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PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED STUDENTS AND THEIR INFORMATION NEEDS

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Abstract

This study is aimed at exploring the information needs of the physically challenged students in Kwara State Library, Ilorin, Nigeria. A Survey research design was adopted. Three objectives were set for the study and the interview was used to elicit information from respondents. Findings showed that 76% were male while 24% were female. Findings also reveal that the information needs of physically challenges students covered medical (94%), academic (82%), security (78%), news/current awareness, training/conference, seminar respectively (76%), transport/travel (53%), sport (55%), politics (18%), and (4%) among others. The study revealed that (82%) used the library occasionally while (18%) regularly. The study showed that (65%) found the information resources inadequate in meeting their needs. Problems confronting information needs of the physically challenged include, furniture in the library are not good for relaxing (100%), lack of infrastructural facility (82%), lack of information materials (76%), lack of architectural design (73%), staff attitude is discouraging (67%), library environment is not accommodating (61%), and others (41%). The paper concludes that library stakeholders,

National Library of Nigeria, Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria, Nigeria Library Association, Federal and State government should take into consideration the physically challenged amongst us, thereby ensuring suitable reading environment. Recommendations were put forward to enhance adequate and relevant information by the physically challenged.

Keywords: Physically Challenges, Information Needs, Public Library Students, Kwara State Library Board, Ilorin.

Introduction

. According to Aina (2002) public library users require different services; hence libraries are expected to provide a variety of services to them. He reiterated that the services demanded by public library users are not static; as users' needs are dynamic requiring different services at different times. Kumar (2008) posited that information may be required by users about local history, local industries and local personalities. According to him, a layman might require information for his survival. This is why the public library has come to play a significant role as a repository of knowledge to serve the information needs of all groups of people in the community where it is located. Therefore, there are persons with physical challenges in all parts of the world and at all levels in every society. The physical challenge has a substantial long-term adverse effect on one's ability to carry out normal day to day activities. Both the causes and the consequences of physical disability vary throughout the world. According to Sandhu et al. (2001), environmental, technical, and attitudinal barriers and consequent social exclusion reduce the opportunities for physically challenged to contribute productively to the household and the community and further increase the risk of falling into poverty.

The American with Disability Act (ADA) also requires that both architectural barriers in existing facilities and communication barriers that are structural in nature be removed as long as such removal is "readily achievable" (i.e. easily accomplished and able to be carried out without much difficulty or expense). On a general note, all these services, facilities, adaptations and modifications are necessary for most disabilities prevalent in our public libraries. The policy also said that libraries should include persons with disabilities as participants in the planning, implementing and evaluating library services, programs and facilities. However, for purpose of specifics, the researcher will restrict the discourse on information needs of the physically challenged students at Kwara State Public Library Board, Ilorin.

Background Information of Kwara State Library Board, Nigeria.

The Kwara State Public Library Board has the headquarters in Ilorin, Kwara State Capital of Nigeria and two Divisional Libraries at Jebba and Offa areas of Kwara State. It is a Kwara State government establishment with the sole aim of providing qualitative and adequate reading resources for the people of Kwara State. The Kwara State Library was established in 1968 following the creation of the state in May 29, 1967. With the emergence of Kwara State in 1967, the former Northern region was divided into six states out of which emerged Kwara State with Ilorin as capital. Following the creation of Kwara State the Federal ministry of information contacted the British Ministry of Overseas Development (B.M.O.D) asked for the help of a library adviser to come and assist in dividing the assets of the regional library into six newly created Northern states Mr. Robert Pearce was therefore assigned to come to Nigeria to help in division of the regional library assets. Pearce in his submission of 1968 stated the objective of the library service which he recommended for the new state.

These objectives are that; there should be public library service to aid education development. To do this, the service should stock books for primary and early secondary school children to improve their reading ability in English. It should also attempt to provide a direct service to part-time students and those who wish to prepare themselves for further formal studies. In consultation with community Development officers, the service should provide books, which will support the social and educational aim of their project. As soon as it becomes apparent in 1967 that states were created, the senior Librarian in Kaduna Mrs. S. A. Mold made a decision to decentralize the services of the regional library. He deployed a qualified Librarian Mr. Popoola was deployed to Ilorin as the first Kwara State Librarian. With were assistant library officer and five library clerks toward the middle of 1967, the senior Librarian in Kaduna Mr. S. A. Mold made the tour to Ilorin to meet Native Authority Officers? As a result of his discussion, the court building of the Native Authority was vacated for the library. This was approved for the period of six months until December 1967 when the reader services division moved to Red Cross building along Offa Road leading to the government printing press. As previously mentioned, the administrative and technical section of the library, having moved from one temporary location to another then settled in the former Ministry of Establishment and Training building (a fabricated building). During this period the state library services has continued to change hands from Governor's office to Ministry of information and culture vice versa, these changes of venue continued with the Ministry of information and culture. Presently library board is over sea by Kwara State Ministry of Education Science and Technology. However, the location and building of new state library

service complex came into being on 1st January 1984. This new state library complex was cited along Sulu Gambari Road, Ilorin, which now houses the administrative, technical services and reader services divisions.

The ultra-modern library complex was opened and commissioned by then commander in-chief of the Nigerian Armed forces and president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babaginda on the 21st November, 1990. The library was renovated and commissioned for second time by the president Chief Olusegun Obasanjo on October 11, 2006. (Kwara State Library Handbook, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

It is generally believed that public libraries suffer the most abandon in terms of funding and operational neglects. Meanwhile, provision of needed information to the physically challenged students at the right time and right format in the library is very essential for efficiency and effective services delivery. Physically challenged people have the same information needs as people without disability. Just as the people without disability might read a newspaper, listen to a CD and internet access etc. This study, however, intends to find out the information needs of the physically challenged students at Kwara State Library Board, Ilorin, (students using wheelchair, crutches, and braces for mobility) to the library. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that this study assess information needs of the physically challenged students, do physically challenges students make uses of the library resources and how relevant are these resources to their needs and what problems are they faced with? These are the questions to which this study intends to answer.

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to established ways of enhancing the information needs of the physically challenges. To attain the goal, the study stipulated the following objectives:

- To identify the information needs of the physically challenged students in Kwara State Library.
- To ascertain the relevance and adequacy of the library resources in meeting their needs
- To identify problems confronting the physically challenged students in Kwara State Library.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this research the following questions have been formulated:

- What are the information needs of the physically challenged students in Kwara State Library?
- Do physically challenged students make uses of the library resources and how relevant are these resources to their needs?
- What are problems confronting the physically challenged students in Kwara State Library?

Literature Review

In Nigeria according to Adamu (2009), there are more than 19 million physically challenged people. Between 75 and 90 per cent of them live below poverty line due to years of neglect by the society, especially their lack of access to paid employment. Many misconceptions and misinterpretation of the physically challenged were highlighted by Alamu (1991) cited in Kotso (2010), when he stated that Nigerian society often regards physically challenged persons as unwell, unable to work, read and in need of help and people that deserve pity. Lawal-Solarin (2012) noted that the wheelchair mobile Nigerians lack access to the banking halls. This is due to the anti-metal cubicles at the entrances to banks in Nigeria, which have denied this disadvantaged group the opportunities of planning for future investment.

Adebowale (2009) in a study investigating the nearness of public places like schools, banks, hospitals, recreation sports, offices etc. from the residence of the physically challenged, notes that on the average about 40% of the physically challenged are not satisfied with the distance they have to cover. According to Lawal-Solarin (2012), carry out a survey of library and information services to physically challenged students in academic libraries in Ogun State. Noted that 21 (87.5%) of the respondents use the library occasionally while the remaining 3 (12.5%) respondents use it regularly. From the foregoing, it is evident that persons with disabilities need information and therefore it is essential that providers and producers of information for persons with disabilities in Nigeria should establish their reading interest and information needs for improved service provision. This information needs will help these people with disabilities function and essentially improve their knowledge and well-being.

Lawal-Solarin (2010) in an article titled Banks and the Physically Challenged quoted MSN Encarta Dictionary which defines physically challenged as an inability to perform some or all the tasks of daily life or a medically diagnosed condition that makes it difficult to engage in the activities of daily life. According to the World Book Encyclopaedia (2004), "some people are born with disabilities, while others develop them later in life. There are however, many

types of challenges or disabilities; both physical and mental, and they vary greatly in causes, degrees and treatments. Common disabilities include blindness, deafness, and deformity, loss of limbs, mental illness, mental retardation, muscular, nervous and sensory disorders"

A lot of studies have been conducted on the information needs of the physically challenged in the Western world. Okoye (2010) submitted that in situations where a challenged person is not able to cope, it results in stereotyping, derogatory labelling and depersonalization. This opinion was supported by Adesokan (2003) when he noted that most challenged persons suffer rejection, isolation, and maltreatment from other members of the society. He opined that challenged persons are shown negative attitudes and in the Traditional Yoruba society terms such as Abirun meaning handicap, Didinrin meaning imbecile, Abami meaning strange person, and Alawoku meaning mentally imbalance are used to refer to them. They are seen as objects of ridicule, shame and pity. However, there is a great deal of disagreement as to what should be considered offensive or derogatory by people with or without disabilities, Wikipedia (2010) noted that views vary with geography and culture, over time, and among individuals. Furthermore, terms such as, "retarded" and "lame" are said to be deliberate insult. Also the term "wheelchair-bound" is inherently negative. Yet another term "Mongolism" is based on stereotypical ideas of certain groups of individuals with disabilities. The word 'handicapped' is considered by some people to be derogatory, while others see it as a synonym for "a person with a disability", and it is still used by some people with disabilities. Certain people are offended by such terms, while others are offended by the replacement of such terms with what they consider to be euphemisms (e.g. 'differently able or 'special needs'). In addition, some insidious words such as retarded, invalid, sufferer, defect etc can cause harm to them. (DADHC Connections). Finally, some people believe that terms should be avoided if they might offend people, while others hold the listener responsible for misinterpreting terms used in a non-offensive context. (Wikipedia 2010). In view of these, this study adopts the term physically challenged. The physically challenged as students encountered barriers in their quest for education. Viney (2006) rightly notes that they encounter physical access limitations such as retrieving books from the library shelves. Okoli (2010), observed horrors of architectural buildings which have discouraged many challenged persons from having education. Bradley (2006) opined that challenged students start out with the same qualifications and aspiration as normal students, but because they encounter barriers, they perform poorer. Crisp (2002) affirms that, disability can lead to frustration in some cases, and can adversely degenerate to a level that an individual may not be able to actualize his aspirations. Moreover, the inability to cope portray them as helpless, mindless, suffering and deserving sympathy and alms. However,

Babar et al. (2004), Elzubeir et al., 2010) concluded that factors such as age, gender, type of disability etc. determine the coping strategy adopted by challenged individual.

Information Needs of Physically-Challenged Students

On the issues of coping with disability and relevance of Information to the physically challenged, Adesina (2003) itemised the under listed as the information needs of the physically challenged:

- Information for educational development: This is of paramount importance. As a student, additional information would be needed to build on what was taught in the classroom.
- Information for social and personal development: Information is needed on assistive devices that could aid mobility.
- Information for recreational purposes: These may include materials for light reading.

The challenged students will need assistance while in the library but the normal students may need little or no assistance. Onifade and Sowole (2009) quoting Ojo rightly noted that, for libraries to add to the advancement of knowledge, they must not only provide resources but also ensure that the resources are effectively used. In this regard, public libraries that are created to served community irrespective of their educational, sex and tribes etc. Should be committed to providing equal access to all categories of students, whether normal or challenged.

Methodology

This study adopts a survey research design. The instrument used for data collection in this study was a structured interview and questionnaires by the researchers and two research assistants who were trained on how to distribute the questionnaires across the physically challenged students. Personal discussions with heads of library, few staff and students. A total number of 57 questionnaires were filled and returned by the physically challenged students at the Kwara State Library Board, Ilorin, Nigeria. Out of the 57 physically challenged students interviewed, the researchers were able to get the required information for analysis from 51 physically challenged students, thus, there was 89.4% response rate.

Research Findings and Discussion

Fig 1: Gender Distribution of the Respondents

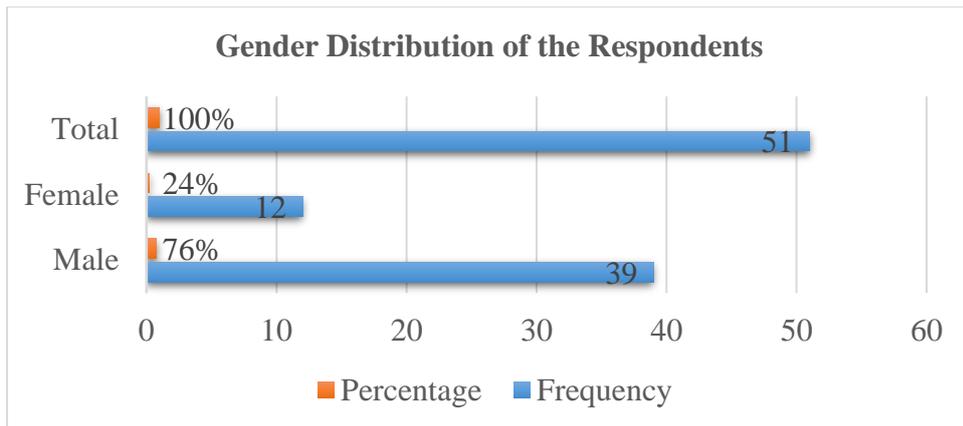


Fig. 1 shows that (76%) of the respondents were male while (24%) were female. This represents the gender distribution of physically challenges involved in the survey.

Fig 2: Distribution of the Respondents by Age

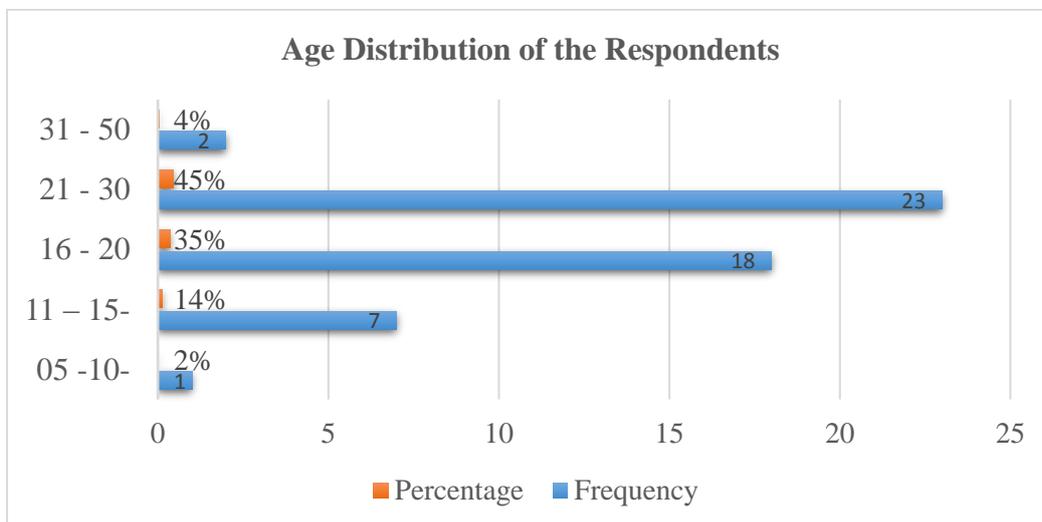
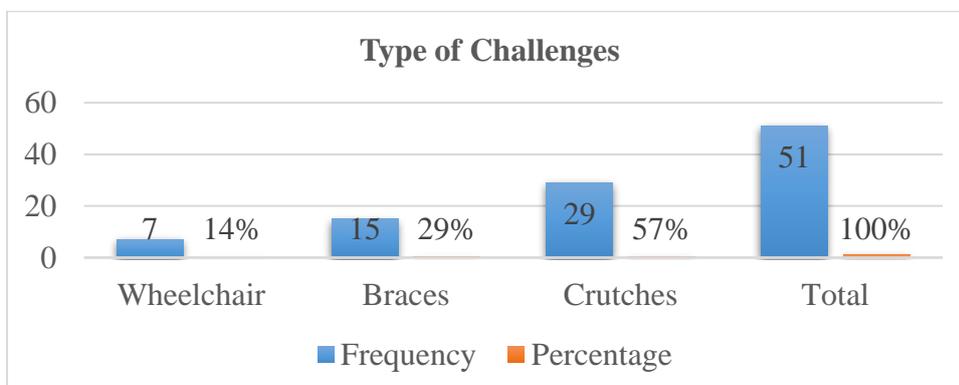


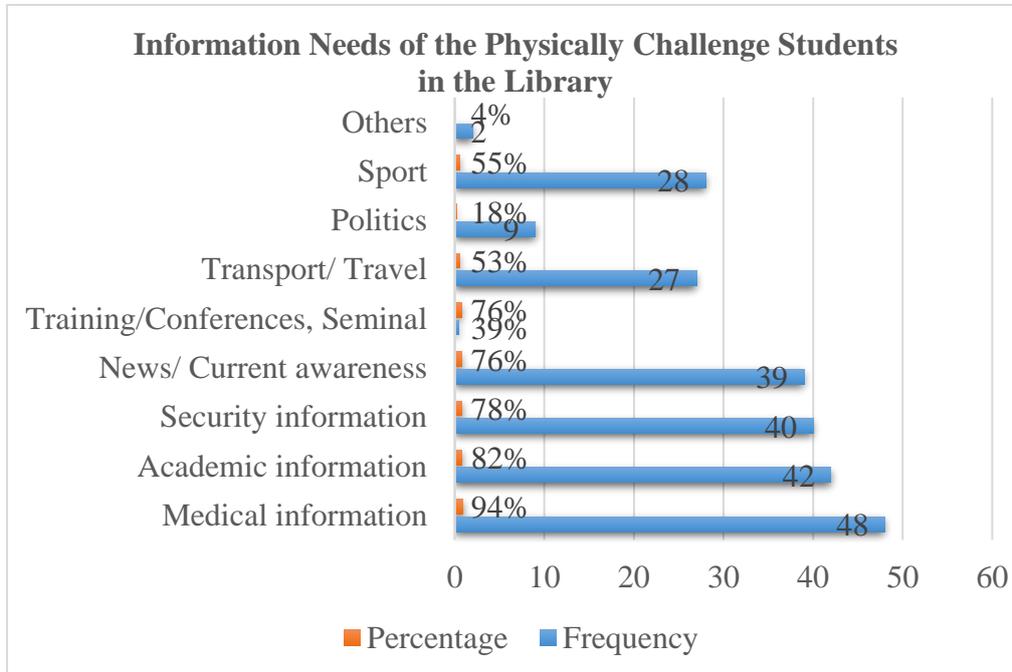
Fig 2 shows the age range of respondents. 48 respondents (96%) were between the ages 5 and 30 while 2 (4%) were 40 or above. This indicates that the majority of the people using the libraries are youths.

Fig 3: Types of Challenge and Number of Respondents



The **Fig 3** shows that (57 %) of the respondents are on crutches for mobility, while (29%) of the respondents are on braces and (14%) of the respondents are using wheelchairs.

Fig 4: Information Needs of the Physically Challenge Students in the Library



As indicated in **Fig. 4**, 94% of respondent’s needs medical information, 82% academic, 78% security, 76% news/current awareness, training/conference, seminar, 53% transport/travel, 55% sport, 18%, politics, 4% other information needs.

Fig 5: Frequency of the Library Use by the Respondents

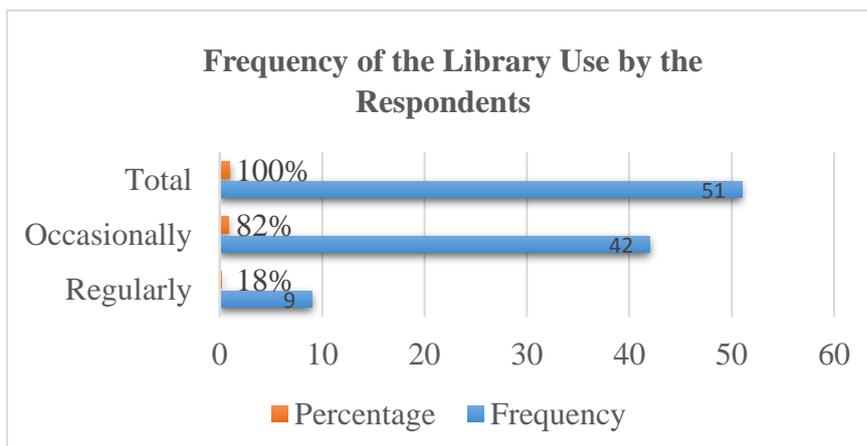


Fig 5 shows that 82% of the respondents use the library occasionally while the remaining 18% respondents use it regularly. This may be due to the frustration encountered in using the library and its resources.

Fig 6: Adequacy of Library Resources to their Needs

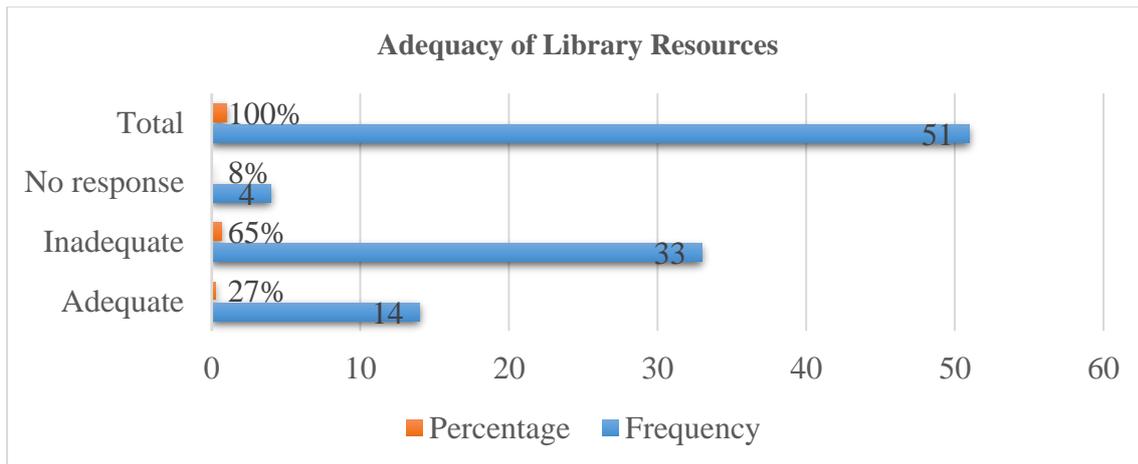


Fig 6 shows that 65% respondents found the information resources provided by the libraries inadequate, 27% found them adequate, and 8% no response. This shows that the majority 65% of the physically challenged students found the library resources inadequate for meeting their information needs.

Fig 7: Relevance of Library Resources to the Respondents Information Needs

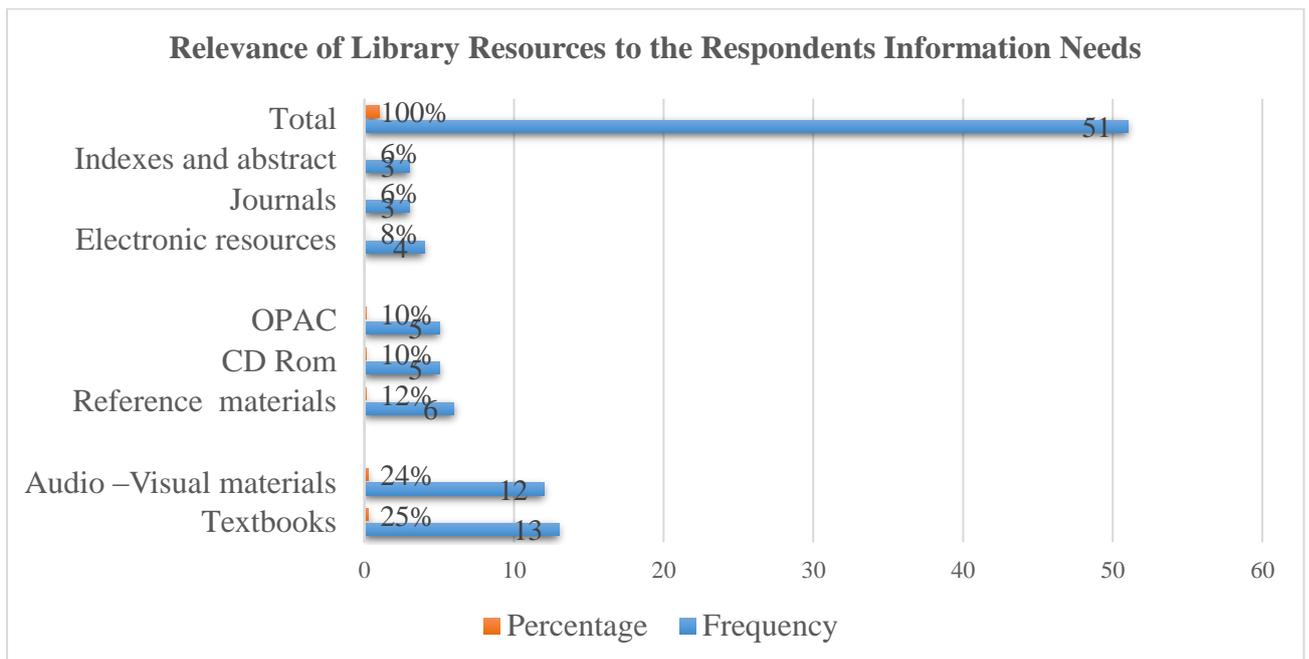
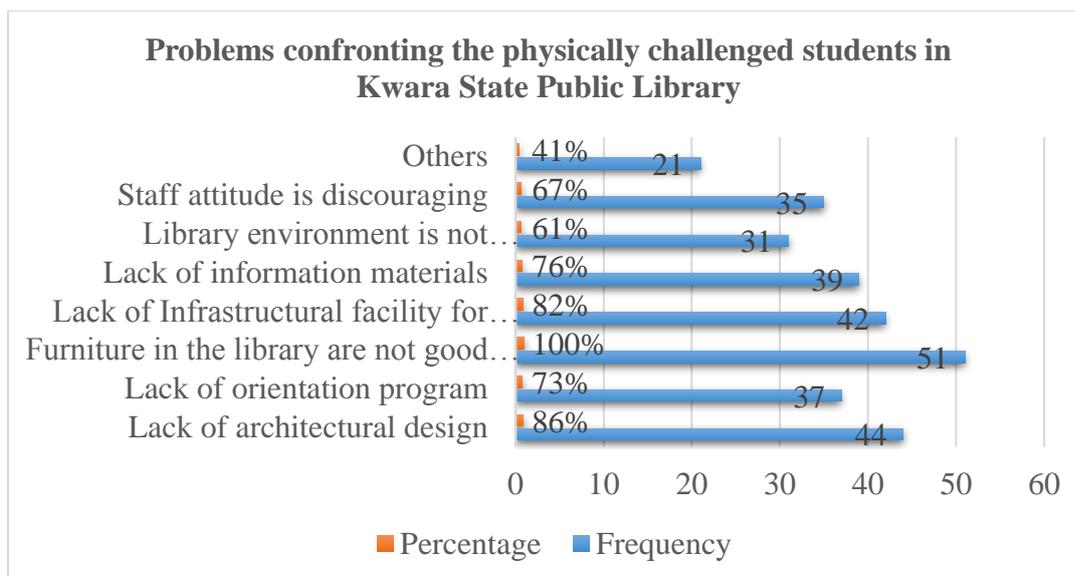


Fig 7 reveals that textbooks and audio-visual materials 25% and 24% were the prominent resources that are relevant to the respondents’ information needs. 12% reference materials, 10% CD-ROMs and OPAC, 8% electronic resources, 6% journals, indexes and abstract each.

Fig 8: Problems confronting the physically challenged students in Kwara State Public Library



From **Fig 8**, indicates that the major problems that hindered physically challenged students information needs include furniture in the library are not good for relaxing 100% and lack of infrastructural facilities 82%, 76% lack of information materials, 73% lack of architectural design, lack of orientation program for each, 67% staff attitude is discouraging, 61% library environment is not accommodating while 41% others.

Discussion of the findings

The distribution of the respondents by sex in **Fig 1** shows that they were (76 %) male and (24%) female that took part in the research. This confirms the finding of Baron and Emeranel et.al (2007), that in Nigeria, the number of disabled children in school is desperately low as a result of insurmountable barriers they faced in their quest for education. Perhaps one may deduce that the female physically challenged do encounter greater challenges. **Fig 2** revealed that (96%) of the participants are youth. **Fig 3** revealed that 57% are on crutches while 29% on braces and 14% are using wheelchairs. The finding above confirms Bradley (2006) that all physically challenged students are not the same. So different solutions to the barriers they faced are needed. **Fig 4** showed that major information needs of the physically challenged was medical information and academic 94%, 82% respectively the study is in consonance with Adesina (2003), found out that the information needs of the physically challenged includes, information for educational development, information for social and personal development and information for recreational purposes. **Fig 5** showed that 82% used the library occasionally. This is agreed with Lawal-Solarin (2012), carry out a survey of library and information services to physically challenged students in academic libraries in Ogun State. Affirmed that 21 (87.5%) of the

respondents use the library occasionally while the remaining 3 (12.5%) respondents use it regularly. **Fig 6** indicated that 65% physically challenged students found the library resources inadequate. **Fig 7** revealed that textbooks and audio-visual materials are the prominent resources that are relevant to them. **Fig 8** showed that the major problems confronting physically challenged students are library is not good for relaxing 100%, 82% infrastructural facility among others. This findings agreed with Sandhu et al. (2001), environmental, technical, and attitudinal barriers and consequent social exclusion reduce the opportunities for physically challenged to contribute productively to the household and the community and further increase the risk of falling into poverty.

Conclusion

Based on the above findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

The physically challenged students are not adequately taken care of in the decision making process of the library. The decision process is the stepping stone for all the array of services or activities to be given to these special groups of clients in the library. All the services provided to the physically challenged users are the same with services provided for the non-physically challenged clients of the library. The physically challenged students are not properly catered for in terms of materials, services, relationship and even in the architectural designs of the libraries. Library Stakeholders, National Library of Nigeria, Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria, Nigeria Library Association, Federal and State government should enunciate policies that address the barriers faced by the physically-challenged in their quest to be educated.

Recommendations

- People with disabilities need special attention when they visit the library. The library staff should be knowledgeable about various disabilities and how to serve persons with these disabilities.
- A person in a wheelchair or using crutches or a walker should be able to enter through the door and pass through security check points. Regardless of the disabilities they should be able to enter without encountering obstacles.
- Library management should provide information materials that would cater for physically challenged.
- The existing library facilities should be redesigned and modified with new technologies so as to enable mobility- challenged users to effectively and efficiently use library resources.
- Orientation should be given to physically challenged students in the library.

- Adjustable chairs and tables specially made for wheel-chair and crutches are recommended for use in libraries to cater for the physically challenged Students.
- Specially trained library staff to be employed to assist and monitor challenged students in the library.
- Good communication between the library staff and the challenged students.
- Architecture of library buildings must take care of their needs.

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