A Study of Needs and Requirements of Visually Impaired Students of University of Delhi

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to find out the needs and requirements of visually impaired students and the facilities provided to them by their respective learning organisations. This study was conducted on visually impaired students of University of Delhi. Various students with visual disability were interviewed with the help of a questionnaire prepared by the investigator by going through deep literature review available on the topic related to the current research study. This research topic was selected with the aim to identify various services provided by their respective institutions, assistive technologies available in their libraries, and to find problems faced by the visually challenged students in retrieving information by the available resources. Findings of this study reveal that visually impaired students are provided with Braille books, big screen computers with assistive technologies, recorded audiobooks in the form of CDs or cassettes and other infrastructure facilities by their respective libraries. Other facilities such as the provision of helpers, writers for making assignment and for writing exam are also available in the libraries for the students. The study further reveals that students face problems such as internet connectivity, inadequate number of assistive devices and lack of adequate helpers, etc. while accessing the library for their needs.

KeyTerms: Needs and requirements of visually impaired, Information needs of blind students, library services to students with a visual disability, facilities for visually impaired students, and Equal Opportunity Cell etc.

INTRODUCTION

Information and information resources are very important tools for the students to be educated and skilled enough to grow themselves. Information retrieval and utilisation of information resources is the right of each and every person in spite of any physical disability. Today, students with visual disability are admitted in all types of academic courses. Hence, it is the responsibility of every institution to provide these students with adequate & efficient resources and other important facilities which help them to retrieve resources effectively.

The collective need of all blind students is the information resources which they can easily use and retrieve according to their requirement without any hindrance. Advanced technologies can make it very convenient to visually impaired students to effectively utilise information resources as they are used by normal students. There are various instruments and software which can help these students to get information according to their requirements in the formats that are comfortable to them. Accordingly, skilled library staff also plays an important role to enable efficient utilisation of those tools and equipment by these students.

The University of Delhi provides various facilities to its users including students with visual disability. These students are also benefited with various facilities by their respective colleges under Delhi University. According to Delhi University guidelines, there should be an “Equal Opportunity Cell” in each College of Delhi University which would take charge to help special need students. These EOCs are provided with specific funds so that they can easily help their users. Centre of Equal Opportunity Cell is located in Faculty of Arts, North Campus, University of Delhi and it coordinates with all other College’s EOC to provide the funds and other required materials.
**Literature Review**

Bhardwaj in his studies had a look at the facilities provided to the visually impaired students by the libraries of Higher Education Institutions in Delhi. He found that it was very difficult for visually impaired students to conduct their studies and research due to very basic facilities being provided to them. Further, it was observed that the libraries in Delhi face problems related to funds and trained staff in providing more advanced facilities to the visually impaired students. There were certain other problems which have been mentioned by the students such as maintenance of assistive software and instruments/equipment, unawareness of resources and services available in the libraries, etc. Kumar & Sanaman mentioned that assistive technologies such as audio web browsers, modified computer keyboards and screen readers or Braille output can effectively provide access to information to students with visual disability. Balagi has cited that Information Communication Technology has a pre-eminence role in rendering education to visually impaired persons. ICT can effectively contribute in bringing social equality in the nation. ICT tools can enable visually impaired students to read, learn and interact easily in a user-friendly manner.

**Objectives**

- To determine the needs and requirements of visually impaired students
- To investigate library and information services provided by the libraries to the blind students
- To investigate the assistive devices used by libraries to provide services to visually impaired users
- To determine various study material produced or purchased by libraries for students with visual disability
- To investigate problems and difficulties encountered by blind students in retrieving information

**Methodology**

Based on the feedback and verbal communications held with the Visually Impaired Students at the University, it is observed that various facilities and services are being provided to the students by the respective institution. The study reveals that the following important services, infrastructure facilities and other assistive technologies are being provided to the visually challenged students in the institution in its libraries:

**a. Library and information services available in the libraries**

- Braille Books
- Talking Books
- Audio Books
- Talking Newspaper
- Assistive Technologies
- Special courses to blind students

**b. Infrastructural facilities provided to visually impaired users by libraries for their personal use**

- Mobile Phones
- Recorders
- Talking book devices
- Portal scanner
- Customised keyboards

- Ramp/Rails
- Braille software
- Blind sticks
- Transport facility

**c. Assistive equipment available in the libraries**

- Screen Magnifiers
- Braille Printers
- Hand-held Scanners
- Magnifying Glasses
- One hand keyboard
- Refresher able Braille display
- Cleat reader
- Large print keyboard
- Assistive listening device converter

**Problems Faced by Students**

The investigator has also observed that there are certain problems being faced by visually impaired users to retrieve information resources. The most common problems as communicated by the students are:-

- Lack of time to utilise resources available to them due to classes
- Lack of space in the library as well as equal opportunity cell of respective colleges
- Helpers to locate and bring reading material in the library
- More reading equipment should be brought in the libraries
- Lack of proper connectivity of internet
- Inadequate number of writers for writing an assignment of these students

**Conclusion**

The present study shows that Delhi University and its affiliated colleges are providing students with visual disability “equal opportunities” to keep themselves upgraded, self-fulfilled and equivalent to other students with the help of facilities and services specially designed for them. These facilities include special courses which are specially designed and organised for them, computer labs as per their requirements, scanning and accessible reading equipments and provisions of volunteers for providing support to visually impaired students. Students are very well satisfied with available facilities but they are also facing some problems such as lack of adequate staff to help them, writers to write their assignments and unavailability of the proper ICT environment.

**References**