

# **Methods of Provision of Library and Information Resources for Visually Impaired Primary School Pupils In South East Nigeria**

DR. ESTHER EKENE AGHAUCHE<sup>1</sup>  
DR. HOPE CHINYERE ILORAH CHIKAODI<sup>2</sup>  
DR. ADAEZE NWONA NZEWI<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(Department of Library and Information Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria)

<sup>2</sup>(Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria)

<sup>3</sup>(College of Medicine and Health Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nnewi Campus, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria)

*Corresponding Author: Dr, Hope Chinyere Ilorah Chikaodi*

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## **Abstract**

*The study sought to determine the methods of provision of library and information resources for visually impaired primary school pupils in South East Nigeria. The population of the study comprised of four librarians of the four special education centres in South East zone of Nigeria. One research question guided the study and survey research design was adopted. The instrument for data collection was interview. Data collected were analyzed qualitatively. Results of the interview showed that librarians adopted various methods in providing information resources for visually impaired pupils especially soliciting help from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Based on the findings, it was recommended that the government should have a written policy on the provision of information resources for the visually impaired so that this may serve as a guide for the provision of information resources to the special education centres in the zone.*

**Keywords:** *Library and information resources, School library, Visually impaired, Primary school pupils, Nigerian National Policy on Education*

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## **I. Introduction**

Library and information resources are information bearing resources that enable libraries to meet the information needs of their users. It is the responsibility of libraries all over the world to locate, procure, prepare, store, make available and disseminate information to their users through appropriate media. According to Babalola and Haliso (2011) libraries have a moral obligation to make information available to all categories of users regardless of the gender, political affiliation or disability. In the same vein, Byrne, Cylke, Hagle, Herridon and Perry (1990) opined that librarians are responsible for identifying, gathering and making available information in any form as required by identified users. Librarians serving users with visual impairment also perform such responsibilities or functions.

Visually impaired primary school pupils are pupils in primary schools with sight loss, which loss cannot be improved by corrective lenses to enable them read as others. Visual impairment is a disability that is associated with loss of vision. It refers to people with irremediable sight loss and it covers a range of impairments. Vision is one of the five senses of human beings and is associated with sight. The eye has different parts that work together to create ability to see. When a part of the eye does not work right or communicate well with the brain, vision is impaired (NICHCY, 2012). Copyright (Visually Impaired Persons) Act 2002, broadly defined a visually impaired person (VIP) as someone who is blind, partially sighted and whose eyesight cannot be improved by corrective lenses to allow him or her to read without a special level or kind of light, who is unable to either hold or manipulate a book or move the eyes to be able to read easily. In other words, any person who is not able to read in a conventional way is visually impaired.

The nature of disability of people with visual impairment makes them more vulnerable to educational deprivation or inaccessibility, being neglected, discriminated against and shut off from the world of information, since they are unable to see and read print materials. The most viable way to help the visually impaired persons come out of this disadvantaged position is through the provision of educational facilities. The Nigerian National Policy on Education specifies school libraries as one of the educational services to be provided for school

children. School libraries play a very important role in the educational development of children by providing library and information resources for teaching and learning. Generally, libraries house information resources.

The aims of school library are to participate effectively in school programmes to meet the needs of pupils, provide them with library materials and services, stimulate and guide pupils in their reading, provide an opportunity through library experience for pupils to develop helpful interest, help children and young people to become skillful users of libraries and work with teachers in the selection and use of all types of library materials (Usoro & Usanga, 2007).

The aforementioned aims of school library would be difficult to realize in the educational development of pupils with visual impairment if information resources are not provided in the appropriate format they can explore.

Given the importance of library resources in the educational development of an individual, it is important to determine the extent of provision of these resources in libraries serving the visually impaired, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Library resources constitute the totality of the library holdings, which include print and non- print materials in various formats and ICT resources, with which the library meets the information needs of users. Majority of library resources are in print. Since the visually impaired cannot access information in print, there is need to repackage information in a format suitable to them, that is, in alternative formats. Alternative formats include Braille, audio/talking materials, large prints and ICT resources. Ajobiewe (1999) was of the opinion that the provision and use of alternative formats such as Braille, large prints, talking books and the availability of reading aids, volunteers and transcription services in libraries servicing persons with visual impairment in Nigeria would go a long way in making information accessible to the blind and partially sighted users.

Braille, which is the oldest format involves the use of the sense of touch. Louis Braille, who was the inventor and designer of Braille writing, became blind when he accidentally stabbed himself in the eye. Braille is a system of reading and writing whereby organized raised dots are used to represent letters and numerals that are read by touching. This was a great innovation that for the first time blind people could read. It appears to be better for young people whose fingertips are more sensitive. A major problem with Braille is that its production is laborious and expensive, thus a limited quantity of materials are produced, and these do not meet the needs of increasing number of visually impaired pupils in schools.

Audio/talking resources are another means by which the visually impaired access information. Audio resources involve the use of sense of hearing. They are audio recordings on tapes, cassettes and compact disks from books and other materials which the visually impaired can listen to, thereby providing them the opportunity of reading through listening. Audio resources are easier and less expensive to produce. They are mainly used by older people and those who met their blindness later in life. Large print materials on the other hand are materials that have their print size enlarged. They are meant to be used by people with low vision.

In recent times, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has provided new possibilities and great potential in terms of information resources and facilities for the visually impaired. A wide range of ICT facilities, also called assistive or adaptive technologies, now exist to provide access to information, giving visually impaired users equal opportunity as the sighted. ICT is a faster means of accessing information but expensive. Software are available to enable visually impaired learners access information. Some of these software are: screen reading software e.g. JAWS, screen magnification software e. g. Zoomtext and web access software e. g. Connect Outloud.

Provision of information resources for visually impaired pupils is viewed from two angles: production and distribution. The production of alternative formats is cumbersome, labour-intensive and require specialized skills that not every publisher can embark on. The nature of alternative formats demands that they be produced by specialized libraries or agencies. There are some organizations that produce information resources for the visually impaired in Nigeria. These include: Nigerwives Braille Book Production Centre Lagos, Anglo-Nigerian Welfare Association for the Blind (ANWAB) Lagos, Gindiri Materials Centre for the Visually Handicapped near Jos, Vocational Training Centre for the Blind Oshodi and Hope for the Blind Zaria.

Nigerwives is an association of foreign women married to Nigerian men with a Braille Book Production Centre in Lagos. The association produces primary and secondary school textbooks in Braille as prescribed by Ministry of Education and sends these to its state branches which in turn send them to schools that need them, mainly on request. These Braille books are also offered for sale at the same price as of the print books.

The Anglo-Nigerian Welfare Association for the Blind is another organization that operates in Lagos. Its main objective is to alleviate the educational problems of the blind by making Braille books available at a cheaper rate. Thus, the centre produces textbooks in Braille which it donates and sells at cheaper rate. The centre produces Braille books in English and Hausa languages at all levels of education. The books are available at the lending library and are also sold at subsidized rates.

Hope for the Blind, Zaria and Vocational Training Centre for the Blind Oshodi also produce reading materials for blind students. Ajobiewe (1999) noted that beside the above centres, there are few

institutions/libraries that also produce information materials for the visually impaired. Among these are Pacelli School for the Blind, Lagos and Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo. Some of the resources can also be produced in-house.

Considering the location of these centres for the production of information resources for the visually impaired, it is obvious that none of them is located in South East Nigeria. This has implications for the provision of information resources for visually impaired pupils in the zone.

With regards to distribution of information resources, the government is expected to play a key role. Since the centres are operating on the principle of free education, it is the responsibility of government to provide information resources, just as is the case in schools for the sighted. It is expected that the government procure these resources from the production centres and send them to the special schools. The extent to which this is done, especially in the South East, is yet to be determined.

Another way of making information resources available in special education centres is through donation. Some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like Nigerwives and Anglo-Nigerian Welfare Association for the Blind (ANWAB) donate alternative resources to the special education centres. International agencies like Torch Trust of USA also provide resources to the centres. The efforts of these NGOs and international agencies supplement those of government in providing learning resources for the visually impaired. If these resources are provided, pupils will be highly motivated to use them.

Provision of information resources to the visually impaired in libraries of the developed countries like America, Britain, Australia, Canada and Netherlands is well established. They have established national libraries that adequately cater for the information needs of visually impaired readers. Library services rendered have been enhanced tremendously in volume and in formats (Iweha, 2003).

The situation in Africa is in contrast. Alemna (n. d.) noted that in most African countries, established and organized library services to the visually impaired is almost non-existent. In Nigeria the situation may not be different from other African countries. Atinmo (2000) observed that library and information services to visually handicapped persons in Nigeria were almost negligible. She pointed out that the Nigerian government has been negligent in fulfilling that part of its educational policy which promised to equalize educational opportunities for all children regardless of their physical, mental and emotional disabilities. This neglect could be in the area of providing adequate reading materials in alternative formats. Unless information resources are provided in alternative formats, the goals of primary education would be difficult to achieve with regards to visually impaired children. This is because majority of information resources that aid learning exist in a format they cannot access. It is in view of this that this study is set to determine the methods of provision of information resources for the visually impaired.

### **Research Question**

What are the methods of provision of information resources for visually impaired primary school pupils in South East Nigeria?

## **II. Methodology**

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. This was considered appropriate for the study because it was aimed at determining the current state of provision of information resources for visually impaired primary school pupils in South East Nigeria. Population of the study comprised of four librarians of the four special schools for the blind in the zone and the instrument for data collection was interview. Data collected were analyzed qualitatively.

## **III. Results**

Results of the interview conducted revealed that librarians adopted various methods in providing information resources to their libraries. In the first instance, they said that educational provision for the visually impaired is based on the principle of free education. According to the National Policy on Education 2013, the education of children with special needs should be free at all levels. It also stated that all necessary facilities that would ensure easy access to education shall be provided, for instance, special education equipment such as Perkins Braille; special training and re-training of personnel to develop capacity and keep abreast of the latest teaching techniques. It however, stressed that Federal, State or Local Governments shall fund these programmes within their areas of jurisdiction. This implies that the provision of educational facilities and services should be free for the visually impaired. In other words, it means that the responsibility for provision of resources and facilities for teaching and learning rests on the government, state or federal. Under the principles of free education, alternative formats of information resources like Braille, audio and digital forms are supposed to be provided by the government. Contrary to this, the government appears to seldom fulfill this obligation. This was confirmed by all the librarians interviewed. In fact, one of them said, "if you wait for the government to provide, it will not come, so you have to solicit help from NGOs, philanthropists, religious groups, etc".

The interview also revealed that there was no policy on provision or laid down pattern of provision of resources to special education centres. Presently, the trend is that the Federal government through Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) sponsors special education centres via the State Universal Basic Education Boards or Ministries of Education of the various states of the federation. So, any provision from the Federal Government goes through the universal basic education boards or ministries of education of the states where the centres are located. A little hitch here is the uncertainty of when such provision is coming. That is why some of the librarians in their responses believed that waiting for the government amounts to not making effort or wasting of time, which does not augur well for the pupils. If there is a policy or principle of provision which may likely spell out the frequency and regularity of provision, it would go a long way to facilitate provision of resources in the centres.

The librarians also affirmed during the interview that soliciting help from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), international agencies, religious organizations and philanthropists has greatly helped in the provision of information resources in the centre libraries. The librarians acknowledged in particular the contributions of Nigerwives Braille Project, an NGO based in Lagos. This was also confirmed by the researcher, who observed that there were Braille textbooks in core subjects of English and Mathematics in all the centre libraries sent by Nigerwives. The researcher was told that sometimes Nigerwives get philanthropists or kind hearted individuals to sponsor the production of information resources which they send to these centres.

The interview also revealed that some international agencies and religious organizations have contributed immensely to the special education centres under study. Through request, they have sent Braille Bibles, Christian magazines, Bible story books and other story books and magazines. One of such organizations is Torch Trust of U.S.A.

From the interview, the researcher was made to understand that some of the resources could be produced in-house if they had facilities and personnel. For instance, if there were Braille typists, they could help to transcribe print textbooks into Braille, and if they had tape recorders and recording studios, they could produce audio tapes for the use of visually impaired pupils. One of the librarians complained that the old Braille typists were retired and new ones are not employed. In other words, where the facilities are available, both human and otherwise, provision of information resources can be enhanced through local production.

#### **IV. Discussion of Findings**

Findings from the study showed that the most viable method of providing information resources for the visually impaired pupils in the libraries under study is through soliciting help from NGOs, religious groups and international agencies. Results of the observation and interview revealed that NGOs such as Nigerwives Association and Anglo-Nigerian Welfare Association for the Blind, have helped tremendously in the production and distribution of Braille and audio resources for the visually impaired. These centres produce Braille books which they sell at subsidized prices. Sometimes, they get sponsors to pay for the production of these resources and they are sent to libraries where they are needed. Nigerwives Association has performed creditably in this regard. Results of the observation showed that all the centre libraries visited contained Braille textbooks in English and Mathematics produced by Nigerwives. The finding agrees with that of Adetoro (2011) who stated that libraries of non-governmental and private associations such as Nigerwives, Anglo-Nigerian Welfare Association of the Blind, Nigeria Society for the Blind, Hope for the Blind, Gindiri Material Centre for the Blind, Association of Libraries for the Visually Impaired and few others also make information materials in alternative formats available for use by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria. This gesture helps to reduce the paucity of information resources for the visually impaired.

It was also inferred from the interview that some religious groups and international organizations have been very helpful in providing information resources in the centre libraries. Substantial quantities of Braille books of the Bible, Christian magazines and other religious books were sent to the centre libraries by some religious groups abroad. Non-Christian magazines and stories books have also been sent to these libraries by non-religious groups abroad. These resources have really helped to ameliorate the problem of lack of information resources in alternative formats in the centre libraries under study.

Again, the interview revealed that presenting requests about information resources needed to the government is another means of making resources available in the centre libraries. This was what was done in Anambra State that led to the supply of Braille textbooks in some subjects to the centre library.

Findings from the study also indicated that some of the information resources can be produced locally. With necessary facilities in place, Braille and audio resources can be produced locally, thereby boosting the availability of information resources for visually impaired pupils.

## V. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The federal or state governments should have written policy statements on the provision of library and information resources for the visually impaired so that the policy may serve as a guide for the provision of information resources to the special education centre libraries.
2. Information resources should be provided in alternative formats readable to the visually impaired pupils. Efforts should be made to provide resources in Braille, audio or ICT formats in all the subjects taught in the schools.

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