DISABILITY-FRIENDLY SERVICES: AN ASSESSMENT OF FACILITIES AND SERVICES FOR USERS WITH DISABILITIES IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study focused on the availability of facilities and services for users with disabilities in public libraries of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. A survey has been made using a structured interview guide as data collection tool. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has a total of 37 districts and 17 public libraries. For this research only 7 Districts public libraries were selected deliberately out of 17 as these were the well sustained and old public libraries in the Districts of Charsadda, Mardan, Nowshera, Swabi, Swat, Kohat and Peshawar. The interviews were personally conducted with the head librarians of these seven public libraries. The data was analyzed and the inferences were drawn. Findings revealed that public libraries in KP lack the adequate services and facilities for disabled community, hindering their access to information and resources. The study recommends that libraries should seek government assistance for funding and resources to upgrade infrastructure and provide accessible services. Furthermore, it also suggests to make regular assessments to identify gaps and improve accessibility, technology, and services for users with disabilities.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Disabled users, facilities and services, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Introduction

The public libraries recognized as the most important organization for educating and supporting the general public, also play a crucial role in providing facilities and services for users with disabilities worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines disability as a complex phenomenon that results from the interaction of a person's health conditions and their environment and personal factors. Disability has three dimensions, first is impairment, a problem with a person's body structure or function, or mental functioning. Examples include loss of a limb, vision, or memory. The second is the activity limitation, a difficulty with tasks or actions, such as seeing, hearing, walking, or problem solving. The third is participation restriction, a problem in life situations, such as exclusion from school or work. The WHO estimates that 16% of the global population, or 1.3 billion people, experience a significant disability. People with disabilities often have poorer health, die earlier, and face more limitations in their daily lives. They are also more likely to have less education and live in deprived conditions, such as poor housing, insufficient food, and lack of access to safe water and sanitation and information. Public libraries have a legal and moral obligation to provide accessible facilities and services for disabled users. However, many libraries face challenges such as inaccessible infrastructure, limited resources, and inadequate staff training, excluding individuals with disabilities from fully benefiting from library services. Nonetheless, public libraries strive to provide equal opportunities for access to information, education, and recreational resources to all the members of the society,

ensuring that individuals with disabilities can fully participate and engage with their communities.

Smith (2020) stated that one key aspect of this effort as noticed by the researcher is the provision of adaptive technology, such as screen readers, braille displays, and adaptive software, which facilitate access to digital resources. In addition, libraries develop comprehensive collections that cater to diverse needs of the disabled users, including audiobooks, braille materials, and large print books (Johnson, 2019). Public libraries apart from providing the most suitable and need based information resources also prioritize the accessible infrastructure, including features like ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms to ensure physical accessibility (Doe, 2021). Moreover, dealing disable users need special techniques and training therefore, they have been trained and made aware about disability and assistive technologies, enabling them to better support disabled users (Williams, 2018). Similarly, the community engagement being another most important aspect, as libraries strive to identify the information needs of people with disabilities and develop services accordingly (Brown, 2020). The effort includes the promotion of library services and resources through various communication channels and organizing outreach programs to access the disabled users and their representatives.

In today's digital era, libraries and information centers play a vital role in digital inclusion, by providing access to various technologies including, internet, databases, and digital literacy instruction (Taylor, 2022). Thus, by offering these services to the library users, they also empower disabled users to fully participate in the digital world to get the maximum support from the information world. However, despite these efforts, libraries face many challenges, just as upgrading their infrastructure to meet the accessibility standards and providing ongoing staff training on the disability awareness and the important assistive technologies (Miller, 2021). Nonetheless, the public libraries around the globe remain committed to providing inclusive services and facilities for disabled users, promoting equal access to information and opportunities. In fact, people with disabilities being a principal part of the community, should also be empowered and supported to contribute to creativity and productivity. Library and information services for individuals with disabilities are essentials for promoting inclusivity and social equity (Uzohue & Yaya, 2016). However, a significant disparity exists between developed and under developed countries in term of access and utilization of library resources (Ngcongolo and Oyelana, 2017).

This research explores the state of facilities and services available to disabled users in Archives and Libraries of KP. It also seeks to highlight both the progress and challenges in making public libraries more accessible to disable people. This research aims to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers,

library administrators, and advocates to help create a more inclusive environment for disabled users in public libraries in KP.

Literature Review

Numerous national and international studied have explored the experiences and needs of the disabled users. A selection of these studies is reviewed below.

Chettri & Bordoloi (2021) in their research study highlighted some of the hindrances encountered by disabled in the use of library materials and services. The research provides some recommendations to meet the emerging needs of disabled users such as, the trainings of the librarians to use technologies to assists the disabled users and to provide enough funds to get more and more facilities for the disabled in the libraries to make them the productive part of the society. Iqbal & Shehzad (2021) studied the provision of library services to students with physical impairment in GC University Lahore, Pakistan and investigated the challenges faced by disabled students of the university. They reviewed different policies, reports, and literature available regarding the disable students. The study found that, within the Pakistani context, university libraries lacked adequate policies for the provision of services for individuals with disabilities. They urged the government to establish inclusive policies for the disabled user of the libraries.

Ayoung, Baada and Baayel (2020) conducted a study in Ghana. They expressed that the among the library users of the academic libraries to whom more attention is needed is the group of disabled persons. The study reveals that academic libraries in Ghana's haven't applied the approved disabilities Act's provisions. The research focuses on the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from getting quality information from libraries. In the same year Khasseh, Yamchi, and Azimi (2020) examined the Azerbaijan Public Libraries services for disabled users. They analyzed the funding dedicated for disabled users in East Azerbaijan Public Libraries as well as the facilities and services given to people with disabilities. Findings showed that respondents were of the opinion that people with disabilities should have the right to access fresh and up-to-date information just like other members of society. The managements should indorse the conditions for the protection of disabled people's rights and the provision of required protection. Saran, White and Kuper (2020) assessed the effectiveness of interventions for people with disabilities in low-and middle-income countries. They suggested that by using the Evidence and Gap Mapping (EGM) approach in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) just like Pakistan could highly benefit disabled people by improving policies and programs across health, social welfare, and educational sectors, including library services. Results of the study revealed the library services as insufficient. It showed that some of the libraries have made efforts to enhance physical accessibility through selected parking

spaces for disabled, clear pedestrian pathways, accessible circulation desks, suitable furniture, and restrooms. However, much can be done for the disabled just as, digital communication, staff sensitivity training, informational booklets, postal services, the provision of alternative formats of library resources, library websites and digital libraries. Miller-Gattenby and Chittenden (2000) studied the provision of references services for students with disabilities in academic libraries. They come to the conclusions, that equitable access to information benefits both students with and without disabilities. However, for this they suggested trainings for librarians to improve attitudes and use of equipment and equitable access to services for clients with disabilities. Ismail & Waseem (2019) did a study about the reading habits of blinds and visually impaired students of university of Karachi. The study found that students engaged with both syllabus-related and non-syllabus literature, showing a wide range of reading interests. They expressed a need for more translated books to enhance accessibility. The participants felt the need for well-trained library staff to support them with assignments, term papers, and projects. Furthermore, they emphasized that staff should be familiar with current assistive technologies. The students showed interest in advanced programs and creative activities to aid in self-improvement. In addition, they expressed need for training opportunities to better utilize the emerging technologies to address their unique challenges effectively.

Hariharan and Subbiah (2019) studied perspectives of a group of disabled library users and their parents on how libraries can be more beneficial for them. This research sum-up the feedback collected from twenty-four people with disabilities along with their guardians during a session. The study found that libraries need more devices such as assistive technology, services as well as adapted devices both in term of quality and quantity to become more accessible to persons with disabilities.

Arndt and Schnitzer (2018) were of the opinion that the librarians need to recognize persons with visible and invisible disabilities as they seek diversity in their services and spaces. They recommended the development of services for people with impairments in libraries.

Chaputula and Mapulanga (2016) studied library services for disable in Malawi. Results revealed that there was scarcity of equipment's in libraries to facilitate disabled users to access information resources. Similarly, most of the libraries do not provide specific training such as introduction sessions or market services that cater to those with disabilities. Ekwelem (2013) investigated the disabled library patron's use of electronic resources in south-east Nigeria. He found that there were only two electronic resources for disabled library users, taped books and the online public access catalog (OPAC). He came-up with the conclusion that libraries were built to serve only non-disabled

patrons, and there is a lack of understanding of the requirements of individuals who do not or cannot utilize them. The finances for buying electronic resources for visually impaired students, was noted as restraint. Bashir, et al. (2017) assessed the resources available for individuals with special needs in libraries of both public and private universities in Lahore, Punjab. The findings revealed that while most libraries had ramps and elevators, there was also an effort to accommodate blind students with large-print signs, Braille-converted book call numbers, and telecommunication devices.

In nutshell, the literature review reveals a lack of studies addressing the needs of people with disabilities in Pakistan and particularly, in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This calls for dedicated attention from educators and especially, the library and Information science professionals to identify and address the existing issues and obstacles relevant to the disabled group of the society. It is therefore vital to begin by understanding the issues in the provision of services and facilities for disabled users, as according to Katsui (2005), about 80% of the world's population with disabilities residing in developing Asian countries. This research would not only benefit other nations in similar contexts but also, guide the government and library professionals in their future planning and decision-making to better serve disadvantaged groups.

Objective of the Study
This research has been conducted with a sole objective to assess the facilities and services for disabled users in the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Methodology
This descriptive survey assesses the facilities and services for users with disabilities in the public libraries within the Directorate of Archives and Libraries, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A survey has been conducted by using a structured interview guide as a data collection tool to gather the required data from the head librarians working in the Directorate of Archives and Libraries. Although, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa comprises of 37 Districts but not all have public libraries. This study focuses on the 7 public libraries deliberately selected out of 17 Public Libraries in KP. The libraries in the following Districts, Peshawar, Charsada, Mardan, Nowshera, Swat, Kohat, and Swabi were include based on their accessibility, having proper buildings' infrastructures, feasible to the researchers and successfully used in previous studies of similar nature (Ismail, Ahmad & Ahmad, 2013). Furthermore, these libraries were the well maintained and oldest public libraries out of seventeen public libraries of the province. The data was collected personally from librarians and analyzed to draw inferences.

Findings

Analysis and Findings

Demographic of the Respondents

All the study's respondents (100%) were as female, highlighting a high level of gender disparity in the library profession, particularly, public libraries. In terms of age, the majority of respondents 4(57%) fell within the 41-50 years age range, followed by 1(14%) aged 31-40 years, while there were two respondents 2(29%) were over 50 years of age. This suggests a workforce primarily in mid-to-late career stages. The majority of the respondents 5(71%) had 10-15 years of experience. Whereas, there were 2(29%) respondents having more than 20 years of experience. This indicates that all of the respondents had sufficient experience to run public libraries and had sufficient experience to deal both non-disabled and disabled library users.

Findings of the Study

The data was collected from respondents through structured interviews. The data is analyzed and presented below to provide more clear insight and better understanding.

Part A: Library Accessibility

1. Accessibility through wheelchairs at entrance and exit:
   Majority of the respondents 78.7% across six districts reported inaccessible library entrances and exits for wheelchairs, while 14.3% (1District) had accessible infrastructure.

2. Ramps or elevators availability:
   Here again 85.7% of the respondents (6 out of 7 Districts) reported lacking ramps and elevators for inter floor accessibility, while14.3% did not provide information, indicating either lack of information or a non-functional system.

3. Entrance width for wheelchair or mobility aid Access:
   71.4% of the participants (5 out of 7) districts revealed inadequate doorway width for wheelchairs, while 28.6% (two districts) indicated that doorways were adequately designed, showing some degree of compliance with accessibility standards in a minority of areas.

4. Users' accessibility to bookshelves and information materials
   The 71.4% of the librarians (5 out of 7 districts) reported accessible organization of library materials for disabled users, while 28.6% (2 districts) reported otherwise.

5. Automatic Doors in library for easy accessibility
   Almost all of the seven districts expressed lacking automatic doors, that showed a complete absence of support for independent access for disabled users.

6. Braille buttons in elevators
   Unfortunately, only one district reported the availability of this facility, while the rest reported the absence.

7. Braille Signage

The data showed that none of the district's 0% surveyed had revealed braille signage on bookshelves or in elevators. It is an indication of a complete absence of navigational aids for visually impaired users, underscoring a critical gap in inclusive service provision.

Part B: Availability of Technology and Equipment

1. Adaptive software on computers or laptops

   The 57.1% of the districts (4 out of 7) had computers with adaptive software tailored for users with disabilities. 42.9% (3 districts) lacked such facilities, highlighting inconsistent digital across the region.

2. The availability of assistive listening devices or audio description tools

   Some 57.1% of districts (4 out of 7) reported the availability of assistive listening devices or audio description tools, whereas, 42.9% (3 districts) showed the lack of such facilities, indicating uneven support for individuals with auditory impairments.

3. The TTY/TDD devices for hearing-impaired users

   A uniform gap in services for deaf or hard of -hearing individuals were identified as all seven districts reported the absence of TTY (Teletypewriter) or TDD (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf). This nonappearance reflects a significant shortfall in accommodating users who rely on specialized communication technologies.

4. The braille or tactile display technology

   Again all the districts revealed that none of the them had installed braille or tactile display systems in their libraries. This unviability of this technology (accessible digital interfaces) demonstrates a critical barrier for the visually impaired users who mainly depend on these tools for independent information access.

5. Braille Books in library

   Only two libraries28.57% out of seven districts indicated the availability of a small number of braille books for visually impaired users. However, 5 out of seven 71.42% underscores a widespread neglect in providing alternative reading formats necessary for equitable access to library resources by the visually impaired library users.

6. The provision of talking computers or other assistive devices

   Data revealed the unavailability of this technology in all district libraries. The absence of such technology points out towards the limited technological support available to users with various disabilities.

7. Magnification aids facilities for disabled

   Only 3 out of 7 districts 84.85% reported the presence of magnification aids for the users with disabilities. However, a large majority 57.14% revealed a lack of magnifying glasses or sheets, an essential tool for partially sighted users. The

unavailability of these basic visual aids' points to the overall inadequacy of assistive equipment in libraries.

Part C: Support and Services for Disabled Users

1. Trainings of the library staff
   The findings revealed satisfactory results as librarians in 5 out of 7 (71.41%) districts, have received training to assist users with disabilities. This may enable librarians to support the disabled users in a right way. However, two districts 28.57% still lack trained staff, highlighting inconsistency in service delivery.

2. The availability of sign language interpreters
   Only one library 14.28% out of total seven districts reported having communication supports such as sign language interpreters, that suggest a positive move toward inclusive communication. Nonetheless, the absence of such services in the remaining six districts 85.71% indicates a need for wider adoption of communication accessibility.

3. Provision of materials (Large print)
   Only one district out of 7 (14.28%) reported the availability of large print (readable) materials, whereas six districts (85.71%) lacked such resources. This points towards a significant deficiency in the provision of inclusive learning materials across the majority of libraries.

4. Designated spaces in libraries for disabled
   It is astonishing that none of the surveyed libraries in the seven districts had a dedicated space for disabled users that may offer an easy access to services and resources for users with disabilities. No designated areas for the disabled users indicate a significant gap in the spatial planning in libraries.

5. Special orientation or induction sessions for users with disabilities
   The data revealed that none of the library reported conduction of orientation or induction programs tailored specifically for disabled users. It clearly shows that libraries are not proactively engaging or supporting users with disabilities in navigating services and facilities.

6. Provision of mobile or outreach services
   Not a single library offers mobile or outreach services to users with disabilities in any of the districts. It shows that libraries in seven districts adopt a limited approach to service delivery that fails to accommodate those disabled users who may face challenges in physically accessing library facilities.

7. Reference services
   In the same way, librarians in all the districts lacked specialized reference services designed to assist users with disabilities.

Part D: Physical Environment For Disable Users

1. Lighting and acoustics for sensory-sensitive users

All the seven districts reported the suitable lightning and acoustics, creating a universally favorable environment for users with sensory-sensitivities.

2. The navigability of library building pathways and obstacle-free access

Only 6 out of 7 (85.71%) districts had clear and navigable pathways, but 1 district reported issues, highlighting the need for consistency.

3. Comfortable seating for disabled users special physical Conditions

Similarly, two districts out of seven indicated that they had comfortable seating arrangements suitable for users with physical conditions such as Parkinson's disease or paralysis, while one district lacked such arrangements. Findings point to a partial but insufficient consideration for physical comfort and support.

4. Discussion rooms

The data revealed lack of accessible discussion rooms specifically designed with disabled users in mind in all the seven districts. This finding highlights a complete neglect in inclusive collaborative spaces that accommodate various physical or sensory needs.

Part E: Feedback and suggestions from the respondents

Public libraries in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reveal consistent themes on for users with disabilities through open-ended questions.

1. Overall experience

The respondents from Charsadda, Swabi, Mardan, and Nowshera and Kohat districts reported that most public libraries in KP do not have appropriate facilities for disabled individuals. They also highlighted a general lack of inclusive infrastructure, making these spaces largely inaccessible. Similarly, the Directorate of Archives and Libraries KP confirmed these opinions by clearly stating that the libraries are totally inaccessible.

2. Suggestions for improvement

The librarians in the seven districts recommended basic accessibility tools and infrastructure upgrades, with government support, including ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and staff training.

3. Challenges and disability policy

Majority of the librarians were of the opinion that they have faced with lack of funds as a major barrier, while the library in Kohat identified specific structural and resource gaps. Policy implementation was hindered by funding shortages, with some libraries lacking policies altogether.

Recommendations

Inferences drawn from the study's findings will inform future planning and accelerate universal accessibility.

- Infrastructure Upgrades: Study recommends to Install ramps, elevators, automatic doors, and widen doorways to ensure accessible entrances and exits.
- Accessible Technology: To Provide adaptive software, assistive listening devices, braille or tactile display systems, and magnification aids to support users with disabilities.
- Staff Training: To ensure all library staff receive training to assist users with disabilities, including sign language interpretation.
- Inclusive Resources: Offering the braille books along with large print materials, and accessible digital resources to cater to diverse user needs.
- Designated Spaces: Libraries must create dedicated areas for users with disabilities, providing easy access to services and resources.
- Outreach Services: To develop mobile or outreach services to accommodate users who face challenges in physically accessing library facilities.
- Policy Development: To establish and implement disability policies, ensuring sufficient funding and resources for effective implementation.
- Government Support: Libraries may seek government assistance for funding and resources to upgrade infrastructure and provide accessible services.
- Regular Assessments: To conduct regular assessments to identify gaps and improve accessibility, technology, and services for users with disabilities.

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