



Accessibility Practices for Students with Physical Disabilities to Foster Diversity in University Libraries in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Ngozi Ogechukwu Nwogwugwu¹, Angela Njideka Anike² and Victoria Obianuju Ezejiofor²

¹ Confucius Institute Library, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
ogenwogwugwu@yahoo.com

² Festus Aghagbo Nwakor Library, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.
an.anike@unizik.edu.ng, voezejiofor@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper examined assessed the current state of accessibility practices in university libraries in Anambra State for students with physical disability. Four research questions guided the study. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised 90 librarians from two public universities in Anambra State. Census method was adopted because the population was manageable. The instrument for data collection was a validated structured questionnaire titled “Inclusive Participation of Students with Physical Disabilities Questionnaire” (IPSPDQ). Cronbach’s Alpha Method was used to test the internal consistency, and an overall coefficient of 0.76 was obtained. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The findings reveal that librarians in universities studied are aware of the specific barriers faced by students with physical disabilities but disagree on the current state of accessibility, indicating varied perceptions of existing conditions. However, there is a consensus among the staff on the importance of assistive technologies and adaptive services in improving accessibility, highlighting a shared recognition of their role in fostering inclusivity for students with disabilities. Based on the findings, it was recommended amongst others that the university libraries should adopt a uniform accessibility policy that mandates the inclusion of disability-friendly services, facilities, and resources.

Keywords: Inclusive participation, physically challenged students, Diversity, University libraries, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Introduction

Inclusive participation in educational institutions has become a global concern, particularly as societies move toward promoting diversity and equity. University libraries, as central academic hubs, play a significant role in supporting students' academic and research needs. University libraries serve a diverse population of students, including those who are physically challenged. Research has shown that inclusive education, including library services, improves overall academic outcomes by catering to the diverse needs of all students (Agboola, 2021; Kaplan, Louie & Murray, 2019). Globally, institutions have begun to adopt policies that ensure libraries are accessible to all students, including those with physical disabilities (IFLA, 2020). Despite these international trends, the situation in Nigeria remains a challenge. Studies on university libraries in Nigeria, including works by Nnadozie and Nnadozie (2016); Oladokun (2020) highlighted significant gaps in the provision of accessible facilities, assistive technologies, and staff training to support physically challenged users. These studies reveal that many university libraries in Nigeria are not equipped with ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, or specialized reading rooms for students with physical disabilities, thus limiting their ability to fully participate in academic activities.

The focus of this study is on physically challenged students, who often face systemic barriers when trying to access educational resources. Research conducted by Adetunji and Fagbami (2017) in Nigerian universities found that over 60% of students with physical disabilities experience difficulties in navigating campus facilities, including libraries, due to a lack of inclusive infrastructure. In Anambra State, anecdotal evidence suggests that university libraries have not adequately addressed these issues, with physically challenged students often struggling to access even basic library services (Chukwuemeka, 2019). This is compounded by the lack of assistive technologies and library staff who are trained to meet the needs of students with physical disabilities.

Chukwuemeka (2019) highlighted the transformative impact of inclusive library services on students with disabilities. In her research on Nigerian universities, students who had access to inclusive library services reported higher levels of academic satisfaction and performance compared to those who did not. This finding underscores the importance of creating library environments that are accessible and accommodating to all students, regardless of their physical abilities. Furthermore, international studies have consistently emphasized the benefits of inclusive practices in educational settings. For instance, UNESCO (2017) and Mutanga (2018) have documented how inclusive educational environments significantly enhance academic outcomes and social integration for students with disabilities. These studies suggest that when libraries adopt inclusive practices-such as providing assistive technologies, adaptive services, and barrier-free physical access-they not only support the academic success of students with disabilities but also foster a culture of diversity and inclusion that benefits the entire university community. Despite these global insights, there remains a gap in the implementation of inclusive

practices in many university libraries in Nigeria. While the importance of inclusivity is widely acknowledged, the specific challenges faced by students with physical disabilities in accessing library resources and facilities are often overlooked. This therefore prompted the need for this study.

Objectives of the Study

The study focused on promoting inclusive participation of physically challenged students in university libraries in Anambra State. This study specifically sought to:

1. Assess the current state of accessibility practices in university libraries in Anambra State for students with physical disability.
2. Examine the role of assistive technologies and adaptive services in enhancing accessibility for students with physical disabilities in university libraries.
3. Evaluate the perceptions of library staff towards fostering inclusive participation for students with physical disabilities.
4. Identify the challenges faced by students with physical disabilities in accessing library resources and facilities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the current state of accessibility in university libraries in Anambra State for students with physical disabilities?
2. What challenges do students with physical disabilities face in accessing library resources and facilities?
3. What are the perceptions of library staff towards fostering inclusive participation for students with physical disabilities?
4. What is the role of assistive technologies and adaptive services in enhancing accessibility for students with physical disabilities in university libraries?

Methods

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised all 90 librarians from two public universities in Anambra State. Census method was adopted because the population is manageable. The instrument for data collection was a validated structured questionnaire titled “Inclusive Participation of Students with Physical Disabilities Questionnaire” (IPSPDQ). This instrument was divided into two sections: A and B. Section A covered the demographic profile of the respondents, while Section B was subdivided into four clusters (I–IV) in line with the specific purpose of the study. The clusters were subjected to a test of internal consistency using the Cronbach Alpha Method, and reliability values of 0.76, 0.77, 0.81 and 0.73 were obtained. The researchers, with three research assistants, were briefed on the modalities of the instrument; they reached out to the respondents and employed on the spot approach for administering the questionnaire. Out of 90 copies distributed, 76 copies were retrieved and used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics

of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The criterion mean of 2.50 served as the benchmark for making decisions. Any mean scores below the 2.50 criterion mean score were rated as disagreed, while any mean scores above the 2.50 criterion mean score were rated as agreed. The analysis was done with the software programme Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23.

Results

Table 1: Respondents' ratings on the current state of accessibility in university libraries in Anambra State for students with physical disabilities

S/N	Item statement	X	SD	Remarks
1	The library has elevators that are functional and accessible to students with physical disabilities.	2.54	0.72	Agree
2	The library entrance has automatic doors or doors wide enough for wheelchair users.	2.56	0.86	Agree
3	The library has designated parking spaces close to the entrance for students with physical disabilities.	2.32	0.90	Disagree
4	The library has accessible restrooms for students with physical disabilities.	2.43	0.64	Disagree
5	The library has adjustable tables and chairs for students with physical disabilities.	2.46	0.62	Disagree
6	The library has clear and visible signage to guide students with physical disabilities.	2.36	0.88	Disagree
7	The library has quiet and spacious study areas that are accessible to students with physical disabilities.	2.62	0.78	Agree
Cluster Mean		2.47		Disagree

Data presented in Table 1 reveals that items 1, 2, and 3 with mean scores 2.54, 2.56 and 2.62 were rated as agreed, while items 3, 4, 5 and 6 with mean scores 2.32, 2.43, 2.46 and 2.36 were rated as disagreed. The cluster mean of 2.47 summarized that library staff disagreed on the current state of accessibility in university libraries in Anambra State for students with physical disabilities.

Table 2: Respondents' ratings of the role of assistive technologies and adaptive services in enhancing accessibility for students with physical disabilities in university libraries

S/N	Item Statement	X	SD	Remarks
1.	Assistive technologies help students with physical disabilities access library resources more effectively.	3.11	0.68	Agree
2.	Adaptive services (e.g., adjustable furniture, accessible workstations) make the library more inclusive for students with physical disabilities.	3.15	0.59	Agree
3.	Assistive technologies enable students with physical disabilities to use library computers and digital resources independently.	3.17	0.80	Agree
4.	Adaptive services ensure that students with physical disabilities can navigate the library space comfortably.	3.05	0.92	Agree
5.	The availability of assistive technologies encourages students with physical disabilities to use the library more frequently.	3.10	0.74	Agree
Cluster Mean		3.11		Agree

Data presented in Table 2 reveals that all items 1 – 5 with their respective mean scores of 3.11, 3.15, 3.17, 3.05 and 3.10 were rated agreed. The cluster mean of 3.11 summarized that library staff agreed on the role of assistive technologies and adaptive services in enhancing accessibility for students with physical disabilities in university libraries.

Table 3: Respondents' ratings on the perceptions of library staff towards fostering inclusive participation for students with physical disabilities

S/N	Item statement	X	SD	Remarks
1.	I believe that students with physical disabilities should have equal access to all library resources and services	3.38	0.61	Agree
2.	I believe the library is committed to creating an inclusive environment for students with physical disabilities.	3.39	0.58	Agree
3.	I feel confident in assisting students with physical disabilities to access library resources.	3.43	0.51	Agree
4.	The library has assistive technologies (e.g., screen readers, Braille materials) to support students with physical disabilities.	3.58	0.51	Agree
5.	The library actively promotes awareness of the needs of students with physical disabilities.	2.57	0.76	Agree
Cluster Mean		3.27		Agree

Data presented in Table 3 reveals that all the items (1 – 5) with their respective mean scores of 3.38, 3.39, 3.43, 3.58 and 2.57 were rated as agreed. The cluster mean of 3.27 was rated as agreed on the perception of library staff towards fostering inclusive participation for students with physical disabilities.

Table 4: Respondents’ ratings on the accessibility challenges in accessing library resources and facilities

S/N	Item statement	X	SD	Remarks
1.	The library lacks ramps and elevators, making access difficult for students with physical disabilities	2.86	0.62	Agree
2.	The library lacks designated seating areas for students with physical disabilities	3.37	0.65	Agree
3.	The bookshelves are too high and difficult to reach for students with mobility impairments	1.97	0.69	Disagree
4.	There are inadequate assistive technologies (e.g., screen readers, Braille materials) for students with physical disabilities	3.49	0.52	Agree
5.	Library staff are not adequately trained to assist students with physical disabilities	1.81	0.50	Disagree
6.	The library lacks clear signage and navigation aids for students with physical disabilities	3.30	0.74	Agree
7.	Library restrooms are not disability-friendly or accessible.	2.75	0.88	Agree
8.	There are limited alternative formats (e.g., audiobooks, digital texts) available for students with physical disabilities.	2.92	0.93	Agree
9.	The library entrance and doorways are not wide enough to accommodate wheelchair users.	2.03	1.03	Disagree
Cluster Mean		2.72		Agree

Data presented in Table 4 reveals that items 3, 5 and 9, with mean scores 1.97, 1.81 and 2.03 were rated disagree while items 1, 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8 with their respective mean scores of 2.86, 3.37, 3.49, 3.30, 2.75, and 2.92 were rated agreed. The cluster mean of 2.72 summarized that library staff agreed on the challenges do students with physical disabilities face in accessing library resources and facilities

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that library staff disagreed on the current state of accessibility in university libraries in Anambra State for students with physical disabilities. It suggests that there is no consensus or clear understanding among the staff regarding how well the libraries are equipped to accommodate students with physical disabilities. This finding supported the finding of Ezeabasili and Umeji (2019) that while some academic libraries recognize the necessity for inclusive services, the actual implementation varies significantly across institutions. This inconsistency can lead to differing opinions among library staff about the adequacy of current accessibility measures. Nwobi and Echedom (2024) found that many federal university libraries in South-East Nigeria lack specialized information resources and services tailored for persons with disabilities. This scarcity may result in differing staff perceptions about the library's ability to meet the needs of students with physical disabilities.

The findings also revealed that library staff agreed on the role of assistive technologies and adaptive services in enhancing accessibility for students with physical disabilities in university libraries. It means that the staff collectively recognize and support the importance of these tools and services in making library resources and facilities more accessible to students with physical disabilities. This finding was in line with the finding of Nwafor (2024) that librarians acknowledged the potential of assistive technologies to facilitate inclusive and quality education for students with visual impairments. However, the study also noted that the availability of such technologies was limited, hindering effective implementation. The finding opposed that of Emmasiegbu, Okeke and Asiegbu (2019) that while non-electronic assistive technologies were deemed more adequate, electronic assistive technologies were lacking. This inadequacy suggests that despite recognizing their importance, the implementation of electronic assistive technologies remains insufficient, limiting their effectiveness in enhancing accessibility. The difference in both findings could be because of the varying opinions of respondents based on geographical location.

The finding in research question three revealed that the cluster mean of 3.27 was rated as agreed on the perception of library staff towards fostering inclusive participation for students with physical disabilities. This refers to how library staff view their role and responsibilities in creating an inclusive environment for students with physical disabilities. It could include their attitudes, awareness, and willingness to support these students. This finding was in line with the finding of Ferrara (2023) that library staff are aware of attitudinal barriers faced by individuals with disabilities. However, this awareness does not always translate into action during the planning and implementation of library programs and services. More so, Selema, Mwantimwa and Mkumbo (2025) that while librarians recognize the need for inclusive services, many lack the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively serve students with disabilities.

The finding in research question two revealed that library staff agreed on the challenges do students with physical disabilities face in accessing library resources and facilities. The findings mean that staff are aware of and recognize the specific

barriers that students with physical disabilities encounter. This is a crucial first step toward addressing these challenges. This finding agreed with that of Osadebe, Onuigbo and Ewa (2019) that resources such as Braille textbooks, Braille printers, and tactile surfaces were unavailable for visually impaired students. Additionally, services like the loan of Braille materials and a library-friendly environment were lacking, hindering effective library use by these students. The study of Ukoye (2010) found that 84% of students with disabilities reported that parking areas, pathways, and library entrances were not accessible. Furthermore, 83% noted that library aisles were unsafe for wheelchair users and visually impaired individuals, indicating significant physical barriers within library facilities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. University libraries in Anambra State should adopt a uniform accessibility policy that mandates the inclusion of disability-friendly services, facilities, and resources across all institutions.
2. Regular workshops and training programs should be organized for library staff to equip them with the necessary skills to support students with disabilities effectively. This should include training on assistive technologies, disability awareness, and inclusive customer service.
3. Universities should invest in upgrading library buildings to be physically accessible, including installing ramps, elevators, wider aisles, tactile floor markings, and designated parking spaces for students with physical disabilities.
4. Libraries should ensure adequate procurement of assistive technologies such as screen readers, Braille printers, voice-to-text software, and adaptive workstations to enhance access for students with disabilities.
5. The government and relevant educational bodies should allocate special funding for the provision and maintenance of accessibility services in university libraries to ensure consistent implementation of inclusive practices.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight critical gaps and opportunities in ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for students with physical disabilities in university libraries in Anambra State. The disagreement among library staff regarding the current state of accessibility indicates a lack of uniformity in both perception and implementation of inclusive services. However, the consensus on the challenges faced by students with physical disabilities underscores a shared awareness of barriers such as inadequate resources, poor physical infrastructure, and limited assistive technologies. Furthermore, while library staff expressed positive perceptions toward fostering inclusivity, the gap between awareness and practical action suggests the need for targeted training and policy enforcement. The

recognition of assistive technologies and adaptive services as key enablers of accessibility is a promising step, yet the limited availability of these tools hinders their effectiveness. The findings reinforce the urgent need for a structured, well-funded, and technology-driven approach to making university libraries more accessible for students with physical disabilities.

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