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Provision of Library and Information Services to the Visually Impaired Pupils in Pacelli School for the Blind, Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examines provision of library and information services to the visually impaired pupils in Pacelli School for the blind, Lagos, Nigeria. It looks into various issues that involved in the provision of Library and information services to the visually impaired students in the school for the blind. The paper equally appreciates the fact that library plays an important role in inculcating in the pupils the spirit of independence and self-reliance that will enable them to cope with the tasks and challenges of life. Using interview and observation methods, the paper proceeds to discuss the various library and information services, resources and equipment available in the school. It also highlights the challenges experience by the visually impaired people and the library. Lastly useful recommendations were made towards the provision of library and information services to the visually impaired person with a view to improving on the library and information services available to the visually impaired pupils in Pacelli School for the blind and these could be generalized to other visually challenged pupils in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

In the world today, information is the driving force for educational and economic development. It is all important that library provides services and resources that will enable the visually impaired person have access to its collection in the appropriate format that will suit them and meet their information needs. Provision of library and information services to the visually impaired young people in any country especially pupils in the elementary and colleges is very important to every society. It is the ultimate aim of the library of Pacelli School for the blind to provide the right information and services at the right time and in the right formats to its pupils regardless of any limitations.

In line with the 1994 IFLA public library manifesto cited in Babalola and Haliso [7], Adetoro [2], [3], Eskay and Chima [12], Lucky and Achebe [14], library services should be opened to all persons regardless of their race, creed, gender, physical ability, social status and economic status. Since information is a primary and fundamental right of any person especially the visually impaired. Libraries play a key role in the provision of good collections in appropriate format and services considering the fact that they are servicing the visually challenged persons who have different information needs. American Library Association [5] highlighted some of the services required by the visually impaired people such as extended loan periods, the waiving of late return fines, extended reserve periods, volunteer readers in the library, volunteer technology assistant in the library and radio reading services. This means that libraries provide variety of services and resources that could enhance independence,

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mobility, education, and daily living skills.

Furthermore in Eskay and Chima [12], visually impaired is a general term used to describe people who are partially sighted or completely blind. In other words, the visually impaired are persons who are blind or have a low vision. In this paper visually impaired persons applied to both people who are totally blind and to those who can partially see. World Health Organization [19] estimated that about 285 million people are estimated to be visually impaired worldwide, 39 million are blind and 246 have low vision. About 99% of the visually impaired live in low income setting while 82% of people living with blindness are age 50 and above.

In the same vein, Adetoro [3] agreed with the position of the Federal Ministry of Health as cited by the Lagos state branch of the Nigerian Optometric Association (NOA) shows that people with blindness are over one million with about three million others with visual impairment, they posited that 42 out of every 100 adult people above the age of 40 are visually impaired in the country. This means that the visually impaired persons in Nigeria are on the increase and care has to be taken to reduce the number. Hence, Pacelli School for the blind and its library ensure that pupils in their school with visual impairment have equal access to library services and collections. In this way, the library performs an effective means of making them to take informed decision and be independent in life.

1.1. History of Pacelli School for the Blind and Partially Sighted Children

Pacelli School for the blind was established in June 16, 1962 by the Roman Catholic Church. The school is a boarding primary school from Basic 1-6.The main teaching in Basic one is to learn how to read Braille and daily living skills. Each student will have to pass basic one examination no matter how long it takes them before proceeding to basic two.

The basics for the establishment of the schools for the blind was to provide education, library and information services that will enable them integrate into the society and have normal life to contribute to the national development through the collaborative effort of the staff, provision of library and information services, up-to-date library collections and quality learning environment.

Presently the population of students in Pacelli School for the blind is 135 students with Boys out numbering the girls with 80 and 55 respectively. Currently they have 38 staff with 4 Sisters making its staff strength increase to 42. More than 50 pupils are on the waiting list to be admitted but because of accommodation problems, the school could not. The vision of the school is to graduate students who are independent, discipline, talented and academically sound to cope with the tasks and challenges of life as well as transforming the school into modern school that will give access to the latest technological development and equipment. Please check for details in Table 1.

The paper employs interview and observation methods to deduct information for its discussion. It aims at knowing various information services and resources available in the library, identify various issues involved in the provision of library and information services to the visually impaired persons as well to establish some challenges facing people with visual impairment while using the library services and the library itself.

Table 1. Population of Students and Staff in Pacelli School for the Blind.

Population in the Pacelli school	Student	Staff
Boys	80	Sisters: 4
Girls	55	Others: 38
Total	135	42

Source: The Researchers (2016)

1.2. Library and Information Services Available in Pacelli School for the Blind

The school have a Library which has a numbers of collection arranged by subject on the shelves of lower height to suit their age and height. The subject arrangement of library collection makes it easier for the visually impaired person to gain access to the library materials.

The library offers wide range of services like lending of books to the students for their informational need, production and transcription of some basic information materials into braille in conjunction with the school management, provision of talking books, reading of stories books and bible from Monday to Friday shared between basic two to five and one hour thirty minutes allocated to each class for library use. This is to inculcate reading habits for the visually impaired persons. Most of the print materials and braille were acquired through donation and by purchase. The library personnel though neither a librarian nor a library officer, teach them the use of library and how to read story books. They have computers and other equipment that take care of all assistive technology and the conversion of print to braille.

1.3. Issues on Provision of Library and Information Services to the Visually Impaired

There are so many issues involved in the provision of library and information services to the visually impaired persons. Such issues were extensively discussed by Atinmo [6], Majinge and Stilwell [15], Adetoro [3] and host of others. The issues are as follows:

1.3.1. Accessibility of Information Materials and Resources

Libraries no matter the type should provide unlimited access to information since the main mission of libraries is to provide access to relevant and quality information. Accessibility to information is essential and basic human right if we really want the visually impaired persons to be independent in their activities. The Information access and use of visually impaired persons are quite different from normal persons. They spend much time in the process of locating and searching for information. The visually impaired depends on the Librarians to checks out books, to scan and translate the material in an accessible format like in Braille, Large print and in speech/audio format. Byrne-Cyike, Hagle, Herndon and Perry [9] noted that librarians are usually responsible for identifying, gathering and making available information in any form as required by identified users. The role of a librarian is to serve as advocates for unhindered access to information to our users including the visually impaired persons.

1.3.2. Availability of Library and Information Materials

Adetoro [3] noted that the availability of Information material for use by persons with visual impairment in many countries is promised on equal access with sighted, although what is available, the world over is far from ideal. He went further to say that information resource for the visually impaired persons are converted into alternative formats such as Braille, talking books/audio recordings, large prints and e-resources to meet their reading need. This alternative formats gives the visually impaired persons the opportunities to read and communicate like sighted counterparts. The American Foundation for the Blind [4] points out that information material becomes useful to people with visual impairment when they are transcribed into alternative formats. Apart from having alternative formats, the visually impaired persons need special attention when they visit the library. Librarians must make sure that all resources both in print and electronics are available. As a matter of facts, for them to be inclusive in the society they must learn how to utilize a whole variety of resources both print and online resources.

1.3.3. Policies and Guidelines for Libraries and Information Services Provision

Library and Information services policies for visually impaired persons vary from country to country. It is the library policy that will be used to clarify objectives, ensure effectiveness of operations as well as provision of equal services to all especially the visually impaired persons. If Policies are not in place, services will not develop talk less of meeting the needs of the visually impaired. Through provisions of library and information services policies, the libraries need to examine and revise these policies when necessary to reflect to the provision services and application of new technologies.

1.3.4. Social Inclusion

The society discriminates against the visually impaired persons because of their status. Issues on attitude, culture belief and neglect from the society are all forms of discrimination against the visually impaired persons. The visually impaired should fight for their right by making themselves relevant both in terms of means of livelihood and education so that they will have equal provision of library services without restriction of any form [Igiamoh & Ogunwemim, 13].

1.3.5. Architectural Design of the Library Building

In provision of library and information services to the blind, the layout of the library building should be suitable and user friendly. There should be access to Library building which involves the provision of lift, hand railing and sizeable doors and toilet facilities to meet their needs. The visually impaired persons should have access to all locations in the Library without any restrictions to meet their informational needs. The Library architectural designs should also improve the lightening, accessible furniture, parking space, accessible pathways and good signage in the library. Good signage makes the visually impaired persons independent in their interaction and use of various facilities within the library. In support of this, Deines-Jones [11] insisted that Libraries should be designed to be universally accessible, and should have equipment in place to enable all users to get maximum benefit from the library materials and services provided.

1.3.6. Library Development for the Visually Impaired

Adimorah [1] outlined the process involved in developing a library for the visually impaired as follows:- Planning Organizational Structure, Equipment Sources, Planning Services, Capacity Building and Management. In the development of services for the blind, there is the need to plan ahead on how to source for materials, how the architectural designs of the library building should be and even the library staff to be employed considering their educational qualifications and disciplines. The library is a crucial centre in the educational development of man that was why Salisu [17], stressed the role of library in the development of nation to include educational, social, economic, political and cultural development, this has made libraries all over the world to invest money for the development of libraries.

1.3.7. Information Needs of Visually Impaired Persons

An information need of the visually impaired persons is of great importance to the librarian who ensures that they match the information requirement of the visually impaired person to meet their specific needs. The visually impaired persons use the library for reading books and to do assignments. The sources of their information are mostly on media sources such as talking, news paper, television, radio and also from family, friends and their organization.

Every individual has a unique information need. Shon [18] stated that Visually Impaired person exhibits a spectrum of special needs as a result of their sensory limitations. The needs of the visually impaired persons depends of the educational status, social status, career needs, recreational needs as well as health information needs on how to get along with life situation.

1.3.8. Information and Communication Technology in Library and Information Provision for People with Visual Impairments

In providing information services to people with visual impairment, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a great role to locate and access information, to scan, translate and print materials in appropriate formats through various Devices. I C T applications in Libraries have today continued to ease and promote quick and timely access to Library and Information services especially for the visually impaired persons. YU [20] and Davies [10] opined that Information through technology has increasingly become a necessary tool to success and the source of opportunity in Education and Employment. Bell and Peter [8] added that in the 21ST century, talking book Library and Mainstream Library are teaming up to use technological Innovation to deliver cutting edge services, programs and a wide variety of electronic books to ensure that People with Visual Impairments have the same access to library material and services as their Sighted counterpart. Libraries should deploy Information and Communication Technology in all their Operations and Provision of Services to the Visual Impairment since it has brought changes in the method of information storage, retrieval and transmission.

1.3.9. Funding

The visually impaired persons in Pacelli School for the blind depend solely on the goodness of charities and philanthropists that provide money and Informational materials for their education. Most of the schools for visually impaired persons established by missionaries and Non-Governmental agencies are not funded by the government. There is no provision of policies enabling supervisory organization or governmental agencies concerned to make necessary budget and create funds for such schools. The schools should partner with nongovernmental organization, individuals and churches to assist in funding and in provision of Braille and other materials. Other issues that call for attention include mobility, training of library staff and the visually impaired on braille reading and other assistive technology use and their information need.

2. Challenges Facing Visually Impaired in Using Library and Information Services

Mann [16] and Eskay and Chima [12] claimed that Individuals with visual impairment faces numerous challenges. They have the challenges of Physically accessing library building, facilities and information without guidance, Inability to personally gaining access to technologies that would help them to become independent in society, The shortage of books and others published materials in appropriate format that are accessible to them, They depend so much on the library staff in the use of library services, It takes them time so much in reading library materials and in doing assignment, Most of the library materials are no longer current, so there is lack of current informational materials in accessible format.

Besides, it could be observed that the following challenges were experienced by the library of Pacelli School for the blind: inadequate equipment such as computers and other technologies for use by the visually impaired persons. The Library is being manned by non-librarians and as such inadequate trained Librarians to handle visually impaired persons in mobility within the library and in reading, High cost of converting information from print to Braille and alternative format and the cost of purchasing these technologies, Inadequate information materials in Braille, large print and other alternative format, Limited mobility of the visual impaired persons who requires to be guided in using the library, Inadequate funding from their parent body and Government and Flooding within the compound which is a serious challenge facing the school.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

The issues involved in the provision of library and information services needs to be examined and re-examined in other to provide enhanced Library and information services to the visually impaired which will lead to provision of equal library services. Pacelli School for the Blind and

Partially Sighted Children like other people should be given equal opportunities by funding the school well. When funds are available, the library collection and delivery of services will be improved which will lead to less challenges and in turn enhance the visually impaired participation in the society and in national development.

On the basis of our observations, the following recommendations were proffered as the way forward:

I. Library should acquire assistive technologies and try to install basic ICT equipment for the use of the visually impaired persons.

II. Library collections should be based on curriculum, story books and other library collection that are current enough to attract and uplift their mind.

III. Librarian should be employed to work in the library and the school authority should also employ other library staff with good braille literacy skills to teach and assist in information retrieval.

IV. Collaborating with international/national organizations in making reading materials and ICT equipment available to persons who are visually impaired at subsidized rate or for donations.

V. The visually impaired persons should not look down on themselves, but rather explore the services rendered by the library and make effective use of it to become independent in life.

VI. The school authority should build more classrooms and hostels in order to accommodate more students who are blind. Also, the school authority should persistently appeal to State or Local Government on ways to solve the flooding issue. To achieve this, the Headmaster of the school will have to play the role of a lobbyist.

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