



Enhancing Inclusivity and Accessibility: Role of Modern Libraries in Information Service Delivery for Person living with Disabilities (PLWD)

Afekhiku, Daniel¹, Oluranti, Shadrack², Ekhueorohan, Cynthia³, Igberase, Evelyn⁴

Edo State College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Iguoriakhi, Benin City^{1,3,4}, Institute of Agricultural Research & Training²

afekhikudaniel93@gmail.com¹, shadrackoluranti@yahoo.com²,

Cynthiaanthony77@gmail.com³, evelyn.omon80@gmail.com⁴

Received: 7, October 2024 **Accepted:** 22, December 2024 **Published:** 30, December 2024

Abstract

Libraries are central to ensuring equitable access to information for all members of society, particularly for marginalized groups like Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWD). This study investigates the critical role of libraries in fostering inclusivity and accessibility by evaluating existing infrastructure, policies, and practices. Using a case study of the Edo State College of Agriculture and Natural Resources library, the research identifies significant progress in integrating accessibility features while uncovering persistent gaps in service delivery for PLWD. The findings emphasize the urgent need for library professionals to implement intentional policies, adopt innovative technologies, and design inclusive spaces to accommodate diverse user needs effectively. Recommendations focus on leveraging Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and enhancing physical infrastructure to ensure comprehensive service delivery. This work advocates for libraries to evolve as fully inclusive spaces, enabling equitable access to information and reinforcing their commitment to societal equity.

Keywords: Inclusivity, Accessibility, Persons Living with Disabilities, Libraries, Service Delivery, Equitable Access

Introduction

One of the powers God has over us as human beings is our non-involvement in the gender, color, shape, family, race, tribe, continent, or religion we are birthed into. For some, their birth was devoid of any complication, while some were not so lucky. Their birth came with one form of disorder or more. This disorder ranges from mild to severe. In a society that is battling all forms of prejudices that range from skin colour, disability, sex, and status among its humans, the library plays a critical role. The library is seen as an information resource hub that is expected to cater to the information needs of its parent organization. Frumkin and Reese (2011), sum up the role of the library in acquiring and disseminating information resources as a vital responsibility; an inevitable one at that. Okoro (2004) posits that apart from serving as a depository of books and other types of documentation, the library in its concept is an organized place where people are known to come and acquire/gather information for their recreational and inspiration needs. If scholars have lucidly

posited how important the library is, there is therefore no gain in saying the fact that the library must be seen as an all-welcoming entity for all forms of members of society.

In recent years, librarians and other stakeholders have become increasingly aware of the importance of providing library access to all users inclusively; this consideration will continue to grow in importance in the future (Hawthorne et al, 1997; Gibson, 2006; Jaeger, et al., 2011; Mates, 2004). Now is the future. It therefore becomes imperative that library professional bodies, library managers, and librarians should be actively involved in the setting up of library buildings. Duckett, et al. (2014) reported that library architecture provides users and library staff a place of leisure and recreation for all categories of users. It therefore means that library buildings must support diversity, equity, and inclusion of the users so that the library will be seen as a model in fostering inclusivity and accessibility as well as functional and efficient in meeting the information needs of the users they serve.

The phrase Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWD) or Persons with Special Needs (PWSN) are usually used interchangeably by professionals in the field of Special Education. Special education according to Firestone (2018) is “the education that is designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities so that they can learn the same skills and information as other children in schools”. Nowadays, terms like; the blind, Deaf, Crippled, Dumb and Mentally Retarded has now been substituted for; Visually Impaired, Hearing Impaired, Physically and health impaired and Intellectually Disabled, to make for a subtle way of describing this special people. These groups of people also form significant percentage of the society which the library cannot afford to discriminate especially as regards inclusiveness, accessibility to library facilities and information service delivery to these set of people. People with disabilities are the largest minority group in the United States (Wentz, et al., 2015). These groups of people are seen not to be physically fit to get access to library resources or who may not because of their nature/situation read the conventional information resources like every other library user (Adejo, 2020).

For library to therefore foster inclusion and access to information by all persons in the society, equality in accessing this information materials and service delivery must be paramount in the scheme of things by libraries and library heads saddled with library management policy formulation and implementation. Pugh (2004) opines that equity of access is now the growing principle for the use of recorded information. Equity of access to information can be defined as people having the right to unlimited library services and materials no matter their age, ethnicity, physical ability, income, language, geographic location, or the type of library they are using (Betty & Gustav, 2010).

Studies have shown that Persons Living with Disability have always been considered in Library and information service delivery. In fact, in many places, libraries were the first social or governmental institution to recognize people with disabilities as equal members of their communities (Wentz, et al., 2015). Library and information service is the science of providing access to vast amounts of accumulated knowledge and information, which has much to be offered by the information providers, who are mostly addressed as librarians (Mafe, et al., 2020). It is noteworthy to state that this service depends on the constituency and provisions of setting up this

library. The roles libraries play in information service delivery also depends on the kind of library and the client group or groups it serves (IFLA, 2003). The services rendered depend on the type of library and purpose of establishing it (Amadi & Oyenachi, 2021). What is paramount is satisfying the user, irrespective of his or her status. However, the scope of this paper is specifically on Enhancing Inclusivity and Accessibility: Role of Modern Libraries in Information Service Delivery for Person living with Disabilities (PLWD). Inferences, where necessary, were drawn from other countries. In the opinions of the authors, the library is still lagging behind in inclusivity and accessibility that is expected of a modern-day library especially in purposeful information service delivery to Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWD); this is a cause for worry and inspired the authors to do this review.

The Sub-themes Covered in this Review are:

- a) Highlights on the Importance of Inclusivity and Accessibility: Discuss the critical need for libraries to foster inclusivity and accessibility for all users, including persons living with disabilities (PLWD).
- b) Discussion of the Evolving Role of Libraries in usage of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to foster inclusivity and accessibility for persons living with disabilities (PLWD).
- c) Evaluation of Library infrastructure and facilities that support diversity, equity, inclusion, and physical accessibility for PLWD.
- d) Challenges libraries face in providing inclusive services for PLWD, and
- e) Recommendations for library managers, architects, and policymakers on creating and maintaining accessible and inclusive library spaces and services for PLWD.

Library in Perspective

The concept and definition of libraries has evolved. Scholars and practitioners in library and information science are adapting to technological advancement, leading to significant changes in the library space. Onye (2016) affirms that the emergence of information communication technology (ICT) is transforming the world of information and redefining libraries' operational services. Modern libraries are now seen as buildings where print and non-print materials are collected, organized, stored, and made available for easy access to all categories of clientele. While some agree on the definition of a library as an institution of books collected, processed, stored, retrieved, and used to disseminate knowledge, others prefer the definition that summarizes a library to represent a place (physical) where books and non-book materials are preserved to spread knowledge (Nwachukwu, et al., 2014). A modern library in the opinion of this paper, is a building purposefully built with library professionals involved, where print and non-print materials are collected and housed, organized, stored and made available for easy access and use.

According to Onye (2016), what constitutes components of a library's definition depends on the type of library in question. Different types of libraries such as public, academic, and special libraries have so established to cater to the information needs of different groups of people in

society (Abdullahi & Abubakar, 2015). It therefore means that modern libraries no matter their parent institution are expected to start taking intentional steps to ensure that library buildings and facilities are accessible, especially for Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWD) without aid or obstruction. The modern library should be built or upgraded to a standard that allows easy and seamless access, especially for persons with physical and health impairments using a wheelchair to aid their movement.

Smith (2022) asserted that a PLWD library provides facilities that assist a different range of disabled persons, including the visually impaired from the walls outside the library with the provision of a ramp or wheelchair for easy passage into the inner part of the library. The newly built Edo State College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Iguoriakhi library serves as a model for modern libraries providing accessible infrastructure and facilities for PLWD. This State library, apart from providing an easily accessible staircase to the first floor of the library, there is a ramp for visually impaired people. The state government of Edo State must be commended for setting a standard in modern-day library buildings.

Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWD)

Persons living with disabilities in this context are a special set of people who are not physically fit to access the library facilities. These set of people suffer from impairment that inhibit them from performing or living their lives like their non-physically challenged counterparts. These impairments include: visually impaired, hearing impaired, speech impaired, and physical and health impaired. These groups of people, though might have been restrained as a result of their impairment, yet, they have innate abilities and also need information to expand their horizon of knowledge. This set of people will therefore need to use the library. These persons though often categorized as disadvantaged groups, have potential. Moisey (2007) opined that for these persons living with disabilities, of them require special tools or alternative forms of library materials to access information. As more people with disability attend institutions of higher learning, it is expedient for the library management to provide the same level of service to all its users without discrimination (Ezeabasili & Umeji, 2021). Madu (2008) noted that the library has to identify the various disabilities and put measures on how the library can handle such problems such as those of the blind and partially sighted, mentally handicapped, physically handicapped, and so on. This type of service is called library extension services.

Library as a Model for Fostering Inclusivity

According to Ezeabasili and Umeji (2021), Inclusion can mean different things to different people. An inclusive library is a vital community resource, addressing the diverse information needs of all members of the community (Moisey, 2007). The library exists for its users who form the fulcrum of the library's existence. Nwalo (2003) vividly puts it that the library user is undoubtedly, the most important person in any library setting. He went further, to define a user as anybody who visits the library to exploit its resources to satisfy his or her information needs. These users, according to Aina (2004), are grouped into children, pupils, students, adults, professionals, researchers, policymakers, artisans, hearing and visually handicapped, physically challenged, and others with special needs, with emphasis on the visually impaired. In a society bedeviled by

discrimination and marginalization, the library must continue to promote and foster inclusiveness in information service delivery to Persons Living with Disability (PLWD). Grassi (2013) defined inclusion as an approach to library service that equitably involves patrons with disabilities, the scholar stated further, that if the library does everything to meet the varied needs of patrons with special needs, they are truly being inclusive.

Libraries have historically been at the forefront of inclusivity. Wentz, Jaeger, and Bertot, (2015) asserted that many libraries have already served patrons with disabilities over a hundred years, recognizing them as equal members of their communities. However, it is profoundly surprising, given the omnipresence of people with disabilities, that so large a percentage of the earth's total population and so large a percentage of each nation's population is so commonly forgotten or ignored in societal contexts.

Library and Accessibility to Information Resources by Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWD)

The place of the library as a hub of knowledge cannot be overemphasized. Libraries exist to provide timely, accurate, pertinent, and reliable information for their users. Olowu (2004) asserts that librarians are devoted to improving easy access and usage of information to satisfying users' needs. Aina (2014) stated that accessibility determines the speed at which an information output in any format is obtained and its usage. A library can be said to be fulfilling its purpose, when its users no matter their size, sex, physical condition, etc. can easily access the facilities of the library from the portal section down to the information resources available without hitch or obstacles. Libraries must provide adequate physical and infrastructural resources that will accommodate and enhance information usage by physically impaired users, especially the visually impaired. Ekwelem (2013) maintained that visually impaired students can access the library's electronic resources through initiatives from the National Library of Korea's web-based service to satisfy the information needs of the visually impaired. Librarians must develop policies to aid the visibility and accessibility of their collections which align appropriately with the aims and objectives of their institutions and the needs of prospective users (Shameenda, 2011).

Great strides have been made by libraries in the accessibility of information resources by PLWD. Results of a study conducted by Harris and Oppenheim (2003) in the UK showed that only 45.8% of the libraries in their study had specific features to assist visually impaired students physically to access the library and its collections. Nevertheless, more recent studies in the USA and the UK have shown that great strides have been made to facilitate the accessibility of libraries to people with disabilities (Samson, 2011; Bishop & Rhind, 2011; Beaton, 2005). The study by Samson (2011) found that, besides providing for most of the equipment required to facilitate accessibility to the library, authorities in 50% of the institutions provided disability parking areas near the library. In the same vein, studies carried out by Bishop and Rhind (2011) and Beaton (2005), both in the UK, also showed that significant strides in facilitating access to people with disabilities had been made. The studies highlighted above demonstrate the progress made in developed countries towards improving the accessibility of libraries for individuals with disabilities. However, the situation is far from perfect in some parts of these developed countries.

A study by Bodaghi and Zainab (2013) indicated that both architects and people with disabilities rated accessibility of the public and university library buildings in Zanjan province in Iran as “not good enough. Todaro (2005) in Argentina and Koulikourdi (2008) in Greece have likewise shown that much more needs to be done if libraries in their countries are to be described as truly accessible to people with disabilities. Todaro (2005) found that most of the libraries in Argentina do not provide the desired physical space to people with disabilities, while Koulikourdi (2008) found that only academic libraries have attempted to create an environment conducive to study in Greece by providing the required facilities and equipment. Such facilities and equipment are largely unavailable in special, national, school, and public libraries. In the case of Malawi, Chilemba (2012) observed that most library spaces in Malawi are not accessible to people with disabilities.

Library, Information Service Delivery and Persons Living with Disabilities: Conceptual explanations

Divergences in the definition of a library will never cease as long as the world exists. Onye (2016) puts it better when she stated that, different definitions emerged from the biases people and institutions have on what makes up a library or what a library is. She further asserts that the emergence of information and communication technology (ICT) is transforming the world of information and adds a new perspective to how a library should be defined. While some accept the definition of a library as an institution of books collected, processed, stored, retrieved, and used to disseminate knowledge, others prefer the definition that summarizes a library to represent a place (physical) where books and non-book materials are preserved to spread knowledge (Nwachukwu, et al., 2014). Hornby (2015) defines a library as "a building in which collection of books, tapes, newspapers are kept for people to read". Library in the opinion of the authors of this paper is a storehouse of information materials acquired and organized for the educational and information advancement of those suitable to use them without any bias. In light of the above, book and non-book resources housed can be referred to as a library.

Information is embedded in human beings and communicated through various mediums including the print and non-print materials in the library. According to Aina (2004), information is a group of processed data that when well utilized helps an individual deduce an inference on value judgment in making a decision. Popoola (2009) posited that information is a critical economic resource that is capable of improving the knowledge state of the individual to make rational decisions. According to Uhegbu (2007), information is a common term, applied or used often with little or no exactitude, which means that information is a broad term and can be acceptable to mean anything required or requested, or more knowledge about any subject matter.

Information is critical for decision-making and improving knowledge. Over time, libraries have developed innovative ways of delivering information services to persons living with disabilities. Libraries provide special services to patrons with special information needs using books-on-tape (talking books), digital talking books and special equipment, Braille materials, and reader advisory services. These services are tailored to different individuals, organizations, and

institutions (Amadi & Onyenachi, 2021). According to Horny (2015), service means providing means, providing something, an act of being of assistance to someone. Library and Information Centres are among the organizations that render services to people. The first in a series of standards to ensure equal service to patrons with disabilities was crafted by the American Library Association (A.L.A) in 1961. Within twenty years, public libraries, school libraries, and academic libraries all had clear standards and mandates for services to patrons with disabilities for accessible building design and inclusive materials and services (Gibson, 1977). The comprehensive “Library Services for People with Disabilities Policy” (2001) is now fifteen years old. Among ALA-accredited master's programmes awarding Master of Library Science or Master of Library and Information Science degrees, knowledge of the legal rights of and the issues of service to patrons with disabilities is a required aspect of the curriculum (Walling, 2004).

For this paper, it, therefore, means that library and information centres’ services to physically fit users also apply to persons living with disabilities. The difference, however, lies in the proportion of time, special training for the service givers, format and packaging of the information which requires special machines and technology, buildings, and furniture designs (Amadi & Onyenachi, 2021).

Evolving Roles of Libraries in Usage of Information and Communication Technology to Foster Inclusivity and Accessibility for Persons Living with Disability (PLWD)

Information and Communication Technology has become a phenomenon in the field of library and information science. The library exists for all and users’ satisfaction is very paramount for libraries and library professionals in service delivery. There is therefore no doubt that Information and Communication Technology has aided libraries, especially in fostering inclusivity and accessibility to information by persons living with disabilities. Adetimirin (2022) posited that a modern-day library is user-centered, a place for social interaction where services are delivered using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and are based on the information needs of users. Therefore, in a modern-day library, there are different services rendered to users through the deployment of ICT such as selective dissemination of information, information literacy, document delivery, outreach programmes, and so on. To foster inclusiveness and accessibility with a focus on persons living with disabilities, Onye (2016) noted that libraries must use multiple sources or platforms (books, non-books, print, non-print, and ICT) to ensure information resources are available or risk losing their fundamental objectives.

Library usage of ICT could be referred to as Assistive technology (AT) that scaffolds information access for students with disabilities (Farmer, 2009; Blue & Pace, 2011; Socol, 2010). Assistive Technology is available as hardware, software, and web-based resources like touch-screen technologies, large-screen monitors, optical scanners, light boxes, specialized keyboards, headsets with microphone, screen readers, speech-to-text converters, and browser add-ons with easy access to magnification or talking dictionaries (Burgstahler, 2011; Cummings, 2011; Ennis-Cole and Smith, 2011; Farmer, 2009; Hopkins 2006; Krueger & Stefanich, 2011; Socol, 2010). The above-highlighted assisted technologies; all find their roots in ICT, can foster inclusivity and

accessibility in libraries if employed. A study by Epp (2006) showed that libraries in the United States of America (USA) and Canada successfully collaborated in this area. According to Adetoro's (2012) study of alternate format preferences among secondary school visually-impaired students in Nigeria, talking books and/or audio recordings were the most preferred format for blind students (51%) as well as partially-sighted students (55%). These formats were preferred over others because of their playback facility and because they were easy to understand. This will not just increase the library traffic and usage; it will also give a sense of belonging to PLWD in the usage of the library facilities.

Library Infrastructures and Facilities as a model for enhancing inclusion and Physical Accessibility for PLWD

The world like someone puts it can always be a better place for all of us to live in only if we are intentional about it. Persons living with disabilities know they live with one form of impairment which is a problem for them. It therefore behoves a modern library not to add to its woes when it comes to accessing library facilities. A modern library must have the following attributes: accessibility, inclusiveness, visibility, connectivity, flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to reflect people's changing interests (Adetimirin, 2022). A good library building must include some very important qualities and characteristics as reported by Metcalf (2015). He concluded that, ideally, a good library building should be:

1. Functional: A library building should have a functional design with spaces that work well, look good, are easy to use, are economical to operate, and last well. The space must enable the library to fulfill its role and facilitate the delivery of high-quality services. The design should recognize the crucial importance of users, information resources, and information technology and the complex and dynamic relationships between them. The building should be built economically so that it can be maintained with minimum staff and finance.

2. Adaptable: This means the creation of a flexible space in a library that can easily be changed. It is important to achieve a high degree of flexibility in the building so that the use of space can easily be changed with the minimum of disruption, merely by rearranging the furniture, shelving, and equipment whenever the need arises in the future.

3. Accessible: The library is the heart of the institution and organization and plays a strong role in the learning, teaching, and research processes within the institution and organization. It should be as accessible as possible, encouraging and inviting people to make full use of the services it provides.

4. Varied: The library building should offer dedicated spaces for learning, research, recreation, and for different media. It should provide access to both traditional and electronic resources, with an increasing emphasis on allocating space for users and services. A variety of spaces can be created using different furniture; lighting and noise levels. A library should have a well-organized space that promotes contact between users and services.

5. Conducive environment: A library building should have a conducive environment that is suitable with appropriate conditions for users, information resources, ICT equipment, ideal

temperature, and humidity; where dust and pollution levels should all be controlled. The building should be safe and secure for users and staff, collections, equipment, data, and the building. Particular attention should be paid to the design of workstations and other ICT equipment. The use of colours, lighting, interior designs, and artwork plays a big part in creating a particular ambiance.

6. Extendable: The library building should be built with the future in mind, possibly 20-25 years keeping in view the rate of stock development, number of users, future use of information technology, and new sections. The building should be extendable to allow for future growth with minimum changes or alterations. Chaputula and Mapulanga (2016) stressed that the doors to the library should be wide enough to ensure that clients using wheelchairs and walkers can access the library, stating that recently, electric doors have been recommended to achieve this objective. They further suggested that electronic lifts be installed in high-rise library buildings to ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities, enabling them to easily reach the upper floors. Research findings indicate that many libraries have made significant progress in enhancing accessibility, demonstrating a growing commitment to inclusivity. However, continued efforts are needed to address the remaining barriers and ensure that all patrons, regardless of their abilities, can fully utilize library resources and services.

Challenges Libraries face in Providing Inclusive Service to Persons Living with Disabilities and Suggestions for Improvement.

It is estimated that 10% of the world's population (650 million people) are living with a disability of one form or another according to the United Nations Secretariat for the Convention on Rights of Persons Living with Disabilities (2013). The Government of the United Kingdom (UK), for instance, passed the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act in 2001. Harris and Oppenheim (2003) and Hill (2013) noted that the Act requires that students with disabilities in institutions of higher learning have the same access to educational facilities and resources provided as all other students. The library is a well of information resources and services, access to it can only be measured by how stress-less its users find their way to it. Socially inclusive libraries need to have collections and equipment that can be used by all, including those with disabilities. Visually-impaired people, for example, face problems using libraries because, besides mobility challenges, they face the challenge of accessing the library collection. There are several contributing factors to these problems, including that only 5% of the world's published output in English is made accessible in alternate formats for people who cannot use traditional print resources (Epp, 2006).

Echezona, et al. (2011) emphasized that while the challenges of providing inclusive library services are significant, they are not insurmountable. They identified the key issues as follows:

- Lack of skilled manpower to produce the material needed by the handicapped may result in poor production of the materials. This also affects the operation and maintenance of equipment needed for inclusive library service.
- Lack of properly trained library personnel remains a challenge, as most library schools curricula are focused on conventional librarianship, leaving staff ill-equipped to address

the needs of individuals with disabilities, such as the blind. Additionally, the reliance on imported materials exacerbates the issues, as these resources often fail to reflect the cultural context and background of the students, making them less effective in meeting their needs

- Another problem identified by Alemna (1993) in offering library services to the handicapped is the architectural barriers. Most of the older libraries especially University libraries were built before the era of inclusive education. Therefore, such barriers as high steps, high bookshelves, narrow doorways, ramps, and lack of elevators are still prevalent in some libraries. These obstacles can be extremely frustrating, if not impossible for the handicapped to cope with.
- Funds: Funds is yet another problem militating against effective library service to the handicapped. The materials and equipment needed for efficient services to the handicapped are very expensive to procure. Above all, is the problem of seeing the handicapped as liabilities and undervaluing them. People's way of thinking needs to be changed.

Suggestions for Library Managers, Architects, and Policymakers in Creating Accessibility and Inclusivity for Persons Living with Disabilities

Persons living with disabilities are part of the society. The library no doubt forms the nucleus of society. To enhance accessibility and inclusivity in modern libraries;

1. Policymakers should consult library professionals, especially in the area of library architecture design and building to better inform the architect or builder on what is obtainable of a modern-day library building.
2. Librarians and other library staff should be trained on empathy and prompt guidance of persons living with disabilities in the library facilities
3. Improvement of LIS curricula. Graduates of library and information science are usually not trained in the library school on how services can be rendered to PLWD, thus making it difficult to attend to them.
4. Library professionals should be sent on special education courses or individuals with special education certification should be employed in the library for conversion of some of the conventional reading materials to Braille's and Talking Books.
5. Increased funding of the library to acquire assistive technology for persons living with disabilities.
6. Inclusiveness in the employment of librarians with disabilities as this will enhance innovation in service delivery and attract PLWD to the library knowing that one of them is an employee of the library.
7. More studies should be encouraged and funded to look into improving service delivery to persons living with disabilities.

Conclusion

This study affirms the pivotal role that libraries must play in shaping inclusive and accessible environments, particularly in the provision of services to Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWD). Exploring current practices, policies, and infrastructural setups, it reveals strides made and areas requiring significant improvement. Libraries, as institutions of learning and knowledge dissemination, must transcend their traditional roles, incorporating advanced ICT solutions and assistive technologies to better serve PLWD. Case studies, such as that of the Edo State College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, exemplify the potential for modern libraries to offer accessible spaces and services that promote inclusivity. However, this is not universal, and much more needs to be done in terms of policy reform, funding, and architectural modifications to ensure libraries can accommodate users with diverse needs.

Suggestions outlined in this paper are not just for librarians but also extend to policymakers, architects, and library schools. Training and retraining of library staff in empathy and service delivery, inclusive employment practices, and the integration of assistive technology are essential to creating sustainable inclusive environments. Moreover, investment in infrastructure, particularly in developing regions, is critical to eliminating barriers that hinder PLWD from accessing library services fully. Libraries of the future must be proactive, embracing their role as community leaders in inclusivity, ensuring all users regardless of physical or cognitive ability have equal opportunities to access and use information resources. Through continued collaboration and innovation, libraries can fulfill their promise of being accessible information hubs, vital to the intellectual, social, and economic empowerment of every member of society. In doing so, they not only uphold the principles of equity and diversity but also set the standard for inclusivity across all public sectors and educational institutions.

References

- Abdullahi, S., & Abubakar, B. A. (2015). *Assessment of school library recourses: A case study of School of Health Technology library, Ningi Bauchi*. <https://academicjournals.org/journal/IJLIS/article-full-text/0469C8353529>
- Adejo, A. A. (2020) *The role of libraries in meeting the information needs of the disadvantaged groups in Nigeria*. Journals.ezenwaohaaetorc.org
- Adetimirin, A. E. (2022). *Library architecture*. Abuja: NOUN Press. nou.edu.ng
- Adetoro, N. (2012) *Alternative format preferences among secondary school visually impaired Students in Nigeria*. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 44(2), 90-96.
- Aina, L. O (2004) *Library and Information Science Text for Africa*. Ibadan: Sam-Adex printers
- Alemna, A. (1993) Library provision for the blind in Africa. *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science*, 61(1), 32-36.
- Amadi, E. C., & Onyenachi, J. C. (2021) *Provision of library and information services to special groups*. *The Research Librarian*, 15(1), 68-77

- Betty, J. T., & Gustav, W. F. (2010) *Access in a digital age*. Encyclopedia of library and information Science, 3rd ed.
- Beaton, M. (2005) *Library, information and learning services for disabled people in Glasgow*. Library Review. 54(8): 472-478.
- Bishop, D., & Rhind, D. J. A. (2011) *Barriers and enablers for visually impaired students at a UK Higher Education Institution*. The British Journal of Visual Impairment, 29(3): 177-195.
- Blue, E. V., & Pace, D. (2011). UD and UDL: Paving the Way toward Inclusion and Independence in the School Library. *Knowledge Quest* 39(3), 48–55.
- Bodaghi, N. B., & Zainab, N. A. (2013) Examining the accessibility and facility for the disabled In public and university library buildings in Iran. *Information Development*, 29(1), 1-10.
- Burgstahler, S. 2012. “*Universal design in education: principles and applications*.” Seattle: University of Washington. www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/PDF/ud_edu.pdf.
- Chaputula, A. H., & Mapulanga, P. (2017) *Provision of library services to people with disabilities in Malawi*. *South African Journal of Library and Information Sciences* 82(2).
- Chilemba, E. (2012) *Promoting disability rights in Malawi*. OSISA: Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa. <http://www.osisa.org/law/blog/promoting-disability-rights-Malawi>
- Cummings, E. O. (2011) Assistive and Adaptive Technology Resources. *Knowledge Quest* 39(3), 70–73.
- Das, A. K., Kuvini, A. B., & Desai, I. P. (2013). Inclusive education in India: are the Teachers prepared? *International Journal of Special Education*, 28(1), 27-36.
- Duckett, K., Lippincott, J., & Vedantham, A. (2014) *Libraries as enablers of pedagogical and Curricular change*. Educase review. <http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/libraries-enablers-pedagogical-and-curricular-change>
- Dziedzic, C. (1983). Public libraries. In F. K. Cykle (Ed.). *That all may read: Library service for blind and handicapped people* (pp. 309-326). Washington DC: Library of Congress.
- Echezona, R. I., Osadebe, N., & Asogwa, B. E. (2011). Library services to the physically challenged: nature, challenges, and strategies. *Journal of Applied Information Science and Technology*, 5(1).
- Ekwelem, V. O. (2013) Library services to disabled students in the digital era: challenges for outcome assessment. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, Paper 970 [Online]. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/970>
- Ennis-Cole, D & Smith, D (2011) *Assistive technology and autism: expanding the Technology leadership role of the school librarian*. *School libraries worldwide* 17 (2), 86–98.
- Epp, M. A. (2006) Closing the 95 percent gap: library resource sharing for people with print disabilities. *Library Trends*, 54(3), 411-429.
- Ezeabasili. C & Umeji, E. C (2021) *Inclusive Library Services: An Imperative For Libraries in Nigeria*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/>

- Farmer, L. S. J. (2009) School Library Media Specialist Collaboration with Special Education Personnel in Support of Student Learning. *Evidence-Based Library and Information Practice* 4 (2), 37–55.
- Firestone, M. (2018). *Special education: definition, types and philosophy*. <http://study.com/academy/lesson/special-education-definition-types-philosophy-html>
- Frumkin, J., & Reese, T. (2011). Provision recognition: Increasing awareness of the library's value in delivering electronic information resources. *Journal of Library Administration*, 51(7-8), 810-819.
- Gibson, M. (1977). Preparing libraries to serve handicapped individuals. *Journal of Education for Librarianship*, 18, 123.
- Grassi, R. (2013). *What does inclusion mean to you?* <http://www.alsc.ala.org>
- Harris, C., & Oppenheim (2003) *The provision of library services to visually impaired students in U.K further education libraries in response to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Acts (SENDA)*. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*. 35(4), 243-257.
- Hawthorne, S., Denge, J., & Coombs, N. (1997) The law and library access for persons with disabilities. *Information Technology and Disabilities*, 4(1). <http://www.rit.edu/~easi/itd.htm>
- Hill, H. (2013). Disability and accessibility in the library and information science literature: a content analysis. *Library & Information Science Research*, 35(2), 137-142.
- Hopkins, L. E. D. (2000) *Library services for visually impaired people: a manual of best practice*. London
- Horny, A. S. (2015) *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of current English (9th edition)*. Oxford: University Press.
- IFLA. (2003). *Information for all: the role of libraries in lifelong learning: Final report of the IFLA project under the section for public libraries*. <http://archive.ifla.org/VII/s8/proj/Lifelong-Learning-Report.pdf>.
- Koulidakourdi, A. (2008) *Library services for people with disabilities in Greece*. *Library Review*, 57(2).
- Krueger, K. S., & Stefanich, G. P. (2011). The School Librarian as an Agent of Scientific Inquiry for Students with Disabilities. *Knowledge Quest*, 39 (3) 40–47.
- Madu, E. C (2008) *Reference service for specific people*. Fundamentals of modern reference services: manual versus electronic. Ibadan: EVI Coleman publications, P.17.
- Mafe, T. A., Kalu, O. C., & Chidi-Kalu, E. (2020). *The role of library, information and women in information service delivery*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340934434> THE ROLE OF LIBRARY INFORMATION AND WOMEN IN INFORMATION SERVICE DELIVERY
- Metcalf, K. D. (2015) *Planning Academic and Research library building*. New York: McGraw hill

- Mohammed, Z. (2011). Organization and retrieval of information and information resources. *Nigerian libraries*, 44(1), pp. 106-144
- Moisey, S. D. (2007). The inclusive libraries initiative: Enhancing the access of persons with developmental disabilities to Information and Communication Technology. *The Developmental Disability Bulletin*, 35(1&2), 56-71.
- Nwachukwu, V. N., Abdulsalami, T., & Salami, P. F. (2014). Availability, accessibility and use of information resources and Services among information seekers of Lafia Public Library in Nasarawa State. *Information and Knowledge Management*, 4(10), 1-13.
- Nwalo, K. I. N. (2003) *Fundamentals of library practices: Manual on library routines*. Ibadan: sterling horden publishers
- Okoro, O. (2004). The library as a communication facilitator in rural (Igbo) communities: Understanding the missing link in socio-economic lives of non-literate persons. *JONLAC*, 6(2).
- Olowu, K. (2004). Access to information: Myths and reality. *Nigerian Libraries*, 38(1), 48-55.
- Onye, U. U. (2016). Availability, accessibility and utilization of library information resources by students of the Federal University of Technology FUTO. *Information Knowledge and Management*, 6(10).
- Popoola, S. O. (2009). Self-efficacy, Information Acquisition and Utilization as Correlate of Effective Decision Making among managers in insurance companies in Nigeria. *Malaysian Journal of Library and Information Science*, 14(1), 1-15.
- Samson, S. (2011). Best practices for serving students with disabilities. *Reference Services Review*, 39(2), 260-277.
- Shameenda, K. L (2011) *The preservation and conservation of library materials, techniques and practices employed in University of Zambia libraries*. Zambia: Dspace
- Socol, I. D. (2010). The Unhappy Place: What Libraries Can Do to Welcome Kids Who Struggle with Print. *School Library Journal*, 56(5), 42–45.
- Subramaniam, M, Oxlev. R., & Kodama, C (2012) *School librarians as Ambassadors of inclusive information*. files.eric.ed.gov
- Todaro, A. J. (2005). Library services for people with disabilities in Argentina. *New Library World*, 106(5/6), 253-268.
- Uhegbu, A. N. (2007) *The information users; issues and themes* (2nd ed). Okigwe: whytem prints
- United Nations Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (2013). *Factsheet on persons with disabilities: Overview*. <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=18>
- United Nations. (1948). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/#atop>

Walling, L. L. (2004). Educating students to serve information seekers with disabilities. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 45, 137-148.

Wentz, B., Jaeger, P. T., & Bertot, J. C. (2015). *Accessibility, inclusion and the roles of libraries*.
<http://www.researchgate.net/publication/290211686>