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PROBLEMS OF *DIVYANG* STUDENTS WHILE USING LIBRARY SERVICES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

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Abstract

This paper presents the barriers in using library services by *Divyang* students in Indian higher education and suggests some majors for improving the library services for these students.

Introduction

Higher education plays very important role in the empowerment of *Divyang* students in India as it gives them opportunity of better social inclusion, economic independence and improved quality of life. Library is a very important source of knowledge at this stage of education. But this source remains very much inaccessible for this category of learners.

The main problem faced by these students is, they cannot use the traditional print materials and must use alternative means of accessing academic information (Braille, audio books and electronic documents) which in most cases are not readily available Hence these students can be regarded as marginalized in their information seeking (Saumure & Given, 2004). The information seeking behavior and library use of these students should be therefore of particular importance to librarians and information professionals because the number of people with disabilities cannot be ignored in Indian context of higher education.

Problems

The disabled students getting higher education are mainly of the following types:

1. Vision impaired;

2. Hearing impaired;

3. Learning disabled(dyslexic);

4. Loco motor Disability.

Among these types the hearing impaired learners do not face problems in using libraries. The learners with with Loco motor disability face mainly infrastructural barriers as they cannot physically access the library if the library is located in a place which cannot be reached with wheelchair. It is the vision impaired and dyslexic students who face the maximum problems at this domain.

Problems Faced by Vision impaired learners

The academic information seeking of the students with vision impairement is different from their sighted peers in many ways. They   perceive their locating and searching academic information as quite complicated compared to their sighted peers. Firstly, they find the information locating as time consuming as they have to depend on someone for locating it if the information is in a conventional print format. Secondly they have to take help from the librarian to use library database or resource links if these links are to be accessed in the institutions only and further convert the material in accessible format if they are allowed to take the source to home. Only after this they can read the information.

Barriers

In the information seeking process the participants come across with several barriers

1.   Non-availability of resources

      The students experience that many resources recommended by their teachers are not available in electronic format.

2.   Inaccessible websites –

      The student feels that their information seeking is also impeded by the fact that many academic websites are not disabled friendly. In many cases even their institutional websites also are not accessible.

3.   Poor print quality of materials

      Poor print quality of print material in the libraries is one of the main concerns. Lack of clarity of print sources makes it very difficult to scan them and further transfer it into an

accessible format. "Library copies of the textbooks often are not clean copies. Besides the sighted peers do not use it properly. They underline text which makes it difficult to scan.

4. Unsuitability of available electronic material-

The materials available in college libraries in electronic format sometimes create following problems:

- If they are saved in PDF format,

- If documents contain text embedded in pictures,

- If electronic documents are scanned as pictures.

Problem also arises when they have to access LMS platforms and access the information if it is not compatible with assistive technology.

5. Rigid library policy

Very often the inflexible library policies in which number of days for issuing a book is fixed and no time concession are given to visually impaired students. Besides certain sources are not allowed to take out of the libraries.The dyslexic students also face the similar problems.

Suggestions for Improvement

- Equipping academic libraries with assistive technology like at least one computer with screen reading software JAWS or NVDA;

- Giving facility of scanning the books – The librarian or library attendant can do this work or some student volunteers can help to do this work;

- Training the library personals' in using assistive technology for the VI people;

- Making the library policy flexible for accommodating the VI students;

- Making the library premise barrier free by providing lifts, proper lighting and creating spacious reading zones.

- *Sugamya Pustakalay*

Conclusion

The libraries can be inclusive if only the institution where the Divyang students get higher education believes in the philosophy of inclusion and the teachers, peers and administrative staff too are the strong believers of this Philosophy.

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