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# Library Services and Resources for the Patrons with Disabilities: a study in selected College Libraries of Jorhat District of Assam, India

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# Library services and resources for the patrons with disabilities: a study in selected College libraries of Jorhat district of Assam, India

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**Abstract:**

A survey based study was undertaken in selected College libraries in Jorhat District of Assam, India to find out the current status of services and resources for the patrons with disabilities. A structured questionnaire was used to collect information from the librarians of the Colleges under the study. Convenience sampling method was used to select the libraries to be part of the study. Data coding and descriptive analysis of data was done using Microsoft Excel. Results show that majority of the College Libraries in Jorhat district are not in a position to provide adequate services to patrons with disabilities. Results also show lack of a common policy among the College libraries regarding the patrons with disabilities. Constraints for implementing services for patrons with disabilities include lack of demand from patrons, lack of trained library manpower, financial constraints, and apathy of the higher authority.

**Keywords:** Disabilities, Patrons, College libraries, Library services, Library resources, Adaptive technologies

## 1. Introduction

Providing access to information for all users, irrespective of their physical disabilities, is a requirement for all libraries. Libraries are service organizations which give services without discrimination to their numerous users, including differently able

people. Inequalities prevent individuals who are discriminated against from enjoying their privileges, remembering the option to get to data assets for libraries and data focuses. The option to get to infrastructure, sources and services with no constraints is one of the major privileges of any general public. Anyway it is clear that individuals with disabilities face difficulties with regards to getting to libraries and utilizing their assets.

The study about the difficulties faced by the librarians to provide services to the differently able persons is very much important. From the review of earlier research study in this area it is evident that several studies have been carried out to understand such issues. According to Wijayaratne and Amarasekara (2015), there is lack of interest from the part of librarians to provide specialized services to the differently able persons. Studies also reveal that there is lack of awareness among librarians and library staff about special needs of the differently able persons. According to the United Nations Secretariat for the convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2013), 10% of the world's population lives with a disability of some kind. Therefore, it is very much important that each and every library have policy ready and special services and resources for the differently abled users.

Literature reviews conducted so far has shown that study on services for differently able persons in the college libraries of Jorhat district has yet not been done. Therefore the present study was conceived to investigate the availability of specialized services and resources for the differently able persons in selected college libraries in Jorhat district. The study would also throw light on the awareness about differently able users and their needs among the librarians and library staff in the college libraries of Jorhat district.

## 2. Literature Review

Lawal- Solarin (2012), in his survey finds that the physically challenged students in Academic libraries in Ogun state, Nigeria are not adequately taken care of in the institutions of higher learning. Similarly, the analysis of the collected data by Bano, Shah and Masud (2013), in their quantitative study confirmed that there was no association or

relationship between provisions and supports for students with disabilities in libraries of Degree Awarding Institutions (DAI) and Rehabilitation Centre (RC).

Majinge (2014), in her research focused on access to information resources and the layout of library buildings in particular and by using both quantitative and qualitative methods her study confirmed that academic libraries in Tanzania provide services to people with visual impairments and in wheelchairs which are not inclusive or universal. Likewise a survey method was done by Ekwelem (2013), regarding library services to specially able students in the digital era showed that the only electronic resources are available to library users with visual impairment are taped books and Online public access catalogue (OPAC). Moreover, Naheem (2014), in his study found that the services like helping patrons to retrieve, copy, checkout, check-in, and renew library materials are provided in the Pondicherry University Library system.

Cassner, Maxey-Harris and Anaya (2011), in their study covered 99 ARL libraries. His study examined and compared academic library websites for the differently abled and the finding of the study indicates that a large majority of ARL libraries have a webpage for people with disabilities. Similarly by analyzing and discussing the data of the qualitative study, Khachatryan (2014), concluded that e- accessibility is something new at the NLA (National Library of Armenia) and the NLA doesn't provide equally available knowledge, resources, services to patrons with disabilities due to lack of continuous funding and support from the state.

Researchers, Wijayaratne and Amarasekara (2011), in their survey that was conducted among the librarians of the national universities of Sri Lanka found that there is lack of interest from the part of librarians and it is mainly due to the small number of differently-abled students get into the universities.

Echezona, Osadebe and Asogwa (2011), in their study, which was to identify the nature, challenges and strategies of the library services to the physically challenged revealed that library services to the physically challenged exist in form of reading materials in different format, oral reading services, circulation services such as renewal and reservation through telephone, etc.

Through an exploratory survey done to investigate the library programs for children with disabilities in Missouri Public Libraries, Poulson (1994), found that many libraries address the special needs of people with disabilities in their mission statements.According to a survey done to investigate assistive technologies for people with disabilities in National Capital Region libraries of India by Sanaman and Kumar (2014), covered 15 libraries and depicted the lack of facilities in National Capital Region Libraries of India. Likewise, Todaro (2005), in her survey which covered 20 different libraries throughout Argentina found that these libraries are not in a position to provide the best library services for visually impaired and physically handicapped individuals.

Iroeze, Umunnakwe and Eze (2017) in their study regarding the origin and challenges of library services for the physically challenged in South-East, Nigeria uncovered the presence of just 2 libraries for the persons with disabilities in the South-East, Nigeria where Braille books, enormous print books, audio book, twin vision books, gesture based communication books are the widely usable reading assets in those libraries. However, in general the services and resources for the patrons with disabilities are mostly outdated.

Bonnici and Maatta (2009), in their survey identified human resources and information technologies as major challenges to the future of information access for disabled persons.

### 3. Methodology

The present study is based on survey methodology. The methodology of the research will involve a detailed primary information collection. Through convenience sampling technique 10 college libraries are selected from Jorhat District.

The current study began with a detailed literature search. For further research, the researcher is heavily depended on primary data collection from the college librarians. A questionnaire is constructed in the process of data collection and it is designed both in open and closed access. The questionnaire is distributed among the librarians of the selected college libraries and the investigator personally visited the libraries to have speedy data collection.

The survey is a technique for gathering data or information as revealed by people. Surveys are a series of inquiries that are directed to explore respondents who answer the inquiries themselves. Since the participants are giving the data, it is alluded to as self-report information. The study method can be broadly categorized into three: mail survey, telephone survey and personal interview. The present study is based on the personal interview. The researcher preferred the survey methodology for the study because it is cost effective and data collection is much easier with surveys than the other research methods.

In choosing the sample area of the research study, the researcher preferred the convenience sampling technique. The convenience sampling which is additionally known as availability or opportunity sampling is a sort of non-probability sampling strategy that depends on information assortment from population individuals who are advantageously accessible to take an interest in investigation. Convenience sampling is a type sampling where the first available primary data source will be used for the research without additional requirements.

For the primary data collection, the questionnaire method is used as an instrument for data collection process. The questionnaire is designed which include questions based on general information of the library, specialized questions relating to the services available for people with disabilities. The questionnaire also consisted of both open and close access questions. But close access questions are more than the open access questions.

The questionnaire is distributed among the librarians of the 10(ten) selected college libraries. The researcher received effective response from the college libraries. All the selected 10(ten) college libraries cooperated in a nice way which helped in smooth gathering of the information by the researcher.

Data collected is further analyzed by using appropriate statistical tool Excel. The gathered information is evaluated in the Excel worksheet and presented in various tables and graphs.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Library services and adaptive equipment or technologies provision for the patrons of disabilities in the selected college libraries of Jorhat district.

As the foremost objective is to highlight the services and resources provided by the 10(ten) selected college libraries of Jorhat district to the differently abled users. And the current study revealed that 30% of the selected 10(ten) college libraries provide services to their differently abled users. The services that they provide to the patrons with disabilities are- Retrieval of materials from the stacks, Photocopy assistance, Specialized reference service, Delivery service, Modification of lending rules, Specialized orientation tours, Telephone requests, Discount for online searching, Sign language for hearing impaired, Braille translation, and Reformatting to another medium. The retrieval of materials from the stacks, photocopy assistance and the specialized reference service are the most common services (70%) provided to the differently-abled users of these libraries.

Moreover, though the percentage of college libraries is low out of the selected 10(ten) college libraries in providing services to the differently abled people, but in eliminating physical barriers in order to provide access to library collections and services, the findings indicated that maximum of the college libraries have worked upon it. The majority (50%) of them have made changes with regard to entryways. The second highest physical barriers that the libraries have responded (40%) are restrooms, telephones and computer workstations. And the third highest is the elevators, with regard to which the libraries have made changes in order to provide access to library collections and services.

Regarding the availability of adaptive equipment or technologies in the library for the patrons with disabilities, it can be noticed from the current study that the selected 10(ten) colleges are not in adequate position to implement major adaptive equipment or technologies in their libraries. Maximum of the college libraries responded negatively. And from the mentioned adaptive equipment or technologies in the questionnaire, 70% responded to CCTV, 60% responded to scanner/reader, 30% responded to a tape recorder and 10% responded to hand held scanner and keyboard overlay. None of the libraries

have responded to the adaptive equipment and technologies like screen-enlargement, speech synthesis, braille printer, braille typewriter and TTY/TTD.

In addition, according to the survey findings, most of the colleges (80%) do not possess any reserved area in their library building designated for specialized library services and adaptive equipment except 2 (20%) colleges. Moreover, only 40% of the 10(ten) selected colleges have designed their library building and also possesses plans for evacuating persons with disabilities in case of emergency.

## 4.2 Availability of library policy for services to differently abled persons

It was evident from the current findings that majority (60%) of the selected college libraries do not possess any kind of written policy for services to differently abled persons. And out of the remaining 40% of the selected college libraries, 20% of them possess the written policy for differently abled patrons and other 20% of the college libraries included such provision in overall library policy.

## 4.3 Types of disabilities addressed through the specialized services provided

The findings of the current study revealed that the most common type of disability that the libraries addressed is the blind and visually impaired as 50% of the college libraries have responded to it. Remaining 50% have addressed the other types of disabilities like deaf and hearing impaired, learning impaired and physically impaired.

## 4.4 Constraints behind libraries' inability to provide specialized services to the differently abled users

It has been mentioned above that majority of the college libraries have responded negatively in providing specialized services to the differently abled users. Therefore, the findings of current study confirmed that receiving no demand from the users is the most common constraint behind libraries' inability to provide specialized services as supported by the 70% college libraries. 30% have no trained library personnel to provide such services. Moreover due to financial constraints 20% are not being able to provide special services or adaptive equipment to their users and 10% are not aware of such services available for the patrons with disabilities.

In addition, from the current study it can also be noticed that there is lack of interest of the library staff in discovering the needs of patrons with disabilities and letting them know about specialized services offered to them. Only 20% of the college libraries have mentioned of conducting user study to discover the needs of the differently abled persons and also informed their differently abled users about the specialized services offered to them.

## 4.5 Availability of trained librarian and library staff to deliver services to the patrons with disabilities

The current study also found that the librarians of the colleges under study are not trained to implement, manage and deliver services and resources to fulfill the need of the patrons with disabilities. The study also supports the claim of lack of availability of trained library staff in adequate numbers to support the patrons with disabilities.

In addition, the findings of the current study also noted that there was a lack of awareness and no encouragement and initiatives taken by the government to trained the library professionals specially in assisting the patrons with disabilities.

## 5. Conclusion

The research study examined the current status of services and resources provided by the selected 10(ten) college libraries of Jorhat district of Assam, India to the differently abled users. So the study can be concluded with this outcome that out of the ten college libraries only few of them (30%) are in adequate position to provide library services and resources to the patrons with disabilities. But the services and resources provided by the college libraries are far below the satisfactory level. Lack of policy, trained library manpower, awareness, interest and apathy of authority towards the patrons with disabilities needs to be addressed at the earliest.

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