

AVAILABILITY AND EXTENT OF USE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES AMONG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN PROFESSOR KENNETH DIKE E-LIBRARY AWKA (KDL).

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Abstract

This study investigated the availability and use of public library services among persons with disabilities in Professor Kenneth Dike State Central E- Library Awka. Survey research method was adopted for this study because it was considered more appropriate for this type of study. The population of the study consists of 22 librarians in the 11 branches of the public library scattered all over the State with Kenneth Dike Library as the headquarter situated in Awka Anambra State. The entire population was used as such there was no sampling. This is because the population was small and manageable. Data was collected for the study through the use of a self-developed questionnaire administered to the respondents by the researchers. The data obtained through the questionnaire was analysed using arithmetic mean (\bar{x}) and tables. The major findings of the study were that the library library services designed for the disabled are not available in KDL except ramp and braille, none of the listed services for the disabled is being used, lack of fund is the major challenge KDL library faces in providing services for persons with disabilities. Based on the findings the study recommended among others that Apart from ramps and braille, other library services meant for persons with disabilities should made available in KDL Awka, the library management should create radio jingles and other means of public announcement to enable them inform the disabled within the community about the available services the library has for them. Government should pass disability discrimination act that protects the interest and rights of the disabled.

Keyword: Public libraries, People with disabilities, Library services, Availability, Use

Introduction:

The public library is established to provide materials, which communicate experience and ideas from one to another and make them easily and freely available to all people. The public library is a local centre of information that makes all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. It is established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through

some other form of community organizations. It provides access to knowledge, information and works of imagination through a range of resources and services. It is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, employment status and educational attainment (Aboyade, as cited in Iwhiwhu, & Okorodudu, 2012). The services of public libraries are usually free or in a few cases, attract little fee. Public libraries are significant institutions in the development of individual and society. In Nigeria, many users use a public library for the purpose of self-improvement because they are concerned with information and education (Olowu, 2004).

The International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) set the minimum standards for information resources, facilities and services to be provided by public libraries (IFLA, 2001). The information resources include fiction books, non-fiction books, textbooks, newspaper/ magazines, pictures and posters, records and tapes, audio and video, toys, CD-ROM and Braille materials. The facilities to be provided include reading tables adequate enough for users, sitting chairs, book shelves, library space, fans, lighting, ventilation, flooring, restaurant, location of exit point, notice board/bulletin, photocopiers, vehicle parking space, computers, carrels, periodical racks, circulation desks and other facilities that would make users comfortable for reading (IFLA, 2001). Zaid, & Zaid, (2017) submitted that a public library is wholly designed for the purpose of rendering information services to the general public irrespective of status, occupation, sex, age, and these services are meant to be free or attract little fee.

The services rendered by public libraries include community information services, recreational activities, reference services, storytelling, reading competition, career information, customer care, adult literacy education, mobile library services, and services to prisoners, online internet search, among others (IFLA, 2001). According to Aina (2004) public library users require different services; hence libraries are expected to provide a variety of services to them. Aina reiterated that the services demanded by public library users are not static; as users' needs are dynamic requiring different services at different times. Kumar (2008) posited that information may be required by users about local history, local industries and local personalities. According to Kumar, a layman might require information for his survival. This is why the public library has come to play a significant role as a repository of knowledge to serve the information needs of all groups of people in the community where it is located. Public libraries are expected to play a key role in their societies by providing users with access to information in an effective and timely manner. The fundamental aim of libraries according to Olowu (2004) is to provide timely, accurate, pertinent, and reliable information for their users. Olowu wrote further that librarians are devoted to improving access to information, and satisfying the user is paramount. The library is the most widely-used source of information available to literate societies. Librarians must be aware of the kind of information being sought and how it can be obtained. Because of the rapidly escalating cost of purchasing and archiving print journals and electronic media, the library has the duty to provide and maintain efficient services.

Use, as applied to the library and its users means utilization of library information resources and services in solving ones academic or other personal problems. Availing oneself of the resources and services offered by the library, public library inclusive is simply the use of public library.

Public libraries generally serve a wide range of users. Aina (2004) posited that users of public libraries vary from highly educated and intelligent people to the stark illiterate, from the poorest to the wealthiest, from the inhabitants of most rural areas to those living in the urban areas and from the least disadvantaged to the most advantaged in the community. The users of public libraries include adult males and females, young males and females, children, the sick, traders, teachers, factory workers, labourers, students, civil servants, the clergy, the disabled like visually impaired and other groups of people in the communities where they are located. The term user encompasses various terms such as patron, client, reader, customer, scholar, and consumer. This study is concerned with the users of public libraries that live with disabilities.

The disabled are the people who have physical, visual, mental or hearing impairment. According to Chaputula, & Mapulanga, (2017), disability can be defined as a physical or mental condition that in some

way prohibits an individual from performing daily tasks. Examples of disabilities include autism, hearing difficulties and deafness, speech and language disorders, limited vision and blindness. Disability is a worldwide concern: 10% of the world's population lives with a disability of some kind (United Nations Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2013). The impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to perform normal day-to-day activities, that border on their survival within the society. The World Health Organization (WHO) defined disability as an umbrella term covering impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. There are various types of disabilities as identified by Ekwelem, (2013). They include;

1. Persons with hearing impairment – They do not hear sounds at all. A few of them who are privileged can hear with the aid of machines.
2. Visually impaired people – These are the blind or those with blurred vision. This category of people can read with magnifying glasses or braille.
3. Those confined on a wheelchair – They include the crippled, accident victims, victims of amputated legs, and so on.
4. Autism – Persons with abnormal development. It is often a psychiatric case with linguistic deficits and communication disorder.

Persons with disabilities in Nigeria have been relegated to the background in the area of information dissemination in the sense that there is no clear-cut policy which spells out how they can be integrated into the society through reasonable availability and access to information especially in public libraries (Akerele, Egunjobi, Awoyemi, & Ogunniyi, 2018). This has consequently reduced a larger percentage of them to street urchins and illiterates; who have very little to contribute to national development. However, in developed nations, well informed people living with disabilities commonly make impact in governance, sport, businesses, economy and politics. They communicate very well and usually offer constructive criticism even better than able bodied ones. This is not unconnected with utilization of public information resources and services, (Akerele, Egunjobi, Awoyemi, & Ogunniyi, 2018). The United Nations Organization (UNO) recognizes this need when it states that, “to enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, states parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communication, including information and communication technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and rural areas.

This study looks at availability as a variable in the use of public library services. Availability of public library services means ensuring the presence of the services in the public libraries for immediate use (Aguolu & Aguolu 2002). In other words, if all the conventional public library services are readily obtainable in a particular public library, they are said to be available. The services in a public library can only be used by either user with disabilities or otherwise, if they are available. Availability of library services therefore triggers use of library services.

Nigerian Libraries (public libraries inclusive) have been criticized on the grounds that people with disabilities are not provided for by the libraries. Internet use remains beyond the reach of many disabled library users as they are physically and psychologically unfit to do so. Librarians are not helping issues as any help rendered to disabled users is considered as an act of sympathy rather than as a necessary requirement which libraries must provide. Infrastructure is another problem in most libraries in Nigerian Universities. There is hardly any provision of ramps or any electronic devices that assist wheelchair users to gain entry into the library. For the visually-impaired users, large monitors using large fonts, is one way to improve visibility but they are hardly available in our University libraries (Ekwelem, 2013). It is against this background that this study sought to investigate the availability and use of public library services among persons with disability in Professor Kenneth Dike State Central E- Library Awka (KDL).

Statement of problem

People with disabilities are the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised people in the whole world. Despite the constitution guaranteeing human rights to all people without discrimination, people with disabilities are excluded from the enjoyment of many of these rights. Studies in other parts of the world have shown that issues to do with accessibility of library buildings, access to information resources, and services tailor-made for people with disabilities are some of the major challenges faced by those with disabilities. This study sought to investigate the availability and use of library services to people with disabilities in Professor Kenneth Dike State Central E- Library Awka (KDL).

Purpose of the study:

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the availability and use of public library services among persons with disability in Professor Kenneth Dike State Central E- Library Awka (KDL). Specifically, this research work seeks to;

1. determine the library services available for people with disabilities in Kenneth Dike Library.
2. determine the library services used by persons with disabilities in Kenneth Dike Library.
3. ascertain challenges faced by the library in provision of services to the people with disabilities.

Research questions

Four research questions guided the study;

1. What library services that are available for people with disabilities in Professor Kenneth Dike State Central E- Library Awka (KDL)?
2. To what extent do people with disabilities use the available services?
3. What are the challenges faced by the library in providing services to persons with disabilities?

Review of related literature

Library services for people with disabilities.

Libraries are service organizations which give services without discrimination to their numerous users, including disabled people. Libraries are required to make modifications to their designs to ensure that they are physically accessible to people with disabilities; acquire appropriate materials and assistive devices to ensure that people with disabilities can access their collections; and introduce services that cater for their special needs (Ahmad 2015). Libraries in developing countries are beginning to provide assistive technologies as well as reading materials to people with disabilities (Nassimbeni & De Jager 2014, Majinge & Stilwell 2013). Most notably, libraries have put in place working lifts and ramps to assist with the mobility of people with disabilities (Majinge & Stilwell 2013). Furthermore, information resources in Braille and large print are being procured to enable people with disabilities to access information sources more easily. Libraries are also training selected members of staff on how best to serve people with disabilities (Nassimbeni & De Jager 2014).

Concerted efforts should be made to ensure that those living with disabilities are able to access the information resources that others are able to access. Access to information resources for all can be made possible through use of assistive tools and technologies. Commonly-used technological devices include Braille books, talking books, playback machines, audiotapes and screen readers (Epp 2006). A recent study by Adetoro (2012) of alternate format preferences among secondary school visually-impaired students in Nigeria found that 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. Other technological devices for people with disabilities, and particularly the visually impaired, include talking computers and Braille embossers.

The use of library services for persons with disabilities.

Popoola (2008) noted that information availability does not mean accessibility and utilization. A lot of information and information resources are available in the libraries, some are good and others are not. Mehta (2010) described service delivery as a process that involves effective communication, building strong relationship, identifying problems, providing solutions, sound planning and all round the clock support with the sole aim of ensuring that the goals of the organization are met. This implies that any organization that does not take this process seriously is bound to lose patrons. Therefore, Nigerian public libraries and libraries in the schools of the deaf, as organizations, should have good service delivery as its watch word. This will in the long run assist in making information available timely to the PWHI, enhance their information literacy level and make them more useful to themselves, their immediate society, the country and the world at large. Ekwelem, (2013) carried out a study and revealed that there is nothing on the ground for disabled student to participate fully in the ongoing technology exploits. It was found that the only electronic resources available are taped books and online public access catalog (OPAC) and these have not been fully put to use. The study also indicated that all the items for the mobility challenged were not available in any of the studied samples, suggesting that, in general terms, that mobility challenged users are not benefiting from the new technology.

Challenges that militate against provision of library services for persons with disabilities.

Studies have associated the marginalization of persons with visual impairment in the public libraries with some challenges such as inadequate budget, poor information and telecommunication infrastructure, limited access to high speed internet, low take-off of open access repositories and digital libraries, non-availability of adaptive technology and specialized software packages (Adetoro, 2011; Lucky and Achebe, 2013; Zaid, 2017). Chaputula, & Mapulanga, (2017) lamented that those with disabilities experience difficulties in accessing library buildings as some buildings had too many steps leading to the top floors and no lifts. Although ramps are provided in some libraries, some users complained that these were very steep, hence making it problematic for those in wheelchairs to access the library on their own. The web has evolved rapidly in recent years, providing the public with access to vast stores of information. However, not everybody is enjoying this. The web creates two potential difficulties for visually impaired persons. First, hypertext web documents are non-linear, allowing users to link quickly to other pages that may have a completely different design and layout. This may cause confusion for those who cannot easily follow visual cues. Second, the web now revolves around video, multimedia real – time collaboration, and interactive documents, all of which are heavily visually based. (Chiang et al, 2005).

It is evident from both theoretical and empirical studies that there exist relevant literatures on public library services for people living with disabilities. But none has studied the situation in Professor Kenneth Dike E-Library, Awka. Thus, there is a knowledge gap on the library services for persons with disabilities in Professor Kenneth Dike E-Library, Awka. This study is set out to fill this gap.

Method

This study investigated the availability and use of public library services among persons with disabilities in Professor Kenneth Dike State Central E- Library Awka. Survey research method was adopted for this study because it was considered more appropriate for this type of study. The population of the study consists of 22 librarians in the 11 branches of the public library scattered all over the State with Kenneth Dike Library as the headquarter situated in Awka Anambra State. The entire population was used as such there was no sampling. This is because the population was small and manageable. Data was collected for the study through the use of questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed by the researchers. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents by the researchers. It has four sections A, B, C, and D. Section A elicited information from respondents on qualification. Section B was concerned with information on library services for people with disabilities; Section C sought information on the use of library services by persons with disabilities, Section D elicited information on challenges faced by the library in providing services for persons with disabilities. The data was collected within one week. All the instrument administered were duly completed and returned. The data obtained through the questionnaire was analysed using arithmetic mean

(x) and tables with 2.5 as the benchmark. Items are accepted if they are 2.50 and above. Items below 2.50 were rejected.

Presentation of result

Table 1: Mean responses for available library services for the disabled in Kenneth Dike Library.

S/N	ITEM	Mean	Decision
1.	Induction sessions	1.83	Rejected
2.	Market library services	2.12	Rejected
3.	Reference services	1.91	Rejected
4.	Audio books	1.02	Rejected
5.	Braille services	3.34	Accepted
6.	Magnifying glasses	2.01	Rejected
7.	Ramps (Paved walkways)	3.53	Accepted
8.	Movable chairs	2.41	Rejected
9.	Talking computers	2.21	Rejected
10.	Audio tapes	1.65	Rejected
11.	Screen readers	1.89	Rejected

The results in Table 1 show that out of the eleven items two were accepted while nine of the items were rejected. Item 7, Ramps (Paved walkways) has the highest acceptance with the mean score of 3.53 while item 5, braille services has the lowest acceptance with the mean of 3.34. Item 4, audio books, has the highest rejection with mean score of 1.02.

Table 2: Mean responses on the extent of use of library services by the disabled.

SN	ITEM	MEAN	DECISION
1.	Induction sessions (orientation)	2.17	Rejected
2.	Market library services	2.00	Rejected
3.	Reference services	1.69	Rejected
4.	Audio books	1.07	Rejected
5.	Braille services	1.00	Rejected
6.	Magnifying glasses	2.34	Rejected
7.	Ramps (Paved walkways)	2.00	Rejected
8.	Movable chairs	1.03	Rejected
9.	Talking computers	2.01	Rejected
10.	Audio tapes	2.00	Rejected
11.	Screen readers	1.57	Rejected

In Table 2, the result shows that all the eight items were rejected by the respondents. Item 6, magnifying glasses has the highest rejection with mean score of 2.34. On the contrary, item 5, braille services, has the least rejection with the mean score of 1.00.

Table 3: Mean responses on the challenges faced by the library in providing services for people with disabilities.

S/N	ITEM	MEAN	DECISION
1.	Cost of buying and equipping electronic resources for disabled users (lack of fund)	3.05	Accepted
2.	Non-passage of disability discrimination act by the federal government	3.68	Accepted
3.	Most electronic resources are designed for normal users.	2.81	Accepted
4.	Due to high development cost and a small market in assistive technology, few industries show little interest in development of the technology.	2.23	Rejected
5.	Library staff provides services to the disabled from sympathies rather than as their equal rights and would only consider serving them after serving normal users.	1.01	Rejected
6.	The library is still unaware of needs of the disabled	3.14	Accepted

It could be noted in Table 3, 4 of the items for challenges faced by the library in providing services for persons with disabilities were accepted by the respondents. Among the accepted items, item 2 (Non-passage of disability discrimination act by the federal government) has the highest level of acceptance with the mean score of 3.68. While item 3 (Most electronic resources are designed for normal users) has the lowest level of acceptance at 2.81. However, the respondents rejected items 4 (Due to high development cost and a small market in assistive technology, few industries show little interest in development of the technology) with mean 2.23 and item 5 (Library staff provides services to the disabled from sympathies rather than as their equal rights and would only consider serving them after serving normal users) with 1.01 as mean.

Discussion of findings

Table 1 revealed that the Brailles and Ramps are the only services meant for persons with disabilities that are available in KDL Awka. The rest of the library services for the disabled listed by the researchers are not available. This is in line with the findings of Ahmad, (2015), who discovered that most public libraries in the Northern part of Nigeria do not provide services with persons with special needs. This finding also agrees with that of Ekwelem, V. O. (2013) who revealed that academic libraries have nothing on the ground for disabled student.

The finding however does not agree with that of Epps (2006) that public libraries in USA and Canada provide technological devices which include Braille books, talking books, playback machines, audiotapes and screen readers.

Table 2 revealed that none of the library services for the disable is being put to use in KDL Awka. This could be because there are no persons with disability among the users. It could equally be because the services are not available in the public library studied. This discovery agrees with the assertion of Ekwelem, (2013) who concluded that persons living with disabilities do not use public library services mostly because they are not aware of their availability.

Table 3 revealed that Lack of fund and Non-passage of disability discrimination act by the federal government are the major challenge faced by the library in the provision of services to persons with disabilities. This finding agrees with that of Zaid (2017) who revealed that the cost of buying and equipping electronic resources for disabled users is high, and the library lacks fund.

Conclusion

This research work studied the availability and extent of use of library services for persons living with disabilities in Professor Kenneth Dike E-Library Awka. The result shows that the library does not have most of the services designed for the disabled except ramps and braille. Persons living with disabilities do not use the library services the few available services in KDL. Inadequate funding and lack of government regulations are the challenges faced by the library in providing services for the disabled.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings, the discussion, and limitation of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Apart from ramps and braille, other library services meant for persons with disabilities should be made available in KDL Awka.
2. The library management should create radio jingles and other means of public announcement to enable them inform the disabled within the community about the available services the library has for them.
3. The government should pass disability discrimination act that protects the interest and rights of the disabled.
4. There should be constant training for the library staff on how to interact with people living with disabilities. This would educate them on how to operate the facilities provided for the disabled library users.

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