



CHAPTER 6

CONTRIBUTIONS OF LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS TO SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

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Introduction

The library is frequently described as the brain of a society, the soul of an institution, the living repository of cultural history, the racial memory, the supporter of future-looking intellectual pursuits, etc. According to Alhassan's (2003), observation, a library is both collections of books and a structure that houses them. It can also be described as a location where printed and non-printed materials are gathered and stored for quick access. Additionally, the terms "information system" and "library" are interchangeable. According to Albadvi et al. (2007), an information system is a technically defined group of related components that gathers (or retrieves), processes, stores, and distributes information to support decision-making and control within an organization. Information systems can assist librarians in problem analysis, the visualization of difficult subjects, and the development of new products in addition to assisting decision making, coordination, and control. It is impossible to overstate how important information systems and libraries are to the education of children with special needs.

Special needs refer to individuals who require assistance for disabilities that may be medical, mental, or psychological. Special needs can range from people with autism, asperger syndrome, cerebralpalsy, downsyndrome, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, dysgr aphia, blindness, deafness and so on. Lawal-Solarin (2012), defined special needs people as individuals with inability to perform some tasks of daily life, or some medically diagnosed conditions that make it difficult for them to engage in activities of daily life. In the view of Gobalakrishnan (2013), special needs students could be described as those restricted, hindered or prevented from having equal opportunities with their contemporaries due to physical deformities. They include the visual, hearing, mobility, cognitive, language and speech impaired. For them to be recognized and gained personality in life, the introduction of special education to this set of people becomes imperative.

According to Anjiode (2010), special education is the education of persons who have learning difficulties due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, mental and physical health pattern or accident. It also refers to education of people (children and adults) who have difficulties in learning; they could be deaf, blind,



crippled, mentally retarded and so on.s Special education is a form of education that focuses on the needs of students with disabilities and learning differences. Present-day special education practices are vastly different from the practices of the past. A series of significant historical events profoundly transformed the practice of special education. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (National Education Association of the United States, 1978), was signed by President Gerald Ford. It required public schools to provide free education to children with mental and physical handicaps. This law ensured that availability of special education services to children in need and guaranteed that decisions about services for students with disabilities were fair and appropriate.

The goal of special education was to ensure that they were provided an opportunity to attend and profit from education. That is a free and appropriate public education is provided to them, just like to all other youngsters. This was the basis for the landmark legislation known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA1997), which gave all students with disabilities the right to public education. The involvement of parents in the education of children with disabilities in the United Kingdom is considered not only a right, but also a necessary component of the delivery of effective and efficient provision of special education. Parental involvement covers many aspects including: the assessment process, where parent's knowledge of their child is an important source of information; decision-making, where parents have a right to receive full information, call their own experts, and express a preference for provision; and educational intervention, to which they may contribute. Parents also provide an important source of information on the working of the systems designed to meet their child's needs. However, the connectivity between libraries and information systems to special needs education is critical for national development.

Special needs and the role of the library.

Libraries work as service organizations which facilitate all their users without discrimination, including persons with special needs as well. According to disability prevalence, it is emerging as the largest marginal group in the world. The global disability prevalence was 10 % in1970s which has increased day by day. World Health Organization and the World Bank (2011), stated that 15% of the total world population is suffering from some kind of special needs (Papworth, 2011). Beaton (2005), highlighted the importance of trained and well managed library staff, resources, and services for individuals with special needs. He further recommended that library and information system may try to investigate the gaps in communication and interaction to check the problems faced by library users with special needs. According to Seth and Parida (2006), libraries can perform an important function in developing a physical challenged person's intellect, imagination and general knowledge by making available books and related information resources. These resources when provided afford them access to private collections, magazines, novels and official information. It also influences



them by helping them become independent, and also less of a burden on their family and the society.

The role of the library and special needs education cannot be over emphasized. The International Federation for Library Association (IFLA) Guidelines for Development of Public Library Services (2005), stated that the development of collections should be based on the principles of access for all and include access to format appropriate to specific client groups and these include: deaf and hard of hearing persons who use sign language books and other hearing aids. These resources are produced and provided by focused librarians for the deaf. IFLA further notes that new technologies have opened up new areas of reading, the deaf can access computer programmes, internet and digital resources using braille display; screen magnifying monitors; screen magnification; scanning software with optical character recognition (OCR); screen reader; speech synthesis and so on. Day (2000), stressed that, a collection on hearing impaired is the most essential area of collection development and such a collection should take into account the diversity of hearing impaired people. He also said that no matter the level of hearing impairment (mild, moderate, severe or deafness), such people may require information resources that will suit their information needs in a specialized manner. Furthermore, Koulikourdi (2008), argued that the role of library schools in educating future librarians about these disability issues is of great importance. She questions whether library schools are oriented towards serving disabled users or whether their primary services target only able-bodied persons. She suggests that, 'in order to provide equal services and effective facilities to persons with disability, librarians have to identify them, understand their needs, their information-seeking behaviors and the problems they encounter in the library environment. Conclusively, the library should be regarded as the bedrock of knowledge and the dissemination of information to spur the less privilege to greater heights.

Special needs and the role of information system

Libraries in developing countries are beginning to provide assistive technologies as well as reading materials to people with disabilities (Nassimbeni & De Jager, 2014; Majinge & Stilwell, 2013). Studies show that libraries have not been a source of attraction for people with special needs due to a number of reasons. Libraries in the past have not assisted blind persons very well, apart from large print and talking books. Additionally, adaptive technology for using the internet has recently begun to be used (Williamson, Schauder & Bow, 2002).

Concerted efforts should be made to ensure that those living with disabilities are able to access the information systems that others are able to access. Access to information resources for all can be made possible through use of assistive tools and technologies. Commonly used technological devices include Braille books, talking books, playback machines, audiotapes and screen readers (Epp, 2006). A recent study by Adetoro (2012), of alternate format preferences among secondary school visually-impaired students in Nigeria found that talking books or audio



recordings were the most preferred format for blind students (51%) as well as partially-sighted students (55%). These formats were preferred over others because of their playback facility and because they were easy to understand. Other technological devices for people with disabilities, and particularly the visually impaired, include talking computers and braille embossers.

Information systems application is very important as it plays an essential role in providing high quality education for students with disabilities. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been introduced into the teaching-learning process in order to improve quality, support curricular changes and new learning experiences. In this way it is possible to meet the specific learning needs of different learner groups, including students with disabilities. The nature and extent of special need informs the type of ICT tools to employ. For instance, children with hearing impairments may require tools such as voice synthesizers and hearing aids to effectively communicate in the classroom. Education cannot be said to have taken place where there is no communication and the application of information systems of special need.

The application of information system in special needs education is critical. UNESCO (1993), is among the most active international organizations supporting modern approaches to education, which are related primarily to application of new technologies solving a wide range of problems and processing a vast number of information sources. UNESCO maintains a capacity to advise national governments on the use of technology for educational purposes and, in particular, on the optimal balance (given local circumstances) between ICTs and traditional educational technologies. Furthermore, UNESCO can assist countries in developing educational software and materials that reflect their national and regional cultures in support of the strategy to achieve the goal of 'Education for All'. In order to contribute to solution of these issues, the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (IITE) within the framework of its training programme has dealt with ICT application in the field of education of people with special educational needs since 1999. One can therefore infer from the narration so far that the application of information systems to special needs education paramount to less privileged.

Challenges of Libraries and Information systems to Special Needs Education

The challenges of libraries and information systems to special needs education if tackled accordingly, it will help actualized the educational development of the less privilege. The following sub-headings are the challenges facing libraries and information system to special needs education in Nigeria and to the world at large, thus

Funding

Lack of funding for special education in Nigeria limits the progress of special education. Funding seems to be either insufficient or not provided for the education and service delivery of learners with disabilities. Also, poor budgetary allocation is



one of the greatest challenges facing provision of library services for the physically challenged students in Nigerian universities. Academic libraries are not well funded to cater adequately for the needs of the physically challenged students. Founding without adequately funding hampers the achievement of 'education for all' initiative of the government. Budgetary allocation for the procurement of equipment that will make accessibility of library resources easy for the physically challenged students in Nigerian universities is usually inadequate. Iroeze, Umunnakwe and Eze (2017), advised that allocation of financial resources and wider varieties of funds should be made available for the libraries to enable them continue to exist, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate the services they provide for the physically challenged students.

Discrimination

Realizing the challenges that people with disabilities face, various governments have enacted laws that guarantee equal opportunities for people with disabilities. The Government of the United Kingdom (UK), for instance, passed the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act in 2001. Harris and Oppenheim (2003) and Hill (2013), noted that the Act requires that students with disabilities in institutions of higher learning have the same access to educational facilities and resources provided as do all other students. Also, Adesokan (2003), posited that most physically challenged students suffer rejection, isolation, and maltreatment from other students. The Disability Act (2012), among other things, guarantees access to the physical environment, transportation, information and communications and systems, and other facilities and services available or provided to the public without discrimination. Phukubje and Ngoepe (2017), have argued that the librarians and the associated staff work very hard to provide services and access to non-disabled students, but the same approach is not seen as far as students with disabilities is concerned. A major area of concern for students with disabilities is the insensitive nature of concerned authorities and officials at the work place. Students with disabilities form a vulnerable group as they face discrimination, barriers to access and are excluded from the mainstream society. They are as such at a disadvantage and are thus not able to utilize their capabilities and potential. People in general are apathetic towards the persons with disabilities.

Lack of qualified librarians/educators

There are still not enough qualified special educators to meet the educational needs and care of persons with disabilities in the society. Many unqualified special education teachers are left to teach these individuals. Lack of skilled manpower to produce the material needed by the handicap may result in poor production of the materials. This also affects operation and maintenance of equipment's needed for inclusive library service. The curricula of most library schools are geared towards conventional librarianship. Library staffs are therefore often unable to attend to the needs of the blind and other persons with disabilities.



This is supported with above assertion when Domzal et al., (2008) opine that managers consistently report that they find it difficult to attract qualified applicants to teach and to mentor people with disabilities.

Inaccessible resources and libraries

Phukubje and Ngoepe (2017), noted that among the barriers that restrict the usage of library services by students with disabilities are the inaccessible media formats. The physically challenged students encountered challenges in physical access to building and physical limitations such as retrieving books from the library shelves (Okoli, 2010). These may be books that have not been transcribed into talking books, 'books not transcribed into talking books, large print books, easy-to-read books, braille books, video/DVD with subtitles and/or sign language, e-books and tactile picture books. Similarly, Carter (2004), had argued that libraries are always in process of updating their electronic resources which may include journal, periodicals, full-text newspapers and multimedia reference publications such as encyclopaedias and dictionaries.

Accessibility is a recognized as a human right, yet it has not been recognized by the institutions. UNCRPD (2006), stressed on the importance of making places accessible for persons with disabilities which affirmed and state that parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. Guyer and Uzeta (2009), suggested that libraries should have provision of adaptive assistive technologies which are accessible to persons with special needs.

Conclusion

Librarians are innovative information specialists who are capable of serving all students, regardless of abilities or special needs. Consideration should be made for the physically challenged students in providing of information resources that would suit their information needs and also the application of information system that would spur them to actualize their potentials. Physically challenged students should not be neglected in the provision of library services. Information resources for them should be physically present and within their reach in the libraries. Aside the funds from the governments, alternative sources of funding should be sourced by the libraries. Lastly, a significant portion of the library budget should be high marked to acquire the facilities that can be used by the physically challenged students. Furthermore, discrimination of this set of people should be avoided. Librarians and special needs educators should embrace them and show them love.

Implications of special needs education to children

All children, even those with special needs, should have access to a top-notch, affordable, and suitable public education. Identification is the first step in



the evaluation of children with impairments (Mc Loughlin & Lewis, 2005). According to federal special education laws, it is the responsibility of the educational agencies to identify students with disabilities, which is done through screening (Niparko, 2000). The learner is referred for a special education assessment when pre-referral measures fail to provide the expected results (Gargiulo, 2006). The parents of the kid are informed about the assessment of their child and are needed to provide written consent for the assessment process and the dissemination of information (Roger & George, 2006). Thus, the implications of special education to children are:

- free and appropriate public education
- providing an adequate learning environment
- respecting the principle of equality in all segments of education
- positively impacting mental health

Suggestions

The study therefore suggests the following thus:

1. funding of libraries and special education is critical to the less privilege;
2. recruitment of professional librarians who are trained towards the actualization of special education is critical;
3. library resources and the physical libraries should be accessible to the less privilege and
4. application of information system is critical for the actualization of special education

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