

Awareness of Learning Disabilities among Academic Librarians in Federal Universities

Onwubiko, Emmanuel Chidiadi

Alex Ekwueme Federal University,
Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, Nigeria
Onwubikoemma@yahoo.com or emmabikos@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to different groups of difficulties manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. This is a descriptive survey that is aimed at ascertaining the level of awareness of learning disabilities among academic librarians who by position serve heterogeneous clientele. The study was guided by one research question based on the objective of the study. The sample population of this study was 50 academic librarians randomly selected from five federal universities in Southeast, Nigeria while the major instrument used in collecting data for this study was a 20-item test like questionnaire constructed by the researcher to test the basic awareness of learning disability among these academic librarians. The data collected were statistically analyzed on percentile basis and analyses were done on the basis of Level of awareness of learning disabilities and scores achieved in test items by the academic librarians. The outcome of the study shows that the academic librarians had a moderate knowledge about learning disability. To this end it was recommended among others that orientation programmes and workshops need to be conducted so that they can diagnose the problem of students who form bulk of their patrons and intervene accordingly as well as addressing the challenge of lack of awareness among the general public as well as educators and library management.

Keywords: Learning Disability, Awareness, academic librarians, Students

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1.0. Introduction

The practice of librarianship constitutes holding out oneself as skilled in the knowledge, art and services of the organisation, dissemination, preservation of recorded information, the reading, the rendering, furnishing and contracting of professional services such as consultation and advice on the organisation and management of libraries data banks, research and information centre to client on a fee or otherwise; the teaching of subjects in the library and information; and the signing or authenticating for clients of document and reports when called for (Chanroble, 2019). This implies that the sole aim of librarianship is to provide the needed information to library users and so to speak to the society regardless of class; creed, sex, status or race. This is what is called inclusion.

Inclusion therefore, is the right of all individuals to participate actively in all aspects of community life. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Division for Early Childhood (DEC), The desired results of inclusive experiences for students with disabilities

and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential (DEC & NAEYC 2009).

Going by the inclusion principle as stated by Meijer (1982), the task of the librarians in respect to library users, therefore, is not to adopt an attitude of passive expectancy, but to stimulate use of the library so that everyone's requirements can be met. Because the influence exercised by books, etc., can be either good or bad, and because the majority of library users require only relevant sources on a subject, the librarian is obliged through reader guidance and reader service to make available not the maximum, but a limited selection of the collection. The librarian as a social worker is also obliged to be of help to any class of users including those with learning disability-which is an aspect of exceptionality a term Ugwu (2015) describes as a state of deviation from normal standard of being or existence of certain human attributes, abilities, capabilities and traits from the average. Learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to different groups of difficulties manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. It is an umbrella term for wide variety of learning problems (Kemp, Smith & Segal, 2013). They added that these difficulties are intrinsic to individuals and are presumed to be as a result of dysfunctions in the central nervous system.

Generally, there has been a misconception between learning disabilities and exceptional students, in this context, it is imperative to clarify for proper understanding that learning disabled students are quite different from exceptional students just like mentally retarded or deaf the issue as explained by Anusiem (2006) is that they cannot accurately perceive things virtually, hear or listen attentively in the same vein writes Ekwe (2003) learning disability is not a problem with intelligence or motivation and that these children are not lazy, deaf or dumb because most of them are smart as everyone else; it is just that their brain are wired differently and this difference affects how they perceive and process information.

In other words, learning disabled students are those who have adequate mental ability and sensory processes but fail to utilize them to perform (Anusiem, 2006) As expressed by Onwubiko (2020), it behooves librarians as social workers to exhibit attitude that will give every library user regardless of class, creed, sex and status a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. It is in consideration of the above that the researcher felt the need to investigate the level of awareness of learning disabilities among academic librarians who by their position serve various classes of patrons including students with learning abilities. The obvious, is that the establishment of their level of awareness we place one in a better position to say whether academic librarians are living up to expectations as it concerns helping every user irrespective of class to reach their full potentials.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

.Learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to different groups of difficulties manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. It is general educational term- an umbrella label- that includes a variety of

different conditions. Unfortunately in the university system, most of the students are never identified as learning disabled. This may be attributed to lack of awareness among academic librarians, lecturers, parents and school authorities as a result, they are usually labeled as slow, behind, incapable and failures. What academic librarians fail to understand is that inclusion is the right of all individuals to participate actively in all aspects of community life including in the use of the library. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Division for Early Childhood (DEC), the desired results of inclusive experiences for children with disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential (DEC & NAEYC, 2009). In the context of provision of library services, it behooves librarians to exhibit attitude that will give every library user no matter what that sense of belonging as to enhancing his/her development and to reach his/her learning potentials. It is disheartening to state, that some librarians do not see their duties in this light neither do appreciate the fact that libraries are the hub on which every educational activity revolves. In fact some academic librarians' tend to see every student entering the library as the same without putting into consideration individual difference. This lackadaisical attitude of some academic librarians seems not to be helping matters as library users with learning disabilities are often seen and treated as any other library users. This undesirable attitude no doubt may stem from ignorance as such librarians lack such skills and pedagogy on how to handle and assist this group of library users and also considering the fact that there is dearth of literature on the level of awareness of learning disabilities among academic librarians in this part of the globe.

It is against this backdrop that this study was deemed necessary as to investigating the level of awareness of learning disabilities among academic librarians using federal universities in Southeast, Nigeria as a case in point, an investigation whose outcome may help to remedy the shortcomings that may be identified.

1.2. Research Objective

The objective of the present study is to assess current knowledge level of academic librarians regarding learning disabilities

1.3. Research Question

The study was guided by one research question which is:

1. What is academic librarians level of awareness regarding learning disabilities?

2.0. Literature Review

2.1. Learning Disabilities

Learning disability refers to delays, deviations and performances discrepancies in the basic academic subjects for instance, arithmetic, reading, writing, spelling as well as speech and cannot be attributed to mental retardation, sensory deficits, or emotional disturbances or learning disabilities. It is general educational term- an umbrella label- that includes a variety of different conditions (Sawhney & Bansal, 2014). According to Kirk; Gallagher, Anastasiow and Coleman (2006), learning disabilities

refer to a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition; organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal and non-verbal information adding that specific learning disability means a specific disorder in one or more of basic psychological processes involved in using language, spoken or written which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations.. A learning disability therefore is a neurological disorder that affects one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language they conclude.

2.2. Empirical and theoretical overview

A number of students with learning disabilities are found in our schools and are entitled to make use of the library. These disabilities explains National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) (2012), were not caused by the students themselves rather by developmental, environment, home and school related problems noting that improper development or accidents before or after birth can cause learning disabilities. Furthermore, the center believes that children who do not receive support necessary to promote their intellectual development early may show sign of learning difficulties one they start school. Since learning disabilities are not any student's fault, it is expected that librarians' attitude towards such students should not be that of discrimination; hostility; prejudice and rejection. As noted by Izuchi and Opara (2014), these students already have the problem of frustration, anger and feeling of inadequacy because of their predicament as well as struggling with low self esteem. This group of students requires special intervention by various agencies such as government; libraries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), well placed individuals, institutions and parents and their education should be given more attention believing that education is a tool for personal and national development as well as capacity building they added.

A learning disability so to speak is a neurological disorder that affects one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language. The disability may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations. A learning disability cannot be cured or fixed; it is a lifelong challenge. Unfortunately, most of these children are never identified as learning disabled. In his contribution, Ugwu (2015) highlights the four types of specific learning disabilities as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia and dyscalcular. He explains that people with dyslexia have troubles making connections between letters, sound and with spellings and recognizing words, those with dysgraphia have problems with writing while those with dyscalcular have problem understanding basic arithmetic concepts like fractions; number lines, positive and negative numbers and dyspraxia victims have problems with motor task. Learning disabilities in reading (dyslexia) is a language based disorder where the student has difficulties in pronunciation, reading, sound or words recognition. It also deals with language processing, reading, writing and spelling. In this case, the victim is confused about letters, names and sound and experiences difficulties in blending sounds and words, slow rate of reading and trouble in remembering after reading text and assignment (Ekwe, 2003; Anusiem, 2006; Baker, 2014). Anusiem (2006), explained that dyscalculia is a mathematical disability whereby an

individual have difficulty in solving arithmetic problems, grasping mathematical concepts and symbols, mathematical skills, computation, remembering facts, concepts of time and money. It refers to a wide range of lifelong learning disabilities involving poor mental mathematical skills and problems with spatial direction added Ekwe (2003).

Writing on level of awareness of learning disabilities, Sawhney and Bansal, (2014), posit that due to lack of awareness among teachers and school authorities, students with learning disabilities are usually labeled as slow, behind, incapable and failures. In support of their claim, Sawhney and Bansal, (2014), revealed that in India around 13-14% of all school children suffer from learning disorders. These children are labeled as failures by the society we live in but in reality it's not that these children who have failed but it is the education system that has failed, failed in recognizing and helping them. As teachers and librarians are the link between the children and education system, it's their level of understanding and awareness that sets the path for these children's future.

Furthermore, researches conducted in different parts of the world have found that teachers' acceptance of inclusion may be promoted by educating them about the characteristics and behaviors of students with special needs (e.g., Carroll, 2003; Koay, Lim, Sim, & Elkins, 2006; Lanier & Lanier, 1996; Papadopoulou, Kokaridas, Papanikolaou, & Patsiaouras, 2004). However, numerous studies have indicated that regular education teachers feel that both pre-service and in-service education programs were inadequate in preparing them for teaching students with learning disabilities in regular classrooms (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006; Wilson, Loprete, & Slostad, 2000).

Al Khatib (2007) investigated the Jordanian regular education teachers' knowledge of learning disabilities and whether this knowledge differed as a function of selected variables. The sample consisted of 405 regular classroom teachers teaching 1st to 6th grade students in 30 schools in three Jordanian districts. Teachers completed a 40-item test designed by the researcher, which had adequate psychometric properties. The results of the study revealed that teachers had a moderate level of knowledge of learning disabilities. Female teachers were found to be significantly more knowledgeable than male teachers. Teachers' level of knowledge was unrelated to teachers' age, teaching experience, or academic qualifications.

Malusu & Kamau-Kang'ethe (2010) assessed the teacher awareness and intervention for pupils with Learning Disabilities in inclusive education in Makadara Division. The study concluded that: teachers were aware of inclusive education in their schools, teachers had different interventions in place to ensure the success of inclusive education e.g. the use of corrective approaches, direct instructions, systematic phonics and using connectivity' with pupils' individual learning needs and that teachers were not professionally prepared to cope with pupils with learning Disabilities in inclusive education. In a related issue, Aladwani and Shaye (2013) investigated Kuwaiti primary school teachers' knowledge of the early signs of dyslexia and their awareness level of the related difficulties that dyslexic children suffer. They concluded that Kuwaiti teachers are aware of this problem, but lack of

time and being overloaded with daily school routines and responsibilities, prevent them from helping and assessing these children.

On a general note, the various studies carried out to investigate the knowledge and awareness of teachers regarding learning disabilities found out that the success of inclusion of students with learning disabilities partially depends on teachers' awareness of these students' needs (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Lanier & Lanier, 1996; Papadopoulou, Kokaridas, Papanikolaou, & Patsiaouras, 2004). While Onwubiko (2020) carried out a study on attitude of librarians towards learners with learning disability in Nigeria and discovered that librarians as social workers must exhibit attitude that will give every library user regardless of class, creed, sex and status a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential.

3.0. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The study adopted a descriptive research survey which is a type of research design that aims to obtain information and systematically describe a phenomenon, situation, or population. More specifically, it helps answer the *what*, *when*, *where*, and *how* questions regarding the research problem, rather than the *why* (Voxco, 2021).

3.2. Population Sample

The sample population of this study was 50 academic librarians randomly selected from five federal universities in Southeast, Nigeria which include: Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State and Nigeria University of Nigeria, Nsukka.. The sample distribution is 10 from each university. Through the simple random sampling techniques, each librarian was given equal opportunity of being selected.

3.3. Instrument for data collection

The major instrument used in collecting data for this study was a 20-item test like questionnaire of constructed by the researcher to test the basic awareness of learning disability among these academic librarians.. The instrument had two sections with section one being for demographic data of the librarians and section two which contained 20-item test questions on general meaning of learning disabilities, types and management. The test was administered individually with adequate instructions to the teachers.

3.4. Method for data analysis

The data collected was statistically analyzed on percentile basis and analyses were done on the basis of Level of awareness of learning disabilities and scores achieved in test items by the academic librarians

4.0. Presentation and Analysis Data

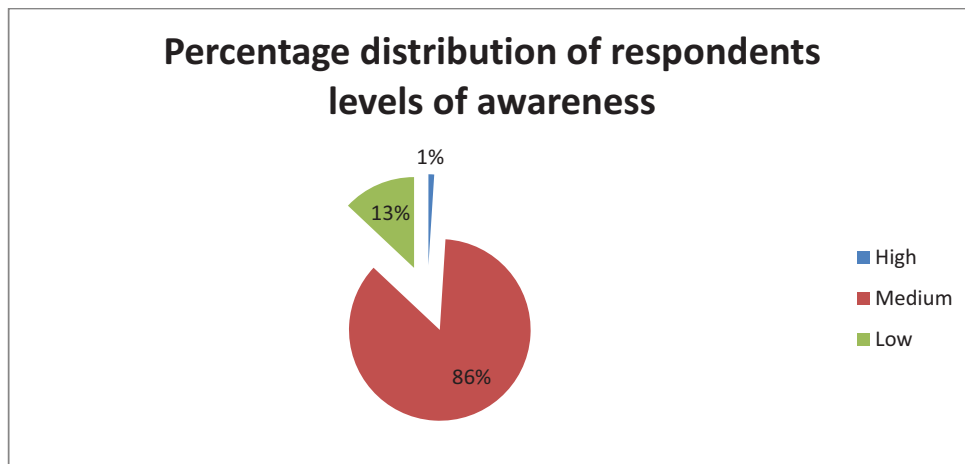
The data collected was statistically analyzed on percentile basis and analyses were done on the basis of Level of awareness of learning disabilities and scores achieved in test items by the teachers.

Analysis on basis of Level of awareness: The scores were divided into high, medium and low level of awareness as depicted in Table 1.

No of respondents		Levels	Score	Percentages
	1	High	>14-20	2%
	43	Medium	>7-14	86%
	6	Low	>0-7	12%
Total	50	-		100

It was found that 12% of the librarians scored between the 0-7 range thus depicting low level of awareness regarding learning disability. 86% of the librarians scored between the >7-14 range thus depicting medium level of awareness regarding learning disability and only one librarian was able to score in the >14-20 range thus 2% of the librarians fall under high level of awareness for Learning disabilities. The overall picture depicts that only one librarian scored above 14 which leads us to conclude that there is a great need to generate awareness among the librarians regarding learning disabilities. The graphical representation of the data is evident from Figure 1 given below:

Figure 1: Percentage distribution of respondents (academic librarians) across various levels of awareness regarding learning disability



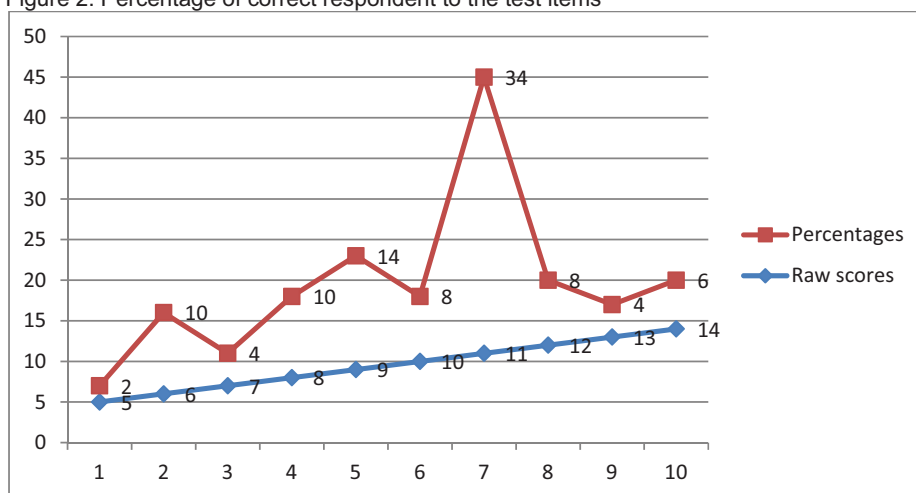
The data as graphical represented in figure 1 above further indicated clearly that majority of academic librarians' level of awareness of learning disabilities was within the medium (86%) while an insignificant 2% or 1 respondents indicated high level of awareness of learning disability.

Table 2: Percentage of the correct respondent to the test items

No of respondents	Raw scores	Percentages
1	5	2%
5	6	10%
2	7	4%
5	8	10%
7	9	14%
4	10	8%
17	11	34%
4	12	8%
2	13	4%
3	14	6%

Table 2 describes the percentage distribution of correct response of the respondents to the test items. The percentage of librarians who correctly answered each of the 20 questions comprising the test of knowledge used was calculated. The percent of correct responses to the test items ranged from 2% to 34%. The mean score obtained by librarians on the total test was 9.95, meaning that librarians only demonstrated medium level knowledge which is 50% the total questions in the test of learning disabilities.

Figure 2: Percentage of correct respondent to the test items



A graphical representation of the data in table 2 is depicted in Figure 2 above

It was evident from the data in table 2 and figure 2, that 2% of librarians responded correctly to 5 items out of 20, 10% librarians to 6 items, 4% of them responded correctly to 7 items, 10% did to 8 items, 14% librarians to 9 items, 8% librarians to 10 items, 34% librarians responded correctly to 11 items, 8% librarians responded to 12 items correctly, 2% to 13 items and only 6% responded correctly

to 14 items. The results suggested that a very small group of academic librarians have basic knowledge regarding learning disabilities.

5.0. Discussion of Result

It is evident from both Tables 1 and 2 and Figures 1 and 2 that majority of the librarians have only 50% knowledge about learning disabilities which is insufficient and inadequate as it cannot be enough to help them identify learning disabled in their users. Only 6% of the librarians or 3 out of 50 librarians achieved a score of 14 or 70% knowledge of learning disabilities again a very small number of librarians reaching the highest score in medium level of awareness. The reason for the majority of librarians falling in medium level of awareness of learning disabilities can be attributed to the fact that the general curriculum of Library and Information Science (LIS) does not cover inclusive education as a separate subject. Thus these librarians are not even able to distinguish learning disabled users from the slow learner as it has been observed and checked through the self made test that most of the librarians answered the very 1st multiple choice question with the observation that the learning disabled users are ones who are academically backward with low Intelligent Quotient (IQ). The outcome of this study is in conformity with that of Sawhney and Bansal, (2014), posit that due to lack of awareness among teachers and school authorities, students with learning disabilities are usually labeled as slow, behind, incapable and failures but contrary to that of Malusu & Kamau-Kang'ethe (2010) who assessed the teacher awareness and intervention for pupils with Learning Disabilities in inclusive education in Makadara Division and discovered that: teachers were aware of inclusive education in their schools and different interventions in place to ensure the success of inclusive education as well as that of Aladwani and Shaye (2013) who investigated Kuwaiti primary school teachers' knowledge of the early signs of dyslexia and their awareness level of the related difficulties that dyslexic children suffer and concluded that Kuwaiti teachers are aware of this problem, but lack of time and being overloaded with daily school routines and responsibilities, prevent them from helping and assessing these children.

5.1. Conclusion and recommendations

The result of this study did show that majority of academic librarians lack adequate knowledge of learning disability which an indictment to their primary function as social workers whose duty is provide information services to all regardless of class so as to reach their maximum potentials. The duty of a librarian is to make the world a better place by providing desirable and relevant information to all and sundry and extending hand of fellowship in knowledge creation. Use of library is the stage at which such students can benefit the most from intervention strategies if identified by the academic librarians at the right time and this can be achieve only if librarians have adequate awareness and knowledge of the same. It is in view of the above findings that the following recommendations are proffered.

- ❖ The lack of awareness among the academic librarians; general public as well as educators and officials in the universities is the first problem that needs to be addressed. This implies that effort must be made to create the desired awareness by educational stakeholders as available information shows that only few parents and general public have meager knowledge about learning disability.
- ❖ There is thus a great need not only to have inclusive education component in LIS course but also to have in service programs for the librarians in the system. The obvious is that regulating bodies in-charge of curriculum planning in library schools, should come up with a course to be titled 'Special Librarianship' in which issues like learning disabilities and other education related challenges will be taught.
- ❖ There is also the need to generate awareness by preparing modules on identification and intervention for the learning disabled and orienting the academic librarians through workshops and training programmes
- ❖ A major review of existing literature on teachers' attitudes to special education needs concluded that what is necessary to change teacher attitudes and provide them with the skills that they need to successfully implement mainstreaming is for education authorities to develop "a coherent plan for teacher training in the educational needs of children with special educational needs" (Avramidi & Norwich, 2002). The same approach as suggested for teachers, should as a matter of facts be replicated in the training of librarians.
- ❖ It has been observed that early intervention helps to improve every disability. It is helpful in early detection of the problem as well as is required for appropriate planning of any intervention programme. The academic libraries management and librarians have to be persuaded to develop a system of early detection and education so that capabilities of these students are identified. For this, the role of academic librarians is most important. Once librarians learn how to handle these students in libraries, the status of these students could improve significantly. One such type of disability which is widely misunderstood, that the librarians need to be aware of is learning disabilities.

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