



Inclusive Library services: an assessment of the Accessibility of Library resources for Disadvantaged Students in the School of special Needs, Lokoja, Kogi State

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Abstract

Background: This study assesses the accessibility of library resources for disadvantaged students at the School of Special Needs in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria, focusing on inclusive library services to support their educational needs.

Method: A descriptive survey research design was employed, guided by three research questions. The study population included 105 disadvantaged students, with a complete enumeration sampling technique applied. Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire, offered in alternative formats (large print, braille) with interpreter support for accessibility. Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages.

Findings/Results: Students reported that easier access to information enables them to contribute meaningfully to societal advancement. The primary challenge identified was insufficient support from library staff, while the key strategy to enhance accessibility was the adoption of assistive technologies, such as braille displays and screen readers.



Implications: Improving library accessibility for disadvantaged students can enhance their educational experience and societal contributions, requiring targeted interventions like advanced technologies and improved staff support.

Conclusion: Enhancing inclusive library services for disadvantaged students necessitates a multifaceted approach, including the integration of assistive technologies and better staff training to address accessibility barriers.

Recommendations: The school should invest in assistive technologies, such as braille displays, screen readers, and other adaptive tools, and provide comprehensive staff training to improve the accessibility of library resources for students with disabilities.

Keywords: Inclusive Library services, Accessibility, Library resources, Disadvantaged Students, School of special Needs.

Introduction

The importance of libraries in supporting the educational and informational needs of students cannot be overemphasized. Libraries provide a wide range of resources, including books, journals, databases, and other materials that can help students achieve their academic goals (Ogunjobi, 2022). However, for disadvantaged students in Schools of special needs, accessing these resources is a challenge (Kendrick, 2017). Disadvantaged students may face challenge such as limited access to technology, inadequate support from library staff, and lack of accessible materials, which can hinder their ability to fully participate in the educational process (Higgins, 2018). However, libraries must have in place the requisite capacity for the availability of digital and online information resources to support teaching and learning for students, particularly disadvantaged students.

The function of the library is to make information resources available and accessible. The library should make information resources available and accessible to users including disadvantaged students. According to Davies (2023), libraries are institutions that provide organized collections of resources, services, and spaces to meet the informational, educational, cultural, and recreational needs of their communities. They play a crucial role in facilitating access to information and knowledge, promoting literacy, fostering lifelong learning, and preserving cultural heritage as well as information resources.

Information accessibility can be referred to the ability of students with disabilities to get and use information (Adekoya, 2023). Accessibility deals with problems of storage, display, and transmission of information resources to users promptly (Lawal, 2022; Nnadozie & Nnadozie, 2018). Accessibility denotes the ease with which



disadvantaged students can obtain and utilize library resources. It encompasses factors such as affordability, physical proximity, and technological access, as well as the absence of barriers that hinder students' ability to utilize available resources effectively. Without access to resources, utilization is unrealizable, and the value of the resources is meaningless to users. The issue of access poses numerous challenges to both library management and users because making resources accessible demands that the library resources are in an appropriate format tailored for every user, particularly disadvantaged students.

Disadvantaged students refer to individuals with disabilities that impede their access to educational resources and opportunities or, who may experience heightened challenges in accessing and utilizing library resources compared to their peers. Disadvantaged students experiences various forms of sensory, mental and physical defects such as hearing impairment, visual impairment and mobility impairment to mention just a few (Adekoya, 2018). Disadvantaged students require specific resources in the library to ensure they have equal access to information and can fully participate in academic activities. Disadvantaged students, who Chaputula and Mapulanga, (2019) described as people with physical, visual, or hearing impairment that in some way prohibits an individual from performing daily tasks, who may rely heavily on library resources for their studies, bear the brunt of these deficiencies. Without access to modern and cutting-edge facilities and a conducive learning environment, their academic pursuits are often hindered.

The concept of inclusive library services encompasses a range of strategies and practices, including the provision of accessible materials, assistive technology, and support services for users with disabilities. Inclusive library services are essential for promoting equal access to information and education for all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2018). The concept of inclusive library services encompasses a wide range of strategies and practices, including the provision of accessible materials, assistive technology, and support from library staff (Kwanya, 2018). By providing inclusive library services, libraries can help to promote social inclusion, reduce inequality, and improve the overall educational experience for disadvantaged students (United Nations, 2019). **Inclusive library services** refer to library programs, resources, and environments designed to ensure equitable access to information, education, and engagement for all users, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or circumstances. These services aim to remove barriers and provide accommodations for diverse user groups, including people with disabilities, marginalized communities, and those with different linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. Adekoya, Odigie and Yusuf (2023) defines Inclusive library services as the provision of library programs, resources, and environments that are accessible, equitable, and welcoming to all users, regardless of their age, ability, cultural background, language, or socio-



economic status. Inclusive library services significantly influence the accessibility of library resources. By curating diverse collections, providing adaptive technology, and partnering with school libraries to ensure that users have access to a wide range of materials and resources. This includes materials in various formats, languages, and cultural perspectives, as well as assistive software, e-readers, and accessible databases. Furthermore, inclusive libraries prioritize physical, digital, and cultural accessibility, creating welcoming environments that respect and celebrate diverse cultures, languages, and perspectives.

In Nigeria, the education sector has made significant progress in recent years, with an increasing number of students with special needs being enrolled in schools (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). However, despite this progress, many schools, including those in Kogi State, still face significant challenges in providing inclusive library services to disadvantaged students (Adeoye, 2019). There is a need to assess the availability and accessibility of these resources to ensure that they meet the needs of disadvantaged students. Research has highlighted the importance of inclusive library services in promoting social inclusion, reducing inequality, and improving the overall educational experience for disadvantaged students. Many libraries still face challenges in providing inclusive services, including lack of funding, inadequate infrastructure, and limited staff training. This study aims to assess the availability and accessibility of library resources for disadvantaged students in the School of Special Needs, Lokoja, Kogi State, which is very crucial in identifying areas for improvement and informing the development of more inclusive library services.

Research Questions

- i. What are the perceptions of disadvantaged students regarding the accessibility of information resources in the school library?
- ii. What specific challenges do disadvantaged students face in accessing library resources at Lokoja Special Need School Library?
- iii. What strategies can enhance the accessibility of information resources for disadvantaged students in Lokoja Special Need School Library?

Literature Review

Accessibility of Library Resources for Students with Special Needs

Accessibility of library resources are crucial components of inclusive library service, especially for students with special needs. Libraries serve as essential educational support systems, providing access to a wide array of information resources, including books, journals, multi-media content, and digital tools. Accessibility involves ensuring that the resources are adapted to their specific physical, cognitive, or sensory requirements. For visually impaired students, libraries must have an adequate



collection of Braille books and tactile resources (Adekoya, 2023). According to IFLA (2023), the shortage of Braille materials is a common issue in many schools, especially in developing regions, where the cost of producing such resources is prohibitive. Audio formats and screen readers are essential for students with visual impairment. These tools convert text into speech, making it easier for visually impaired students to access information. Large-print materials are essential for students with partial sight who may find regular print too difficult to read. These resources are available in some libraries, though many institutions face challenges in acquiring enough large-print books due to financial constraints (UNESCO, 2023). For hearing-impaired students, sign language, videos, and interpreters provide an alternative way to access spoken or auditory information. Libraries must also ensure that videos and multimedia materials are equipped with captions or subtitles (Sharma, 2023). Students with cognitive or learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, benefit from specialized software that adjusts text display, highlights words as they are read aloud, or breaks down complex information into simpler terms. According to EdTech Research Group (2023), assistive technologies like dyslexia-friendly fonts, speech-to-text converters, and digital note-taking apps have proven effective in supporting students with learning disabilities.

Physical access to the library building is a primary concern for students with mobility issues. The absence of ramps, elevators, or wide aisles can severely limit the ability of physically disabled students to enter and navigate the library (Lawal, 2023). According to Lawal-Solarin (2023), in many Nigerian institutions, inadequate infrastructure remains a significant barrier for students with physical disabilities, preventing them from fully utilizing library services. With the increasing digitization of library resources, online databases, e-books, and digital repositories have become essential components of modern libraries. However, for students with special needs, ensuring digital accessibility is key. This includes designing websites that comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and making sure that all digital materials are compatible with screen readers and other assistive technologies (IFLA, 2023). Beyond physical and digital barriers, information accessibility refers to the ease with which students can comprehend and use the available resources. This is especially important for students with cognitive or learning disabilities who may struggle with complex texts or unfamiliar formats. Libraries must ensure that their catalogs, databases, and services are easy to navigate and understand, with simple interfaces and clear instructions (Johnson, 2022). Trained librarians play a crucial role in making library resources accessible to students with special needs. Librarians should be trained on how to assist students with different disabilities, including using assistive technologies and offering guidance on how to locate and utilize specialized materials (Davies, 2023). In addition, libraries should have dedicated staff members who can provide one-on-one support to students with disabilities, helping them overcome any obstacles they may face when using the library.



Challenges Faced by Disadvantaged Students in Accessing Library Resources

Disadvantaged students face various challenges when accessing library resources. These challenges limit their educational progress and hinder their ability to fully engage with academic resources. Addressing these issues is essential to ensuring that all students, regardless of their background or abilities, have equitable access to information and learning opportunities. One of the most significant challenges in accessing library resources is the physical environment. Some school libraries lack necessary infrastructure such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms, making it difficult for students with mobility issues to navigate the facility. Narrow aisles, high shelves, and inadequate seating arrangements further compounds the problem. According to Adekoya et al. (2022), most libraries in developing countries, particularly in rural areas, are not designed to accommodate the physical needs of students with disabilities. The lack of accessible infrastructure remains a critical barrier to inclusivity. Students with disabilities, such as visual or hearing impairments, often rely on assistive technologies to access library resources. However, the availability of these technologies in many libraries, particularly in low-resource regions, is inadequate. For example, students with visual impairments may require screen readers, braille printers, or audiobooks, while students with hearing impairments may need captioned videos or sign language interpreters. According to IFLA (2023), the lack of assistive technologies in many libraries poses a significant challenge for students who need these tools to access information effectively.

In today's increasingly digital world, access to online resources is a critical component of library services. However, disadvantaged students, especially those from low-income backgrounds, often face a significant digital divide. This divide can manifest in several ways, including a lack of access to computers, the internet, or even electricity. According to UNESCO (2023), the digital divide disproportionately affects disadvantaged students, making it harder for them to access e-books, databases, and other digital resources available in libraries. A lack of financial resources can also limit their access to digital devices or assistive technologies (Davies, 2023).

Another significant challenge is the lack of trained library staff who understand the specific needs of disadvantaged students. In many libraries, staff are not adequately trained to assist students with disabilities or other socio-economic challenges, limiting the effectiveness of the services offered. This lack of specialized knowledge can result in students not receiving the help they need to access resources (Olanrewaju, 2022). Disadvantaged students face a variety of challenges when accessing library resources, including physical, technological, socio-economic, and psychological barriers. These challenges can severely limit their ability to benefit from educational opportunities and contribute to academic inequities. To address these issues, libraries must adopt inclusive policies, invest in assistive technologies, and create



environments that are accessible and supportive for all students (Adekoya et al, 2022). By doing so, libraries can play a pivotal role in leveling the educational playing field and ensuring that disadvantaged students have equal access to knowledge and resources.

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive survey research design. The population of this study is 105 disadvantaged students enrolled in Special Need School in Lokoja, Kogi State. The sample technique is total enumeration or census. Data were collected with the use of a self-structured questionnaire. For respondents who have difficulty accessing the questionnaire in its standard format, alternative formats (large print, braille) and an interpreter were provided. Descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the respondent's responses to the questionnaire items.

Findings

Table 1: *Perceptions of the Disadvantaged Students about their Information Resources Accessibility*

S/N	Items statement	Frequencies	percentages
1.	Access to information means depending on the library.	14	13.3%
2.	Accessibility to information is a human right issue	10	9.5%
3.	Accessible information will make it easier for students with disabilities to cope with their academic activities.	9	8.6%
4.	Access to information will lessen dependence of students with disabilities on others.	16	15.2%
5.	Accessibility of information should focus on computers and technologies.	16	15.2%
6.	Access to information through computer is crucial to successful learning outcome and literacy	05	4.8%
7.	Information can be made effectively accessible by assistive technologies.	05	4.8%
8.	With easier access to information, students with disabilities can contribute meaningfully to societal advancement.	30	28.6%
		105	100%

The researcher established the perceptions of the disadvantaged students about their Information resources accessibility. Majority of the respondents with 30 (28.6%) perceived that with easier access to information, students with disabilities can



contribute meaningfully to societal advancement. Respondents with 16 (15.2%) believed that access to information will lessen dependence of students with disabilities on others and that accessibility of information should focus on computers and technologies respectively while access to information means depending on the library had 14 (13.3%). This is followed by accessibility to information is a human right issue 10 (9.5%). Respondent with 9 (8.6%) perceived that accessible information will make it easier for students with disabilities to cope with their academic activities while the least with 5 (4.85) believed that access to information through computer is crucial to successful learning outcome and literacy; and Information can be made effectively accessible by assistive technologies respectively. From the table above, majority of the respondents perceived that with easier access to information, students with disabilities can contribute meaningfully to societal advancement while access to information through computer is crucial to successful learning outcome and literacy; and information can be made effectively accessible by assistive technologies were the least with 5 (4.8%).

The findings echo the conclusions of Nnadozie, and Nnadozie (2018) who emphasized the importance of ensuring that library resources are easily accessible to all students, especially those with disabilities. Accessibility is often linked to the availability of assistive technologies, such as screen readers, braille displays, and electronic resources, which help bridge the gap for students with physical or learning disabilities. Anderson (2019), found out that access to information significantly improves academic outcomes for students with disabilities.

Table 2: Challenges Faced by the Disadvantaged Students in Accessing Library Resources

S/N	Items statement	Frequencies	percentages
1.	Inadequate resource organization in the library.	19	18.1%
2.	The library does not have enough resources (e.g print materials in large format) designed for visually impaired students.	14	13.3%
3.	There are limited electronic resources in the library	9	8.6%
4.	Inadequate assistive technologies (e.g., braille displays, screen readers)	20	19.0%
5.	There is insufficient support from library staff when I need help	24	22.9%
6.	I am not fully aware of all the resources available for disadvantaged students.	13	12.4%
7.	The library's physical structure makes it difficult for me to access some sections.	6	5.7%
		105	100%



Table 2 identified the challenges faced by disadvantaged students in accessing library resources. The result shows that majority of the respondent with 24 (22.9%) indicates that there is insufficient support from library staff when needed help. Inadequate assistive technologies (e.g., braille displays, screen readers) came second with 20 (19.0%) respondents as the challenge faced when accessing library resources. Respondents with 19 (18.1%) indicate inadequate resource organization in the library as a challenge while the library does not have enough resources (e.g print materials in large format) designed for visually impaired students had 14 (13.3%). This is followed by I am not fully aware of all the resources available for disadvantaged students with 13 (12.4%). Respondents with 9 (8.6%) indicate limited electronic resources in the library as a challenge in accessing library resources. The library's physical structure makes it difficult for me to access some sections is the least with 6 (5.7%). The result clearly indicates that insufficient support from library staff when needed help, inadequate assistive technologies and inadequate resource organization in the library as the major challenges in accessing library resources while the least is library's physical structure makes it difficult for me to access some sections. This is in collaboration with Jones (2022), who asserted that the common challenges faced by disadvantaged students in accessing information resources include inadequate resource organization, limited assistive technology, and poor training of library staff in supporting students with disabilities. Davies (2023) also noted that well-trained library staff are critical in helping students overcome accessibility barriers, particularly in special needs settings. The lack of insufficient support from library staff, is a key factor that worsens the challenges faced by disadvantaged students.

Table 3: Strategies to enhance the Accessibility of Library information resources

Items statement	Frequencies	percentages
1. Library resources should be adequate arranged and organized in the right order	7	6.7%
2. Collaborating with external organizations to provide more resources (print materials in large format) will improve library usage.	20	19.0%
3. Providing more electronic resources will enhance access	21	20.0%
4. Introducing more assistive technologies (e.g., Braille displays, screen readers) will improve accessibility.	26	24.8%
5. Training library staff to assist disadvantaged students will enhance resource accessibility	19	18.1%
6. Organising a workshop to create an awareness of all the resources available for disadvantaged students in the Library.	8	7.6%
7. Making the library more physically accessible will increase resource usage.	4	3.8%
	105	100%

The researcher established the strategies to enhance the accessibility of library information resources by disadvantaged students. Majority of the respondents with 26



(24.8%) indicates introducing more assistive technologies (e.g., braille displays, screen readers) will improve accessibility, then 21 (20%) respondents believe that providing more electronic resources will enhance access accessibility. Collaborating with external organizations to provide more resources (print materials in large format) will improve library usage with 20 (19%), meanwhile training library staff to assist disadvantaged students will enhance resource accessibility with 19 (18.1%) respondents. Respondents with 8 (7.6%) indicate organizing a workshop to create an awareness of all the resources available for disadvantaged students in the library will enhance accessibility. Library resources should be adequate arranged and organized in the right order had 7 (6.75) respondents. Making the library more physically accessible will increase resource usage was the least with 4 (3.8%). From the above table, majority of the respondents indicate introducing more assistive technologies and providing more electronic resources will enhance the accessibility of library information resources while the least is making the library more physically accessible will increase resource usage. This align with Jones (2022), who emphasized the need for libraries to invest in both print and electronic materials, as well as assistive technologies, to meet the diverse needs of students.

Conclusion

The paper assessed inclusive library and the accessibility of library resources for disadvantaged students in the school of special needs, Lokoja, Kogi State. The study concluded that students with disabilities can contribute meaningfully to societal advancement with easier access to information. It is also concluded that there is insufficient support from library staff when disadvantaged students need help. Another conclusion was that introducing more assistive technologies (braille displays, screen readers) will improve accessibility. The lack of adequate electronic resources and assistive technologies poses a major challenge to these students' academic success. Accessibility has to do with the ability of students to use library resources without any barriers. Improving library services for these students will require a multifaceted approach, including introduction of new technologies and better staff training. By addressing these issues, the library can become an inclusive environment that supports the academic needs of all categories of students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. All equipment for accessing information by students with disabilities should be readily available in the libraries
2. Library staff should undergo regular training on how to assist disadvantaged students in accessing and using both print and electronic resources. This



- training should focus on understanding the unique needs of these students and ensuring they are adequately supported.
3. The school should invest in more assistive technologies, such as Braille displays, screen readers, and other adaptive tools, to improve the accessibility of library resources for students with disabilities.

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