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**Practice of Library and Information Services for Differently Able Community in the
University Libraries of Assam**

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Abstract: *The study aims to examine various Library and Information Services that are being delivered for the Differently Able Community in the selected University libraries of Assam. The study highlights the special services, different types of equipment and infrastructural facilities that the libraries have provided for the Differently Able Users. The study also focuses on the physical barriers which are faced by the Differently Able users and the purpose of Information seeking in the libraries. The finding shows that there is an urgent need and improvement of the services delivered for the Differently Able users by the surveyed libraries. The University libraries under the study should switch over from the traditional environment to the modern ICT environment to cope up with the ever-changing world.*

Keywords: **Library and Information Services, Differently Able, University Libraries, Assam.**

1. Introduction:

Libraries are always recognized as an information provider to all cadre of user communities irrespective of their differential abilities. With the use of the latest technologies, it becomes easier for the librarians to provide a supportive hand to the differently able user community in the libraries. Disability can be referred to as an unhealthy physical and psychological condition that limits the human being's movements, senses or to perform general activities in daily life. It can also be defined as meaning that one cannot learn easily. Service provided by Academic libraries for the differently able person who defined as those with a greater degree of visual impairment than would be associated with the description partially sighted.

1.1. Types of Disabilities-

- i. Visual Disabilities;
- ii. Hearing and Speech Disabilities;
- iii. Cognitive Disabilities;
- iv. Physical Disabilities;
- v. Brain Disabilities;
- vi. Spinal Cord Disabilities;
- vii. Learning Disabilities.

1.2. Special services provided to Differently Able Community by the Library Staff-

- i. Home Delivery service to disabled persons who are unable to visit the library;
- ii. Providing Outreach Services and Care facilities;
- iii. Providing Reading Room facility for the users who have difficulties in reading or scanning the texts to make them accessible on a computer with a screen reader;
- iv. Consultations for persons with Reading Disabilities on a regularly scheduled basis.

1.3. Current Status of Library Provision for Differently Able in India:

According to Indian Census Reports 2011, there are around 2.19 core persons with disabilities and millions of people suffering from some kind of disabilities. India is trying to all possible support for the differently able persons by executing a “National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006”, or by providing reservations in different sectors like education, employment, government schemes and establishing institutions and organizations like National Institute of Visually Handicapped situated at Dehradun to empower persons with disabilities with proper skills. Given this background, it is evident that India is committed to support, encourage and empower its large population of the Differently-Able community.

2. Objectives of the Study:

- i. To find out the availability of special Library and Information Services for the Differently Able Community in the selected University Libraries of Assam.
- ii. To examine the various assistive equipment related to Differently Able Community in the libraries under the study.
- iii. To study the Information Needs and Information Seeking Behaviour of Differently Able Community of the surveyed libraries.

3. Scope and Limitations of the Study:

The scope of this study mainly concerns with the special Library and Information Services for the Differently Able Community in Assam with special emphasis on selected University Libraries of Assam. It examines the factors that are responsible for the growth and development of library services for the Differently Able Community of Assam. The study is not far away beyond the limitations, which can be drawn as only Four University Libraries situated in Assam, India. The University Libraries which are taken for study are:

- i. Krishna Kanta Handiqui Library, Gauhati University (KKHLGU), Assam, India;
- ii. Lakshminath Bezbaruah Library, Dibrugarh University (LNBLDU), Assam, India;
- iii. Central Library, Tezpur University (CLTU), Assam, India;
- iv. Central Library, Assam Kaziranga University (CLAKU), Assam, India.

4. Methodology:

Total Four University libraries of Assam are purposively selected for the study. Primary data are collected through a structured questionnaire and personal observation also has been done to collect relevant information. The collected data for each category were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and calculated them in percentages. The data were tabulated using simple averages.

5. Literature Review:

Craven (2003) pointing out the information-seeking behaviour of blind and visually impaired people when using digital resources. **Irvall & Nielsen (2005)** discussed the infrastructural facilities for persons with different kinds of disabilities. **Cassner, Harris & Anaya (2011)** examined and compared the Academic Library websites for the differently able community. **Majinge & Stilwell (2013)** in their research paper highlighted various special library services to the visually impaired and wheelchairs users provided by the academic libraries of Tanzania. They also recommended that academic libraries should possess as a role model for social reform by introducing inclusive services to all users including people with disabilities. **Kumar & Majeed (2014)** described the most frequently used information sources by differently able students and identify the various methods adopted to locate information resources. **Naheem (2014)** described the various facilities and services provides to patrons with disabilities. He also discussed Special software like JAWS, Kurzweil, etc. which are used for the disabled community. **Bhue & Bhoi (2015)** recognized the role of Universities Libraries in the implication of legal framework and proper guidelines of library authority; for proper deliberation of library services to the disabled students. **Solanki & Mandaliya (2016)** emphasized on providing various assistive services for the disable users along with proper infrastructural facilities and special types of equipment. **Rayini (2017)** described various library services related to visually impaired users. The author also included the information needs and the challenges faced in using the special types of equipment by the visually impaired persons. Further, some suggestive guidelines were also recommended for improving the library and information services to visually impaired users in the libraries.

6. Analysis and Findings:

Table 1: Total Number Users in the Surveyed Libraries

<i>SL. No.</i>	<i>Name of the Library</i>	<i>Type of Users</i>					
		<i>Students</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Research Scholars</i>	<i>Differently Able Users</i>	<i>Others</i>	Σfi
1	KKHLGU	3397	364	1442	02	250	5455
2	LNBLDU	4528	203	349	02	292	5374
3	CLTU	4046	357	563	09	279	5254
4	CLAKU	2010	119	15	02	103	2249
Total Users		13981	1043	2369	15	924	$\Sigma fix_i=18332$
Average (%)		76.27%	5.69%	12.92%	0.08%	5.04%	

Differently Able Users: Table-1 shows that out of the total users of the surveyed University Libraries, the average of differently able users is only 0.08% which is the least value compared to the other users. The majority of the Library users are the students in the Universities.

Table 2: Different kinds of Differently Able Users in the Surveyed libraries

<i>Name of the University Library</i>	<i>Blind and Visually impaired</i>	<i>Deaf and Hearing-impaired</i>	<i>Learning impaired</i>	<i>Physically impaired</i>
KKHLGU	N	N	N	Y
LNBLDU	Y	Y	N	Y
CLTU	Y	N	N	Y
CLAKU	N	N	N	Y
Total	2	1	0	4

(Note: Y= Y & N= No)

Different kinds of Differently Able Users: The above table reveals that the majority of the differently able users are physically impaired whereas Blind and Visually impaired and Deaf and Hearing-impaired users are less than that in the surveyed libraries. There is no Learning Impaired user in the surveyed libraries.

Table 3: Provision of Separate Section for Differently Able Community

<i>Name of the University Library</i>	<i>Section Available</i>	
	<i>Y</i>	<i>N</i>
KKHLGU	-	✓
LNBLDU	✓	-
CLTU	✓	-
CLAKU	-	✓
TOTAL	2	2
Average (%)	50%	50%

Separate Section: Table-3 shows that 50% of the surveyed libraries have a separate section for the differently able community to provide various library facilities related to them. And the rest of the libraries have provided various library services through their common sections of the library.

Table 4: Library Services provided for Differently Able in the Surveyed Libraries

<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Services</i>	<i>KKHLGU</i>	<i>LNBLDU</i>	<i>CLTU</i>	<i>CLAKU</i>
1	Retrieval of Information from the stacks	Y	Y	Y	Y
2	Photocopy Assistance	Y	Y	Y	Y
3.	Specialized Reference Service	N	Y	Y	Y
4	Delivery Service	Y	N	Y	Y
5	Modification of Lending Rules	N	Y	Y	N
6	Specialized Orientation Tours	N	Y	Y	Y
7	Telephone Request	N	Y	Y	Y
8	Discount for Online Searching	Y	Y	Y	N

9	Sign Language for the Hearing Impaired	N	N	Y	N
10	Braille Translation	N	Y	Y	N
11	Reformatting to Another Medium	N	Y	N	N
12	Wheelchair	N	Y	Y	N
13	Toilet	Y	Y	Y	Y
Total		5	11	12	7
Average (%)		38.46%	84.62%	92.31%	53.85%

(Note: Y= Y & N= No)

Library Services: From the above table, it can be said that all the surveyed libraries have to practice the various services related to Differently Able Users more or less.

Table 5: Types of Equipment available in the Surveyed Libraries

<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Types of Equipment</i>	<i>KKHLGU</i>	<i>LNBLDU</i>	<i>CLTU</i>	<i>CLAKU</i>
1	Scanner/ Reader	Y	Y	Y	Y
2	Braille Printer	N	Y	N	N
3	Keyboard Overlay	N	Y	Y	N
4	Hand-Held Scanner	N	Y	N	N
5	Speech Synthesis	N	N	N	N
6	Braille Typewriter	N	Y	N	N
7	TTY/TDD	N	N	N	N
8	Tape Recorder	N	N	N	N
Total		1	5	2	1
Average (%)		12.5%	62.5%	25%	12.5%

(Note: Y= Y & N= No)

Types of equipment: Regarding the availability of equipment (Table-5) for the Differently Able Users, they are not good enough in the surveyed libraries. There is an urgent need for such kind of equipment in the surveyed libraries for delivering better Library and Information Services to them.

Table 6: Categories of Physical Barriers which are eliminated in the Surveyed Libraries

<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>KKHLGU</i>	<i>LNBLDU</i>	<i>CLTU</i>	<i>CLAKU</i>
1	Entryways	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Restrooms	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Water Functions	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Elevators	-	✓	✓	-
5	Stack Aisle Widths	-	-	-	-
6	Telephone	✓	✓	-	✓
7	Signage	-	-	✓	-
8	Service Counter Heights	-	✓	✓	-
9	Computers Workstations	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Ramps	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Door hardware	-	✓	✓	-
12	Toilet	✓	✓	✓	✓
Total		7	10	10	7
Average (%)		58.33%	83.33%	83.33%	58.33%

Removing of Physical Barriers: From the above table, it can be said that almost all the libraries somewhat can able to remove or abolish the physical barriers which are regarded as a hindrance for providing Library and Information Services to the Differently Able Community.

Table 7: Purpose of Information Seeking by Differently Able Users in Surveyed Libraries

<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Name of the Library</i>				
		<i>KKHLGU</i>	<i>LNBLDU</i>	<i>CLTU</i>	<i>CLAKU</i>	<i>Total</i>
1	To Update Knowledge	1	2	1	2	6
2	For solve immediate practical problem	-	1	-	2	3
3	Academic and Research Purpose	1	1	1	2	5
4	For career development	1	2	1	2	6

Information Seeking: The above table shows that most of the Differently Able Users seek information to update knowledge, for career development and their Academic and Research purpose.

8. Conclusion:

From the above, it can be concluded that Electronic Information Services should be included in all the University libraries for Differently Able Community in Assam to meet all requirements of them. The Differently Able users cannot easily adopt the specially designed Electronic Information Services due to complicity found in the latest hardware and software. These complications are such a huge in Assam that the assistive staffs need to be there either to help out or give special training to the disabled people. It is because using such equipment by individuals is very difficult without such guidance. In this connection, it is also the fact that the lack of proper Training of the Assistive staff, Lack of interest of the Authority and the Financial constraints are the major factors of slow adaptation of specially designed available Electronic information service in the libraries. But these equipments are extremely helpful and fruitful for the Differently Able people. The choice, requirements, and demands of the users are changing and increasing rapidly in modern times. To fulfill these requirements and demands of the users these University libraries of Assam need to be changed and come out from the traditional age to modern ICT age.

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