, Nigeria**

S/N	LIBRARY OF LIBRARY	Prosthetic and Orthotic Devices	Simple/Electric Wheels	Walking Frames/Rotators	Adaptive Keyboards	Speech Input Devices	Cursor – Control Devices	Television/Projection Tricycle	Cervical Collar
1	University of Lagos	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
2	Obafemi Awolowo University	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO
3	University of Ibadan	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
4	Ajayi Crowther University	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO

Table 6: 2 of the libraries have Adaptive Keyboards, Cursor Control. 3 libraries have Television/Projection Tricycle. 1 of the libraries has Cervical Collar

Interview conducted by the researcher on some librarians to ascertain the challenges they face in rendering equal service delivery to all categories of users. Respondents seem to have similar challenges of poor power supply, lack of funds and none of the librarians have been professionally trained to handle people with disabilities in the library.

The interview question on if there are any plans to enhance inclusiveness and accessibility in academic libraries in the future.

One of the respondents complained that one of the problems the library has that seriously affects achieving all-inclusive library services is the problem of funds as the assistive devices are very expensive. Two of the respondents were of the view that the different categories of users, especially those with disabilities are not considered when planning and in collection development. One of the respondents hoped that future library acquisitions will take holistic approaches that will encompass diverse kinds of users.

Interview responses from some of the students with disabilities showed that most of them are not satisfied with the services of the libraries. The worst hit being those with deaf/hearing and locomotive impairments, according to some of the respondents, they don't boarder going to the library but depend on their course mates for information. They expressed deep concern over the libraries negligence over the provision of information in alternative formats to suite all categories of users.

## **Conclusion**

People with disabilities are an essential part of academic library users. Library services and information resources should encompass different forms of disabilities in the society. People with disabilities in the university have the same information need like the abled people but requires information to be provided in alternative formats to make the information accessible to them. This study shows that certain disabilities are neglected, though none was adequately provided for. Academic libraries should take into consideration the specific assistive technology required to provide information to different kinds of disabilities and ensure that their needs are met. ATs facilitates services and provision of information in a manner suitable to make people with disabilities access information as at when needed, have a sense of belonging and feel at home when in the library.

## **Recommendation**

1. Academic libraries should provide various services to persons with disabilities like they do for the abled users; this will motivate users with disabilities to utilise the library resources.
2. Librarians should be trained in the library school on how to handle and render services to users with disabilities.
3. Adequate funds should be made available to academic libraries to purchase necessary technologies and resources to enable them to achieve inclusive services.
4. Information resources in alternative formats should be made available and accessible to users with disabilities through the provision of ATs to enable them access needed information resources freely.

5. All forms of disabilities should be given equal attention when it comes to ATs provision

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