Chapter 11
Accessibility of Library Services to Patrons With Disabilities at Bindura University of Science Education Library

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the accessibility of library services to patrons with disabilities at Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE). The study was carried out because, since the commissioning and the movement of all BUSE library services to the new library, there has not been any study to determine how accommodative the library is to patrons with disabilities. The study made use of International Federation of Libraries and Associations (IFLA) access to libraries for persons with disabilities checklist as its theoretical framework. The study recommended that for BUSE library to improve the accessibility of library services to patrons with disabilities it must craft an institutional policy for people with disabilities at BUSE, provide more resources in alternative formats, as well as provide assistive technologies through establishing a disability centre for patrons with disabilities, training of library staff members to better equip them to serve patrons with disabilities, and physical accessibility of the library by patrons with disability must be improved.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion, accessibility, equality, diversity, dignity and fairness are just some of the many concepts heard when addressing the rights of individuals who live with disabilities (Mooney, 2016). This is because accessibility bridges the gap between the special needs of persons with disabilities and the realization of social, economic, cultural and political inclusion (United Nations, 2015). Accessibility issues are at the forefront of library services as the number of students with disabilities attending colleges or universities

continues to increase (Carter, 2004). People with disabilities face numerous challenges when it comes to the use of academic libraries (Chaputula and Mapulanga, 2016). These challenges include access to the physical library buildings, access to information resources, and lack of services that are tailor-made for them. This in turn has violated certain provisions of the human rights as enshrined in various conventions and treaties all over the world. Librarians and other stakeholders have become increasingly aware of the importance of providing library access to all users inclusively; this consideration will continue to grow in importance in the future (Ayiah, 2017).

Africa has prioritised disability issues, evidence of which can be noted in its declaration on the rights and welfare of PWDs which culminated in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa. Article 11 of the Charter provides that every person with a disability has the right to barrier free access to the physical environment, transportation, information, including communications technologies and systems, and other facilities and services open or provided to the public (African Union, 2016).

Zimbabwe ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) on 23 September 2013 (Mandipa, 2014). The Convention embodies the best practices for the realisation of the rights of patrons with disabilities. This convention has excellent provisions on disability and how state parties should ensure the inclusion of Persons with disabilities in all spheres of life.

A brief synopsis of disability and legislation in Zimbabwe reveal that under the Lancaster House Constitution disability was heavily subdued, only to feature in a somewhat muted form under Amendment 17 when it was defined as physical disability. This continued until 2013 when Zimbabwe adopted a new constitution. This new constitution is more disability friendly than the Lancaster House one (Mtetwa, 2011). The major reason for the adoption of a disability friendly constitution is that persons with disabilities themselves pushed the disability agenda during the constitution making process. This represents a great leap forward in the right direction and it demonstrates the country's willingness to protect, promote and fulfil the rights of people with disabilities as required by the UNCRPD (Manatsa, 2015). The Constitution of Zimbabwe (Section 22) deals with the rights of people with disabilities. The constitution emphasizes the need for treating people with disability with respect and dignity. Section 83 of the constitution further states that people with disabilities must be able to achieve their full potential through the provision of special facilities for their education and this includes the right to use libraries at their institutions of learning.

Chimhenga (2017) describes disability as a conceptualized and a complex process involving bodily functions, health, environment, activity limitations and restrictions in social participation. Cameron (2014) emphasizes that disability is a more complex social construct. Todaro (2005) defines disability as a physical or mental condition that in some way prohibits an individual from performing daily tasks. WHO (2011) posits that disabilities affect persons in activities of daily living such as learning and applying knowledge, communicating, accessing buildings and domestic life. This study however, conceptualizes disability as envisaged in article one of the UNCRPD (2007). The UNCRPD describes persons with disabilities as those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) is an institution of higher learning located in Bindura. BUSE was established in 1996 through the Bindura University of Science Education Act of 2000 (BUSE Annual report, 2015). It is during this year that the library department was also established. The new library building was commissioned in 2017 (BUSE Annual report, 2017). The library can be

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