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ACCESSIBILITY OF NIGERIAN LAW LIBRARIES BY USERS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract
This paper examines availability of provisions made for people with disabilities most especially in our law libraries in Nigeria and how they are accessible. Therefore, it investigates the provisions the apex and other subsidiary courts have made for the people with varying disabilities in our community. Oral interviews and physical observation methods were adopted to investigate the accessibility and availability of made ready facilities for people with disability in our law libraries. Thus the supreme Court, Appeal Court of Federal Capital Territory, Federal High Court, National Industrial Court of Nigeria, High Court of FCT and Customary Court of Appeal, National Judicial Court, Law School Abuja were investigated with the following findings: On availability, none of these Courts has made any provision for the disable people originally in the construction of the Court halls as well as the libraries. On accessibility, what is available cannot be accessible. Hence the paper suggested to library heads to raise accessibility librarians who will be at the fore front of advocacy for inclusion of users with disabilities in law libraries policies, an appeals was also made to the Federal Government of Nigeria and other stake holders in law business and our law institutions to please consider these people with varying disabilities to be able to meet up with their able counterparts by providing library facilities and resources with assistive technologies that are accessible by these special people among us.
Keywords: Accessibility, Law Librarian, Disabilities, Barriers, Libraries, Information.

Introduction

Accessibility of library users with disabilities in law libraries in Nigeria is a vital topic that requires attention. It has been noticed that many individuals with disabilities face significant barriers when trying to access information in law libraries across the country. This issue not only affects the individuals directly, but it also impacts their ability to participate in society and have equal opportunities. In order to address this issue, there is a need for comprehensive research and analysis of the current state of accessibility for library users with disabilities in law libraries in Nigeria. The essence of reference service and flexibility is what librarians need to maximize to be able to provide encompassing service for both user with and without disabilities without prejudice and the wheel on which library user with disabilities can ride to access the library .Law libraries are not exempted from carrying out the same obligations as expected of every other library, hence the essence of this research to see how well this is being done and to seek a redress if lagging behind, also to explore the possibility of improving the existing facilities

Libraries and librarians have germane roles in acquiring, processing and providing access to information, space or accommodation, information resources and assistive technologies for every library user by organizing and helping users find the information needed in which law libraries are included. They are established as essential elements of their parent institutions and serve as Centre's for acquiring information and knowledge; they vary based on services rendered by the parent body, which are government or court libraries, academic law libraries and libraries in private law firms. Despite their variety, the information sources available in law libraries are crucial for scholarly work research and strengthening the legal system. The ideal library service is one in which every library user has access to information materials that is appropriate at the time they are needed, in a format and setting that can be used, in the quantity and quality that is necessary, and in a setting where the staff is aware of the needs of the user (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) for libraries to be given special attention in the laws, it means that law libraries should be at the fore front of upholding the law by providing access for users with disabilities in our libraries. Accessibility as relates to people with disability is when they are given the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions and enjoy the same services as people without disability in equally effective and equally integrated manner but there are factors that limits persons with disabilities from having the same accessibility as their counterparts that are not disabled. These barriers are attitudinal, organizational or systematic architectural or physical, information or communications, and technological. In order to protect persons with disabilities and to ensure that they enjoy the same accessibility as their counterparts. Different laws were enacted on their behalf globally and nationally and there were specification act of 1973 and reaffirmed in 2009 and section 8 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, which Disabilities, Person with disabilities are individuals with long term bodily, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in relations with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. The American with disabilities Act (ADA) defines a person with disability as "a person who has a physical and mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment," they all have the same needs as their contemporaries without disabilities and needs unique access or accessibility to get it satisfied. Access is the way chance to come within reach of a thing or to go in to a place .Merriam Webster dictionary defined it as the ability to use, enter, or get near while accessibility is being within reach , use or seen, they are both inter –woven and comes in to play.

Statement of the Problem

Accessibility of users with disabilities to libraries such as academic, special school and public libraries has been widely researched globally and nationally but the researcher observed from literature that not much has been done in the area of law libraries and users with disabilities in Nigeria. To bridge the gap in knowledge, this study seeks to examine accessibility of law libraries by users with disabilities.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the provision made for the accessibility of information resources and facilities for users with disabilities in law libraries in Nigeria. While, the specific objectives are:

1. Find out the library services, resources and facilities available for users with disabilities in law libraries in Nigeria
2. To examines if the available resources for users with disabilities in law libraries in Nigeria adequate for them.
3. To ascertain the barriers to accessibility of law libraries in Nigeria by users with disabilities
4. To find out the level satisfaction of users with disabilities in accessing law libraries in Nigeria
5. To determine how accessibility of law libraries in Nigeria by users with disabilities can be improved on

Research Questions

The fallowing research question were answered in this study

1. What library services, resources and facilities is available for users with disabilities in law school libraries in Nigeria
2. Are the available resources for users with disabilities in law school libraries in Nigeria adequate for them?
3. What are the barriers to accessibility of law school libraries in Nigeria by uses with disabilities?
4. Do users with disabilities derive satisfaction in accessing law school libraries in Nigeria?
5. How can law school libraries in Nigeria be improved on for accessibility of users with disabilities?

Literature Review

The availability of resources and facilities for users with disabilities in law school libraries in Nigeria is a crucial aspect that needs to be addressed. As per the Disability Discrimination Act, all educational institutions, including law school libraries, are required to provide equal access and opportunities for students with disabilities. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that these libraries have the necessary resources and facilities to cater to the specific needs of disabled users. Our tool utilizes natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning algorithms to generate academic abstracts from user input. Persons with disabilities as defined by individuals with Disabilities Education improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 are people with mental retardation, hearing impairment (including deafness) , speech or language impairments visual impairments (including blindness),serious emotional disturbance ,orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury , other health impairment or specific learning disabilities and who by reason there of need special education and related services. OLutoyosi (2018) opined

that law library users with special needs are peoples who are constrained by a psychological, bodily, or social impairment whose information needs and accessibility to facilities and resources needed are not universally included in the library policies and plans. Globally, the percentage of persons with to disability continues to increase, as a result of population growth, medical advancements and the ageing process. According to World Health Organization, about 29 million of the 195 million people Nigeria are with disabilities. There is different form of disabilities with their different needs. Persons with visual impairment are either near or far sighted, dry-eye syndrome and can use computers without special accommodations. Other impairments that cannot be remedied are macular degeneration, color blindness, poor vision. They still have usable vision but cannot read print that is less than 14 point they can safely move about in unfamiliar areas. The resources needed by them are taking books, large print books , braille books, video/DVD books with subtitles, e-books, tactile picture books enlarged and colorful prints that can easily be manipulated, background that changes, screen reader. While persons with blindness are people with extremely limited vision, they are unable to differentiate. Between daylight and night; cannot safely move about in unfamiliar areas without the aid of a cane or a guide. They need to access information by touch; use of braille boos, listening to audio books and internet audio. They are best accommodated by software that read text laud using synesthetic text to –speech software or by using refreshable brailed display.

Hearing impairment and deafness is characterized by difficulty in differentiating definite frequencies, localizing sounds, and hearing certain pitches. Those with hearing loss are often helped by using hearing aids or seeking during conversations, they lack the ability to hear any sound and are totally reliant on visual cues, sign language and lip reading to communicate and learn. Physically they need hearing aids, interpreter in sign language, seats arranged for easy lip reading, text over speech videos, computers with visual alternatives, auditory signal, instant messaging, amplifiers and captioning. While the deaf and blind are not able to use the organ for vision or hearing at all. They rely mostly on their sense of touch, smell and a guide, braille books braille based signage for direction; resources and adaptive technologies for them must be tactile. Person with learning disabilities do not have the ability to understand or use spoken or written language , do mathematical calculations, coordinate movements and has very low attention span, for example; dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), dyscalculia dysgraphia, dyspraxia, auditory and visual processing disorders, executive functioning issues(poor planning and prioritizing). They need resources that will help them manage their disabilities well. Furthermore, cognitive impairment may be congenital, may develop as a result of a physical trauma, or may be part of aging process. Persons with cognitive disabilities generally need more time to process information, and they might be overwhelmed with the presentation of much new information. Person with this disability might benefit from using technologies such as screen readers, modifying the screen display by eliminating ribbons or buttons, or employing different types of inputting hardware. People cognitive disabilities can often learn to use computers, but it may take

more time and more patience. People with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of development and behavioral disorders that affect a person's verbal and verbal communication, understanding of language, and socialization skills Computer software designed to teach basic social skills, and story board-writing software such as Mayer – Johnson's board maker, joysticks oversize, keyboards, or touch screens. Colorfully books talking books stuffed toys. While mobility or dexterity impaired is individuals who use crutches and wheelchair, they may have severe Rheumatoid arthritis and cannot flex their fingers or person who may not be able sit or stand for long Periods of time. They may not have the ability to move their fingers across a standard keyboard or Move any part of their limbs. They may be helped by adding different types of input device or Peripherals to the library's computer tool chest. Large keyboards, small keyboards, trackballs, scanning Software, designated car park walk ways and entrance where they can easily manipulate their wheel Chair, ramps and floor not slippery, appropriate chairs and table, adequate space within the library. To be grant them the same access as their contemporaries, the concept of accessibility need be understood by librarians. Accessibility is a universal term used to describe the degree to which a product, device, service, Or environment is available to be used by all intended audiences; generally it refers to the physical Accessibility of the library facilities however, it is more than just physical access to library services but Individuals with disabilities should be able to use and access all the same services and materials in The library as their non-disabled peers, either thought alternate means or with assistance. Several studies have been carried out on accessibility, however, (momodu, 2013; kumbier and Starkey, 2016) opined that physical in accessibility of library buildings is probably the biggest challenge to persons with disabilities. Most libraries have been constructed in a manner that virtually prevents the physically disabled from gaining access. This is concisely stated when Bigdeli, 2009 posits that, even when they are able to get inside a library, the interior planning grants them little to no freedom of movement. Sometimes, accessibility can be achieved through the use of assistive technology devices. Example of accessibility is as follows.

Types of Barriers

In as much as it is deal for library users to have the aforementioned access, literature has it that there are limitations and barriers that make library accessibility not an easy task for users with disabilities. Wond Wossen, 2018 noted that some of the barriers encountered by user disabilities in the library includes in accessibility of facilities within libraries, difficult in communicating with library staff and technology and an online environment that is inclusive. The barriers faced by users with disabilities are physical or structural, attitudinal, informational and communication, technological and systematic barriers.

Physical or Structural Barriers: condition in any environment that prevent impede and individual with a disability from defiantly navigating when people think and act based on false assumptions and false expectation that individuals with disabilities are unable to contribute as much as their peers who have no disabilities.

Information and Communication Barriers: these are created when information is offered in a form that suits some, but not all, of the population. Example: print that is too small for some peoples to read and public address systems that alert only people who can hear the message.

Technological Barriers: these are policies, practices or procedures that result in some people receiving unequal access or being excluded there by placing undue burdens on individuals with disabilities. Example: Websites not accessible to people who are blind and use screen reader software.

Systematic Barriers: these are policies **practice** or procedures that result in some people receiving unequal access or being excluded thereby placing undue burdens on individuals with disabilities. Example: eligible criteria that effectively exclude people based on a disability, such as requiring a job applicant to have a driver, license even though there are others means of identification.

Information Format Barriers: arise when a person with a disability cannot easily receive or understand information that is available to others for example information that is not available in a readable format for individuals with disabilities.

Roles of Librarians

It is imperative for librarians to recognize the Barrie**rs** and proffer solution that will grant users with disabilities accessibility to the library. Momodu (2023) and Lawal – Solarin (2012) in surveys carried out respectively established that people with disabilities encounter physical access limitations such as retrieving books from library shelves. Similarly, all library materials must should ideally be accessible for all patrons of the library. In achieving this goal, library materials acquire taking books, video or DVD books with subtitles and or sign language, Braille books, accessible e-books, easy –to read books and others non print materials that will meet the needs of users with disabilities, Furthermore, Oud (2019) found that librarians with disabilities reported a lack of awareness about disability issues among their colleagues. Therefore it expected of librarians to put the fallowing in place.

Policy and Procedures: polices of the library should be reviewed to accommodate users with disabilities

Access to Facilities and Equipment's: existing library structures be worked on to accommodate users with disabilities or another structures can be constructed with the furniture and equipment's in right specification to meet the needs of the users

Special or Specific Services: information resources need to be available in different formats such as Braille, audio, videos, large print books, taking books, interpreted books with sign languages voice over and text over for both visually impaired, extended period of lending library materials to them at home, reading to them individually etcetera.

Staff Training and Development: library staff needs to be trained to enable them to interact with users with disabilities without any discrimination or negative attitude toward them.

Research Methodology

The research design adopting for this research is oral interview and physical observation methods with the providers and the user of law libraries, more importantly that the research focused on law libraries in Nigeria. Law librarians and staff interviewed majority online are the government libraries which should serve as precedence for other private and institution libraries to emulate. The population of this study is limited to libraries attached to government courts and academic law libraries, private firm's libraries are not included. Also, almost all the libraries have a lot in common in terms of users and facilities hence the similarities in response of users and library staff.

Discussion of Findings

Responses to questions about whether the libraries under study were accessible to users with special needs revealed that none of the libraries has provision for users with disabilities to access the library, there are no provisions for them in the library policies no acquisition of resources ; the web sites of the court and libraries has no provision for users with disabilities .Library users with mobility impairments lamented their inability to access their respective library buildings because most court libraries are in store buildings and when electricity supply is not constant for elevators, they are deprived of going in to the library physically. Those with visual impairment cannot come in to their library of their own accord not does the libraries have resources in braille or audio media for them. There are no interpreters in the libraries for [people with speech and hearing impairments. In as much as law libraries have failed in having accessible libraries for users with disabilities, there is still room for us to do it, this is the only way to uphold the law that we are meant to keep which protects users with disabilities. We need to start by looking at ourselves from a different perspective by empathizing with users with disabilities, when we do so then we will understand them better and change our mind set to fight their cause by becoming "accessibility librarians

An accessibility librarian is the important link between the diverse user base and the library staff, being able to relate user experience to the library staff and explain how services and websites can be improved to serve all users with disabilities better. A librarian that ensures that the library fronts the cause of accessibility produces resources to advance the profession, and influences practices in technology, publishing and scholarship. This expertise can be acquired through professional development

opportunities such as workshops, conferences, and continued education or through active engagement with others accessibility experts. Convert print materials into accessible files, testing database for usability and applying principles of universal design to services, spaces and acquisition of resources, universal design (UD) enables a librarian to design facilities and services for the average user, which is done for people with a broad range of abilities, disabilities, and other characteristics such as reading ability learning style, Language culture and others. It will make the library to be more usable by everyone and minimize the need for special accommodations for those who use library service and for future users.

Able to train and educate other library staff in the area of accessibility to ensure that all library staff has basic competencies to handle entry –level queries from the patrons or provide basic tech support assistive technology users. Should have working knowledge of contemporary technologies, digital accessibility and assistive technologies. The obligation of advancing library accessibility by an accessibility librarian consists of education, strategy, advocacy, and research. An accessibility librarian must be patently willing to teach other library staff and library users with disabilities when there is need for it. Advocacy is a huge component of what an accessibility librarian does, as their role is in extricable linked to outreach , building trust and reliable working relationships with stakeholders, collaborating with publishers and working with policy , makers, working with other organization that serves people with disabilities to achieve the set goal of accessibility for all.

Recommendations

1. In order to provide equal services and effective facilities to persons with disabilities, librarians have to identify them, understand their needs, and the problems they encounter in the library environment
2. Libraries can also provide equipment that can scan text, enlarge it , or read it back for visually impaired
3. Special software that will enable them to edit and save word files and prints in brailed or enlarge text. As law librarians we should start from taking to our heads of court about the need for accessibility in the library draw up library policy that includes users with disabilities to serve as guide
4. Collaborate with in-house publishers to produce resources in formats and media that users with disabilities can access, for example braille, tactile, audio and audio visual resources etcetera. Each library should raise accessibility librarians which is probably new in law libraries.

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