

What Are The Determinants of User Satisfaction Among Visually Impaired Library Users?

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Abstract

The study investigated determinants of user satisfaction with library services among visually impaired user. Visually impaired is a general term used to describe people who are partially sighted or completely blind. The term has been used in a similar sense throughout the study. The number of visually impaired persons is increasing and therefore their satisfaction or otherwise with library services needs to be addressed. Learning institutions must provide adequate library resources/ services to meet the needs of this special group. The study had four specific objectives, which were; to establish the satisfaction levels among the visually impaired users; the views from the visually impaired on how services can be improved, to find out the factors that influence satisfaction with services among the visually impaired. The study used the Confirmation/Disconfirmation Theory. The theory explains how users expectations and perceptions are formed. A review of relevant literature was carried out to provide in-depth understanding on user satisfaction with library services among the visually impaired. The reviews were drawn in line with the objectives of the study. The target population was the visually impaired library users in Thika and St. Lucy schools, and library staff. Descriptive survey method was applied while interviews and questionnaires were used in data collection. The findings of the study revealed that visually impaired library users face challenges when accessing library services as well as inadequacies of resources. This leads to their dissatisfaction with available library services. The recommendations for the study include enactment of relevant policies, adequate financial resources, hiring of adequate and well-trained staff, and appropriate facilities.

Key Words: User Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction, Visually Impaired, library services.

Background Information

Libraries provide access to information that people need to participate in the emerging information society (Babalola, 2006). Therefore, they have to avail information to all categories of users regardless of their age, gender, race or disability. Such inclusive, non-discriminatory service however still remains the ideal rather than the norm as some users remain marginalized. Among this disadvantaged group are the visually impaired. According to Friend (2009), visually impaired is a general term used to describe people who are partially sighted or completely blind. The term was used in a similar sense throughout this study. Certainly, user satisfaction is an important attribute that libraries desire for their users (Olden, 2006).

Globally, the CERLIM based at Manchester University is currently undertaking project NOVA (Non-Visual Access), a project concerned with countering the exclusion from access to information which can all too easily occur when individuals are blind or partially sighted. The aim of the project was to ensure that digital library services are accessible to visually impaired people as to anyone else.

According to WHO, the number of visually impaired people is increasing every year. About 50 million people in the world are blind. Globally, 135 million people have visual impairment and are in need of social, vocational, economic or rehabilitative support services (WHO, 2011). India has 15 million visually impaired persons (Singh, 2010). According to persons with disabilities Act No 14 of 2003, Kenya has approximately 2.5 million Persons with Disability (4% of the population are visually impaired). In 2009, the Ministry of Education released a report, which indicated that only 21% of visually impaired children are attending schools. It is estimated that there are approximately 15,500 visually impaired children in Kenya. Almost 90% of the visually impaired live in developing countries, with women and people above 50 years of age being at a higher risk (Babalola, 2006). These figures show that the population worldwide of visually impaired is huge. Libraries provide services to this group and it becomes important to find out whether they are satisfied with the services provided.

Although visually impaired users cannot read the conventional prints, they have the right to information in formats that are accessible to them. Therefore, librarians need to make information available in alternative formats that can be easily accessed by the visually impaired. The most endangered people are the elderly aged more than 60. India is now the home of the world's largest number of sight-disadvantaged people over 15million. Of these 15.5% are from Delhi and 15.6% from Uttah Pradesh. Despite the challenge of a large population with special needs, Delhi boasts of good libraries as it takes care of the information needs of its population of visually impaired people. This is in form of National Association of Blind (NFB), National Federation of Blind (NFB), Braille and talking book libraries among others which cater for this category of special people.

It is evident that the importance of making information accessible to the visually impaired people is now realized by different sections in different countries. For example, the UK legislation, such as the Disability Discrimination Act (The statutory office 1950) highlighted the importance of making information accessible to the visually impaired people. Service providers now need to make “reasonable adjustments” for such special people. In Maryland school for the blind, library services are available to all (Lewis, 2004).

In Africa user satisfaction has continued to be a subject of discussion in various fora. For example, the Tanzania Library Services Board (TLSB) organized a forum held in Dar-es-salaam, 20-24 March 2004 that highlighted the needs for every user that visits the library. The discussions revealed that every user that the library serves has his or her own special needs and great expectations about the service. Therefore, the library should be able to meet such needs.

In Nigeria, library and information services to the visually impaired are largely undertaken by Non Governmental organizations (NGO), that are committed to the education and empowerment of the visually impaired students (Atimno, 2007).

In Kenya, user satisfaction seems to be of concern in some libraries as to the majority of users, libraries are store books organized in such a way that nobody can find them without clear guidance of library staff (Cherono, 2003). Visually impaired users may only be interested in obtaining the most relevant information in a timely way. Where this is not availed, they prefer to search for alternative sources to satisfy their needs. Kiarie, (2006) argues that in Kenya, there seems to be no clear guidelines on library services for the visually impaired and yet these special users need libraries to access information to embrace lifelong benefits.

At Institutional level, CHE (2007) recommends that information services/resources shall be organized and efficiently arranged for easy access and retrieval by all, including the physically challenged. It further states that, the library shall have appropriate qualified and adequate staff whose services shall be convenient for all including the physically and visually challenged users. This indicates that library services need to be availed to all users without discrimination by library providers.

Traditionally, all students admitted to special schools of the visually impaired are expected to read and write in Braille (Yalo, 2010). Due to advances in Information and Communication technologies (ICT), a variety of enabling technologies such as synthetic speech, print enlargement on CRT screens, Braille prints and displays, can make library operations at institutional libraries applicable. Therefore, being able to use, read and understand communications is not only a precondition to participate in social life; it is also a key to quality of life for the individual. Not being able to read and write at the same level as everybody else is a serious disadvantage in the knowledge society. Therefore, the importance of making information accessible and available to visually impaired users in schools needs to be realized by librarians in school libraries (Lewis, 2004). Additionally, school libraries need to provide reliable technology devices that can enable visually impaired users access library services with much ease. The objectives of schools for the blind are to link users to library services so that they can be able to acquire necessary skills for self reliance and total integration in the society, and to live independent lives. Libraries for the blind have to

provide relevant information resources/services to their users to meet the institutional goals.

Ideally, libraries should focus their attention on providing accessible information to visually impaired users. Service providers now have to make reasonable adjustments for such special people (Singh, 2010). This means that there is always need to investigate the challenges faced by both users and library staff to determine if they affect the satisfaction levels.

Despite the advantages of library services, user satisfaction in educational institutions still lags behind, principally due to challenges that need to be addressed. David (2007), states that libraries generally enjoy a reputation for emphasizing good user services. To maintain this image, libraries need to develop and implement plans to improve access to services to their users with special needs.

Though user satisfaction should be the pride of every school library, access to library resources for the visually impaired users may only be realized if special training is availed to librarians in order to assist this special group in information use. Lack of this may be a concern to most library staff and users. Therefore, there is need for investment on staff training to enable access and utilization of library resources in these libraries (Lewis, 2004). Without significant investment in staff training, computer access technology that aims to improve library services for the visually impaired people may attract very little use in libraries. The major concern of this study therefore, was to attempt to highlight determinants of user satisfaction that may help libraries improve services to the visually impaired users. Additionally, it will help them access information that can transform their lives and help them live independent lives.

Statement of The Problem

Librarians serve users by connecting them to information they need in order to meet their needs. Access to information helps users to not only improve but to transform their lives. Therefore, visually impaired users need access to specific information/services such as, Braille, talking book and newspaper as well as large printed material that can meet their information needs. If visually impaired users are not connected to the useful resources in alternative formats, then librarians in educational institutions may not be very instrumental in helping them achieve their goals of independence. Visually impaired users, have the right to information like any user even in alternative formats that can be easily accessible to them. Therefore, librarians need to make information available in formats that can be easily accessed by the visually impaired. It becomes important therefore to find out if visually impaired users are satisfied with such services and the inherent challenges.

A lot of effort put in place by libraries continues to improve services offered to visually impaired users. However, the effort is not adequate and challenge still prevails. A recent report by IFLA (2010) on a study done to investigate on library and information services for the visually impaired, states that, visually impaired people's access to reading materials remains highly restricted and reduces their chances both in terms of employment and in leisure. The study findings further reveal that libraries

should strive to improve their infrastructure that can cater for all categories of users regardless of their age, race and disability. Despite the foregoing input by this organization, user satisfaction among the visually impaired users in the case studies is still depressing (CHE, 2007). For instance, St. Lucy School that shares a library with the primary school has inadequate personnel to offer effective library services to the visually impaired students. A report by the Ministry of Education (2012) indicates that Thika School for the blind did not perform very well in the 2011 KNEC results. This can be a worrying trend if repeated bearing in mind that it has been among the best performers in national examinations. Lack of adequate staff, library resources and equipments that can aid visually impaired users keep abreast with new assistive technology devices may cause dissatisfaction with services, and also affect student performance. This shows that if visually impaired people's views on services are not urgently addressed, then users may remain unsatisfied.

Despite the changes brought by use of ICT in libraries, user satisfaction still remains a challenge in most libraries (Wafula, 2006). Having changed the image of normal library users, it is expected to impact positively on visually impaired users. Use of ICT in provision of library services for visually impaired is facing challenges such as inadequate training, facilities and competent staff (CHE, 2007). This study tried to highlight challenges and determinants of user satisfaction in the educational institutions. If addressed, visually impaired users can be able to access information that may transform their lives and make them live independent lives. The problem addressed by this study was that even though librarians in schools are aware of the need to provide services to the visually impaired, no study has been done locally to find out how users view such services and the challenges they face. Librarians should also be able to predict challenges and improve services by providing relevant recommendations in the field.

Materials and Methods

The research adopted descriptive survey method to find out user satisfaction among visually impaired users in Kenyan learning institutions for the blind. The target population for this study was 384. It was composed of students, teacher librarians and library staff. The unit of analysis comprised of a sample size of 91 that is, 55 from Thika School and 36 from St. Lucy School.

Purposive sampling was used to select schools that had a large proportion of visually impaired users and operational libraries.

Measurement

The questionnaires was structured in four parts, Section A was for the collection of general information. Other sections used an interview schedule to collect data from the respondents on the level satisfaction with their library services. This was used because the students were blind hence, unable to fill the questionnaires.

Results Analysis & Findings

User's Level of Satisfaction

The study revealed that majority of respondents (60.9%) indicated that they were not satisfied with library services offered in their institutions. Only a few (39.1%) were satisfied with library services. From the findings, the respondents reacted differently on the level of satisfaction. For example Braille services were preferred over textbooks, while computers services were preferred over Magazines. Those that acknowledged satisfaction attributed it to awareness and accessibility of the available services. When interviewed the majority (60.9%) on the contrary indicated that they were not able to access library services due to lack of assistance by library staff. This response indicates that VI users in these schools were not satisfied with library services that are offered. Olden (2006) suggests that "the ideal library service is one where each individual regardless of the degree of visually impaired' has access to the materials and information at the time they are required, in a format that can be used, in the quantities that are needed, and where the needs of the user are understood by the staff. These findings concur with those of Atimno, (2007) who suggests that service quality is an antecedent of customer satisfaction and that the levels of service quality result in increased customer satisfaction. The finding in the current study supports the views above.

Users' Preference for Library Materials

From table below, majority of respondents (25.4%) preferred talking books, while magazines were least preferred (3.5%). This was attributed to the conditions of visually impaired as they were not able to see and therefore, talking books were the most appropriate materials. The respondent teacher /librarian from Thika high also supported this during interview emphasizing that students need more talking books and radio navigators because they were the most appropriate. This is in line with IFLA (2010) Guidelines for Development of Public Library service that states that "the development of collections should be based on the principle of access for all and include access to formats appropriate to specific client groups, for example radio navigators, Braille, and talking books for blind people". The findings indicate that VI institutions such as Thika high and St. Lucy need to have more talking books and magazines, radio navigators, Braille library materials accessible and available since they are the most preferred.

Library materials preferred

User preference	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Talking books	22	25.4
Radio navigators	21	24.4
Magazines	3	3.5
Story books	7	8.1
Victor readers	14	16.1
Talking newspapers	10	11.5
Braille	10	11.5
Total	87	100.0

Source: field data 2013

Discussions

The research findings showed that library services offered to VI students both in Thika high and St. Lucy schools were not adequate. The available textbooks and Braille materials, which were mostly used, were not enough for the students in the two institutions respectfully. For instance, the study revealed that a total response (77%) in the two schools indicated that Braille services were relevant to their studies. Only a few (23%) preferred Magazines and textbooks. Therefore, it is evident that from the reactions from VI users they need a variety of facilities for example CCTV screens, talking books, among others.

Given that the services offered were not satisfactory, the study however realized that users had challenges in accessing library facilities. The minimal help was from teachers and fellow students who were not always willing and unavailable. On information on new services, the study revealed that in Thika, VI students were not alerted at all about new services or new materials, while in St. Lucy School, students were alerted every Mondays and Fridays. This indicates that library services offered to VI students are inadequate.

The study revealed that VI students in both schools a total of (48.3%) expressed that they received some training in search of relevant resources. On the other hand the VI users had challenges in accessing facilities. For example, in St. Lucy School some users indicated that they were not able to access library facilities as it was housed upstairs. In addition, the VI users expressed the need to be provided with special facilities in the library such as screen magnifiers, victor readers, and large type keyboards among others. Therefore, it is obvious that VI users need facilities in the two schools.

The study came to the conclusion that school librarians need to manage libraries as organizations using professional management skills and training in order to promote access and utilization of library services. The VI students expressed need for librarians to provide adequate assistance in retrieval and access of library services. In the two learning institutions, the VI students suggested that the school library provide CCTV screens for enlargement of newspapers/magazines, victor readers and radio

navigators to enable them access to library services. Wafula (2006) suggest that visually impaired users need adaptive equipment to use internet, digitalized material, customized services and accessible library webpage. Learning institutions for the VI need to move ahead with the changing times and embrace technology as learners in the sighted schools.

Conclusion

This study has shown that VI faces many challenges that affect their potential of exploiting available library services in their pursuit of knowledge or information. Library staff serving the VI users lack training in management of visually impaired. Therefore, the approach in determining user satisfaction among visually impaired users in the library as to change if they have to exploit library services available. For this to succeed, a number of special facilities such as victor readers, CCTV screen enlargers, appropriate training, proper location of the facility must be in place. Certainly, the above requirements need to be planned for and necessary policies put in place to make it a reality in both Thika and St. Lucy schools.

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