

**ENHANCING INFORMATION ACCESS AND USE FOR THE DYSLEXICS:
ADOPTING NEW STRATEGIES FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA.**

By

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ABSTRACT

It is estimated that dyslexia affects 8 -10% of the world's population and between 5 to 10% of a given population. The purpose of this paper is to create awareness among librarians about dyslexia and to introduce some of the issues that dyslexic people face in connection with using the public library. The paper identifies likely factors that can discourage dyslexic people from visiting and using libraries including: difficulty with reading quietly in a library and problems with locating books and other resources. The paper recommends some low cost measures for enhancing access and use of information by the Dyslexics and suggests that librarians should go the extra mile by providing access to information and resources in a variety of media, along with providing pictograms, talking books, bold use of signage and selective dissemination of information. These will help in achieving one of the goals of the public library which is to provide equal access to all library users including people with dyslexia their attendant problems notwithstanding.

Keywords: *public libraries; dyslexia; information access; learning disability.*

INTRODUCTION

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty which mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is likely to be present at

birth and to be lifelong in its effects. It is characterized by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities. Within the last ten years there has been in many countries an increasing interest in dyslexia or specific learning difficulties – not only among scientists and other professionals, but also in the general society (Gyda, 2006).

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that about 500 million people live with disability worldwide, with about 75% living in the developing countries. In Nigeria, WHO estimates put the number of people with disability at 19 million or approximately 20% of the country's population (Lang and Upah, 2008). It is estimated that dyslexia affects 8% -10% of the world's population and between 5 to 10 percent of a given population although there have been no studies to indicate an accurate percentage. Only 5 out of 100 dyslexics are recognized and get attention. (Dylexia Africa)

The contemporary public library is supposed to be the most economically efficient community resource for providing people of all ages and educational levels with ready access to information and knowledge. It is expedient for public libraries to be proactive in nature and make the library conducive and have services to suit the dyslexic who are part of any population

Dyslexia tends to be resistant to conventional teaching/ learning methods, but its effects can be mitigated by appropriately specific intervention, including the application of information technology and supportive counseling. (British Dyslexia Association, 1995). Rhea (2002), further stressed that libraries can play catalytic role in the lives of people with disabilities by facilitating their full participation in society.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to propose possible strategies of enhancing access and use of public libraries by dyslexic people. Specifically, the study aims to achieve the following:

- To create awareness to librarians in public libraries about potential users who could be dyslexic.
- To identify possible barriers that could affect dyslexic people's library use.
- To establish how the public library can improve service to enable the dyslexic to use the library with ease.

CONCEPT OF DYSLEXIA

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty; it is a complex neurological condition, which is constitutional in origin. Dyslexia can be described as a pattern of strengths and weaknesses which affects each person differently: some people can be very articulate, others have a word-finding difficulty. Some can read well, others always find it hard. Some people can spell and write well, others find these impossible tasks. This is why understanding the nature of dyslexia is so important." (McLoughlin, Leather and Stringer, 2003)

Dyslexia is a broad term defining a learning disability that impairs a person's fluency or comprehension accuracy in being able to read, and spell, and which can manifest itself as a difficulty with phonological awareness, phonological decoding, orthographic coding, auditory short-term memory, and/or rapid naming. Dyslexia is separate and distinct from reading difficulties resulting from other causes, such as a non-neurological deficiency with vision or hearing, or from poor or inadequate reading instruction. (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

TYPES OF DYSLEXIA

There are several variations in the categorization of the term. However, Carlson (1998) has suggested two major types as follows:

- **Developmental Dyslexia:** are caused by biological anomalies, usually genetic, in the brain at various levels (i.e. morphological or synaptic) from prenatal through childhood development.
- **Acquired Dyslexia:** are caused by brain trauma that may occur prenatally or later, which leads to similar behavioral characteristics of developmental SLDs.

Apart from the above two major categories, there are so many sub types of Dyslexia. The first attempt to sub-divide dyslexia into different types was made by Marshall and Newcombe (1973). They put forth the following sub types:

Surface Dyslexia: relates to the mistakes made where the rules of English pronunciation are inconsistent. For example, "bowl" is read as though it rhymed with "howl", and "pretty" might be read as though it rhymed with "jetty".

Phonological Dyslexia: is a failure to grasp the phonic nature of the English language. Individuals with it have great problems reading new or nonsense words because they do not and cannot grasp the links between the individual sounds or phonemes and letters on the page.

Double-Deficit Dyslexia: is the term applied to the condition of individuals who have both Surface Dyslexia and Phonological Dyslexia.

Auditory Dyslexia and Visual Dyslexia: Many studies have shown that dyslexics do have weaknesses in their visual and auditory processing, but not to the same degree.

Orthographic Dyslexia: Orthography is the set of symbols or letters that make up a language. In English this is the 26 letters of the alphabet whilst in Japanese or Chinese it covers thousands of different symbols. And so Orthographic Dyslexia relates to problems in identifying and manipulating letters in reading, writing and spelling.

CAUSES

According to the Online Medical Free Dictionary, the underlying cause of dyslexia is not known, although research suggests the condition is often inherited. Using positron emission tomography (PET) scans and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), researchers have been able to track the parts of the brain that become active when people with and without dyslexia read. Their general conclusion is that the brains of people with dyslexia are organized differently than those without the disorder and that this different organization results in less concentrated and efficient analysis and processing of the written representation of letter sounds into meaningful information.

As a result of this condition, listed below are some likely factors that can discourage dyslexic people from visiting and using libraries:

- Reading quietly in a library
- Problems locating books/ other resources
- Confusion about signages/ arrows indicating location
- Problem of reading and understanding
- Problem of Communicating with staff
- Unwillingness to declare status as being dyslexic
- Interior layout of the library
- allocated loan periods and even the word 'library' itself

In the words of Coxon (2003), "If you have dyslexia, libraries can present you with more obstacles than opportunities".

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY AND DYSLEXICS

The public library is open to all types of readers regardless of any disabilities and should be able to meet their needs. In order for public libraries to provide relevant and meaningful services and facilities to people with Dyslexia, there must be an awareness of the problem of Dyslexia by the staff, there must be an understanding of their needs, and the problems they may encounter while using the library services and facilities.

The term public library has been defined as a noncommercial library often supported with public funds, intended for use by the general public. Hence, the library staff should strive to meet the needs of their various user communities. Libraries should have laid down strategies so as to help users no matter their disability. It therefore behooves librarians to make sure that

persons with learning disabilities (including dyslexia) do not have difficulties in accessing and using library materials when they visit the library.

The public library is often called "the people's university" because it is available to all, regardless of age, skill level, or ability to pay. School children depend on the public library for books and materials that supplement those of the school library and for library access when school libraries are closed. Some libraries offer homework help and other student services in addition to supplementary resources (Lyn, 2011). Dyslexia has often been described in literature as an invisible or hidden disability which provides no visible clues about its presence (Nielsen & Irvall, 2001). For this reason, public libraries need to proactively offer extra help and support to suit dyslexic people. Christina (2001) advised that libraries need to make their services and collections more accessible to users irrespective of any users challenge.

Recommended Strategies for Enhancing Access and Use of Information For The Dyslexics

Economic challenges facing the public library notwithstanding, there are some strategies that could cost the public library little, nevertheless the few expensive strategies could be considered when the budget allows:

Listed below are some potential roles/ services of public library in serving the needs of the dyslexic:

- All staff should be made aware of the potential difficulties that dyslexic people may experience as well as the factors that may be obstructing their library use. Many of the factors that obstruct dyslexic people's library use can be tackled with specialist material, aids, equipment and support from staff.
- According to Grant (2005) and Gilroy & Miles (2001), leisure reading causes little difficulty for many dyslexic readers but significant problems arise when they are required to study complex material that they must absorb and remember within a limited amount of time, for example academic texts. For this reason, pictograms should be provided (for all categories of readers) so as to reduce reading difficulty for persons with reading disabilities especially Dyslexia.
- There should be a section for people with reading disabilities and it should be attractively designed.
- The library should provide talking books to dyslexic persons. Talking books could be on tapes, cassettes, or new digital media. In certain instances, individuals with reading disabilities such as dyslexia are also eligible.
- There should be posters in conspicuous places in the library which carries campaign in support and help of Dyslexics. This would make the library welcoming to them and give some form of comfort. Libraries must not discriminate against individuals with disabilities and shall

ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal access to library resources.

- Signage should be created in all corners of the library and should appear bold and with large letters and plain backgrounds. The ways in which material and equipment are displayed and positioned in the library is fundamental to creating an accessible environment. Therefore, library materials should be displayed in a manner that would make for easy accessibility of materials.
- There should be laws provided which requires publishers to publish printed books for the visually impaired and dyslexics. Dyslexics should be able to have access to talking books which will be published alongside text.
- Proper lighting can enhance reading, and this can have positive psychological effects on the reader. Proper lighting is crucial to the overall success of a library. A well-lit and bright environment contributes to the enjoyment of reading.
- The library should be able to offer individualized orientation and tours of the library to persons who are dyslexic and especially for new users. To help them understand the various sections in the library and to have acquainted with all the sections in the library.
- Library staff should be trained on how to communicate effectively in order to serve persons with dyslexia. Rebecca (2000), points out that there is some anecdotal or incidental evidence that staff attitudes can be an issue. According to her, library staff may be more comfortable dealing with people with some impairment than others. Training will improve awareness about dyslexia and staff will learn how to be generally friendly and helpful to dyslexics. Library staff will become more knowledgeable about the basic library needs of dyslexic persons and identify barriers affecting dyslexic peoples library use. With the right training, staff members will be better placed to render service to these groups of persons.
- Current Awareness and Selective Dissemination of Information should be promoted for the Dyslexics. Current awareness service will enable the patron to request information on specific subject of interest and the librarian in turn sends updates on such subject areas to the patrons.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, libraries are vital for learning outcome and developing informational need. The dyslexic may not be able to maximize the library and use the materials to their fullest extent without knowledgeable and supportive librarians who will continue to offer a helping hand and show empathy.

Librarians need to continue in the redefinition of their roles and responsibilities within fundamentally changing environments so as to better serve the ever growing and dynamic users. Libraries are no longer simply

information depositories; they have been established as places of learning where knowledge is kept in motion. Librarians are not only custodians or gatekeepers of knowledge; they are now mediators of fundamental learning skills. Serving people with disabilities of any kind is a challenge as well as an opportunity for public libraries to improve lives by empowering them.

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