



ACCESSIBILITY OF LIBRARY SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH VISUAL AND HEARING IMPAIRMENTS: EVIDENCE FROM THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF LAFIA

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Abstract

This study examined the accessibility of library resources and services for students with visual and hearing impairments in the Department of Special Needs and Rehabilitation Sciences at the Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State. The study sought to examine the availability of library resources and services for students with visual and hearing impairments and students' perceptions of their adequacy. The population consisted of forty-two (42) students with visual and hearing impairments in the Department of Special Needs and Rehabilitation Sciences at the Federal University of Lafia. A total enumeration technique was employed, and data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that the availability of library resources and services was largely limited to basic provisions, with relatively limited access to specialized resources. Participants also perceived the available resources and services as inadequate, citing the absence of appropriate reading materials, insufficiently inclusive services, inadequate staff support, and a lack of specialized personnel. The study concludes that improving access to information for students with visual and hearing impairments requires more than expanding library resources; it also requires institutional commitment to inclusive policies, accessible information resources, assistive technologies, and staff capacity building. The study therefore recommends strengthening accessibility policies, expanding accessible information resources and assistive technologies, and providing regular professional development for library personnel to promote equitable access to information in higher education.

Keywords: Library Resources, Library Services, Accessibility, Visual Impairments, Hearing Impairments, Inclusive Education.

Introduction

Academic libraries play a central role in promoting equitable access to information and supporting student success. For students with visual and hearing impairment however, access to library resources often remains constrained by inaccessible services, limited assistive technologies, and institutional practices that fail to accommodate diverse learning needs. Despite the increasing emphasis on inclusive education, many academic libraries still lack the necessary infrastructure, technology, and tailored services to accommodate students with these impairments. The majority of academic libraries are still poorly equipped to serve visually impaired students (Selema, et al., 2025). Limited access to assistive technologies, specialized reading materials, adaptive software, and trained personnel often prevents these students from fully benefiting from library resources.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 2.2 billion people worldwide have a near or distance vision impairment (World Health Organization, 2023). Similarly, an estimated 430 million individuals worldwide experience disabling hearing loss, with 34 million of these being children (World Health Organization, 2021). In the context of higher education, these statistics underscore the significance of addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by students with visual and hearing impairments.

Visually impaired students encounter barriers such as inaccessible learning materials, insufficient tactile or auditory alternatives, and a lack of appropriate assistive technology (Pandey and Pandey, 2021), as well as with accessing printed resources due to the predominantly visual nature of most learning materials. These barriers include the physical format of materials, lack of accessible formats like Braille or audio, and inadequate assistive technology. With the advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), there is an opportunity to enhance library accessibility for students with Visual and Hearing Impairments. Features like text-to-speech software, screen readers, audio books, digital libraries with adaptive content, comfortable study spaces, and specialized librarian support can significantly improve accessibility and learning outcomes. Traditional library services, which heavily rely on printed texts and visual cues, often pose significant challenges for these students, limiting their ability to engage fully in the academic environment (Parmar and Solanki, 2019).

Similarly, students with hearing impairments encounter barriers in accessing auditory information, participating in group discussions, and communicating with library staff (Paul and Morgan, 2017). Despite advancements in assistive technologies such as captioning and sign language

interpretation, many academic libraries lack adequate accommodations and support services for hearing impaired students (Ding et al., 2020).

Although inclusive education has become a policy priority within Nigerian higher education, empirical evidence on the accessibility of academic library services for students with visual and learning impairment is limited. Examining the experiences of students within the Department of Special Needs Education and Rehabilitation Sciences at the Federal University of Lafia provides insight into broader institutional challenges affecting inclusive information service delivery in similar higher education contexts.

While previous studies have examined disability inclusion and library accessibility in different settings, relatively little research has focused on how students with visual and hearing impairments experience academic library services within Nigerian universities. To address this gap, this study investigates the experiences of students with visual and hearing-impairments in accessing library resources and services within the Department of Special Needs Education and Rehabilitation Sciences at the Federal University of Lafia. By examining these experiences, the study provides evidence that can inform institutional efforts to improve accessibility and strengthen inclusive library service delivery in higher education.

In this study, accessibility refers to the extent to which students with visual and hearing impairments are able to obtain and use library resources and services. Operationally, it encompasses the availability of appropriate information formats and assistive technologies, the adequacy of library staff support and inclusive services, and the extent to which physical and other barriers affect students' access to library resources.

Statement of the Problem

Despite growing commitments to inclusive education, many academic libraries continue to provide services that are not fully accessible to students with visual and hearing impairments. While policies increasingly emphasize equal educational opportunities, the practical implementation of accessible library services often remains inadequate, limiting students' ability to independently locate, access, and use academic information resources. Within the Department of Special Needs Education and Rehabilitation Sciences at the Federal University of Lafia, little empirical evidence exists on how students with visual and hearing impairments experience existing library services. Without such evidence, accessibility gaps may remain unrecognized, limiting institutional efforts to improve service delivery and promote equitable participation in higher education. This study therefore investigates students' experiences of library services, identifies existing accessibility challenges, and

provides evidence-based recommendations to support more inclusive library service delivery for students with visual and hearing impairments.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine the accessibility of library services for students with visual and hearing impairments in the Department of Special Needs Education and Rehabilitation Sciences at Federal University of Lafia. Specifically, the study intends to

1. Examine the availability of library resources and services for students with visual and hearing impairments within the Department of Special Needs Education and Rehabilitation Sciences at the Federal University of Lafia.
2. Examine students' perceptions of the adequacy of library resources and services provided by the Federal University of Lafia Library.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What library resources and services are available to visually and hearing-impaired students in the Department of Special Needs and Rehabilitation Sciences at the Federal University of Lafia?
2. How do visually and hearing-impaired students perceive the adequacy of library resources and services provided by the university library?

Theoretical Review

This study is guided by the Social Model of Disability, which conceptualizes disability as arising primarily from environmental, institutional, and societal barriers rather than from an individual's impairment. The model provides an appropriate framework for examining how academic library services can either facilitate or restrict equitable access to information for students with visual and hearing impairments. The Social Model of Disability emerged as an alternative to the Medical Model, which views disability primarily as a personal problem resulting from physical or cognitive impairments. In contrast, the Social Model reframes disability as a socially constructed phenomenon in which barriers created by the environment, attitudes, and institutions, rather than an individual's impairment, are understood as the primary disabling factors. From this perspective, disability arises not solely from an individual's impairment but also from the way society and its institutions are organized (Oliver, 1996).

The Social Model of Disability asserts that individuals are disabled not by their impairments but by barriers created by society, including physical environments, institutional policies, and negative attitudes. Rather than viewing inaccessible services as inevitable consequences of disability,

the model emphasizes that exclusion often results from the way institutions are designed and operated. Within academic libraries, this perspective shifts attention from students' impairments to the accessibility of library systems and services. Barriers such as inaccessible information formats, limited assistive technologies, inadequate staff training, and exclusionary service practices are therefore understood as institutional challenges that can be addressed through inclusive policies, accessible technologies, staff capacity building, and user-centred service design. Accordingly, the Social Model of Disability provides the analytical lens for interpreting the findings of this study. It enables the study to examine how institutional barriers within academic library services influence students' ability to access, retrieve, and use information effectively, rather than attributing these challenges to students' impairments.

Research Methodology

This study used a descriptive survey design and targeted all 42 students with visual and hearing impairments in the Department of Special Needs and Rehabilitation, Federal University of Lafia (2025). Because the population was small, total enumeration was employed, with all 42 students included using a census sampling approach. Data were collected using a structured, expert-validated questionnaire titled *Questionnaire for Students with Learning Disability (Visually and Hearing Impaired)*. Trained volunteers assisted in administering the instrument to ensure effective communication. For visually impaired respondents, questions were read aloud and responses were verbally provided and recorded. For hearing-impaired students, administration was supported by sign-language interpreters. All participants received identical questions in the same order to ensure reliability. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, and the results were presented in tables.

Results

Research Question 1: What library resources and services are available to students with visual and hearing-impairments in the Department of Special Needs and Rehabilitation Sciences?

Table 1: Respondent's Assessment of the Availability of Library Resources and Services

Availability Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Basic	32	78%
Intermediate	7	17.1%

Advanced 2 4.9%

Table 1 presents respondents' assessment of the availability of library resources and services for students with visual and hearing impairments. The majority of respondents (78%) perceived that only basic library resources and services were available, while 17.1% indicated the availability of intermediate-level resources and only 4.9% reported access to advanced resources. These findings suggest that although library resources and services are available, their provision is largely limited to basic-level support, with relatively little access to specialized resources and assistive technologies.

Research Question 2: How do students with visual and hearing impairments perceive the adequacy of library resources and services available to them?

Table 2: Respondents' Perception of Adequacy of available library resources and services

N=42

ITEMS	SA	A	DA	SD	$\bar{x}$ ($\bar{x}$)
There is a notable absence of appropriate reading materials for students with visual and hearing impairments	21	18	2	1 4.1	3.40
The support received from the library staff is satisfactory for students with visual and hearing impairments	3	16	17	6	2.38
The services provided by the library are not inclusive for students with visual and hearing impairments	13	25	2	2	3.17
Lack of specialized staff in the library to cater to the needs of students with visual and hearing impairments	17	24	0	1	3.36

Table 2 presents respondents' perceptions of the adequacy of available library resources and services. Most respondents agreed that appropriate reading materials for students with visual and hearing impairments were unavailable ($\bar{x}$ = 3.40). Respondents also perceived library services as

insufficiently inclusive ($\bar{x} = 3.17$) and reported a lack of specialized staff to support students with visual and hearing impairments ($\bar{x} = 3.36$). Furthermore, the relatively low mean score for staff support ($\bar{x} = 2.38$) indicates dissatisfaction with the support services currently provided by the library.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that library resources and services available to students with visual and hearing impairments at the Federal University of Lafia remain limited and largely confined to basic levels of provision. Most respondents reported access only to basic library resources and services, with relatively few indicating the availability of intermediate or advanced resources. This finding is consistent with previous studies on the accessibility of library and information services for persons with disabilities, including Selema et al. (2025) and Munemo and Chiwanza (2024), which highlight continuing concerns regarding the provision of accessible resources and services. This suggests that accessibility within the university library remains largely reactive rather than intentionally embedded within library service delivery. Rather than anticipating the diverse information needs of students with visual and hearing impairments, existing services appear to provide only minimal support, leaving important accessibility gaps unaddressed.

Students also perceived the available library resources and services as largely inadequate. Respondents reported the absence of appropriate reading materials, insufficiently inclusive library services, and a lack of specialized personnel to support students with visual and hearing impairments. Dissatisfaction with staff support further suggests that accessibility extends beyond the availability of resources to include the capacity of library personnel to provide appropriate assistance. This finding is consistent with previous studies on users' experiences and perceptions of library services for persons with disabilities, including Goroba et al. (2023), Pandey and Pandey (2021), and Ding et al. (2020), which highlight the importance of accessible resources, appropriate support, and inclusive library services. Collectively, these findings indicate that barriers to information access arise not only from limited resources but also from institutional practices and service delivery arrangements that fail to adequately support students with visual and hearing impairments.

These findings align with the Social Model of Disability, which argues that disability is produced primarily through environmental and institutional barriers rather than individual impairments. From this perspective, the limited availability of accessible information formats, assistive technologies, and trained personnel reflects shortcomings in institutional design rather than limitations inherent to students themselves. The findings therefore suggest that improving accessibility requires organizational and policy reforms that embed inclusive practices into routine

library service delivery rather than relying on students to adapt to inaccessible environments.

The findings are consistent with previous studies by Selema et al. (2025), Pandey and Pandey (2021), and Ding et al. (2020), which similarly reported that many academic libraries lack accessible information resources, assistive technologies, and adequately trained personnel to support students with disabilities. These studies likewise identified institutional barriers as significant constraints to equitable access to information. However, studies by Smadi (2022), Younis (2022), and Phukubje and Ngoepe (2017) demonstrate that where institutions invest in accessible infrastructure, specialized support services, and staff capacity building, students with disabilities report greater satisfaction and improved access to library services. Together, these studies suggest that inclusive library services are achievable when accessibility is treated as an institutional responsibility rather than an individual accommodation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the library at the Federal University of Lafia provides only foundational support for students with visual and hearing impairments and lacks many of the structural conditions necessary for genuinely inclusive information services. Strengthening accessibility therefore requires more than expanding available resources; it also demands institutional commitment to inclusive policies, accessible technologies, staff development, and service practices that enable equitable participation for all library users.

Conclusion

This study concludes that although the Federal University of Lafia library provides basic library resources and services for students with visual and hearing impairments, these provisions remain inadequate to support equitable access to information. The findings revealed limited availability of specialized resources and assistive technologies, insufficiently inclusive library services, and inadequate staff support, indicating that significant barriers to information access persist within the university library.

Viewed through the Social Model of Disability, these findings suggest that many of the challenges experienced by students arise from institutional and service-related barriers rather than individual impairments. Improving accessibility therefore requires deliberate institutional action through inclusive policies, accessible information resources, assistive technologies, and continuous staff capacity building. Strengthening these areas will contribute to a more inclusive library environment that promotes equitable participation and supports the academic success of students with visual and hearing impairments.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen inclusive library service delivery for students with visual and hearing impairments at the Federal University of Lafia.

1. The university library should expand the availability of accessible information resources and assistive technologies for students with visual and hearing impairments. This should include accessible formats such as Braille materials, audiobooks, captioned resources, and appropriate assistive technologies, with regular review and updating to ensure their continued relevance and effectiveness.
2. The university should strengthen the capacity of library personnel through regular training in disability inclusion, accessible information services, and the effective support of students with visual and hearing impairments. Mechanisms for obtaining regular feedback from students should also be institutionalized to support continuous improvement of inclusive library services.

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