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Equitable School Library Services for Students with Dyslexia in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper attempts to establish ways in which school libraries in Nigeria can make available the right information resources to students suffering from dyslexia. Dyslexia is a mental disability and individuals that are dyslexic find it difficult to read, comprehend, lack ability to synchronize letters amongst others. The paper tried to establish what dyslexia is, the cause and symptoms. It also identified what stands as a barrier to efficient library use for the dyslexic. It also looked into the information resources that could be used by a dyslexic to get maximum satisfaction of having used the library. These resources include media resources such as audio books, music and pictograms. The role of stakeholders in ensuring that school libraries are established and well equipped was also discussed. The paper concludes that all hands must be on deck to ensure that disabled student, especially the dyslexic are not left out in the information world.




Keywords: *Dyslexia; school libraries, disabilities, Nigeria, information resources, Nigerian School Library Association (NSLA)*

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Öz

Bu çalışma Nijerya'daki okul kütüphanelerinin disleksili öğrencilere doğru bilgi kaynaklarını sunmaları için nasıl yöntemler izlemesi gerektiğini incelemektedir. Disleksi zihinsel bir engeldir ve disleksi olan bireyler okumada, anlamada zorlanırlar, harfleri ayırt edemezler. Makalede disleksinin ne olduğu, nedenleri ve belirtileri açıklanmıştır. Aynı zamanda disleksi olanların kütüphaneyi etkili kullanmalarının önündeki engellerin neler olduğu tespit edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bunun yanı sıra, disleksili bireyin bir kütüphanede en üst düzeyde memnuniyete ulaşması için kullanabileceği bilgi kaynakları incelenmiştir. Bu bilgi kaynakları sesli kitap, müzik ve piktogram (resimli sözlük/kitap) gibi medya kaynaklarını içermektedir. Çalışmada okul kütüphanelerinin kurulması ve iyi donanımlı olması konusunda paydaşların rolleri de tartışılmıştır. Makale engelli öğrencilerin, özellikle de disleksili olanların bilgi dünyasının dışında kalmaması için herkesin görev başında olması gerektiği ile sonuçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Disleksi, okul kütüphaneleri, engellilik, Nijerya, bilgi kaynakları, Nijerya Okul Kütüphanesi Derneği

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Introduction

Provision of information and information resources is very vital in any society. Getting access to right information at the right time is very essential because an informed individual has better chances of doing things differently and achieving excellent results. Information is supposed to be made available to every individual irrespective of social or economic status, region, country or even physical appearance or disabilities. However, some individuals are most times left out in the information world and they are those with disabilities. In this part of the world, the disabled are mostly not considered when planning on projects such as building schools, libraries etc Despite their disability, some individuals still want to achieve their dreams and aspirations by getting educated in schools just like other normal children. Disability ranges from been physically deformed to been mentally retarded.

According to the United Nations Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (n. d.), six hundred and fifty million people which represents about 10% of the world's population live with a disability of different forms. Such disabilities vary from deformity, total or partial blindness, paralysis, hearing problems, or mental retardation amongst others. Disabilities according to The World Health Organization [WHO] and World Bank (2011) are of various types. It is a term that covers several parts such as impairments, activity limitations, participation and restrictions (Bickenbach et al., 2011). For any nation to develop, educating the young ones is of utmost importance. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2009) averred that a school is under compulsion to render services to students without considering gender, religion, ethnic differences, family status, physical and mental abilities or disabilities. Schools are meant to be child friendly. It should be a place where the atmosphere is conducive for learning and where their needs are met. UNICEF (2009) posited that where these are absent, then the school should not be termed as friendly.

According to Epp (2006) and corroborated by Russell and Huang (2009), Libraries have been said to possess the potential needed to provide meaningful assistance to users with disability. They further asserted that libraries are considered as a leveler in terms of socioeconomic differences and providing resources to people who might not otherwise have access. Persons with disabilities might not find it comfortable to visit places like the library because of the stigmatization they often face. However, Dequin, Schilling and Huang (1988) reported that the attitudes of librarians towards disabled patrons can help in no small measure to reduce anxiety. This was reported after the researchers had under studied some librarians and found that over fifty percent of the respondents held slightly positive attitudes towards disabled patrons. This shows that interacting with persons with disabilities is a positive way of ensuring that these persons maximize the use of the library since they are human and definitely have information needs.

The main objective of this paper therefore is to establish how school libraries can meet the information needs of dyslexic students.

Dyslexia

The International Dyslexia Association (2012) defines dyslexia as a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is majorly characterized by having difficulties with accurate and or fluent recognition, by poor spelling and decoding abilities. Dyslexia is a lifelong condition, it is a problem associated with reading accurately and fluently, reading comprehension, spelling, writing and mathematics. It is the most common learning issue. Martin, Carlson, and Buskist (2007) posited that dyslexia is a disorder that involves impaired reading, writing and spelling and Ikediashi (2012) citing The World Federation of Neurologists (1968) averred that dyslexia is a disorder in children, and this disorder affects their reading, writing and spelling.

There are different symptoms for different children. Some key signs that shows that a child is suffering from dyslexia is when such child have difficulty in matching letters, lacks ability to recognize sounds in words or by avoiding reading entirely. A child affected by dyslexia is also faced with problems such as confusion with dates, time and places, poor self-confidence and low self-esteem, short concentration spans, poor organizational skills as well as difficulty remembering instructions (North Shore Pediatric Therapy [NSPT], 2012). Despite all these, dyslexics can be very intelligent.

The National Institute for Neurological Disorder and Stroke (2010) categorized dyslexia into different six (6) types: Trauma dyslexia: caused by trauma to the area of the brain responsible for reading and writing, Primary dyslexia: a result of malfunction rather than damage to the left side of the brain. This form of dyslexia does not change and is hereditary in nature. It is also more common among boys than girls, Secondary dyslexia: caused by hormonal development during early stages of fetal development. The positive side is that it diminishes as a child grows. It is also more common among boys than girls. Visual dyslexia: manifests by number and letter reversal and inability to write symbols in the right order. Auditory dyslexia: presents when the affected child has difficulty with sounds. He/she perceives sounds to be mixed up or not heard correctly and Dysgraphia: This when an individual experiences difficulty in holding and controlling a pencil to write correctly

The primary cause of dyslexia is impairment in the brain's ability to translate image received from the eyes or ears into understandable language, it is not as a result of sight or hearing problems neither is it a consequence of mental retardation, brain damage neither is it due to lack of intelligence (McCandliss & Nobel, 2003, Czepita & Lodygowska, 2006).

Symptoms of dyslexia

The following were identified by a team of researchers tagged “The Understood Team (n.d.)” to be some of the symptoms of dyslexia:

- Trouble recognizing whether two words rhyme
- Struggles with taking away the beginning sound from a word
- Struggles with learning new words
- Has trouble recognizing letters and matching them to sounds
- Has trouble taking away the middle sound from a word or blending several sounds to make a word
- Often cannot recognize common sight words
- Quickly forgets how to spell many of the words she studies
- Makes many spelling errors
- Frequently has to re-read sentences and passages
- Reads at a lower academic level than how she speaks
- Often skips over small words when reading aloud
- Doesn't read at the expected grade level
- Strongly prefers multiple-choice questions over fill-in-the-blank or short answer.

Awareness of dyslexia in the Nigerian context

Ahmad (2015) posited that in Nigeria there is lack of awareness of dyslexia and its impact on the reading, writing and learning among children. Owate and Iroha (2013) also averred that the lack of awareness extends to the school libraries which are few or none existent and where available, not adequately equipped. Ajoku-Christopher, (2012) found out the reasons for the lack of awareness, and they are:

- The society's preponderant understanding of disability
- cultural interpretation of disability
- limited definition of disabilities featuring in policies and the general lack of awareness of the nature
- none or rare inclusion of hidden disabilities like dyslexia in national disability policy.

Ajoku-Christopher (2012) further asserted that the nonchalant attitude, lack of interest and recognition of dyslexia by Nigerian educational authorities makes policy making, funding, special teacher education, curriculum planning, teaching and learning process a difficult task.

School library

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2015, p. 16) defines the library “as a school’s physical and digital space where reading, inquiry, research, thinking, imagination and creativity are central to students’ information to knowledge journey and to their personal, social and cultural growth”. This definition applies to all potential school library users irrespective of their social, economic, physical status. The school library guidelines further outlined the roles of a school library as follows:

- Resource-based capabilities – availing students opportunity to seek, access and utilize different formats of information which includes technological tools.
- Thinking-based capabilities – expose students to the art of research, critical thinking, making inquiries and having the zeal to have understanding of resources at their disposal.
- Reading and literacy capabilities – this is a major role expected of any school library. Students must be able to enjoy reading, either for pleasure or learning.
- Learning management capabilities – school libraries must prepare students on how to make academic plans and how to achieve same successfully (IFLA, 2015)

This suggests that the library should provide services to all users in a manner that is both appropriate and convenient. Skat Nielsen (2001) reported that a dyslexic should have a personal librarian who has special knowledge and empathy for such a library user. Librarians should be taught about dyslexia in the training process, workshops and conferences to be attended.

Dyslexics and library Use

Information is very vital in every sphere of life. A well-informed citizen helps to develop the nation (Oyeronke, 2012). Libraries are established to meet information needs of users, however, according to Iwu-James and Itsekor (2012) they can also present barriers for students with dyslexia. The reason being that dyslexic students have difficulties with a number of areas required for successful use of the library. The following factors can serve as hindrances or barriers for the dyslexic:

- Rate of processing: the manner in which information is understood and interpreted.
- Inability to remember instructions
- Sequencing: transferring information accurately such as typing in correct passwords, recognizing shelf marks.
- inability to communicate needs at service desks effectively.
- unable to assimilate information, most especially at the library orientation or induction
- not been able to keep to time.

Easily distracted (Iwu-James & Itsekor, 2012)

The following emotions are experienced by the dyslexic student at some point.

Stress and anxiety: Libraries are often large and filled with busy users. A dyslexic user might have difficulty using the equipment or lack the patience to wait for others to finish using such equipment before their turn.

Confusion, frustration and anger: Locating information resources can be a herculean task for the dyslexic most especially when resources are relocated often.

Low self-esteem: this is as a result of lack of confidence. The dyslexic may not ask for help even when it is inevitable (Ryan, 2004).

Equitable School library services for students with Dyslexia

Allen and Hughes-Hassell (2010) posited that it is of a great necessity for librarians to be knowledgeable about dyslexics and their special needs. This will make dissemination of information an easy task both for the dyslexic and the school librarian. Librarians are information intermediaries; therefore, they can serve as a bridge to improve the quality of life and academic achievement of students suffering from dyslexia. Studies have shown that different treatments have greatly reduced the symptoms of dyslexia among those affected. These treatments can also be included as part of school library service delivery. The school library can deliver efficient and effective service to children suffering from dyslexia in the following ways:

Providing the appropriate electronic media

Playing action video games for 12 hours not involving any direct phonological or orthographic training improves reading abilities in children with dyslexia (Gori et al., 2013). This could probably be because the children focus so much while playing the games hence, their attention skills are improved generally. This skill is also naturally

extended to their reading abilities. This finding was corroborated by Blaesius and Fleck (2015) when they discovered that after exposing children to 15minutes of playing video games, there was a significant decrease in the number of reading errors, indicating that a short session is sufficient to stimulate attentional abilities. The school library should have an area dedicated for playing of video games as part of provisions for dyslexic children. Perhaps, these dyslexics can later pick up enough interest in video games and invent one too.

Introduction of music in the library could also be very beneficial to dyslexics. Music and language have common mechanisms. Therefore, enhancing basic musical rhythm perception skills in children who have developmental dyslexia will influence positive reading abilities. Bonacina, Cancer, Lanzi, Lorusso and Antonietti (2015) exposed fourteen (14) students to bi-weekly individual sessions of rhythmic reading training (reading exercises with rhythm in the background) and it was found that there was improvement in reading speed and accuracy.

Text to speech and scanning tools may also be installed on computer systems in the school library. These are software which converts text to audio format which are read out loud. In a library that has been digitized, catalogues, articles, directories and even ebooks can be converted to speech. Examples of this software are Ivona, Zabaware text to speech reader, Acapela group virtual speaker, text speech pro, audio bookmaker, TextAloud, Read and Write Gold, Kurzweil 3000, Natural Reader etc.

Provision of electronic reference and study materials: the existence of materials in electronic format allows a multi-sensory environment which is much easier for dyslexics. For instance, an electronic dictionary eliminates the need to spell topics being searched for neither is there a need to know the alphabetical order.

Bookshare: This is the world's biggest online library for people with print disabilities. It consists of more than 563,140 digital books. This online library however, is only free for students in the U.S because their Government had paid fully for access. This kind of gesture is worthy of emulation by the Nigerian Government. These digital books help the dyslexic in the area of phonics, fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension and phonemic awareness (*Bookshare.org*, 2018).

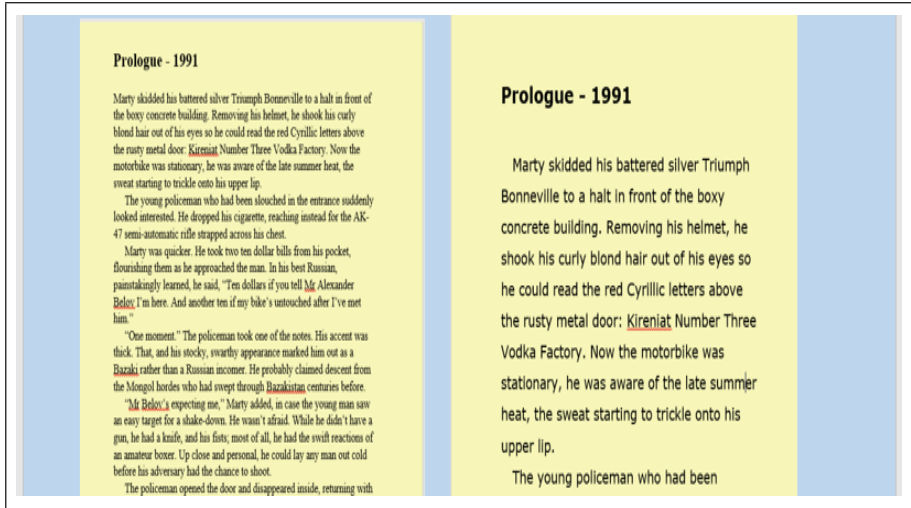
Providing the appropriate reading resources

School libraries can also provide coloured overlays to ease visual stress. They are coloured transparencies used with reading materials in printed form. They are however restricted to reading only. Below are pictures of coloured overlays.



Source: Colour Clarity CLL (2017)

The dyslexic font can also be used for printed materials as much as possible and also used for signage. The signage should be created in all corners of the library as well as bold. Below is a comparison of traditional font with dyslexic font.



(Abbott, 2016)

Use of pictograms: It is usually advisable to provide pictograms to reduce reading difficulties for dyslexics. This according to Grant and French (2017) is because dyslexics experience difficulties when trying to read complex materials that they are expected to remember in a short period of time. Use of pictograms helps the dyslexics to retain the memory of what he/she has seen and this helps to eliminate the problem of loss of memory.

School library Staff

Availability of the right resources in a school library is not the ultimate. It is very important that the library personnel build capacity in order to have knowledge of how to make the resources available to the library users. Library staff should be aware of difficulties dyslexics may face while making attempt to use the library and they should be proactive in terms of tackling these difficulties. There must be constant training and re-training of school library staff to keep them abreast of new developments on how to serve their users better, on new resources that improve and meet the changing nature of their users. The library staff needs to be friendly, accommodating, ready to help without discrimination, have ability to discern and read users body language and empathize with users most especially the dyslexics because they might be difficult to deal with (Adebayo, Fagbohun, Osayande & Owolabi, 2015).

Environment

The environment in which a dyslexic will thrive must be one that is serene. There must be limited noise, proper lightning as this helps to make reading less boring and cumbersome. Bold signage are also important as this acquaints the dyslexics to each section of the library.

School libraries in Nigeria

In any institution of learning, the library is very crucial if the learning and teaching process is to be successful. The library serves as a hub on which the teaching and learning process revolves. However, it is disheartening to note that in Nigeria, school libraries are almost nonexistent. Not much importance is attached to establishing school libraries both in the private and public schools and this is so because the Ministry in charge of education here in Nigeria have neglected the idea of making it mandatory to establish a school library in the planning process of establishing secondary schools. (Baro & Eze, 2016). This was corroborated by Adepoju, Oluwatola, and Abomoge (2015), they posited that in schools where there are libraries, the resources are mostly under lock and key thereby making it very difficult for students to access and utilize the meagre resources available.

Dyslexic students need special information resources, conducive environment which is not available in almost all school libraries both in public or private schools. Daniel (2013), in an interview said lack of funds hampers the provision of modern libraries in the country. He further stated that this slowed the provision of current literature and the e-library scheme in most libraries. Daniel posited that the non-availability of up-to-date library materials and bad infrastructure had also contributed in making people to lose interest in libraries. In view of all these, it would be safe to categorically state that very few school libraries in Nigeria have facilities and resources for students with disabilities most especially the dyslexic.

Role of stakeholders in ensuring the provision of right information resources to dyslexic students in Nigeria

➤ The role of the Nigerian Government

To ensure the provision of adequate information resources and ambience in school libraries, it behooves the Nigerian Government to formulate and enforce implementation of policies that will govern school libraries. For instance, (Malawi Government, 2012) states that “no education or training institution shall deny any benefits or services to any person, on the basis of disability”. It is advisable that the Nigerian Government take a cue from the Disability Act used in Malawi because it is important to have institutions that have excellent facilities for all categories of users. (Ahmad, 2015).

➤ **Nigerian Library Association (NLA) / Librarians Registration Council Nigeria (LRCN)**

In a study conducted by Uzuegbu and Onyekweodiri (2011), one of their findings was that the NLA is not visible in Nigeria. They further asserted that the association is placid and not sufficiently publicizing its existence and relevance. This goes a long way to affect libraries and librarians because NLA is supposed to be the voice that speaks for the profession both at the Government level, organizational/institutional level etc. It is the joint responsibility of the LRCN and NLA to ensure that school libraries are well equipped with appropriate resources to meet the information needs of users and to ensure that school libraries are established where they are non-existent.

➤ **Nigerian School Library Association**

This association is supposed to liaise with NLA to enforce the establishment of libraries in schools. It should also play the role of monitoring the activities of both school librarians and the school libraries. Forming partnership with proprietors of private primary and secondary schools is also very essential as this will ensure that these schools establish proper libraries and not just a bookstore. This association should play oversight functions and ensure that only qualified librarians are employed to manage school libraries.

➤ **Librarian**

School librarians must have the ability to think outside the box. They need to liaise with class teachers to bring out the best in each student, participate in developing a suitable curriculum for the school, and make the library an interesting place for staff and students. School librarians must possess the ability to deal with difficult students such as those with dyslexia and other disabilities.

➤ **School management**

Establishing schools without adequate teaching and learning resources in which a library is part, does not bring about effectiveness in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, it is mandatory for all school management to strive and make sure there is a library that is equipped with state of the art equipment that will cater for all students without discrimination. It is also very vital to employ qualified librarians because librarianship is a skilled profession and it is those that are adequately trained in any of the library schools that will be efficient in-service delivery.

➤ **Parents**

Parents should have the interest of their wards at heart. Almost all schools have a Parent Teacher Association (PTA). This forum can help in sourcing for relevant resources that can help the library staff carry out their duties efficiently.

Conclusion

Schools are meant to be child friendly. It should be a place where the atmosphere is conducive for learning and where their needs are met irrespective of their background, gender, religious and ethnic differences, family status, physical and mental abilities or disabilities and this includes the dyslexic student. Dyslexia is not a function of not being intelligent but a reading and comprehending disorder. It is caused by an impairment of the brain and the symptoms include not being able to recognize words, difficulty in comprehension, spelling errors amongst others.

Dyslexic students might not be willing to make use of the library because of certain features that they consider as barriers. For example, they might not be able to remember passwords to log in to media facilities, reading of spine label on books, signage that are not too bold may also deter their library usage.

It is therefore expected that stakeholders such as the Government, NLA/LRCN, school management, Nigeria Library Association, Nigeria School Library Association, Librarians, parents play their roles in order to make learning an easy task for the dyslexic student.

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