



Creativity in Mainstreaming Library and Material
Production Service for the Visually Impaired in
Nigerian Universities: Innovative Approaches for
Operation and Provision of Library Services

Niran Adetoro

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**CREATIVITY IN MAINSTREAMING LIBRARY AND MATERIAL PRODUCTION
SERVICE FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES:
INNOVATIVE APPROACHES FOR OPERATION AND PROVISION OF LIBRARY
SERVICES.**

By

‘Niran Adetoro PhD

**Department of Library and Information Science,
Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria.
adetoroaa@tasued.edu.ng**

Abstract

University Libraries in Nigeria have operated for decade providing information services which excluded the visually impaired generally and the students with visual impairment in some of these universities. The paper advocates innovative methods for the inclusion of services to the visually impaired in Nigerian university libraries. It provides useful guidelines for the establishment of functional library services and material production centres as part of mainstream library services. The article further explains the guidelines in the areas of framework for service, customer care, cooperation and networking, collection development, access to services and collection, production of alternative formats, management and marketing. It concludes that library services and material production centres for the visually impaired in Nigerian universities is not only desirable but would help widen access to information.

Keywords: Mainstreaming, Material Production, Visually Impaired, Innovative Approaches, Library Services, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Visually impaired persons have the same information needs as sighted people. Just as sighted persons might want to read newspapers or journal articles, listen to a CD or download electronic information from the internet, visually impaired persons also want access to relevant information in their chosen accessible format. (Adetoro and Atinmo,2012)

Nigerian university libraries are some of the most developed in the country. Many had automated their operations and provide internet and information search services in databases. But despite their efforts in meeting the information need of the university community for teaching and research, they have failed to extend their services to persons with disabilities and to the visually impaired in particular. The author cannot pinpoint any university library in Nigeria with either a standalone service for the visually impaired or existing as part of mainstream library services.

Developing efficient library service and production centre for print disabled students in Nigerian universities is important because there are significant fewer books/information materials available commercially in accessible formats compared to what is published in print for the general public (sighted).

Globally, the visually impaired have access to a mere five percent (5%) of information material available to the sighted (Harris, 2005) The establishment of libraries and material production centres for the visually impaired members of the Nigerian University system is necessary to help bridge the access gap to information resources and to help address their information needs for leisure and academic purposes.

The library and material production centre should strive to meet the following objectives:

- Identify needs, identify resources and plan services in such a way that the visually impaired users have access to the same range of services as everyone.
- Take reasonable steps to change policies, practices and procedures which could make it difficult or impossible for the visually impaired to use their services.
- Consciously take steps to remove or alter physical features which could be a barrier to the visually impaired using the library.
- Information about services should be available in alternative format (transcribe notices)

This framework is developed to meet international best practices for libraries providing services to the blind. The term print disabled is used to describe those who are unable to read print due to blindness, low vision, a learning disability or a physical disability. It is believed that these guidelines would provide benchmarks which Nigerian University Libraries should strive to attain in order to serve its visually impaired students.

FRAMEWORK FOR SERVICE

The democratic right to access to information and continuous learning extends to disabled persons. This right is also enshrined in IFLA Declaration of fundamental Right to Access and Express Information (IFLA, 2001)

Mission

The mission statement for libraries for the visually impaired must be in conformity with the mission statement of the university libraries, in addition it must also emphasise equality of access to all information for the visually impaired.

Legal Framework

Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human rights as well as she is a party to the implementation of the United Nations Standard Rules for the equalisation of opportunities for people with disabilities. These legislations form the basis for the provision of library services the visually impaired communities in Nigerian Universities.

Copyright and other Licenses

Copyright laws protect the works of authors, translators and publishers from being copied illegally. In many countries including Nigeria, copyright laws have exemptions for the transcription of literary works into Braille, electronic text and talking books for the use of the visually impaired. Usually these exemptions are restricted to libraries for the visually impaired; and information materials (alternative format) produced may not be sold for commercial gain.(IFLA,1998)

Need Assessment

The libraries and material production centre will need to undertake an assessment of needs periodically in cooperation with their print-disabled community. This will influence the design of buildings and signs, stock levels and the development plan for alternative formats; provision of new adaptive equipment, and a promotional and reader development programme.

Service Delivery

Service delivery should take the visually impaired readers' circumstances into account. Patrons may need services delivered to them in hostels or at their academic departments. Staff should undergo training to understand the range of needs and be able to offer appropriate assistance. The ideal library service is one where each individual, regardless of the degree of visual impairment has access to the materials and information at the time they are required, in a format that can be used, in the quantities that are needed and where the needs of the users are understood by the staff. Students will need support in core curriculum materials, wider course reading and research materials. The need of the student must be assessed and ensure books are provided in required format.

Management of library service

The management must make sure that the library is accessible to users and that appropriate policies and designs are developed as part of the core values of the university library. Management should strive for goals that establish equity of access as an underlying principle of service. There must be arrangement for the allocation of necessary resources, appropriate performance targets; procedure monitoring and accountability must be ensured by management. There is the need to also consider promotion of services and partnerships.

CUSTOMER CARE

Information materials

Print disabled university students have the need for textbooks and supplementary reading materials as those who read print, but face the continuous problem of not receiving materials in time for course work and examinations. They also have interest in reading recreational and leisure materials, and as people who are blind pursue life-long education; students will be depending more and more on a library service to support learning trends. Students also need access to computers with adaptive technologies and training in the use of available resources for research.

Library Interior and Surroundings.

Inside the library, visually impaired person's predominant need is for a hazard-free environment with good colour contrast. This means that any hazard such as steps or lifts, or changes in floor level, should be clearly identifiable from the texture on the floor covering. Changes in floor level of more than 15cm need a handrail. Clearly defined walkways will help to make the environment safer for visually impaired patrons. Pathways need to be free of all book trolleys, rubbish bins, flower pots etc, and wall surfaces should be clear of any protruding object that is not marked for safety (CILIP, 2005)

Good lighting is important. Changes in lightning levels cause problems for visually impaired people. Therefore lightning levels should be as even as possible. Readers using low vision aids such as magnifiers find supplementary directional lightning (shining on text) particularly helpful.

In addition to the foregoing, the library should also ensure that:

- Signs in the building are clear and well lit.
- Service point have low desks
- Contrasting colour schemes for the floor, walls and furniture are used to design the library.
- Guides and induction sessions are provided in accessible format such that students are given information they need to use the library.
- Publications relating to services must be made available in alternative formats.
- Large print notices/ signage and tactile signs are made available.
- Braille signings are placed on all shelves
- Study tables are located away from the doors.
- For high rise buildings lifts with Braille buttons are provided. (Jean,1996)

Students Appraisal and Examinations.

For the purposes of students' appraisal and examinations the material production centre will work in partnership with student's academic departments. The centre will carry out the following activity for the departments:

- Braille students' appraisal and examination questions- for those who are comfortable reading Braille. Students would answer the questions using their typewriters or laptops
- Transcribe appraisal and examination questions into audio Mp3 format for the students- for those who prefer audio. Students would answer the questions either through their typewriters or computer laptops.

CO-OPERATION AND NETWORKING

Library for the visually impaired should be aware of collections held in other libraries. Professionals need to maintain awareness of copyright requirements and protocols for borrowing or lending materials to other libraries for the blind. Libraries for the visually impaired should support their work with direct link to specialised agencies and libraries for the print disabled. (Brophy and Craven, 1999)

A cooperative approach is imperative for developing collections, embracing future technologies and sharing resources. Since many people who are visually impaired are also users of these agencies, there are substantial opportunities for partnership in supporting technologies and understanding consumer needs (Brophy and Craven, 1999)

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

A library's collection is the heart of its service and a reflection of its mission. Building a good collection that meets users' needs requires the consideration of its demography, economic and cultural diversity. The library should put down a collection development policy which defines clearly the strategy for building the collection. The policy should also guide the selection, maintenance and evaluation of content. (Machel,1996)

A collection plan is also necessary to cover collection goals, subjects, formats and areas that are to be developed, weeded or replaced. Criteria for selection of materials should be established. It should reflect the needs of the users and be balanced to consider a wide range of subjects for academic and leisure, popular books, literary classics and timely materials.

The needs of the reader should be primary. Reader requests should be routinely gathered and analysed when selecting materials to be produced and added to collection. Gifts and donations of materials from other libraries and organisations providing library services to the visually impaired are important sources in expanding the library's collection and giving breadth to its content. However, the library has the right to refuse materials it considers to be of no value to its readers. Collection should be organised and classified by SUBJECTS, CATEGORIES, THEMES AND FORMATS.

This catalogue should be available to clients. An online catalogue access (OPAC) should be created. This will allow users to browse independently using adaptive technology and it will guarantee the satisfaction of users because of it links the users directly with the collection.

ACCESS TO SERVICE AND COLLECTION

Libraries need to develop policies and procedures to ensure clients are well served and choose the most efficient methods of delivery. The libraries should also be aware of software and hardware solutions used by print disabled persons. Beyond the foregoing, the library needs to develop strategy for engaging readers and providing them with training especially in the use of services and in technology that support these services. (CILIP, 2005)

One unique requirement of a library for the visually impaired is that staff should have access to the reading history of patrons in order to ensure the best use of the collection to these readers.

PRODUCTION OF ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

Libraries serving the visually impaired are also the producer of books, documents, and other contents in formats that can be read by those who are print-disabled. Traditionally audio and braille are the primary formats but more recently digital technologies and translation software programs allow multiple accessible formats (including Braille, audio, electronic text and large print). According to Brophy and Craven (1999) the library should set standard for the production of its materials, the transcription of materials into alternative formats and from analogue materials to digital.

MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING

Management.

Libraries for the visually impaired need a wide range of skills for success and relationship building. Libraries require an effective manager who understands the need of the users of this specialised service. Essentially, staff complement should include support staff, professional librarians, paraprofessionals or technicians. The librarian must understand the collection, organisation and distribution materials and other content as well as a wide variety of systems and tools. In addition to these professional skills, the librarian should possess other specialised skills in the management of:

- Information systems
- Technical aids
- Narrators for audio production
- Braillist / transcribers / tactillists

Training should be one of the foremost goals in the development of staff. In-house training and attendance at conferences is vital in developing staff. It is important for other students and staff in general to come to terms with the social inclusion imperative which means the staff must identify the physical, sensory, cultural and psychological barriers that prevent or deter print-disabled people from using services and take appropriate step to remove them or reduce them. (Brophy and Craven, 1999)

Sensitivity training

Libraries for the visually impaired can hire sighted and visually impaired staff. Library should foster sensitivity to blindness. The sighted staff must learn how to engage and work respectfully with the visually impaired staff and patrons. The culture of awareness should start at management level and become part of the overall values of the university libraries. The values should reflect enlightened view of disability, emphasising that attitudes are often a much greater barrier than the physical problems faced by disabled persons.

Recruitment and training of volunteers

Libraries for the visually impaired make use of volunteers as part of the human resource complement. Use of volunteers endorses community values, where it is considered appropriate to donate ones' time to improve the quality of life for others. Whatever the philosophy behind the decision to use volunteers to assist in material production and library operations, they should be expected to fulfil the aims and objectives of the operations of the library.

It is therefore necessary that good human resource skills be applied in the selection, recruitment, interviewing and management of volunteers. Appropriate skill is key and volunteers should be deployed to work in areas of greatest need which may not be their preference. They should also undergo periodic training while a programme for recognizing and rewarding volunteers should be developed as appropriate to them.

The underlisted management imperatives in the opinion of CILIP (2005) should be put in place for the sustainability of libraries for the visually impaired. They include.

- Strategic and operational planning
- Financial planning
- Appropriate mechanism for management of relationships or linkages.
- Efficient management of resources
- The management of change and technologies
- Anticipation of future development
- Performance analysis and effectiveness monitoring

Marketing and Advocacy

Libraries for the visually impaired should promote and publicize services and advocate on behalf of their patrons. Marketing require special skills to make them aware of library service opportunities. Marketing also means informing the visually impaired community in the University and any other interest group/department or units within the institution to which they might belong about what the library can offer as well as telling their academic departments. Marketing and advocacy initiatives must also engage stakeholders including relevant agencies and the public who could support the work of the library.

Services could also be launched and advertised within the University libraries so that people who know the visually impaired would become aware of the materials and services available.

Marketing of services should be directed towards:

- Potential patrons
- Existing patrons
- Associations for people who are print disabled
- Blindness agencies
- Librarianship community
- Educators

- Decision makers and government officials

The library should carry out a regular evaluation of its marketing and promotion programmes and ensure that the results of each evaluation are taken into account when planning future programmes.

CONCLUSION

This paper provides a discussion of the practical operational guidelines for the establishment and provision of library services and material production centre for the visually impaired as part of mainstream library services in Nigerian University libraries. The issues discussed are not only topical but also implementable. The issues include framework for service, customer care concerns, cooperation and networking, collection development, access to materials and services, production of formats, management and marketing of services. It is regrettable that Nigerian university libraries have little or nothing so far to the visually impaired generally and their visually impaired students. It is hoped this article would serve as a blueprint for the actualisation of libraries and material production centres for the visually impaired in Nigerian universities.

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