

Perceptions of users living with Disabilities towards Academic Library Services: A Marketing and Quality Assurance Approach.

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ABSTRACT

A mixed method study was conducted to explore the perception of users living with disabilities towards academic library services offered at one of the State Universities in Zimbabwe. The study was precipitated by the fact that while learning institutions worldwide are advocating for inclusivity in the teaching and learning discourses, nothing was done at this university to cater for the disabled users in its libraries. The study adopted a mixed methods approach to generate data from a population of 200 lecturers, non-teaching staff and students. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample of 35 participants who actually took part in the study. The study was premised on the Marketing and Quality Assurance Approach as a conceptual framework guiding it. Findings of the study revealed that there were no resources in the libraries such as the assistive devices as well as the human capital base to assist the disabled users to effectively utilise library resources. The study also revealed that there was no clear cut policy at the library for the benefit of users living with disabilities. The study recommends that library policies that cater for the needs of people living with disabilities be crafted and implemented, so that universally accessible use of resources that integrate the needs of users with disabilities are taken care of. The study also recommends that; librarians acquire assistive equipment related to users living with disabilities as well as seconding qualified staff to the libraries as assistants to users living with disability.

Keywords: Disability, Perceptions, Academic Libraries

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, persons with disabilities face a variety of difficulties as they try to find a place in a competitive and modern society that is dominated by able-bodied people. The general rule that excludes persons with disabilities from social activities and does not treat them similarly to those who are able-bodied applies to academic libraries as well. A number of countries such as South Africa (The South African Constitution, adopted in 1996, includes provisions that protect the rights of persons with disabilities); Zimbabwe (The Constitution of Zimbabwe, adopted in 2013, recognizes and protects the rights of persons with disabilities); Botswana (Botswana passed the Disability Act in 2010, which provides for the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities) and Namibia (Namibia has the Disability Act, enacted in 2004, which aims to promote and protect the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities) have lately passed laws aimed at guaranteeing the support of disabled people's rights and enabling them to take part in society as equal members (International Labour Organization, 2020). Despite these regulations

recognizing people with disabilities, there isn't much being done in practice to serve this population, especially in academic libraries. Academic libraries are the driving force behind teaching, learning, research, and community services in any higher education setting, including universities. Despite their physical limitations, the library should provide services to all members of the academic community.

Academic libraries should be the stewards of readily available and widely available information resources, providing a welcoming environment for persons from all backgrounds (Feinberge and Feldma 1996 cited in Davis 2009). In order to do this, libraries must serve a diverse clientele, including people who are visually impaired. (Kharamin and Siamian 2011, cited in Onoyeyan (2019) stated that an ideal library service, is one in which every person, regardless of the severity of their visual impairment or other disability, the user gets access to information resources when they are needed, in a usable manner, in the necessary amounts, and in a setting where the staff is aware of the user's needs. Libraries should identify certain key areas that could be investigated to address the information needs of students with disabilities and to give them relevant information, according to Gul and Khowaja (2020). The argument propagated by the foregoing is that there should not be any form of discrimination to any library user regardless of their physical condition, race, creed or colour or religion.

Additionally, it is the duty of library and information science educators to prepare the next generation of librarians and knowledge specialists to comprehend and cater to the special information needs of users who live in environments with visual, auditory, physical, and electronic information (Majinge and Msonge 2020). These are crucial skills for librarians to develop since they will allow them to assist people who have disabilities.

According to Gul and Khowaja (2020), while libraries offer services to their patrons, the majority of them still fall short in providing adequate services to patrons with disabilities. Although several universities have taken the initiative to offer these students in particular services, there is always need for development (Khowaja and Fatima, 2019). Museke and Sibanda (2021) further assert that, in order to accommodate students who are blind or visually impaired, Zimbabwean universities must create Disability Resource Centers and put aside funding for the purchase of assistive technologies. They also emphasised the importance of increasing inclusivity in Zimbabwean academic libraries, which can be done if university administration, professors, and librarians adopt a different perspective toward students with disabilities.

Neither age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language, nor social circumstance shall be used as grounds for discrimination in libraries., according to the "Public Library Manifesto" (1994) published by UNESCO and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). In their IFLA checklist, Irvall and Nielsen (2005) offered detailed instructions for granting people with impairments access to libraries. According to the American Library Association (2001), libraries need to make sure that all learners and customers have fair access to the resources available. and that they must not discriminate against people based on disability. Academic libraries should be at the forefront of breaking down the barriers preventing access to information, according to Majinge and Stilwell (2014), who view academic libraries as information hubs of higher education institutions.

Academic libraries as institutions that provides information to all kinds of users should advocate for Freedom of Expression and Opinion, and Access to Information. This is supported by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), (2006) Article 21 – Freedom of Expression and Opinion, as well as Access to Information, states that parties must take all necessary steps to ensure that people with disabilities can exercise their right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek out, receive, and share information and ideas on an equal footing with others and through any means of communication.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24 of 2020

(United Nations 2020) emphasises that equal opportunity must be realised. These provisions of Article 24 reflect the principle of inclusive education, which promotes equal opportunities and access to education for all individuals, including those with disabilities. It highlights the need for educational systems to accommodate the diverse needs of students with disabilities and provide the necessary support and accommodations to ensure their effective participation and development.

Otike and Barát (2023) supported the Marrakesh Treaty and the crucial part that IFLA has played in carrying out the Treaty, including serving as a global representative for libraries and providing outreach services as well as serving in advising and advocacy positions. It was passed on June 27, 2013 in Marrakesh, Morocco, and became effect on September 30, 2016. The primary objective of the Marrakesh Treaty was to address the “book famine” experienced by people with print disabilities. This refers to the significant shortage of accessible books and other printed materials available to people who are blind, visually impaired, or have other disabilities that affect their ability to read standard printed materials.

The aim of libraries and library associations worldwide, according to IFLA (2022), is centred on the necessity of granting access to information. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) states that one of its objectives is to “empower and inspire society by promoting access to information, knowledge, and culture for all” in order to promote growth, learning, creativity, and innovation. Its four guiding principles highlight that everyone, including those with disabilities, should have access to high-quality library services and reflect this dedication. A few examples of how IFLA, the world’s largest association for all sorts of libraries, especially highlights the significance of libraries that help people with special needs include the Marrakesh Treaty, the CRPD, and the SDGs.

A study was undertaken by Nazim, Beg, and Sarkar (2021) at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in India to assess the usability and accessibility of library services for users with disabilities. The study found that although AMU has a library specifically for users with disabilities, less funding was given to developing library infrastructure, assistive technologies, and collections in accessible formats, resulting in the delivery of subpar services to users with disabilities. The study discovered that, despite the existence of some specialized services, users with disabilities have numerous difficulties when utilizing library services due to a lack of accessible formats for library items, a lack of support from knowledgeable library employees, and a lack of user education. The study concludes with recommendations for adopting IFLA and UNESCO principles addressing impaired users’ access to library services.

The academic libraries in Ghana’s Upper East Region were the subject of a study by Ayoung, Baada, and Baayel (2021) to determine whether libraries included accessibility features for people with disabilities. The results showed that the Upper East Region academic libraries had not yet put the required rules of Ghana’s ratified Persons with Disability Act into practice. Beyond their main entrances, the majority of libraries were inaccessible to people with disabilities. The main issue was lack of diversified media information available to those with hearing and vision impairments. The results also revealed that library staff lacked sufficient knowledge of problems solving pertaining to people with disabilities and their right to information access. The study emphasizes the difficulties that people with disabilities encounter when trying to access library services. The study thus suggests that appropriate state entities be given the authority to carry out the Ghanaian People with Disabilities Act’s implementation and that stakeholders be better informed about the need of enhancing people with disabilities’ access to information. Additionally, more money should be invested in and allocated to libraries to meet the information needs of people with disabilities.

A research by Phukubje and Ngoepe (2017) at the University of Limpopo in South Africa used the IFLA checklist to evaluate how convenient and accessible the library services were for students with disabilities. Despite the presence of a specially designed library service unit for students with disabilities that adheres to international best practices, it was discovered that these students were dissatisfied with the library services they received because very few library materials had been converted into accessible formats. According to

the report, the institution needed to hire more librarians to help disabled students at the audio-braille library. The study is intended to encourage decision-makers to engage students with disabilities in the development of library collections.

As seen by its statement on the rights and welfare of people with disabilities, which culminated in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa (Murray, 2019), Africa has prioritized the issue of persons with disabilities. According to the Disability Rights Charter (African Union, 2016), every person with a disability has the right to unrestricted access to the built environment, transportation, information, including communications technologies and systems, and other facilities and services available to the general public.

In trying to address the challenges which were being faced by people living with disabilities, the Government of Zimbabwe, through the provisions of the constitution, chapter 2 Section 22 enforces state institutions and Government Agencies to avail and channel resources to assist persons living with disabilities so that they can reach their full potential. Furthermore, all state institutions were urged to provide infrastructure in the form of buildings and amenities in public places that are accessible to people living with disabilities (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). Therefore, academic libraries as government institutions are also urged to provide these services.

In June 2021, Zimbabwe introduced a National Disability Policy that addressed matters pertaining to PWDs. According to the National Disability Policy (2012:46), appropriate accommodations must be made for each person's needs, including those related to preferred language, physical infrastructure, timetable, staffing, assistive technology, teaching and learning methods, information, and resources. Academic libraries are required to offer sufficient informational resources and services that accommodate users with impairments in this regard.

Effective administration and uniformity of higher education must be achieved, the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) was established in 1990. All national universities and other private institutions are required to abide by a set of operating standards, norms, and objectives thanks to a policing and consultative framework developed by ZIMCHE. According to the ZIMCHE Act [Chapter 25:27], (2006:12), PART V, in order for an institution of higher learning to be accredited,

- An institution of higher education shall be issued with a certificate of accreditation if it demonstrates the achievement of acceptable standards in terms of physical, human, financial and material resources, management and operational procedures and an acceptable standard of academic life focusing on teaching, research and public and expert service.
- (d) the size and quality of the library and equipment, which have been developed;

The goal was to raise and harmonize the level of higher education quality. This required creating rules, guidelines, and protocols that develop and ensure successful management of colleges and universities. The establishment of libraries in all state universities, including private universities, is also approved by the Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education (Zvobgo, 2014). Although most university libraries in Zimbabwe have policies that address the issues faced by People with Disabilities, (PWDs), these services have not yet been effectively implemented. Since PWDs are enrolled in and employed by tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe, libraries should be fully prepared to provide services for PWDs. Studies that have been carried out at university libraries provide support for this. In accordance with a study by Machuve (2021), the Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) Library must establish institutional policy at BUSE for individuals with disabilities, opening a center for users with disabilities to provide more materials in alternative formats and assistive technology, and training staff members to better equip them to help these users.

Statement Of the Problem

According to the American Library Association (2022), libraries help persons with disabilities live full lives by enabling their full involvement in society. Libraries should use solutions based on the universal design principles to make sure that every person's needs are met by library policy, resources, and services. However, it appears unlikely that any guidelines governing the accessibility of information resources and services for people with disabilities have been established by the majority of academic libraries in Zimbabwe. Due to a lack of resources and services, academic libraries in Zimbabwe do not significantly contribute to enabling users with disabilities to participate in society more fully.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the perceptions of students living with disabilities towards academic library services at the University?
- What kind of library service was offered to users living with disabilities at the university?
- What are the challenges faced by academic libraries in offering services to people living with disabilities?
- What strategies were in place to improve library services for the benefit of people living with disabilities at the university?

Theoretical Framework

Total Quality Management (TQM) is used as the study's theoretical foundation of the study. W. Edwards Deming developed the idea of total quality management (TQM) in the 1950s. It was first implemented in Japan following World War II to help the country's citizens rebuild their economy. The main goal of TQM has been and continues to currently underway product or service quality improvement, employer-employee relations, and customer-business interactions. TQM can be used in a library setting, despite the fact that it was initially created for and effectively utilized in commercial and manufacturing settings. As a result, they must offer their customers high-quality goods and services. Libraries and information centres have long been committed to offering their users high-quality services, and they still are. As a result, the services provided must be both internally and externally effective. The term "total quality" in the management of library and information services starts to make sense in this situation.

In removing departmental obstacles, shifting the focus of the recipients of library services to internal users (library personnel), and external customers (users), and achieving a stage of perpetual enhancement, libraries can gain from TQM. Information accessibility requires personnel with the knowledge or abilities to help users from various backgrounds. Staff in academic libraries should make sure that everyone, including people with impairments, can access the information. TQM is thus applicable in this study because it encompasses all activities that, the demands of the consumer, the community, and the business are met in the most efficient and effective way possible by utilizing the full potential of every individual in a never-ending pursuit for development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceptions of students living with disabilities towards academic library services

Access to resources, information, and services without hindrances is one of the fundamental rights that a society and it should respect, everyone even individuals who have impairments (Bodaghi & Zainab, 2013). As a result, libraries should uphold these rights by making information resources accessible to persons with disabilities in all formats. A study by The majority (80%) of students with impairments felt rejected by their

non-disabled peers, staff, and the institution, according to Ramakuela and Maluleke's 2011 research, to explore the opinions of students with disabilities towards the social and learning environment. This is a sign of an environment that is hostile and unforgiving of students with disabilities.

In order to address information delivery centred on specific requirements as a new genre of academic library services at the United Arab Emirates University, Al-Harrasi and Taha (2019) conducted a study. The study focused on the orientation and help provided by access service librarians, as well as any experience using assistive educational technology for reading and information access. The research found out that the university library is unable to fully meet their needs for online services and access to digital content.

Similarly, to this Smadi's (2022) study aimed to examine the level of satisfaction of students with disabilities with library and information services in Saudi universities. The study sample included 35 disabled students enrolled at Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study's data was gathered using a questionnaire. Despite the fact that some students were satisfied with the majority of the offerings. The disability signs (directions) in the library and their compatibility with the needs of students with disabilities, as well as the availability of tools and technology to meet their needs in the library without the assistance of others, were rated inadequate.

Al-Mkaneen and Abo-Tayeh (2019) used interviews and a questionnaire to investigate the reality of environmental facilities for students with impairments accessing the services of the Hashemite University library. According to the findings, there is a high level of accessibility for students with disabilities to library services in terms of personnel, public safety precautions, information resources, library building, interior design, and finally, support technology. Additionally, research demonstrated that students with visual disabilities made up the least number of the categories of disabled people for whom the university library offers services, compared to students with other types of disabilities.

At the University of Gezira in Sudan, Babiker (2014) presented findings of a study that sought to clarify how academic libraries can help those with special needs access information. Fifty students with visual, motor, and hearing impairments made up the sample. The findings showed that the university's libraries' structural and technical features weren't accessible to those with impairments. Additionally, there were not enough tools, aids, and informational containers available for information gathering. The librarians also had little experience hence lacked the necessary training to handle this group, which in turn resulted in users failing to access library resources. There were no distinct classifications for those with disabilities at the time. The university libraries lacked the latest technology and equipment, and computers were not adjusted to accommodate users with disabilities.

Library services offered to people living with disabilities

Some libraries in developing nations are gradually offering reading materials and assistive technologies to users with visual impairments. In addition to its services, Chaputula and According to Mapulanga (2017), a library's collection and the resources available to users determine how good it is. In socially inclusive libraries, the collections and technology must be accessible to all users, including those with impairments. For example, people with vision impairments find it challenging to utilize libraries because, in addition to having mobility problems, they have trouble accessing the collection. According to Preece (1994), whose work was acknowledged by Ekwelem (2013), "The technology to overcome challenges in using traditional equipment exists in numerous forms and levels of sophistication. Examples include gadgets that can sense and track the user's motions using electrophysiological and photoelectric methods. For those with severe motor disabilities, eye-typers have been created."

Dhamdhare and Andres (2022) claim that adaptive technologies, which primarily benefit the visually handicapped, can be used as assistive technologies for users with disabilities. Electro-optical technology

includes optional aids like screen-magnification tools and optical character recognition software that are meant to boost accessibility for students with vision impairments.

According to Alabi and Mutula (2020), several assistive technologies (ATs) have been developed to help people with visual impairments overcome the challenge of navigation. One of the first ATs listed by Alabi and Mutula (2020) is Vizorro, a small, wearable laser navigation tool that calculates the distance to any obstruction when the user points it in that direction. By utilizing the concept of sensory extension, it enables blind persons to “sense” the distance to various barriers. The second ATs is “Sunu”, a smart wristband, which uses an object tracker to improve freedom and movement for people who are blind or visually challenged. With the help of its ultrasonic technology, it can sense the surroundings and give input to the wrist to signal proximity. Visually impaired people can travel with ease and accuracy while using the Sunu Band to feel their surroundings without making physical contact. The third ATs is the Tablet for the Blind (BLITAB) which generates text and visuals that are haptic in real time using cutting-edge stimulation technology. Students with visual impairments can use voiceover to operate the tablet and listen to an e-book. By pressing a side button, the top half of the gadget can be changed into a Braille reader. Due to this, blind students are able to download documents and websites and read them in Braille. The Job Application With Speech (JAWS), the most widely used screen reader for blind people, is the fourth assistive technology. Alabi and Mutula (2020) report that it works with Windows and provides access to online resources and software applications.

For the purpose of helping in the movement of people with disabilities, libraries in particular have operable elevators and ramps added (Majinge & Stilwell 2013). Also being purchased are Braille and big print information resources to make it simpler for those with disabilities to access information sources. A small number of staff workers are also receiving training from libraries on how to help customers with disabilities (Nassimbeni and De-Jager 2014).

Chaputula and Mapulanga (2017) point out that a library’s quality is influenced by its collection and the resources that provide customers access to it in addition to the services it offers. In socially inclusive libraries, the resources and technology must be accessible to all users, including those with disabilities. For example, those who are visually challenged find it challenging to utilize libraries because, in addition to having mobility concerns, they have trouble accessing the collection. One of the many variables that contribute to these problems is the fact that just 5% of the English-language literature published worldwide is accessible in alternate formats for people who cannot access traditional print resources (Epp 2006). This highlights the severity of the challenges faced by academic libraries in delivering library services.

Challenges faced by academic libraries in offering services to users living with disabilities

Academic libraries worldwide face challenges when providing services to users living with disabilities. The difficulties differ from library to library, but the main barriers are the librarians themselves. In other cases, providing services to patrons who have impairments is not a top priority for academic libraries. Alabi and Mutula (2020), who add that regretfully most libraries do not provide enough attention to provision of assistive technologies to the visually impaired pupils, expressed the same thoughts. Despite numerous policies that have been presented to establish specialized and personalized library services for the visually impaired students, the implementation of these services is not yet functioning, according to Al-Harrasi and Taha (2020). Al-Harrasi and Taha (2020) note that this delay in guidelines implementation may be the result of various ways that academic librarians in the United Arab Emirates have interpreted these guidelines. The aforementioned facts suggest that most libraries might have been properly resourced to serve such consumers if inclusive library services had been prioritized. According to Wentz, Gorham, and Jaeger (2023), libraries have a long-standing commitment to accessibility in addition to being legally bound by law to ensure fair access for everyone who uses their resources and services. However, libraries may encounter considerable difficulties in ensuring equal access. Some of these difficulties result from the fact that a

library's capacity to guarantee equal access frequently depends on the actions of other organizations. Wentz, Gorham, and Jaeger (2023) note that some of these issues are particularly specific to libraries because of the increasingly diverse responsibilities they play in ensuring accessibility.

The research by Burrows (2019) indicates that although academic library staff members are well-intentioned and frequently assist disabled people one-on-one, there is a dearth of knowledge about accessibility requirements and how services and resources may be modified to accommodate more users. Although students praise their interactions with library employees, they encounter a number of barriers when trying to access the facilities, materials, and information regarding accommodations or accessible services. This is also emphasised by Majinge and Msonge (2020) who state that users who have visual, hearing, or physical impairments are underserved and subject to discrimination because so few professional librarians are aware of their information needs and how to effectively address them.

According to research by Amoah, Bamfo-Agyei, and Simpeh from 2023, not all university facilities in Ghana were totally accessible to people with disabilities. The laboratories, canteens, resident halls, restrooms, football fields, houses of worship, and transportation hubs were judged to be the least complying structures. The administration building, library, hospital building, lecture rooms, department offices, and ATM areas are among the locations with high compliance. The main reasons for this non-compliance are lax enforcement of construction laws, limited enrolment of students with disabilities, the age of the building, ignorance of the issue, and subpar building designs. Enforcing the right to education for all people, especially those with disabilities, compliance with disability access standards makes institutions world-class and creates secure learning environments for people with impairments. The full utilization of these facilities will be hampered by a lack of compliance with disability access, which will have an impact on how well individuals with disabilities are educated.

A study by Chaputula and Mapulanga (2017) recognized potential impediments and emphasized the absence of accessible libraries and information services. The study found a lack of equipment to support limited access to libraries and information services. Similar to this, few libraries actively promote services that are accessible to individuals with disabilities, and even fewer do so despite an increase in the number of people with disabilities. The report suggests, among other things, that Braille books and other equipment deemed essential for people with impairments be purchased.

According to Jadhav, Chambers, and Tatpuje (2020), many governments in low-income nations fail to obtain and offer the essential assistive goods and devices to persons in need. Additionally, they struggle with a lack of infrastructure and basic knowledge of the many assistive technology (ATs) that are available and how to use them to aid those with disabilities. Adetoro (2012) further highlights that many libraries with little funding find it challenging to acquire the majority of these technological improvements, which creates extra challenges for those who are visually impaired. However, this issue can be resolved by institutional resource sharing initiatives, in which libraries pool their funds to purchase the equipment they need. A study by Epp (2006) found that libraries in the US and Canada were successfully working together in this area.

Engelbrecht (2014) conducted a research study on the barriers to access faced by students with disabilities at a South African institution. Twenty-three students took part in the quantitative research, which included questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews. The study used a purposive convenience sampling strategy. The primary conclusions of this study were that tertiary education institutions were not always accessible to students who had visual or mobility impairments. The majority of restrictions were brought on by the built environment and had to do with parking and library accessibility. The absence of obvious information, difficulties with the course material, and the university's requirement that impaired students produce a medical certificate annually were additional obstacles. While most students can help themselves but still

need aid from others, the results indicate that the tertiary institution can be categorized as accessible with limited support. Additionally, there was a strong correlation between students' motivation to finish their education and their perception of their independence.

In a similar vein, Momodu (2013) sought to investigate the pertinent accommodations for people with physical disabilities in Nigerian libraries in his study. His study's conclusions show that there were not enough accessible libraries for people with disabilities. Architectural concerns and a lack of PWD emergency facilities were only two of the many faults that his analysis found. Students with visual impairments have trouble going to classes and other venues on and off campus, according to Alabi and Mutula (2020). Given the aforementioned examples, it can be challenging for people with disabilities to enter buildings in general and libraries in particular.

Libraries may employ streaming video as a component of assistive technology. Copeland (2023) defines streaming videos as audio-visual content that is accessible via the internet or an online streaming service. Customers who have hearing impairments and those who are deaf must be able to understand audio-visual material in order for it to be used. If the audio-visual content lacks subtitles, the impacted customer will be unable to comprehend its contents or fully engage in any associated activities.

In Enugu State, Nigeria, nine universities participated in a focus group interview done by Ekwelem (2013) with 194 library users who were disabled (mobility impaired and visually impaired). When asked about the accessibility of the library's space and furnishings, interviewees said that elements such as an adjustable table and keyboard tray, ramps, a lift with capabilities for the disabled, and automatically opening doors were not present. The respondents were thus persuaded to believe, among other things, that libraries were designed to primarily serve non-disabled users and that the requirements of people who cannot or do not want to use the library are not well understood.

According to Singh (2023), despite the tremendous advancements in communication technology that have significantly changed services in libraries, empirical data on impaired customers in southern Nigeria has shown that. Access to technological resources is severely disadvantaged for some people, particularly the disabled. The separation might widen the already-existing achievement disparity between pupils with and without disabilities. This indicated the presence of a digital divide between students who can use electronic resources and those who are unable to, as seen by the unequal accessibility to new information technology among impaired students compared to non-disabled and non-student users.

Strategies to improve library services for the benefit of people living with disabilities.

A number of strategies have been suggested to enhance library services for patrons with impairments. Betz (2022) performed a study and in-depth interviews with 40 academic librarians who work full-time and have a range of disabilities. These librarians used a variety of techniques to modify the hiring procedure to better suit their unique requirements. There are ways for hiring committees and administrators to reconsider existing procedures in order to make the recruiting process more inclusive and accessible for librarians with impairments.

Equipment deemed required for people with impairments (such as Braille books) should be purchased, according to Chaputula and Mapulanga's (2017) recommendations. Libraries should also take the necessary steps to address the accessibility problems experienced by customers with disabilities. Libraries ought to make it a point to expand or enhance their services for people with impairments.

In a contemporary academic library setting, Alabi and Mutula (2020) pointed out the importance of assistive technology (ATs) such as screen magnifiers, screen readers, text-to-speech software, voice recognition software, translation, scanners with customized keyboards, and closed-circuit television (CCTV). They also concluded that access to ATs in libraries is a fundamental human right.

The study by Solanki and Shishir (2016) concentrated on the current circumstances of the library services for students with disabilities. The report highlights the specialized resources, facilities, and services that some university libraries in India are expected to offer to students with disabilities.

Libraries should work together with people with disabilities, agencies, organizations, and vendors to integrate assistive technology into their facilities and services so that they can better meet the needs of people with a variety of disabilities, such as learning, mobility, sensory, and developmental impairments. The staff in libraries ought to be able to help everyone use the available technology and ought to be knowledgeable about how modern technology accommodates disability.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed a mixed methods approach to investigate how users with disabilities perceived academic library services at one of the state universities in Zimbabwe. In-depth interviews, document analysis, and material analysis are the foundations of qualitative research, according to Creswell (2016). The use of a mixed approach design was chosen due to its benefits, including the ability to observe participants in their natural environments (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). As this study involves users (staff and students) who use library services, the mixed approach research design was most appropriate.

Participants and settings

The study had a total of 35 participants who were purposefully selected to participate. Purposive sampling was used to estimate the number of people who visit libraries frequently and live with disabilities. Ten participants- students and staff members who were living with impairments were interviewed to learn more about their perceptions as users. Purposive sampling was the best sampling technique for this study since users with impairments would provide the essential data for its success.

Questionnaires were administered to 25 library staff members. Five branches of the library exist, so five members of the staff from each branch library received questionnaires. Because they are the ones who engage with patrons with disabilities and are informed about library services, questionnaires were distributed across all branch libraries.

Instrumentation

Questionnaires were administered to library staff members while interviews were conducted to students and staff (users) living with disabilities, which is excellent for both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. In order to gather data on how students who live with impairments perceive library services in academic libraries, the researchers developed an interview guide comprising structured interviews and questionnaires.

Procedure

Researchers visited the participants for questionnaire distribution and face to face interviews. The interview took about thirty minutes and it was also audio taped with the participant's consent.

Data Analysis

Data analysis, according to Creswell (2007), entails summarizing, reordering, and other related processes. The thematic approach and statistical analysis, the researcher's method of choice for data analysis, was utilized to analyse and interpret the data in this study. The researchers employed a qualitative and quantitative techniques. The study used thematic approach for qualitative data and Statistical Package for social sciences (SPSS) as a data analysis tool for quantitative data.

Ethical considerations

Participants were informed that taking part in the study was entirely voluntary and that the data collected would be handled in strict confidentiality. Consent forms were also encouraged to be filled out voluntarily by participants. They were informed that if they felt unable to continue with the study, they were free to do so at any time of the research process.

RESULTS

Questionnaire results

The study examined the perceptions of users living with disabilities towards academic library services at one of the state universities in Zimbabwe. The objective included the perceptions of users towards academic library services; Library service offered to users living with disabilities; challenges faced by libraries in offering services to users with disabilities.

Response rate

The questionnaires were emailed to 25 library staff members and 19 were responded to. The response rate was 76%. According to, Bryman (2012) a response rate of 83% is acceptable in relation to Mangione’s (1995) classification of bands presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mangione’s Classification of Bands of Response Rate

%	Bands of response
Over 85	Excellent
70-85	Very good
60-69	Acceptable
5-59	Barely acceptable
Below 50	Not acceptable

Table 1 The questionnaire was divided into sections, background information of participants; library services offered to users living with disabilities; challenges faced by academic libraries in offering services to users with disabilities and strategies to improve library services for users with disabilities.

Background information of participants

From the data that was gathered, 52.6% were females while 47.4% were males. Respondents were also required to provide information about their age. The results have been displayed in Figure 1 below.

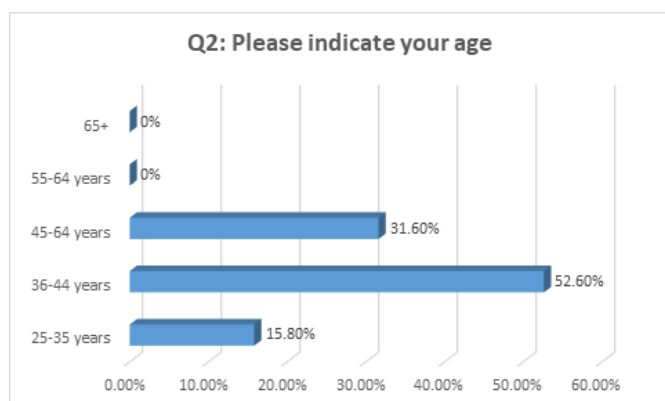


Figure 1. Age of Participants

Q.3 Please indicate years of experience in current library

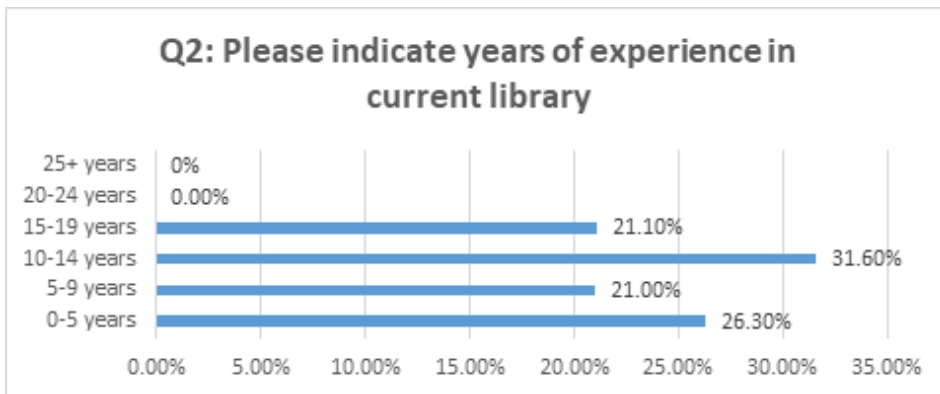


Figure 2. Years of Experience

From the responses obtained, most respondents (31.6%) had ten to fourteen years’ experience in the current library, (26.6%) had zero to five years’ experience, (21.1%) had fifteen to nineteen years’ experience; (21%) had five to nine years’ experience. This is shown in Figure 2 above. These figures represent the distribution of respondents’ years of experience within the specified ranges in their current library. It provides an overview of the experience levels of the participants in the survey or study. The study was dominated by library staff who have experience as shown by the number of years they have been in the library. The results also indicate that library staff are well experienced hence had substantial experiences in providing services to disabled and non-disabled users.

Section B: Library Services Offered to Users Living with Disabilities

Question 1 required participants to indicate the frequency with which users living with disabilities visit the library. Results showed that on a daily basis, (0%) visit the library, (10.5%) visit on a daily basis, (0%) visit the library on a monthly basis, (73.7) visit the library occasionally while (21.1%) indicated that users living with disabilities never visited the library. The results indicated that users living with disabilities visits to the library are limited. This is shown in figure 1 below

How often do users living with disabilities visit your library?

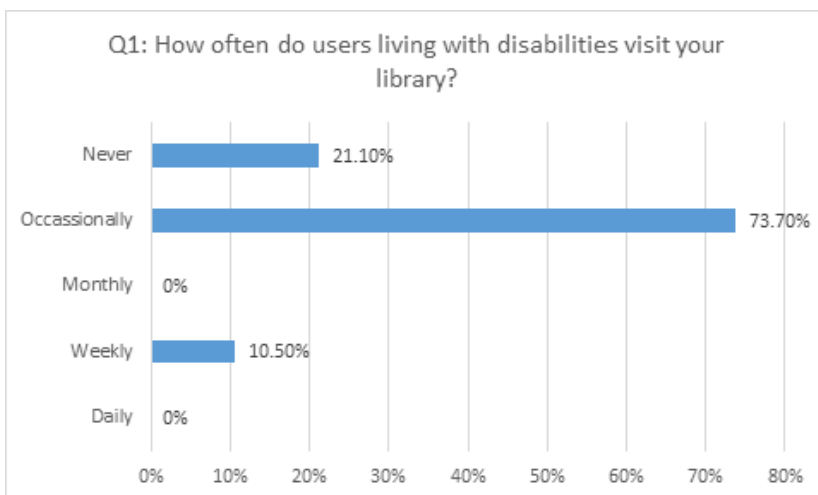


Figure 3. Frequency of Library Visits

Does your library provide services to users living with disabilities?

Respondents were required to indicate the services that they offer to users living with disabilities. The majority of the respondents 15 (78.9) indicated that the library does not offer services to users living with disabilities. Only 21.1% indicated that the library offers services to users living with disabilities. indicate that services offered to users living with disabilities are very limited or very few.

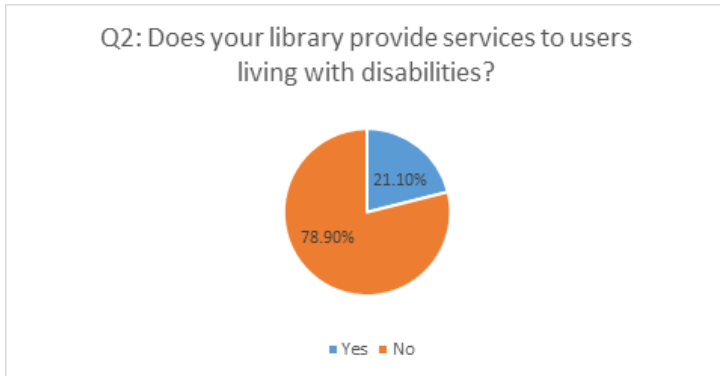


Figure 4. Services Offered to Users Living with Disabilities

Q3. If your answer to Question 2 above is Yes, please indicate the type of service(s) that your library offers to users living with disabilities

The services offered to users living with disabilities include research services, circulation services, A total of four responses were obtained. The services offered listed include

R1 *We offer physical books and electronic resources*

R2. *We have a ramp for wheelchairs and toilets for the physically challenged*

R.3 *Research services*

R4. *Circulation services*

Results indicate that there are no special services for users living with disabilities.

Have you ever assisted a user living with disabilities in your library?

The results indicate that (68.4%) 13 have assisted users living with disabilities in the library while (31.6%) have never assisted users living with disabilities in the library. This is indicated in figure 5 below.

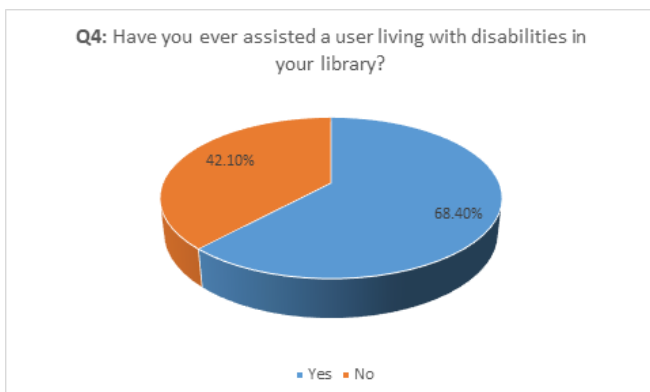


Figure 5. Assistance offered to Users Living with Disabilities

If your answer to question 4 above is Yes, please indicate the type of disability(ies) such a user or users had.

Most respondents (50%) indicated that they had assisted users with visual impairment; 66% had hearing impairment; (16.6%) we using wheelchairs, (16.6%) were crippled (16.6%) had crutches, (16.6%) were physically handicapped and (16.6%) had an amputated arm. Results indicate that most users have hearing impairments while the rest have physical disabilities. This is shown in figure 6 below.

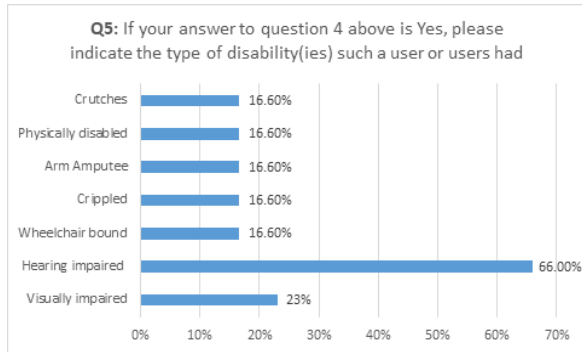


Figure 6. Types of Disabilities

If your response to question 4 is NO, state the reason(s) why you have never assisted a user living with disabilities

The reasons indicated by respondents were as follows

- “Our library does not have facilities to cater for the disabled”
- “The user had an assistant who accompanied him to the library”
- “My workmate was the one who helped her”
- “I have never seen them in the library, but I know they are there on campus”
- Our library usually enrol people who have no physical disabilities
- Our institution does not admit users living with disabilities

Q7. What assistive technologies are available in your library?

From the data gathered, all respondents (100%) indicated that there were no assistive technologies available in the library.

Q8. Do you conduct tours of library and facilities and other sessions on how to use special equipment to users living with disabilities?

Most of the respondents (88.2%) 15 indicated that they do not offer tours to users living with disabilities. Only 11.8% (2) of the respondents responded that they offer tours to users with disabilities. This is shown in Figure 5 below.

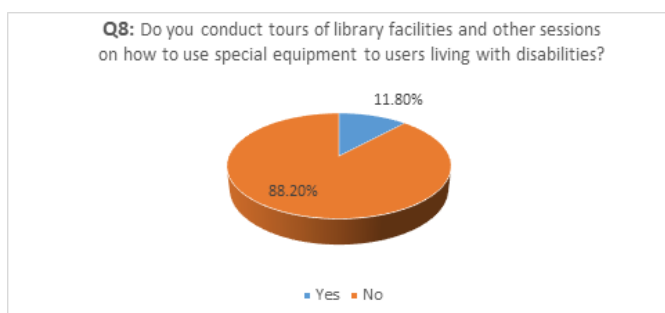


Figure 7. Library Tours and Sessions

Q9. If your answer to question 8 is Yes, how often do you conduct library tour of facilities to users living with disabilities?

Fifty percent (50%) of the respondents indicated that they offer tours of library facilities during library orientation for first year students while (50%), while (50%) of the respondents indicated that they conduct tours to users with disabilities when they visit the library. These figures suggest that there is an equal distribution among the respondents regarding the frequency of conducting library tours for users living with disabilities. Half of the respondents conduct tours during library orientation for first-year students, while the other half conduct tours specifically when users with disabilities visit the library.

Q10. Does your library set aside space specifically designed for users living with disabilities?

All respondents 100% indicated that the library has no space which is specifically set aside for users with disabilities.

Q11. What other facilities does your library provide to users living with disabilities?

Most respondents (63.1%) indicated that the library has ramps, (36.9%) indicated that the library has rest rooms specifically designed for users with disabilities. Results indicate that some of the facilities that cater for users living with disabilities have been established in the library.

Section C: Challenges Faced by Academic Libraries in Offering Services To Users With Disabilities

Q1. Among the listed disabilities, indicate the type of user you are capable of assisting. Tick all that apply.

Majority of the respondents (63.2%) indicated that they are capable of assisting physically handicapped users, (47%) for visually impaired users, (15.8%) are capable of assisting users with hearing impairment. Only (21.1%) were not capable of assisting users with disabilities indicated on the list. Results indicate that some library members of staff can assist users living with disabilities while some are not capable of assisting users living with disabilities.

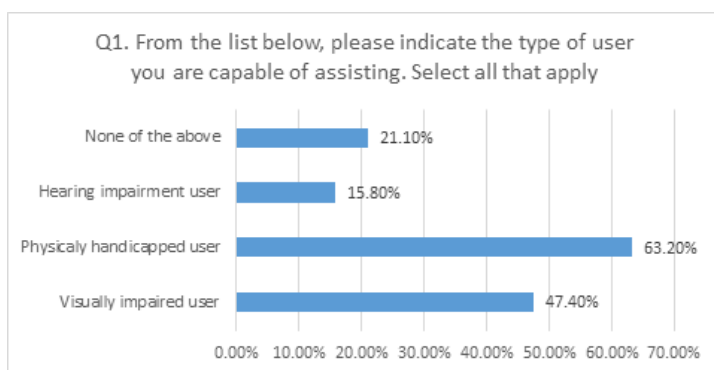


Figure 8. Types of Users Librarians were Capable of Assisting

If your response to question 1 above is “None of the above” please explain the reason why you are not capable of assisting the listed users with disabilities?

The reasons why respondents were not capable of assisting users with disabilities were as follows:

- “We do not have clients in those categories”
- “They do not come to our library”

- “We do not have any assistive technologies/utilities for users with disabilities”
- “I never came across a user living with disabilities in the library”

If you have indicated one or more users with disabilities listed in Question 1, did you encounter challenges in assisting such a user?

A majority of the respondents (46.2%) encountered challenges when assisting users with disabilities, while (53.8%) did not encounter challenges when assisting users with disabilities. This is shown in figure 9 below.

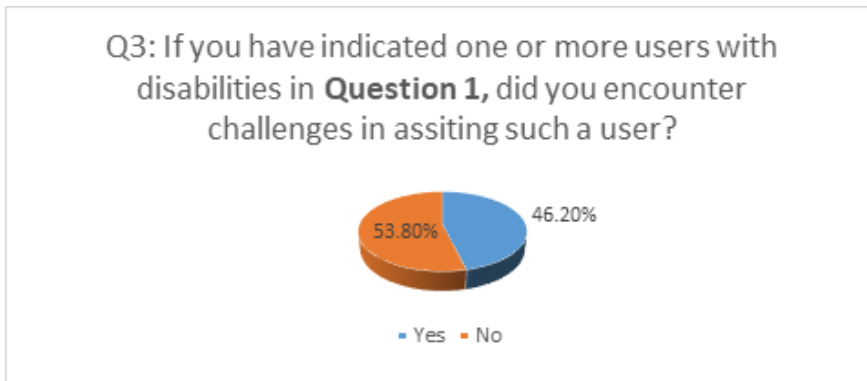


Figure 9. Challenges in Assisting Users Living with Disabilities

If your response to Question 3 above is YES, please explain in detail the challenge(s) that you encountered?

The challenges encountered were as follows:

- “I am still learning sign language”
- “There is lack of space and furniture designed for people with disability”
- “The person was on a wheelchair and I had to push the wheelchair into the library. After that I had to go to the shelves and select books that he needed since he was unable to reach the shelves because of their height. Secondly, the chairs were too high and uncomfortable for him”
- “There is lack of internet and adequate assistive technologies”
- “The library structure is not designed to accommodate users with wheelchairs”
- “Lack of resources such as braille”

These challenges mentioned above reflect various aspects of accessibility, including physical barriers, communication, technology, and the availability of inclusive resources.

In your opinion, what are some of the barriers encountered in offering services to users living with disabilities?

A total of 94.7% responded to the question. The barriers encountered in offering services to users living with disabilities were as follows:

Communication barriers (36.8%), lack of assistive technologies (42%), lack of facilities (31.5%), lack of policies (5.2%), budgetary constraints (5.2%), lack of skills (42.1%), lack of resources like braille (5.2%), poor infrastructure (15.7%). These barriers, as reported by the respondents, highlight the multifaceted challenges faced in providing services to users living with disabilities.

This is indicated in Figure 10 below.

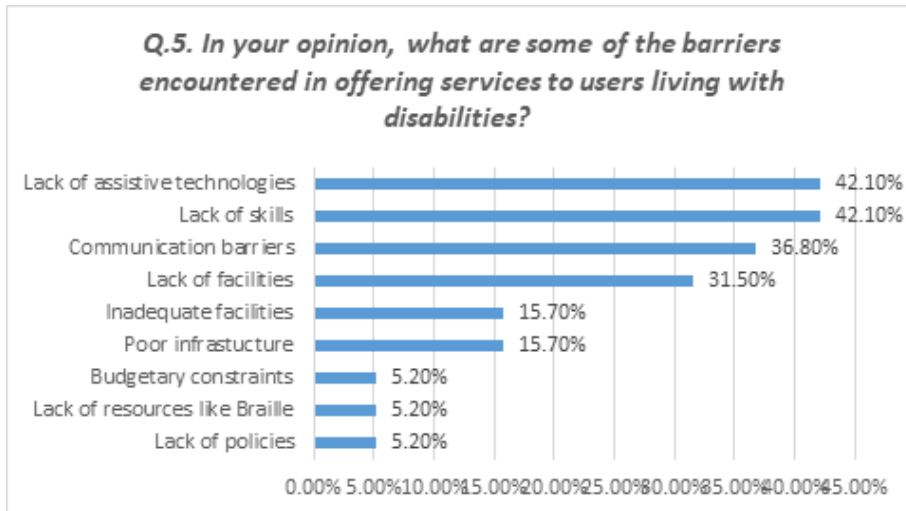


Figure 10. Barriers encountered in Offering Services to Users Living with Disabilities

Section C: Strategies To Improve Library Services for People Living with Disabilities In your opinion, what can be done in order to improve library services for users living with disabilities?

In order to improve library services for users living with disabilities 13 (68.4%) indicated that there was need for funding; 9 (47.3%) acquisition of resources and assistive technologies; (42.1%) 8 training librarians and equip them with skills on how to adequately assist users with disabilities; (21.1%) 4 improving library facilities; formulation of policies 3 (15.7%); constructing library buildings with infrastructure that accommodate the physical challenges 2 (10.5%); designing spaces specially for users with disabilities 3 (15.7%); with the least (5.2%) 1 advocating for understanding the needs of users with disabilities. This is shown in Figure 11 below.

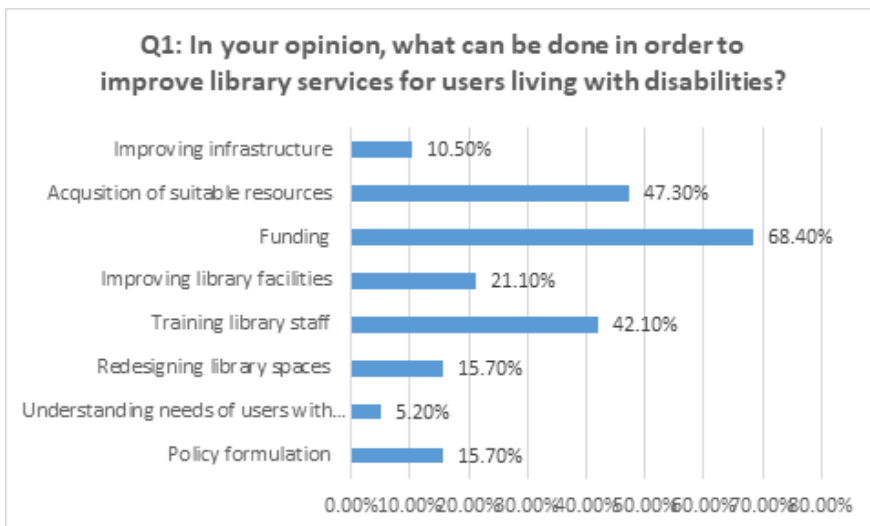


Figure 11. Strategies to Improve Library Services for Users Living with Disabilities

Q2. What are some of the services you expect your library to offer to users living with disabilities?

The services that respondents expected the library to offer include

Assistive technologies 14 (73.6%); reference services by email 1 (5.2%), library instruction 3 (15.7%), Braille 15 (78.9%), JAWS software, 1 (5.2%), sign language 5 (26.3%), home delivery services, (4 (21.1%) personalised assistance, 6 (31.5%), section for the disabled (3 (15.7%)).

A total of 17 responses were obtained.

R1. Braille section to cater for the blind

R.2 Conducive physical space which allows for wheelchair movement, lifts, Braille, JAWS software, staff training on sign language and how to how clients with disabilities

R3 Rooms where people with visual impairment can actually sit to use their braille machines, braille books, software that aid hearing

R4 Sign language, DVD books, Braille books, dedicated gadgets such as laptops, radios and talking books

R5 Braille, computer technology to cater for the disabled

R6 Assistive technologies e.g. audio books for the blind, computer hardware and software for different kinds of disabilities

R7 Sign language, Braille, appropriate technological software for the visually impaired

R8 libraries should provide disability service coordinator, specialized equipment, parking provisions, reader sign interpreters etc.

R9 Familiarization tours to other Disability Resource Centres in Universities

R10 Reference services by email TTY or other alternative methods, home delivery service, Sign Language interpreter or Real-time captioning services, integrate assistive technology into their facilities and services

R11 Conduct library instruction in a format which suits all people even those with disability.

R12 Assistive technology and spaces with adequate space conducive to users with disabilities

R13 Sign language interpreter

R14 Accessible spaces

R15 Personalized assistance

R16 Sensory-friendly resources

R17 Training on how to use assistive technology training

Interview Results

The interviews were conducted to a total of 10 users living with disabilities. The interview questions were divided into sections according to the study's objectives.

Section A: Perception Of Users Living With Disabilities Towards Academic Library Services

Responses to questions about how often do you visit the library in order to access library services?

had this to say

'we rarely visit the library due to a number of reasons which affect us people living with disabilities such as the distance from the venues to the library is not favourable for the disabled''

the second respondent opined that: –

‘The chairs in the library are not designed for people with physical disabilities, as they are not padded and occasionally may be too high or low for the user with a disability’

Adds that: –

‘the library set up was not designed to cater for all disabilities for example the hearing impairment need assistance and there is no interpreter in the library’

opined that: –

‘the library lacks quite a number of equipment needed by the disabled users such as the lack of assertive technologies, braille and assertive software’s JAWS SOFTWARES’

Based on the responses, it is clear that people with disabilities experience a number of barriers when it comes to accessing library services. The distance between the venues and the library is inconvenient for those with impairments, making it difficult for them to use the library’s services. Furthermore, the library chairs are not meant for those with physical disabilities, and the library layout was not planned to accommodate all disabilities, such as hearing-impaired people who may require an interpreter. According to several responders, the library lacks certain equipment required by impaired people, such as assistive technologies, braille, and assertive software like JAWS SOFTWARES. This lack of equipment inhibits their capacity to successfully access and use library resources.

Response on if your response is NEVER, please explain why you have never visited the library?**had this to say:**

‘there is no purpose to visit the library because there are no adequate facilities and resources that caters for the visually impaired’

said this;

‘the library had no staff that can assist students who have sign language interpretation skills making it difficult to communicate with users’

The responses from R.4 and R.5 show that they had specific justifications for not going to the library. The key themes that arose from the responses are listed below: Lack of adequate resources: According to R.4, there are insufficient facilities and resources for the blind, making it difficult for them to access and successfully use library resources. This suggests that the library should spend money on items such as braille books, assistive technology, and accessible furnishings that are designed to meet the needs of users who are blind or visually impaired. Lack of staff support: According to R.5, it is difficult for students to interact with users at the library since there are no staff members who can help them with sign language interpretation. This demonstrates the need of having personnel with diverse skills and abilities to cater to the needs of all users.

On responses on whether user have obtained assistance from library staff when you visited the library?**had this to say: –**

‘the library staff have assisted us but their assistance was not adequate as they cannot assist other

impairments such as those who are deaf and dumb’

The response from R.6 suggests that although they sought assistance from library workers throughout their trips, the help given was insufficient. The following summarizes the key takeaway from the response: Inadequate Help: According to R.6, the library personnel did offer aid, but it was insufficient because they were unable to help those with other disabilities, like the deaf and dumb. This suggests that the personnel of the library need to receive training so they can support and help patrons with a variety of needs and abilities.

Responses to questions about If your response to question above is YES, please explain the type of assistance that you obtained.

R.8 had this to say: –

‘as a physical disabled user the library staff assisted me by collecting books I have requested from the shelve to the reading desks’

R.8’s reaction suggests that they have benefited from staff support while visiting the library. The main lesson learned from the answer is summed up as follows: assistance with book retrieval: R.8 said that the library staff assisted them by retrieving the requested books from the shelves and delivering them to the reading desks. This shows that the library staff is ready to offer tailored assistance and support to patrons with physical limitations, such as helping them get books off high shelves or find their way through the library.

Responses to questions about if your response is NO. explain why you could not get any assistance from library staff

R.7 adds that: –

‘Since the library lacked the facilities and resources necessary to support patrons with impairments, the staff is unable to help us.

According to R.7’s response, they were unable to get any assistance from library staff members during their trips. The main lesson learned from the answer is summed up as follows: not enough resources R.7 asserted that the staff was unable to assist patrons with disabilities because the library lacked the tools and supplies necessary to do so. This implies that the library ought to invest money in resources and furnishings that meet the requirements of those with disabilities, such as assistive technologies, furniture made for the disabled, and braille books.

Responses to questions about if the library environment conducive to your needs?

had this to say: –

‘The lack of several of my resources, such the braille, makes the library unsuitable for my purposes’

Based on R.9’s response, the environment in the library is not suited for their needs. The main lesson from the reaction is outlined in the following: insufficient resources R.9 asserted that the library was unsatisfactory for their needs because it lacked the bulk of the materials they required, such braille books. This implies that the library ought to invest money in resources and furnishings aimed toward fulfilling the needs of people with disabilities, such as braille books, assistive technology, and accessible furniture.

Section B: Library Services Offered To Users Living With Disabilities

Responses to questions about does your library provide services that address your needs?**had this to say: –**

‘the library lacks the resources to meet the demands that someone with impairments like me would generally have’

The library does not provide them with the services they need, according to R.10’s response. The following is the main insight from the response: lack of resources According to R.10, the library lacks the tools essential to cater to the needs of a person with a disability. This recommends that the library should spend money on items and resources that meet the requirements of patrons with disabilities, such as assistive technology, braille books, and accessible furniture.

Responses to questions on what assistive technologies are available in the library?**R.6 said this: –**

‘there are no assertive technologies in the library that is critical for people living with disabilities’

There are no assistive devices available in the library, according to R.6’s response. The following describes the key takeaway from the response: Absence of assistive technology According to R.6, the library does not have any essential assistive technologies for people with impairments. This recommends that the library should spend money on assistive technology that meet the requirements of users with disabilities, such as screen readers, text-to-speech programs, and software for magnification.

Responses to questions have you ever participated in any library programmes such as orientation, use of library facilities and how to use special equipment?**R.5 had this to say: –**

‘I only managed to attend the orientation programme and it was not useful to me because they concentrated on how to utilise books and no information on assertive technologies usage’

R.3 opined that: –

‘Yes I have attended to the orientation programme and it was useful to a certain extent as we managed to familiarise with the library set up through some tours but less information on those living with disabilities’

The responses from R.5 and R.3 indicate that they have participated in library programs such as orientation, but the usefulness of the program varied. Below are the main themes that emerged from the responses:

Lack of knowledge about assistive technologies: According to R.5, the orientation training was useless to them because it did not cover how to utilize these devices. This recommends that the library should include information on assistive equipment in its orientation programs in order to satisfy the needs of disabled patrons. According to R.3, who also mentioned that the orientation workshop was fairly beneficial, there was insufficient information about people with impairments. This shows that in order for patrons with disabilities to access and utilize library services effectively, the library needs to provide them with additional information regarding impairments in their orientation programs.

Responses to questions “If your response to question 3 above is “YES” ...please indicate the programme that you participated in.

R.8 had this to say: – *Orientation programme*

R.2 adds that: – *library instruction*

Based to their responses, R.8 and R.2 have taken part in library programs including orientation and teaching. The key themes that arose from the responses are listed below: R.8 mentioned that they took part in the library’s orientation session, which gave them an overview of the services, resources, and facilities available there. This shows that the orientation session was successful in assisting them in becoming familiar with the design, rules, and practices of the library. R.2 said that they took part in library instruction, which would have included specialized instruction on how to use particular library tools or resources. This shows that the library provides more specialized training to those who need it.

Responses to question: “If your response to question 3 is “NO” provide reasons why you did not participate in such programmes?”

R.4 Said this: –

‘I could not participate at the orientation because of the distance and the disability I have affects my mobility as I cannot compete with physically fit’

As to the response from R.4, they were unable to engage in library programs like orientation because of mobility issues brought on by their disability. The key takeaway from the response is provided below: Mobility issues: According to R.4, they were unable to attend the orientation program due to travel time and mobility issues brought on by their disability. This implies that the library should take into account the mobility requirements of people with impairments while developing and implementing library activities.

Responses to question: “Does the library set aside specifically for library users living with disabilities?”

R.7 had this to say:

‘the library does not offer such kind of privileges to users living with disabilities’

R.10 adds that:

‘ the library only assists you after asking for it otherwise they have no such facilities designed for people living with disabilities ’

R.3 Opined that: –

‘I think the library seems to lack policy regarding provision of facilities and resources to users with disabilities’

The responses from R.7, R.10, and R.3 suggest that the library lacks regulations governing the provision of facilities and resources to users with disabilities as well as a designated location designated for those customers. The key themes that arose from the responses are listed below: Lack of accessible space: According to R.7 and R.10, the library does not provide special accommodations or dedicated spaces for patrons with disabilities. This shows that the library may not be giving the needs of patrons with disabilities first priority and that it needs to spend money on supplies and equipment that are designed to meet their

requirements. Lack of regulations: According to R.3, the library doesn't appear to have any regulations governing the provision of services and materials to patrons with disabilities. This suggests that the library might not have a clear plan in place for serving patrons with disabilities who require inclusive services.

Section C: Challenges Faced By Academic Libraries In Offering Services To People Living With Disabilities

Responses to question: "What challenges did you encounter when you visited the library?"

R.1 had this to say: –

'mobility challenges in the library as the floors have tiles which are slippery''

opined that: – *'the are few resources and infrastructures such as computers and those who are ablebodied always access this facility first all the times''*

also said this: –

"the tables and chairs are not designed for those who are physically challenged sometimes the chairs and tables are too high or to low"

opined that:

"the arrangement of desks and chairs are too crowded that if one is using a wheelchair cannot move freely between the four corners of the library"

adds that: –

"the designs of the shelves that carries the library books was designed without people with disabilities in mind hence making it difficult for a disabled person to access reading materials freely"

According to R.1, R.4, R.5, R.9, and R.10's comments, they encountered a variety of difficulties when visiting the library. The key themes that arose from the responses are listed below: Accessibility difficulties: R.1, R.5, R.9, and R.10 reported that they ran into accessibility issues at the library, including slick surfaces, cramped desks and chairs, and non-disability-friendly bookcases. These issues indicate that the library should spend money on materials and furnishings that accommodate the needs of people with disabilities, such as braille books, safe flooring materials, and accessible furniture. Resources are scarce: According to R.4, they had trouble using the library's computers because there aren't many of them and the infrastructure is prioritized for physically able users. Therefore, the library has to spend more money on supplies and technology and make sure that everyone has equitable access to the collection.

Section D: Strategies To Improve Library Services For People With Disabilities

Responses to question: "What are some of the services you expect the library to offer?"

R.3 had this to say:" *the library should design discussion rooms for people living with disabilities''*

R.7adds that: – *"special collection or rare books should be reserved for people living with disabilities and even computer slots should be made available to all users"*

R.9 opined that:" *the library should design a section dedicated for people living with disabilities within the library"*

The responses from R.3, R.7, and R.9 indicate that patrons anticipate the library to provide services that are accommodating to their requirements. The key themes that arose from the responses are listed below: Dedicated spaces: According to R.3 and R.9, the library shall create special areas with discussion areas, sections, and other amenities that are tailored to the requirements of patrons with disabilities. This recommends that the library should spend money on equipment and facilities that meet the needs of patrons with disabilities. R.7 stipulated that the library should hold unique collections or rare books exclusively for patrons with disabilities. It indicates that while assigning resources and materials, the library should take the needs and preferences of users who are impaired into account.

Responses to question: “What suggestions or recommendations do you propose in order to improve library services?”

R. 2 had this to say: – *“Training library staff members on disability awareness, etiquette, and inclusion so that there can be knowledgeable about various types of disabilities, assistive technologies, and communication methods to better assist patrons with disabilities”.*

R.5 opined that: – *“The library should create an accessible physical environment by ensuring that your library is physically accessible to people with disabilities.*

R.8 said this: – *“The library should provide assistive technologies and tools so that the library adequately equipped with a range of assistive technologies and tools to support individuals with disabilities.*

R.10 adds that: – *“The library should offer a variety of accessible formats for library materials such as audiobooks, e-books, large-print materials, Braille versions and other technologies”*

Several recommendations for enhancing library services are made in the responses from R.2, R.5, R.8, and R.10. The following are the key themes that appeared in the responses: R.2 recommended that library staff members get training on disability awareness, etiquette, and inclusiveness in order to better serve patrons with impairments. This suggests that in order to offer inclusive services, library staff members must have a thorough understanding of the many types of disabilities, assistive devices, and communication techniques. A more accessible environment should be created by the library to make sure that it is physically accessible to people with disabilities, according to R.5. This indicates that the library should spend money on items and furnishings that meet the needs of patrons with disabilities, such as braille readers, handicap-accessible furniture, and safe flooring materials. Assistive technologies: According to R.8, the library shall offer tools and assistive technology to help people with disabilities. This suggests that in order to support patrons with visual, hearing, or movement challenges, the library needs to invest in assistive technologies like screen readers, text-to-speech software, and voice recognition software. Accessible formats: According to R.10, the library must provide a range of accessible formats for its collection of books, including audiobooks, e-books, large-print publications, Braille editions, and other modern technology. This implies that the library must offer materials in ways that are usable by everyone, including those who are disabled.

DISCUSSION

The study’s findings indicated that there aren’t enough resources available locally for people with disabilities to take part fully in current technological endeavours. Audio books and the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) have been found to be the only electronic resources that are now available. neither of which have been used to their full potential. The study also revealed that none of the analysed samples had any of the goods for the mobility challenged, indicating that these users are not generally benefiting from the new technology. The findings are consistent with WHO’s observation from 2002 that adolescents with physical disabilities frequently face numerous limitations in everyday life, including those related to activities related to mobility, communication, and self-care. Their ability to fully participate in academic

activities has been hampered by this in many ways. According to Lathouwers, Moor, and Didden (2003), technology like the internet gives disabled persons more opportunity to interact with the outside world despite their disabilities. Based to the findings, respondents thought that libraries, in their current physical forms, catered only to physically fit individuals and that the needs of those who are unable to use or do not utilize the library were not completely understood

CONCLUSION

Findings of study revealed that there were no resources in the libraries such as the assistive devices as well as the human capital base to assist the disabled learners to effectively use the libraries. The study also showed that there was no clear cut policy at the libraries for the benefit of students living with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that library policies that cater for the needs of people living with disabilities be crafted and implemented, so that universally accessible use of resources that integrate the needs of people with disabilities are taken care of. The study also recommends that; librarians acquire assistive equipment related to people living with disabilities as well as seconding qualified staff to the libraries as assistants to people living with disability.

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