Assessing Information Literacy Competencies of Persons with Disabilities in University Libraries

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
Research Paper **Accepted:** 24-02-2026 **Published:** 10-03-2026 **Keywords:** *Information, knowledge, utilization, academic libraries, methodology*	Information literacy (IL) is a notion commonly known as an important requisite to being a member of the knowledge society. The students in institution of higher learning are likely to determine their need of information, find the sources of information, appraise the information credibility, and apply information in an ethical manner both academically and in research. Nevertheless, people with disabilities (PwDs) tend to be met with challenges of accessibility and utilization of information resources because of physical, technological, and institutional obstacles. The knowledge bases of university libraries are central and thus play a significant role in guaranteeing equality in access to information resources by all users, including the disabled. The proposed research paper focuses on discussing information literacy competency among people with disabilities within university libraries. The paper examines how disabled patrons experience barriers to accessing library services, the purpose of the academic libraries in offering inclusive information services, and how to enhance the information literacy programmes among disabled learners. The study takes a qualitative methodology of analysis due to the thorough review

of academic literature concerning information literacy, accessibility, inclusive education, and assistive technologies. The results indicate that despite the increasing access to information resources through the technological development and use of digital libraries, not all universities libraries are well-equipped with appropriate infrastructure, assistive technologies, and special training programmes to offer to disabled users. The paper highlights the importance of inclusive policies, digital environments being made accessible, and specific information literacy training to ensure the academic success of people with disabilities.

1. Introduction

With the advent of the information society, the content of information creation, distribution and consumption has radically changed. In modern educational contexts, learners have to communicate with multiple sources of information such as books, academic journals, electronic databases, online repositories, and online multimedia platforms. To successfully manage such complicated information landscape, people need a complex of skills that are commonly known as information literacy.

This is because information literacy is the skill of identifying information requirements, finding the necessary information, judging the accuracy of the information sources, and applying information in a efficient and ethical way (American Library Association, 2000). These are competencies that are vital to academic success, research development as well as lifelong learning. University libraries are prime institutions within the higher education institutions that fulfill their roles in advancing information literacy by way of teaching programmes, research support services and access to information resources.

Nevertheless, access to information resources and services is not the same to all students. People who are disabled usually experience great hindrances when accessing libraries, electronic resources as well as information literacy training programmes. Such obstacles can be inaccessible library facilities, absence of assistive technologies, ineffective digital platforms, and insufficient knowledge of library professionals about the needs of the disabled users (Burgstahler, 2015).

The policies of inclusive education help in underlining the need to offer equal access to all students in terms of learning opportunities irrespective of their physical or cognitive differences. The importance of accessible information and communication technologies in the enhancement of education inclusion is

emphasized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (United Nations, 2006). Libraries in Universities must thus bear a responsibility of making sure that information services are availed to everyone.

The evaluation of information literacy of persons with disabilities is critical towards understanding the issue that they cut across when attempting to access information resources and also the formulation of the strategies that can be used to address their learning needs. This research paper will discuss the importance of university libraries in enhancing information literacy among the disabled persons and what should be done to increase the level of inclusive information services in the institutions of higher learning.

2. Literature Review

The concept of information literacy has been widely researched under the library and information science discipline. The idea rose to fame after the American Library Association (2000) introduced the Information Literacy Competency Standards of Higher Education. These were the standards which described information literacy as the capacity to know when information is required and to find out, evaluate and utilize information appropriately.

Subsequently, this concept was extended to include later developments like the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework of Information Literacy in Higher Education that focused on critical thinking, knowledge creation, and sound use of information (ACRL, 2016). Even scholars like Bruce (1997) defined information literacy as a complex concept that relates to a number of information interaction methods. Lloyd (2010) also maintained that the concept of information literacy can be viewed as a social practice which can be applied within particular situations.

Academic libraries have long been significant in nurturing information literacy skills in the students. Librarians can organize user education programmes, workshops, and consultation of research to assist students in learning how to use databases, assess information sources and citation tools (Julien, 2016).

It has been discovered that the information literacy programmes contribute to a considerable improvement in the academic performance and ability of the students to conduct research (Head & Eisenberg, 2010). Nevertheless, these programmes can be focused on the entire student body and in many cases do not provide sufficient support to students with disabilities.

The library services to persons with disabilities have gotten more attention over the past decades. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has come up with guidelines that

advise libraries to embrace the concept of universal design and assistive technologies to create a fair access to information (IFLA, 2013).

Assistive technologies are necessary in order to enable the disabled users to access information resources. Some of them are screen readers, Braille displays, text-to-speech software, speech recognition tools, and captioned multimedia resources (Brophy and Craven, 2007). The technologies allow blind and deaf and dumb users to communicate in digital information systems.

Irrespective of these trends, inclusive services continue to be a problem to a number of academic libraries. Other obstacles found in the studies include the absence of funding, staff training, and awareness regarding the accessibility standards (Hill, 2013). Also, the digital library sites may not necessarily adhere to the web accessibility standards, and thus the disabled individuals cannot easily access electronic materials (Kelly, Phipps, and Swift, 2004).

Students with disabilities are also found to use intermediaries like librarians and peers or disability support services to access information resources (Mulliken and Atkins, 2024). This dependence may restrict their freedom of engaging in scholarly research.

On the whole, the literature points to the necessity of creating special information literacy programmes to meet the needs of disabled users. Accessible library services that combine assistive technologies, accessible digital services, and trained employees are mandatory in enhancing equitable access to information.

3. Objectives of the Study

The key questions of this research paper are:

1.To investigate the notion and significance of information literacy competencies among people with disabilities.

2. To examine the contribution of university libraries to inclusive access to information.

3. To determine some of the difficulties encountered by individuals with disabilities when they seek information resources.

4. To determine ways of bettering information literacy programmes by disabled users.

5. To propose policy suggestions to enhance inclusive library.

4. Research Methodology

The proposed study follows a qualitative research method founded on a comprehensive analysis of academic sources referring to the problem of information literacy, access, and inclusive education. The research summarizes the results of academic journals, books, conference papers, and international policy papers.

Major themes associated with information literacy competencies, assistive technologies, and inclusive library services were identified with the help of content analysis. The literature review methodology will enable the researcher to have a holistic view of current practices and problems in assisting disabled users in academic libraries.

Though the study is theoretical in character, it makes significant contributions to the current situation of inclusive information literacy practices and makes some recommendations on the way future research and policy-making should be done.

5. Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework of the study focuses on the connection between the notion of accessibility, assistive technologies, teaching information literacy, and user empowerment. Accessible infrastructure means that the library facilities will be accessible to the persons having mobility impairments. Assistive technologies help visually impaired and hearing-impaired people to communicate with digital information systems.

Information literacy training programmes are important in equipping the disabled users with the skills on information searching, evaluation and ethical use of information. Inclusive policies and sufficient funding are also a form of institutional support that should be in place to implement accessible library services.

A combination with the factors results in the competencies in information literacy development of the persons with disabilities, and in the creation of inclusive educational settings.

6. Findings and Discussion

Literary review indicates that information literacy skills are critical towards empowering individuals with disabilities within the institutions of higher learning. The higher the information literacy skills of students are, the more opportunities they have to find academic resources, analyze research materials, and engage in scholarly communication.

University libraries are very important to ensure that people have access to knowledge resources in an inclusive manner. The availability of the assistive technologies and accessible digital platforms in libraries also greatly enhance the access of the disabled users to the information by enabling them to do so independently.

Nonetheless, there are various obstacles that still influence the process of the acquisition of the information literacy competencies in persons with disabilities. Such barriers are the restricted access to assistive technologies, insufficient knowledge on available information resources, ineffective training programmes and poor collaboration between libraries and disability support units.

Digital access is also another major challenge. Assistive technologies are not entirely compatible with many electronic databases and library websites. This problem demonstrates an urgency to implement international accessibility standards in libraries, as is the case with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

Another important point in the findings is the role of librarian training. The professionals working in libraries should be trained to have the knowledge and skills needed to accommodate the disabled users and apply inclusive service practice.

7. Recommendations and Suggestions.

Depending on the results of the present research, it is possible to recommend several measures that should be taken to advance information literacy competencies in the group of persons with disabilities.

The first thing that should be done is that university libraries must create assistive technology labs with screen reader, Braille printers and speech recognition software. Second, libraries are encouraged to develop information literacy training programmes to meet the needs of the disabled users.

Third, the library web pages and online platforms must also adhere to the international principles of accessibility to make the availability of electronic resources to all users. Fourth, the library staff members are to be trained professionally on the practice of accessibility and inclusive service.

Lastly, the universities are encouraged to facilitate the efforts of libraries, disability support centers and academic departments to develop an entire system of assistance to disabled students.

8. Conclusion

The skills of information literacy are needed in order to make persons with disabilities engage in the academic and research processes completely. University libraries play an important role in facilitating the inclusive use of the information resources and enhancing the cultivation of such competencies.

Despite the fact that technological advances have enhanced the level of accessibility in most academic libraries, there still exist tremendous problems associated with infrastructure, training, and awareness. The inclusion of library services by using assistive technologies, simple online Internet resources, and specific information literacy programmes will also contribute to equal knowledge access among persons with disabilities.

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