

Awareness of Information Resources and Services Among Persons With Disability in Public Libraries of Kano State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose: The study sought to determine the awareness of information resources and services among persons with disability in public libraries in Kano State, Nigeria.

Design/methodology/approach: Survey research design was adopted. A population of 130 persons with disability was studied. Data collected were analyzed using percentage, mean and standard deviation.

Research limitation(s): This study is specifically on persons with disability in public libraries in Kano State, Nigeria. The result will not be applicable to other type of library users without disability. Therefore, findings of this study can only be generalized to library users with disability.

Key finding(s): The findings of this study revealed that majority of persons with disability were aware of a number of information resources but they were not aware of the specific services as most of them were either new to them or not available in the libraries.

Practical implication(s): The findings of this study have some implications for public library service delivery to persons with disability. It implies that public libraries need to do more in creating awareness of various library services that are suitable for persons with disability.

Contribution to knowledge: This study highlights proper library awareness approaches that can be adopted by public librarians in their attempt to promote the image of their libraries and attract persons with disability to visit libraries and utilize the collection of materials and services.

Paper type: Research.

Keyword(s): Awareness; Information resources; Special services; Public libraries; Persons with disability; Nigeria.

Introduction

In the 21st century, access to information resources and services among persons with disability is crucial. However, this fundamental role of access will not be successful without proper awareness of resources, services and programmes that are available in libraries. Raising awareness of information resources and services is a technique designed and implemented to attract patrons to the library. Therefore, awareness is meant to bring together persons with disability to use the library collections. Familiarity with information resources and services helps persons with disability to develop a favourable disposition towards libraries. It is through awareness that persons with disability form a patronage intention, visit libraries, browse collections, make inquiry and utilize information resources and services for the purpose of education, information, entertainment and self-development.

According to Disabled World (2018) the concept of disability is used to refer to individual functioning, including physical impairment, sensory impairment, cognitive impairment, intellectual impairment, mental illness and various types of chronic disease. However, the Australian Network on Disability (2020) stated that disability does not mean that a person with disability is unable to perform all the important requirements of a job and exceed the expectations of their employer. Persons with disability come in a variety of shapes, sizes, colours, gender and cultures. The only thing that separates a person with a disability is that, for one reason or another, they are unable to do certain things in the same way as the mainstream of society. They may require some form of adaptation or alteration to assist them to overcome the effect of their disability. These types of people are categorized as follows:

1. Physical: affects a person's mobility or dexterity
2. Intellectual: affects a person's abilities to learn
3. Psychiatric: affects a person's thinking processes

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4. Sensory: affects a person's ability to hear or see
5. Neurological: this results in the loss of some bodily or mental functions

Generally, Persons with disability need support services in every way in terms of better access to opportunities in schools, libraries and hospitals. Over time different types of libraries have been recognizing the fundamental right of persons with disability and were striving to deliver wide range of information resources and services that are suitable for them. Libraries are equally opening door of opportunities to persons with disability to help them survive in the modern society. Persons with disability are expected to be assisted by libraries to use information resources and services thereby improving their personal skills and standard of living. Consequently, this function has vividly portrays the central position of libraries as key players in the lives of persons with disability in the 21st century.

According to Adetoro (2014), “in many African countries including Nigeria, one of the earliest types of libraries was the public library. The colonialist encouraged the development of public library in Nigeria”. As such, public libraries were the first institutions established to provide information services to the general public free of charge. However, studies have shown that public libraries in the country were particularly concern about the right of persons with disability as regards to provision and access to information resources and services. For instance, a study conducted in two public libraries in South-Eastern region of Nigeria by Iroeze, Umannakwe and Eze (2017) revealed that the benefits of services provided by libraries to persons with disability are remarkable. The authors reported that the beginning of these services in the South-Eastern region of Nigeria can be traced to the early 1900s, while the modern library services started in the region with the establishment of public library services for the handicapped in 1989.

However, awareness of information resources and services among persons with disability in Nigerian public libraries seems to be a major challenge. The lack of awareness of information resources and services in libraries as reported by Namugera (2014) can be caused by poor communication, inadequate interaction between users and the library, coupled with the library's failure to apply marketing strategies to promote its services. Creating awareness is part of user education as such Agyen-Gyasi (2008) opined that awareness allows patrons to be conversant with services of the library, facilities and organization, information resources and search strategies.

On the other hand, public library can professionally promote awareness of information resources and services among persons with disability if the library can adopts a defined strategy which can be used to create a suitable environment to enhance user understanding of the entire library system including the diverse collections, services and programmes. Awareness is an essential component that can bring person with disability closer to the library. It will make persons with disability to be conversant with the library and its collection thereby developing the necessary confidence to utilize the information resources. In a similar way persons with disability will be acquainted with the benefits which the library can offer.

Persons with Disability in Nigeria

Global statistics show that persons with disability formed 15 percent of the entire world population and among which 80 percent live in developing countries. Persons with disability are people who are facing life challenges such as poverty, lack of employment, inadequate access to education and poor access to healthcare services. It has been noted that these difficult situation were mostly as a result of barriers to access information and necessary connection that will help them improve their lives, enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms. (World Bank, 2019; United Nations, 2006).

In Nigeria, the country's National Population Commission (NPC) has estimated that no fewer than 19 million Nigerians are living with disabilities (Premium Times, 2018). On January 23, 2019, the Nigerian government signed into law the discrimination against Person with Disability Act. The act prohibits all forms of discrimination against persons with disability (Iroanusi, 2019).

Kano State is the area of study for this research. The state is situated in Northern Nigeria. It was created from the defunct Northern Region in 1967. Kano is the largest city in Northern Nigeria and has been a commercial centre of the region with various economic activities. Kano State presently has a total number of 44 Local Government Areas. It has a total land area of 20,760sq kilometres. The law to protect the right

of persons with disability was signed by the state government in December 2018. The law emphasized on education, employment opportunities, health care and participation in politics (Adewale, 2019).

However, public library services will significantly enhance opportunities for persons with disability in Kano State, Nigeria. Therefore, this category of users should be made aware about the services, resources and programmes that the libraries are ready to provide.

Imperative for Creating Awareness of Library Services

Awareness of libraries is the fact of knowing about the existence of libraries and the services they render to their user community. Various ways of creating user awareness comprise formal and informal channels of communication. The formal communication is in form of marketing campaign meant to make persons with disability to notice, realize and appreciate libraries around them. The informal communication may include daily conversation, chatting and discussions with persons with disability so that they would recognize the existence of their libraries, services, facilities and programmes.

It is a tradition in public library that regular and potential patrons are made to be aware of what the library has in stock for them. Therefore, information about the activities of library is being publicized in order to create awareness. This according to Doucett (2008) is meant to inform anyone consider using the library about what makes it special and worth visiting. For instance, a meaningful story or news about the library will motivate potential users to come to the library because they are seeking what the library provides. Lansdale (2007) is of the view that if communities are unaware of a public library services, they cannot take advantage of those services, and return on public library investment necessarily suffers. The return on investment is critical to public libraries because it can pave the way for understanding why and how the library is so important to the community it serves. That is why many public libraries are investing in public relations functions as a critical aspect of their routine operations in order to create awareness of information resources and services.

Generally, libraries are establishing awareness through interaction with persons with disability, while several public relation activities such as library advertisement and publicity programmes can similarly enhance user awareness of information resources and services in libraries. Eduscapes (2017) stated that the library awareness campaign focuses on promoting awareness of the value of libraries, librarians and services that are offered at the library. Although public libraries are expected to cover the information needs of the general public, but not all users are aware of specific services. Dobransky and Hargittai (2006) maintain that if users are not aware of information resources and services, they are less likely to seek certain type of material in the library. In the same vein, lack of sufficient awareness of the format in which the information is packaged (prints, electronic or digital) may also hinder access to the library collections as well.

Similarly, a library may act as a community information resource centre and collect relevant information resources to meet the need of the people who are totally or partially unaware of the sources of information that are available. As a strategy, a public library can also create awareness through information support programme and motivate their local community to take responsibility for the development and dissemination of such programme to others. In the present digital age, a library can create computer awareness programmes and training about Internet to various categories of library users (Majumder, 2016).

However, lack of awareness seems to be a major problem preventing persons with disability to use information resources and services in many libraries. Hence, a good awareness initiative should come through effective communication with users. The services offered by a library must be well known to the present and potential users. Persons with disability should also be made aware of other programmes, activities and events that are happening in the library. A successful awareness convinces persons with disability to look for materials, seek reference assistance from librarian or participate in library events and activities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. Are persons with disability aware of information resources in public libraries in Kano State, Nigeria?
2. Are persons with disability aware of library services in public libraries in Kano State, Nigeria?
3. What are the challenges of awareness of information resources and services among persons with disability in public libraries in Kano State, Nigeria?

Methodology

The population for this study is 130 persons with disability. The population distribution consisted of visually challenged 29, hearing challenged 38 and mobility challenged 63 which made up of 130 persons with disability. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify and select the target population based on their availability and willingness to participate in the survey. Questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. It was designed in line with the objectives of the study. The response options on awareness of information resources in table 1 are YES/NO options. In table 2 of the analysis, the response preferences on awareness of library services are also YES/NO options while in table 3 the response choices on challenges of awareness of information resources and library services are (SA) Strongly Agree, (A) Agree, (U) Undecided, (D) Disagree, (SD) Strongly Disagree. The reliability and validity of the instrument was established using pilot test in a small sample of 20 persons with disability. Cronbach’s Alpha method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument which yielded coefficients of 0.875, 0.931 and 0.745 for the different scale items. Copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researcher with the help of three research assistants through special schools and to members of the association of persons with disability. The set of questions in the questionnaire were read to visually impaired persons and their responses were recorded appropriately. However, out of 130 questionnaires administered, four copies were inappropriately filled by the respondents; this has reduced the number of completed copies of the questionnaire used for data analysis to 126 which constitutes 97 percent of the entire population.

Findings of the Study

Data collected with respect to the research questions of the study were analyzed and presented in below tables.

Table 1. Awareness of Persons with Disability about Information Resources (n=126)

#	Information resource	Yes	% of Yes	No	% of No	Decision
1	Easy-to-read text	102	81%	24	19%	Aware
2	Large prints	93	74%	33	26%	Aware
3	CDs/DVDs	96	76%	30	24%	Aware
4	Braille	113	90%	13	10%	Aware
5	Accessible websites	51	40%	75	60%	Not aware
6	Audio tapes	76	60%	50	40%	Aware
7	Sign language videos	33	26%	93	74%	Not aware
8	Digital talking books	30	24%	96	76%	Not aware
9	Video tapes	73	58%	53	42%	Aware
10	Tactile picture books	48	38%	78	62%	Not aware

Data in Table 1 above show that respondents were aware of information resources such as easy-to-read text with a percentage of (81%), large prints (74%), CDs/DVDs (76%), Braille (90%), audio tapes (60%) and video tapes (58%). Also, the respondents were not aware of accessible websites with a percentage of (60%), sign language videos (74%), digital talking book (76%) and tactile picture books (62%). On the whole, majority of persons with disability were aware of information resources in public libraries in Kano State.

Table 2. Awareness of Persons with Disability about Library Services (n=126)

#	Library service	Yes	% of Yes	No	% of No	Decision
1	Book reservation services	84	67%	42	33%	Aware
2	Referral services	27	21%	99	79%	Not aware
3	Free home library services	11	9%	115	91%	Not aware
4	Internet services	96	76%	30	24%	Aware
5	Reprographic services	31	25%	95	75%	Not aware
6	Mobile library services	42	33%	84	67%	Not aware
7	Consultancy services	9	7%	117	93%	Not aware
8	Lending services	112	89%	14	11%	Aware
9	Face to face reading services	13	10%	113	90%	Not aware
10	Current awareness services	19	15%	107	85%	Not aware

Data in Table 2 above show that respondents were aware of public library services such as book reservation services with a percentage of (67%), Internet services (76%) and lending services (89%). On the other hand, the respondents were not aware of referral services with a percentage of (79%), free home library services (91%), reprographic services (75%) mobile library services (67%), consultancy services (93%), face to face reading services (90%) and current awareness services (85%). On the whole, majority of persons with disability were not aware of library services in Kano State.

Data in Table 3 below reveal that, the respondents strongly agreed that three out of five listed items (items 41, 42 and 44) with mean ratings ranging from 4.71 to 4.92 were challenges to awareness of information resources and services while respondents agree that the remaining two items (item 43 and 45) with mean ratings of 3.56 and 3.61 were the challenges to awareness of information resources and services. The grand mean of 4.34 means that persons with disability agreed that the items listed were challenges to awareness of information resources and services in public libraries in Kano State. The standard deviation for all the items is within the same range which shows that the respondents were having consistent opinion.

Table 3. Challenges of Awareness of Information Resources and Services (n=126)

#	Challenge	X	SD	Decision
1	There is lack of library publicity through appropriate media channels	4.71	0.67	SA
2	There is lack of library awareness tour	4.92	0.44	SA
3	There is lack of library book exhibition	3.58	0.51	A
4	There is lack of awareness through effective partnership arrangement with associations of persons with disability	4.86	0.60	SA
5	There is lack of telephone call and SMS alert	3.61	0.87	A

Discussion of Results

Awareness of Information Resources

Finding of the study in table 1 showed that majority of persons with disability were aware of easy-to-read text, large prints, CDs/DVDs, Braille collections, audio and video tapes. This most likely was as a result of the fact that, these information resources were commonly available not only in the libraries but also available in the market. The State library has audio visual section and Braille collections for visually impaired persons.

On the other hand, the study revealed that respondents were not aware of accessible websites, sign language videos, digital talking books and tactile picture books. This may also be for the reason that, the State public libraries do not have effective digital and Internet connectivity to provide services to persons with disability. Sometimes the libraries have poor collection development for most current special resources which may have an effect on the awareness of their users.

Awareness of Library Services

Finding of the study as shown in table 2 indicated that majority of persons with disability were not aware of referral service, free home library service, reprographic service, mobile library service, consultancy service, face to face reading service and current awareness services. This most likely was for the reason that, a number of library services like face to face reading services, consultancy services, and home delivery services were almost new to many persons with disability or may not be available in the libraries at present.

The finding of the study also revealed that respondents were aware of reservation services, Internet services and lending services. This was because the public libraries have been providing these services long time ago and the State library board is the only agency that provides free book lending services to the general public.

Challenges of Awareness of Information Resources and Services

In table 3 the study finding revealed that the respondents agree that lack of library publicity through appropriate media channels, lack of library awareness tour and effective partnership arrangement with associations of persons with disability, lack of library book exhibition and lack of telephone call and SMS alert were the challenges to the awareness of information resources and services. This shows that communication gap is a major challenge facing the libraries in an attempt to publicize information resources and services to persons with disability. The lack of effective partnership arrangement with the associations of persons with disability clearly shows that the library has failed to include stakeholders in the process of awareness of information resources and services.

Conclusion

The study determined awareness of information resources and services among persons with disability in public libraries in Kano State, Nigeria. From the finding of this study, it was concluded that majority of persons with disability were aware of easy-to-read text, large prints, CDs/DVDs, Braille collections, audio and video tapes. Concerning library services, the study indicated that majority of persons with disability were not aware of referral service, free home library service, reprographic service, mobile library service, consultancy service, face to face reading service and current awareness services. Also, the survey results show that lack of library publicity through appropriate media channels, lack of library awareness tour and effective partnership with associations of persons with disability, lack of library exhibition and lack of telephone call and SMS alert were the challenges of awareness of information resources and services among persons with disability.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Considering that majority of persons with disability in Kano State public libraries were not aware of accessible websites, sign language videos, digital talking books and tactile picture books, the Kano State public library management should provide these resources and execute library awareness programmes such as collections exhibition, display, lectures and special events for persons with disability. The public librarians in Kano State should also provide full advice, tips, library signs, audio announcement and photos that will attract patronage and help persons with disability to know more about the collections in the public libraries.
2. Given that majority of persons with disability in public libraries in Kano State were not aware of referral service, free home library service, reprographic service, mobile library service, consultancy service, face to face reading service and current awareness services, the Kano State public library management should provide these services and use various channels and means such as television, radio, Internet, print media, email messages and library friends to spread information to persons with disability and to raise awareness on the services available for them in the libraries. This will help influence their familiarity and make them acquainted with the services thereby making informed choices about the range of services available in the libraries.

3. Given that persons with disability agree that lack of library publicity, lack of library tour, lack of partnership with association of persons with disability, lack of library book exhibition, lack of telephone call and SMS alert were the challenges to awareness of information resources and services in public libraries in Kano State, Nigeria. This require the State public libraries to use the appropriate media channels such as the State radio and television stations, the social media and library friends to disseminate news about the library collections and services for the benefit of persons with disability.

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