“If You Can’t See Go and Start the Weekend”: Towards the Provision of Information Resources to Students with Visual Impairments in Tanzanian Academic Libraries

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Abstract
This article reports on an empirical study which examined information resources provision to people with visual impairments in five Tanzanian academic libraries. A pragmatism paradigm and Oliver’s social model of disability were employed as well as the International Classification of Functioning model. Quantitative and qualitative methods, including questionnaires, interview schedules and an observation checklist were used to collect data. The study population of 196 respondents comprised library directors, other professional library staff, disability unit staff, students with visual impairments and staff from the Ministry of Education’s Special Needs Unit. This paper adds to the small body of current literature on this group. The study found that there were no alternative materials for this group in Tanzanian academic libraries; hence they used normal print information resources with the aid of volunteer readers. Information resources in Braille and large print, as well as other assistive technologies are required for people with visual impairments. Students’ practical suggestions give some pointers to how services to diverse and dispersed target audiences of people with visual impairments could be improved. The data gathered could be used in collaboration with regional lobby groups to address the immense gaps in service.

Keywords: information resources; people with visual impairments; academic libraries; Tanzania; social model of disability


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1 Introduction and Motivation for the Study

Libraries the world over serve to locate, procure, prepare, store, make available and disseminate information through appropriate means to all users (Ajobiwe, 2006). Everyone require access to information. For this reason libraries should provide the required information in an appropriate format to meet the specific needs of users (Majinge and Stilwell, 2013). Ekwelem (2013) claims that libraries are organization which provide services without discrimination to various users including users with visual impairments but this issue is generally neglected in current library and information science research (Manžuch and Macevičiūtė, 2016).

Many people who live with disabilities, in particular those with visual impairments, attend institutions of higher learning. It is important for these institutions and their libraries to provide the same level of access and service to them as it provides to other people (Ekwelem 2013). A priority for academic libraries should be to ensure that the information resources which they access and deliver in various formats are made available in appropriate formats for all users including people with visual impairments (Ekwelem 2013). The use of information resources in appropriate formats by people with visual impairments, however, is limited and the availability of and access to information for them, equal to that offered to people without visual impairments, is far from a reality in many countries (Adetoro, 2011). Lack of access to information resources can have a significant impact on education and learning processes as well as on people’s lives.
(Rugeyasila, 2013). Access to people with visual impairments is particularly urgent given their difficulties in accessing the social media which constitute such a useful and generally ubiquitous source of information today (Majinge and Mutula, 2016).

As information dissemination centres academic libraries should take responsibility for, and honour, their obligations to provide knowledge aids for people with visual impairments, so that these people can enjoy the basic human right of acquiring knowledge through the efficient services of libraries in equal measure to the non-disabled (Wei, Lirong and Chunning, 2012). Bagandanshwa (2006) sees information as a source of power because it provides knowledge and facts and as Epp (2006) points out that people with visual impairments need information in their daily lives, and for educational purposes, including access to information, just like people without this disability.

The terms visual impairment requires clear definition. The related terms “visually impaired”, “partially sighted” and “low vision” are frequently used interchangeably to indicate a level of residual vision according to Kleynhans and Fourie (2014:371-2). They draw on Kleynhans (2009) and the World Health Organization (WHO n.d.) to define the terms in a helpful way. The WHO’s classification of visual impairment offers more details in its International Classification of Diseases (ICD 10) (WHO n.d.). It defines two main terms: namely low vision and blindness, using the term “visual impairment” to indicate impairment in both low vision and blindness. To be more specific the term “low vision” includes those whose visual acuity falls in the range less than 6/18 and greater than or equal to 3/60. “Blindness” includes those whose visual acuity falls in the range less than 3/60 to no light perception (Kleynhans and Fourie, 2014:371-2). People with a visual field or peripheral vision of less than 101 are classified as blind, even if the central acuity is not impaired. Apart from the print devices such as Braille, a wide range of assistive technology devices are available for addressing the needs of people with visual impairments: screen magnifiers and readers, voice recognition software and alternative keyboards as well as alternative pointing devices to using a mouse (Kleynhans, 2009).

Majinge and Stilwell (2015) presented the problems regarding physical access experienced by those with visual impairments and in wheelchairs in Tanzanian academic libraries. They found that in all the academic libraries surveyed there were no functioning lifts and ramps for these groups to gain access to the information resources housed in the libraries. The study recommended inclusive services to people with visual impairments and in wheelchairs by having working lifts, ramps, appropriate signage and devices for them to gain access to information resources housed in libraries. The current article focuses on people with visual impairments only, looking at the available information resources in Tanzanian academic libraries and whether they are suitable for this group.

People with visual impairments face numerous challenges, but one of the most urgent is access to information (Mann ,2010). Many actors at different levels, including international, regional and national level, have taken various initiatives to serve this group, but very little effort has been made by library and information services (LIS) to respond to the needs, interests and priorities of people with visual impairments (Ndumbaro, 2009). In Tanzania there is a growing number of people with visual impairments who need library and information services (Ndumbaro, 2009).

Bagandanshwa’s (1998) Tanzanian study on library services for visually impaired and blind people, noted that the material available in libraries was not generally accessible for people with visual impairments. All the journals, other periodicals and books were in normal print. Large print materials for the partially sighted were not available. As a result of this, people with visual impairments were denied access to these materials and services. Majinge (2014) also observed that people with visual impairments were using normal print information resources with the aid of volunteer readers who read for them. Rugeyasila (2013) found that students with visual impairments struggle to identify suitable materials. Universal access to information is still far from reality in Tanzania and many developing countries.

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2 Purpose and Objectives
The study’s purpose was to find out which information resources were provided to people with visual impairments in academic libraries in Tanzania and whether they were suitable for this group.

This purpose gave rise to two objectives: i) to establish whether the printed information resources available in these libraries met the requirements of people with visual impairments, and ii) to find out whether software, such as Job Access With Speech (JAWS) that makes access possible, was available in the academic libraries. JAWS, for example, is a computer screen reader program for Microsoft Windows that allows people with visual impairments to read the screen. This software helps people with visual impairments to access information resources easily and allows users, once trained, a measure of independence.

3 Research Questions
Two research questions addressed by the study in this paper are:

1. What information resources are provided by academic libraries for people with visual impairments?
2. What software is available in the academic libraries to assist people with visual impairments to access to information resources?

4 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review
The social model of disability of Oliver (1990) provided the theoretical framework and model for this study. Oliver’s model is grounded in the principles of the United Kingdom’s (UK) Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation (UPIAS) which were publicised in the mid-1970s. Social barriers of a physical, attitudinal and/or behavioural nature are the reason that some people are disabled according to the social model (Robertson, 2001). The model further outlines all the factors that impose restrictions on people with disabilities such as: individual prejudice, institutional discrimination, inaccessible public buildings, unusable transport systems, segregated education and work arrangements that exclude them (Oliver, 1996). As Robertson (2001:2) pointed out the model embraces the recognition that people are disabled by social barriers: physical, and/or attitudinal or behavioural and that: “If no barrier exists, then a person with an impairment is not prevented from using services”. Oliver’s model is endorsed by the United Kingdom’s Society of College, National and University Libraries’ (SCONUL) Access Working Group (Robertson, 2001).

The focus of the social model is to change the negative attitudes of society to people with disabilities to positive attitudes and to create an environment in which life is made easier for them and allows their participation in all aspects of community life (Majinge 2014). Barnes (1998) cited in Shava (2008) pointed out that the solution to the problem of disability lies in changing society. This change can be partly achieved through adoption of the principle of universal design. Ginnerup (2009:5) describes design that is universal as “a strategy for making environments, products, communication, information technology and services accessible to and usable by everyone – particularly people with disabilities – to the greatest extent possible.” By applying this principle to policies and solutions barriers to taking part in many aspects of life can be avoided in the early stages of planning. Implementing universal design principles necessitates “constructing ramps alongside stairs, installing automatic doors, providing information in Braille and other accessible formats, and providing appropriate accessible technology that ensures the empowerment and full inclusion of disabled people in mainstream society” (Shava, 2008:17).

The social model, if taken to an extreme, suggests that disability would be eradicated if society were changed in appropriate ways (Majinge and Stilwell, 2015). Such a view can appear to ignore the limitations which may result from impairment, such as pain and discomfort that change to the social context may alleviate but not remove completely (Chitereka, 2010). Universal design also has limits in that some design solutions might not apply to other users who are either disabled or non-disabled. They are specific
to certain types of impairment such as provision of Braille signage for directions and shelf information, as opposed to providing large print books which could be used by sighted people as well (Majinge and Stilwell, 2015). Majinge and Mutula (2016) suggested that despite the social model’s predominant focus on the physical world rather than virtual world of social media, it does reflect some key aspects that are applicable more widely and also in social media environments. These aspects are prejudice, cases where rights of access to information are limited for those with visual impairments, not providing tools and services that cater for them, and generally inadequate services.

In terms of policy guidelines, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1997) states that every individual should enjoy rights that are equal to those of others. The United Nations (UN, 1993) further sets out standards for technical and economic compliance in the form of its Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. This standard shows the commitment of governments to equalising opportunities for persons with disabilities but is not legally binding. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions’ (IFLA) and UNESCO’s Public Library Manifesto (1994) declare that discrimination on the basis of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social condition by libraries is wrong. Furthermore the necessary practical guidelines regarding access to libraries for people with disabilities is contained in the comprehensive IFLA checklist (Irval and Nielsen, 2005).

On the African continent the African Disability Alliance (ADA) is a body promoting human rights and development for persons with disabilities that is inclusive of all (ADA, 2015). In 2014 it took the place of the Secretariat of the African Decade of Persons with Disability (SADPD). The ADA works in partnership with the African Union (AU), United Nations, African governments, civil society organisations, academia and disabled people’s organisations. Tanzania is a member of the ADA which provides a coalition of alliance and network partners. The ADA’s role is influencing policy making and bringing into the mainstream policy addressing disability issues in government and civil society organisations. It could be a useful ally in providing for those with disabilities in Tanzanian universities. An alliance was formed to lobby for an inclusive process for drafting an African Disability Protocol in South Africa in 2011 (SADPD, 2012).

In Tanzania guidelines and parameters for service delivery are set out in the United Republic of Tanzania’s (URT, 2004) National Policy on Disability provides. This policy focusses on development, and the rights and dignity of people with disabilities but does not take into account the provision of library services generally, or in academic library services, to people with disabilities with any specificity (Majinge, 2014). This gap lay behind the motivation for this study.

The primary role of the library has been established as providing information services to support the educational, recreation, cultural, economic and technological endeavours of members of their respective communities (Afolabi and Abidoye, n.d.), including people with visual impairments. Magara and Nyumba (2004:313) acknowledged that a right to education implies a right to access information. Libraries and other related information services are crucial in educational development because the information they hold is an essential tool with which to foster learning processes. Similarly, Onohwakpor (2006) asserted that education without the services of a library is half-baked education that can only produce narrow minded individuals who are unlikely to be productive in their respective community. The library is one of the most important elements which support education services to all people including people with visual impairments (Abdul, Mohammed, Usman and Mailabari, 2015). Library services supplement skills that have been gained through classroom or lecture hall learning. A library is a hub for information and knowledge (Kumari, Kumari and Devi, 2013).

Information plays an important role in helping, supporting and improving people’s lives (Epp 2006). It has a vital role in the different arenas of knowledge: decision making, cultural growth, economic planning, research and development (Kumari, Kumari and Devi, 2013). In addition information has an important role in increasing knowledge and awareness among the public (Beverley, Bath and Booth, 2004). Beverley, Bath
and Barber (2007; 2011) argued that information resources are not always accessible or appropriately packaged for people with visual impairments. Hence, despite the importance of information resources in the teaching and learning process for people with visual impairments, many academic libraries do not have information resources in a suitable format for them. Alemmna (1993) stated that in Africa there is a dearth of appropriate information resources such as books in Braille and talking books to aid people with visual impairments. Similarly, Koulikoudi (2007) found that in Greece inadequate alternative information resources were provided through libraries and publishing houses. In a recent Lithuanian study Manžuch and Macevičiūtė (2016) analysed the performance of libraries for the blind, from 2008 to 2012, and suggested that library managers and policy-makers can use balanced scorecard and historical benchmarking approaches to analyse the performance of the libraries. Performance data of this sort could then be applied to develop new strategies for planning, improved service delivery and sustainability.

Frank, McLinden and Douglas (2014) also observed that learning for students with visual impairments, in particular, is hampered by teaching and learning materials that are in an inappropriate format. Tugli, Zungu, Ramakuela, Goon and Anyanwu (2013) pointed out that the Department for Higher Education and Training in South Africa supports the provision of an array of special programmes and services to support students with disabilities. In this country a growing number of tertiary institutions (the Universities of Cape Town; Johannesburg; Pretoria; KwaZulu-Natal; Venda, and Zululand) have embarked on establishing disability units to promote the equal participation of students with disabilities in all spheres of university life (Tugli et al 2013). The information seeking patterns and broader information behaviour of students with visual impairments are varied (Shunnugam, 2002) and the units have had mixed success as pointed out by Seyama, Morris and Stilwell (2014 ) with reference to the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Tugli et al’s (2013:363) survey research using a self administered questionnaire at the rural University of Venda found that an “inaccessible environment coupled with poor support services emerged as the main inhibitors to quality of life in the learning environment”. Fakoya-Michael and Fakoya’s (2015) survey using a semi-structured questionnaire to investigate access by university students with disabilities to information, as well as the challenges they faced in a rural university context at the University of Limpopo, reported that the neglect of the information needs of students with visual impairments had affected their academic performance and future negatively.

A recent study at the same university, reported on a quantitative survey of students with disabilities, as well as an interview with the librarian responsible for the disabled students unit and observation. Using the IFLA (2005) checklist for access to libraries for disabled people, the researchers, Phukubje and Ngoepe (2016), found that sufficient access to library services by students with disabilities was not yet available. This was despite the purpose-built library service unit for students with disabilities that complies with international best practice at this institution. Students with disabilities were not satisfied with the library services they received; very few library materials had been made accessible in the required formats and only one librarian had been appointed to manage and run the library services for those with disabilities.

With particular reference to Tanzania, Majinge (2014) investigated library services’ provision for people with visual impairments and in wheelchairs in academic libraries. Based on the field data from this doctoral study Majinge and Stilwell (2013) reported on the extent to which five Tanzanian universities provided adequate library services to people with visual impairments. They focused on the question of access to information resources and the manner in which the library buildings were laid out. Majinge and Stilwell (2014) then focused specifically on the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in information delivery for these groups in Tanzanian universities. They explained how assistive technologies facilitate access to information to people with visual impairments and those in wheelchairs. The study noted that there was no assistive equipment for these at the five universities studied and recommended that academic libraries install this equipment. In a comprehensive review of the theoretical and empirical
literature from the LIS field on the information behaviour of students with visual impairments in university libraries Mutula and Majinge (2016) confirmed that there is a shortage of information resources in Braille and large print, as well as inaccessible library buildings and a lack of assistive technologies. As noted above this article focuses on the students with visual impairments, looking at the available information resources in academic libraries and whether they are suitable for this group.

5 Methodology
This study used a pragmatism paradigm which is a mixed method approach. According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004:16-17) this paradigm favours a mix of research approaches in order to exploit achieve a good fit in responding to research questions.

The reason for using a pragmatism paradigm was to solve the problems which people with visual impairments encounter in accessing information resources in Tanzanian higher education institutions. Five universities were surveyed in three administrative regions: Dar es Salaam, Dodoma and Tanga. These universities were: University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), Open University of Tanzania (OUT), Dar es Salaam University College of Education (DUCE), Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University (SEKOMU) and St. John’s University of Tanzania (SJUT). In addition, the Special Needs Education Unit for Disabilities at the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) was included in the study. These five universities were targeted because they were the largest universities in Tanzania and they were also willing to participate in the study. Data collection took place from 30th September to 31st December, 2012 which allowed the primary researcher to visit all of the institutions herself.

The researcher was not able to establish the population of library users with the targeted disabilities in the universities in advance. For this reason snowball sampling was used to identify the users with visual impairments and this form of sampling helped to ensure reaching a suitable sample of 57 library users with visual impairments. For the population of library staff which was relatively small the census method was used to collect data from every member of the population rather than using a sample (Kothari, 2004).

Data collection instruments comprised i) two questionnaires, one each for the library staff and disability unit staff ii) two interview schedules with one each for the library directors and people with visual impairments respectively, and finally an observation checklist. Descriptive statistics facilitated by SPSS software were used to analyse data gathered through the questionnaires and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was employed to analyse data gathered through interviews. The questionnaires and interview schedules were pretested on subject librarians and students with visual impairments at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and appropriate changes were made to them.

Of the 139 library staff respondents targeted in Tanzania, 66 (47%) were from the University of Dar es Salaam, 17(12%) of 24 from Dar es Salaam University College of Education, 13(9%) of 18 respondents were from Open University of Tanzania, 11(8%) of 13 respondents from St John’s University of Tanzania and 6(5%) of 7 respondents were from Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University. The total number of respondents who completed and returned the copies of the questionnaire from all the universities surveyed was 113(81%) (Table1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Libraries Staff</th>
<th>Expected respondents</th>
<th>Actual Respondents</th>
<th>% response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>UDSM</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>DUCE</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>SJUT</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 SEKOMU 7 6 5%
Total 139 113 81%

Table 1. Population of library staff (N= 139)

Of 19 potential respondents from the disability units, 15 (78.9%) completed and returned the questionnaire. Of these 3(15.8%) were from University of Dar es Salaam, 3(15.8%) were from Dar es Salaam University College of Education, 1(5.2%) was from Open University of Tanzania, 5 (26.3%) were from Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University and 3(15.8%) were from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. There were no responses in this group from St John’s University of Tanzania (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Expected respondents</th>
<th>Actual Respondents</th>
<th>% response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>UDSM</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>DUCE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>SJUT</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>SEKOMU</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>MoEVT</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Population of disability unit staff (N= 19)

The breakdown of respondents with visual impairments by institution was 23(33.3%) from the University of Dar es Salaam, 8(10.1%) Dar es Salaam University College of Education, 9(11.6%) from the Open University of Tanzania, 1(1.4%) was from St John’s University of Tanzania and 16(23.2%) were from Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University (Table 3). The responses of 57(85%) of 67 respondents with visual impairments are discussed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Expected respondents</th>
<th>Actual Respondents</th>
<th>% response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>UDSM</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>DUCE</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>OUT</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>SJUT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>SEKOMU</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Population of users with visual impairments (N=67)

In addition five (100%) directors of academic libraries from five universities in Tanzania were interviewed.
6 Findings and Discussion

The results of the study that pertain to the students with visual impairments are presented and discussed in this section.

6.1 Educational Level of Students with Visual Impairments

The student respondents held: a Bachelor’s degree (48), a Master’s (6) and PhD (3). The disciplines which they were studying included Bachelor of Arts (BA), Master of Arts (MA) and PhD, education special needs (48). A few responded Bachelor in Law (LLB) and Master of Law (LLM) (4), BA Mass Communication (2), BA Political Science (1), Bachelor of Commerce (1) and Bachelor of Cultural Heritage (1). When asked about the reason for choosing the discipline which they were studying the majority stated that they preferred studying education special needs because it was easy to implement and easy to get employment. Those who responded LLB and LLM, BA Mass Communication, BA Political Science, Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor in Cultural Heritage just liked the discipline.

6.2 Did the Library Provide Suitable Services to Students with Visual Impairments?

The library staff responses to the question of library service provision to people with visual impairments were as follows: 71(63%) responded positively that there was such provision with 42(37%) responding negatively. Elaboration on the positive responses confirmed that the library provided lending, photocopy, internet services and study rooms. Those who responded negatively stated that their libraries were not designed to provide services to people with visual impairments, and that there was a lack of policy addressing issues relating to people with visual impairments. The respondents pointed out that the services for this group were provided by a unit overseen by the School of Education. The directors of the libraries confirmed this was true in most cases, and that materials and equipment suitable for this group people with visual impairments were not kept in the libraries but in the disability units.

Students with visual impairments responded to a question asked in their interviews about whether or not they made use of the library services. Forty seven (82%) of the 57 respondents replied that they used the library to borrow information sources and books in particular. Ten (18%) students who did not use these services explained that none of the required information resources were available to them in the formats which they required. A further barrier was the library buildings’ layout which impeded their access to the information resources. Through observation the researcher confirmed that the libraries provided lending, Internet and photocopying services to this group but that access was hampered by a lack of working lifts, ramps and appropriate signage.

6.3 Provision of Services by the Disability Units

Having confirmed that the disability units, overseen by the School of Education, were involved in service provision to people with disabilities, the researcher asked the staff of the units about the services they provided for people with disabilities. There was more than one response per staff respondent (Table 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transcribing information resources into Braille</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of teaching and learning materials</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of note takers and readers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of wheelchairs and white canes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinating education for people with disabilities in the</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training teachers in special needs education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Services provided by disability unit for students with disabilities (N= 15)


The most commonly provided services were transcription of resources into Braille and the provision of teaching and learning materials, followed by provision of note takers and readers.

Disability unit staff elaborated on the methods used to alert people with disabilities to their services. They said the units promoted their services on websites, and through various media for example, television, radio, and newspapers, as well as during the orientation week every year. However, one student with visual impairment complained that:

It takes time to know the unit and sometime you can finish a semester without knowing there is a unit within the University and we have readers who read for us as materials in the library are not in Braille and large print.

Seyama, Morris and Stilwell (2014) found that at the Pietermaritzburg Campus of the UKZN students depended mostly on the disability unit staff to access resources. They did not rely on the library staff. This placed limits on their access as the unit was not located near the library or the halls of residence where the students lived, and staffing of the units was not optimum. Steps were being taken, however, to achieve universal access. Phukubje and Ngoepe (2016) also found at the University of Limpopo (South Africa) that, despite the purpose-built library service unit for students with disabilities that complied with international best practice, sufficient access to library services by students with disabilities was not yet available. Hence the problem appears to be a lot more complex than the simple provision of the appropriate facilities at these units.

6.4 Information Resources Provided by Tanzanian Academic Libraries to People with Visual Impairments

Library staff were asked a general question about whether the information resources available in the library were suitable for people with visual impairments. Of the responses from the 113 library staff, 99(88%) responded negatively and 14 (12%) responded positively.

Responses in the interviews with the directors of the libraries revealed that although some library staff thought that the library held suitable materials for this group the directors indicated that they were under the impression that the libraries did not hold such materials.

People with visual impairments were also interviewed to establish whether academic libraries had alternative information resources. All 57 (100%) of the students with visual impairments responded negatively. The students further elaborated on why they were not satisfied with the services provided to them: the library was not user friendly in terms of information resources, assistive equipment and even infrastructure. In addition they said that the books which were in normal print were not provided in sufficient numbers to fulfill their needs. Furthermore, the researcher observed that only one university had a few manuals which were in Braille which had been sourced by the lecturers.

Student comments included the explanation by a student with visual impairments that when s/he complained during a test that s/he could not read the text paper as the words were not in large print s/he was told “if you don’t [sic] see go and start the weekend.” S/he failed the test which meant doing a supplementary test. The print was simply in too small a font to be suitable for partially sighted students. His/her verbatim comments were:

One day we had a test. I told my lecturer that I couldn’t see well because the words were too small he said if you don’t [sic] see go and start the weekend. I failed that test and I had to go for
supplementary [sic]. The reason for failure was due to the fact that the words in that test were not in large print and suitable for partially sighted students.

Another student with visual impairments complained that it took so much longer to complete their degrees and that this was discouraging and resulted in students dropping out. His/her exact words were:

We are taking so many years to finish our degrees instead of taking three or four years to finish our degree we are taking ten or more and sometimes we decide not to continue because the information resources available in the libraries are not in Braille or large print to make us read ourselves like people without visual impairments.

This latter complaint is supported by Monson (2015: 4), in his extensive literature review for the American Printing House for the Blind, pointed out that even in well-equipped online environments, learning can be challenging for students with visual impairments: “In some instances, it has been documented that it takes blind users twice as long to complete learning tasks in this environment as it does sighted users.”

Monson (2015: 4) confirms that students with visual impairments “receive significantly lower scores than their sighted peers when tested on the content.” Rugeyasila (2013) observes that the shortage of suitable teaching and learning materials affects the performance by primary school pupils with visual impairments in examinations. Seyama (2009) stresses the importance of appropriate attitudes by all staff if they aim to serve students with visual impairments adequately.

The study found in Tanzania alternative information resources for people with visual impairments were not available in academic libraries and therefore people with visual impairments used the limited supply of normal print information resources and the university readers to read these materials to them. The readers, however, were scarce; there were either only a few readers or they were completely absent in all academic libraries investigated. The earlier study of Tungaraza (2010) found that that at the University of Dar es Salaam students with visual impairments had no library books in Braille and therefore depended on readers to read for them. In their studies of academic libraries Kajjage (1991), Bagandanshwa (1998) and Ndumbaro (2009), in Tanzania, and Ochoggia (2003) in Kenya, all confirmed the lack of information resources in alternative formats for people with visual impairments. These findings resonate particularly with those from two universities in the rural areas of South Africa by Tugli et al (2013) and Fakoya-Michael and Fakoya (2015).

In Tanzania two studies which investigated the information needs and seeking behaviour of primary school pupils with visual impairments confirmed that there was a shortage of teaching and learning materials at these lower educational levels and that most of the core textbooks required were in normal print. Rugeyasila’s (2013) study was at the Uhuru Mchanganyiko Primary School, Dar es Salaam, and Ndijuye’s (2009) at the Buigiri Primary School, Dodoma.

6.5 Other Student Comments
All 57(100%) of the students stressed the need for the library to be designed to meet the needs of people with disabilities. In addition they made many worthwhile recommendations to the Tanzanian government. The government should i) make sure that the policy regarding people with disabilities is implemented in all sectors including libraries; ii) increase awareness programmes so that the general public is informed on all matters related to people with disabilities such as education, employment, transport, and health; iii) educate the community on the importance of education for people with disabilities just as for able-bodied people; iv) give assurances of employment to people with disabilities so that they can study any courses, and v) the educational curriculum should include components relating to people with disabilities from primary to university level.

They also recommended that vi) government fund and equip all schools so that people with visual impairments can attend any school rather than going to special schools. They felt that they were
discriminated against. They recommended that vii) the Tanzania Loan Board should provide sufficient
funds to people with visual impairments as assistive equipment and information resources are very
expensive. They urged viii) librarians and other government officials to visit developed countries to see
how libraries and other facilities are provided for people with disabilities. They also pointed out that ix)
the Tanzania Commission for Universities website should be suitable for people with visual impairments and
x) the application form for universities should have a field for indicating “disabled” so that staff who are
responsible for selecting students know who was disabled and who was not. People with disabilities could
then be selected for the right university with appropriate facilities. In addition xi) education awareness
programmes should be conducted by people with disabilities and not exclusively by the non-disabled.

On the positive side policy initiatives on library services were reported as being underway by three
(15%) of the five library directors. The directors responded that did have plans to improve library services
for people with visual impairments: to train library staff members in special needs, and to plan new library
buildings which would accommodate people with visual impairments and other disabilities. To ascertain
progress a follow-up study is needed.

7 Conclusion and Recommendations
The study found that there were virtually no alternative information resources for people with visual
impairments in all five academic libraries in Tanzania. There were a few manuals in Braille which had been
sourced by lecturers, and a few audio tapes. There was no other assistive technology available in the libraries
and physical access to the library and the resources was daunting for this group. The services of the disability
units were not offered in conjunction with the library and it appeared to be possible for students to lack
awareness of the services offered by the units. Library staff were not trained, experienced in, or especially
positive as a group in their attitudes to service to these users and potential users.

Following the social model of disability of Oliver (1990), academic libraries in all learning
institutions are required to at least apply the principles of universal design to their library services for the
benefit of all users including people with visual impairments. As pointed out above, in addition specialised
materials and assistive devices for certain types of disability are essential, especially with regard to people
with visual impairments. Furthermore software like JAWS should be available. People with visual
impairments need information resources like Braille, large print materials to read without the assistance of
a reader, embossors and CCTV. They also need talking computers, tape recorders, audio cassettes, talking
calculators, abacuses, and other reading aids (Rugeyasila 2013). For academic libraries having information
resources in a suitable format would help students with visual impairments to read without additional
difficulties, to perform to the best of their ability in their examinations, and to finish their degrees in the
span of three to five years like non-disabled people. A concerted effort to meet the needs of people with
visual impairments is long overdue in Tanzanian academic libraries, despite support from powerful lobbies
in the LIS sector as well as in the region. These libraries must as a matter of urgency acquire, organise and
deseminate information in appropriate formats for people with visual impairments.

The students with visual impairments offered many practical recommendations to government
which offer insights into the complexity of library services to this group, especially taking into account the
fact that they are a diverse and dispersed group. Students also confirmed that academic libraries are core
to the educational purpose of universities in supporting teaching, learning, and research. Strategic support
for equitable access in university and other libraries in Tanzania could possible be drawn from the ADA’s
(2015) efforts regarding knowledge development. The implementation of the draft African Disability
Protocol is another anticipated positive future development. The Tanzanian government and higher
education sector, have the potential to ameliorate the situation further by taking a collaborative approach
to addressing the immense gaps in service which this article has revealed. As the title of the article suggests,
among other things, attitudinal change on the part of university staff is also required.
8 References


