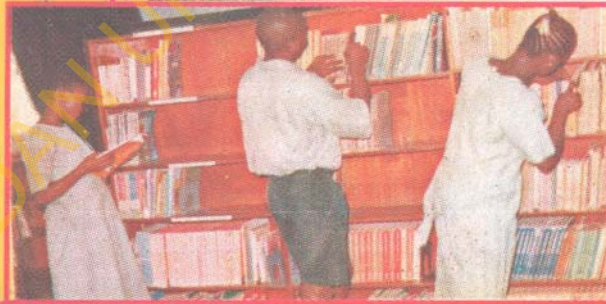




# Nigerian School Library Journal

ISSN: 0331-8214

VOL. 5 NO. 2, 2006



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**MEETING INFORMATION NEEDS OF PROFESSIONALS  
WORKING WITH OTHERWISE-ABLE STUDENTS IN  
NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: FEDERAL  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION (SPECIAL), OYO AS A CASE  
STUDY.**

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**Abstract**

*This study sought to find out how information sources available to Professionals (Braille experts, Sign Language Interpreters, Audiologists and Speech Therapists) working with the otherwise able students of Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo meet their needs. Survey method was employed in carrying out this study. The unstructured questionnaire was used to collect data and the method of sampling adopted was random sampling technique.*

*The study found written text information such as talking books, sign language textbooks and talking fingers, to be most preferred by the respondents. They also expressed reliance on Internet facilities as a good source of information. Electronic and print media, professional publications and interaction with colleagues are amongst other sources found to be reliable and very useful when seeking information products. It was revealed that the available information system meets the needs of the professionals. However the need for improvement in the observed area of weakness was emphasized as part of recommendation for the library.*

## Introduction

The Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo was established to train teachers of physically challenged and otherwise-able children. Various categories of disability are taken into consideration in formulation of curricula. Prominent amongst them includes hearing impairment, visual impairment, learning disabled and paraplegia. The College was established in 1977. For almost three decades of its existence it has been training teachers that would teach the handicapped learners. Some of these trained teachers end up as instructors and/or support service providers such as Braille experts, Sign Language Interpreters, Speech Therapists and Audiologists.

There exists in the College two categories of students — handicapped and normal students. This implied that the system of education is the integrated type. The College is also made up of academic and non-academic staff spread into various schools and departments. The academic staff teaching a class of students in which otherwise-able individuals are integrated may not necessarily possess the skills to carry the special students along in his teaching. This is why these specialists are necessary as a link between the lecturers and special students. They provide essential services that ensure teaching-learning processes. They are best regarded as support service providers. Majority of them are Federal College of Education (Special) trained personnel hence they possess expected teaching methodologies and pedagogies. Mention must be made too that greater percentage of them have obtained higher degrees in Special Education and General Education with various subjects background. This is why they belong to the category of staff referred to as Senior Staff Union of Colleges of Education (SSUCOE). The importance of these personnel is felt in the following areas:

- Determination of specific problem such as degree of hearing loss of students with hearing problems.
- Recommendation based on the observed problems.
- Rehabilitation of handicapped students



- Interpretation (through Total communication) of lectures to the deaf and hard of hearing students and
- Transcription of textual materials to Braille format amongst other functions.

Some of these professionals render their services behind the scene. A very good example of such services visibly rendered directly to both lecturers and special students to facilitate teaching-learning is interpreting to the 'silent world'. Silent world here means the group of students with hearing difficulties. The professional responsible for interpreting is known as the interpreter.

### **Interpreters Role and Responsibilities**

Interpreters need to have a certain level of education, training, and experience. Not everyone who knows sign language is capable of interpreting.

Interpreting is a complex process requiring:

- \* A vast array of world knowledge.
- \* Knowledge of and sensitivity to both deaf and hearing cultures.
- \* Fluency in English, American Sign Language, or the signed system used by the deaf person.
- \* Professionalism—adherence to the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Code of Ethics and current business practices, continuous education, and interaction with peers in professional organizations.

The primary role of the interpreter is to:

- \* Prepare ahead of time for specialized content of an assignment.
- \* Evaluate the logistics for interpreter placement, lighting, background, etc.
- \* Educate consumers, both hearing and deaf, regarding the role and use of an interpreter.
- \* Assess his or her own skills and limitations for the interpreting situation.
- \* Monitor the entire interpreting process.

The audiologist is one who specializes in audiology while audiology is the science or study of hearing. Braille is used to designate a system of embossed printing for the blind. French teacher of the Blind Louis Braille perfected it in 1834. He lived between 1809 and 1852. So, a Brailist is the one who transcribes or print in Braille to aid reading of the text by the visually challenged students. Speech Therapist is the specialist who treats a speech-related problems or illness of an individual. The essence of all this is to ensure effective adjustment to teaching-learning by these otherwise-able students.

Provision of the above-listed essential services facilitates ease of communication among students and lecturers. The lecturers are mostly not expected to provide these services during teaching-learning exercises. Hence, lecturers and special students rely more on these professionals for teaching-learning to take place effectively. For instance, a deaf student in a general class would not learn anything except the lesson is interpreted by a qualified Sign language expert. Colleague of the special student could volunteer to provide such service in an unprofessional way at times.

The College Library at present operates at a temporary building on the Campus. This is due to slow pace of work on the library-building edifice. The library services for the visually challenged, the deaf, and hard of hearing are slightly different from what obtains in other institutions of higher learning. Therefore with its large concentration of the otherwise-able students and with the little available facilities at the resource room, the College Library has a challenge to provide adequate library and information services to this set of professionals.

The dynamic nature of the College brings with it various complex societal, sociological, and psychological differences among others. This requires specialists to display enough relevant information, in order to equip or train individual handicapped persons that will be able to cope or find solution to these challenges. Above all, they should be able to excel despite their handicapping condition because there is ability in disability. It is hoped that if the personnel employed to work with such otherwise-able students have access to enough



information they too can transmit knowledge (information) or the skill of decision-making and progress to their students ultimately in their future endeavour.

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study is to assess information resources provision for special instructors working with the disabled/handicapped students referred to as otherwise-able students of the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo.

The specific objectives include to:

- determine activities for which information is sought;
- identify information sources consulted by these professionals;
- reveal their level of satisfaction with the use of these information sources provided by the college library/resource room;

### **Scope of the Study**

The study covers four major groups of special education instructors referred to as professionals in this study. They are: Braille experts, Sign Language Interpreters, Audiologists and Speech Therapists. They serve as intermediaries between the staff and special students of Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo.

### **Literature review**

Utor (1994) says information could be regarded as data communicated or received by prospective users. Much earlier, Cary (1966) said that information is that which is concerned with ideas and the using of it is a complex process, which includes both taking in and giving out. Ideas can be in the form of some laid down facts, opinion, reasoning, or emotion. These ideas will then have to be put into a meaningful form and finally expressed in a language, which is understandable to those for whom it is intended. Information need is seen as the need necessary to life or happiness or success or fulfillment.

Information need has to be expressed in a particular form either orally or verbally by asking or requesting for it in writing.

Information could be sourced from variety of media which include textbooks, journals, microforms, specimens, charts, maps, models, games and so on. However, some of these sources of information provision are not readily available and whenever available not in desired quantity. Also, their relevance is mostly doubted.

Jackson (1992) postulates that information needs of the instructors (professional inclusive) should not only be provided by the information centres because it is more profitable for information centres to see their role as not only facilitating access and usage of resources, but also promoting utilization of information so provided in the curriculum. Therefore if an information centre distances itself from a direct concern for the problems of the professional and development of their students, it is difficult to see how it can even provide effective information about the materials in stock or channel appropriately it attempts at facilitating usage (Foote: 1989).

Cohen (1994) says face-to-face spoken communication is problematic for many deaf children, even after years of speech and lip-reading training. This is one of the problems facing the special students of all categories in the college. The need for special instrutors can therefore not be overemphasized. Cohen (1994) also reported in *the New York Times* of 22nd February that interpreter is not enough. If it could be reported in the United States of America, then, the effectiveness of educational interpreters and other specialists for meeting the emotional, social, and educational needs of the otherwise-able students is relevant for discussion in Nigeria. Most of these students cannot and will not lip-read or speak effectively in regular classroom settings. In oder not to create an abnormal and impoverished milieu, placement in a school setting must not lack appropriate communication with peers and adults. Peters (1993) submitted that bad teaching is easier to hide in full inclusion. This is because full inclusion without interpreter creates language and communication barriers that are potentially harmful, and consequently deny many of these



students an education in the least restrictive environment. Since the college is expected to provide an appropriated environment the otherwise-able students must be given a quality education.

Agbaje (2000), submitted that current researches deal with handling the areas of exceptionality as they affect or are relevant to attention, co-ordination, social interaction, academic achievement, communication and so on. Exceptional persons/ otherwise-able are relevant to the society and so they prefer to be treated as a part of the society through mainstreaming or regularization as the goal of modern special education. The trend recognizes the dominant role of the teacher/educator/ librarian, as the case may be, much more than that of the physician and psychologists. For this dream to be achieved, there should be free access to useful available information by the professionals employed to work with the otherwise-able so as to deliver the goods.

Previous researchers, Atinmo (1981), Ogunlade (1982), Ojo (1983), Agbaje (1996) and Atinmo (1996), scored facilities in Nigerian libraries low. It is still as bad as noted by Akpe (1989) that the Nigerian society has not adequately faced the challenge in her over forty years of independence.

## **Methodology**

Survey method that allows use of descriptive statistics was employed for this study. This method allows easy assessment of the situation, compilation of results and discussion of it. The data-gathering instrument was unstructured questionnaire. Only fifteen specialists participated in the study. They were grouped according to the services provided into four categories before selection was made at random. The breakdown is as follows: Five Braille experts representing 33.4%, Five Sign Language Interpreters (33.4 percent), two Speech Therapists, (16.6%) and two Audiologists (16.6%). This is adjudged most obtainable equitable means of deciding the population for this study.

The research questions containing twelve items centred on the bio data, establishment, administration, availability,

accessibility and utilization of the information sources available for the college populace (both staff and students) were administered. Also, a portion of the questionnaire finds out the information needs of the professionals to determine the degree to which the college resource/information centre has been able to meet these needs.

### Results and discussion

Specific questions that allow respondents indicate various activities for which information is sourced were asked and the responses were tabulated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Activities for which information is needed**

Activities	Frequency	Percentages
Education	11	73.3
Health	04	26.6
Aesthetic	-	-
Students discipline	04	26.6
Social/Enlightenment	06	40.0
Current affairs	05	33.3
Sports/Recreation	03	20.0
Finance/Economy	02	13.3
General Knowledge	04	26.6
Religious	02	13.3
Career	03	20.0

As clearly indicated in Table 1, education forms the major activity for which information is sought, 73.3 percent of the respondents indicated this. This shows that a lot of curricula-related activities requiring professional expertise take place in the college. Social/enlightenment takes the second position with 40.0 percent while current affairs was ranked third most used with 33.3 percent. None of the respondents indicated sourcing information for aesthetic related activities. Information is also needed for the following – religious, finance/economy, career development, sports and recreation, students' discipline



and health related activities to enable them cope with day-to-day activities.

**Table 2: Identification of information sources consulted**

Information sources	Frequency	Percentage
Textbooks	10	66.7
Radio & Television	08	53.3
Newspapers/Magazines	05	33.3
Workshop & Seminar Proceedings	07	46.7
Professional publications	07	46.7
Library/learning resource centre	07	46.7
Internet	09	60
Professional communications	01	6.7

From Table 2, greater number (66.7 percent) percent of respondents relied more on textbooks (talking books, sign language textbooks and talking fingers). Observations made by the researchers revealed that greater percentage of information materials available in the college library is books and magazines. Sixty percent relied on Internet as their major information source. This further confirms the general trend of information in the present age. Internet has really revolutionalized the information practice, even in Nigeria. However, these Internet facilities are not found in the library. The professionals browse the net outside the college premises in order to meet their information needs. Enlightenment through radio and television had 53.3 percent. This shows that information is needed in the area of general welfare, matters of the moment, health, economy and recreation so as to ensure development of an all-round being. Only one respondent, 6.7 percent favoured professional communications

(interaction with colleagues). Workshop/seminar proceedings and professional publications (such as *The Blind*, *Talking Pleasure*, *Audiowatch* et cetera), which are associational magazines and/or newsletters occasionally published by these specialists, are also useful sources of information. There are 46.7 percent of the respondents that see it as a consulted information source that is reliable. Some of these sources are found in the library but greater percentage is only available to the professionals that are registered members of the issuing associations.

There are also 46.7 percent of the respondents that relied upon Library/Media resource centre as information sources. This further confirms the previous findings which scored the Nigerian library materials low. Not up to 50 percent respondents indicated their use of library materials. This suggests that the library is still poorly stocked in the area of information needs of these specialists. Observations by the researchers showed that some of the hardware needed by these specialists are kept in the resource room instead of putting them in the library. Restricted access and underutilization becomes the order of the day. This may be due to the fragile nature of the equipment or the fact that the library is not operating from its main building. Security is also guaranteed in the resource room at least to a greater extent. The percentage of the respondents (33.3 percent), used conventional newspapers and/or magazines. They only rely on the newsprint for the current affairs and matters of the moment. These disabled students are also part of the public hence they need information about happenings around them. The professionals should therefore take no chances to equip themselves with sufficient general information that would meet these needs. A careful examination revealed that many of the respondents relied more on multiple sources of information. Therefore, average information sources utilized by the specialists at Federal College of Education (Special) falls in-between three and four.



## **Summary and conclusion**

The study reveals that the information sources available for the specialists involved in the education of the otherwise able students of Federal College of education (Special), Oyo is adequate if considered with the number of cases they handled. Also, information material is sought mainly for education related activities and other extra-curricula activities that prepares these students adequately for life challenges. Many of these information sources are reliable and have affected their practice positively too.

However, problems cannot be divorced from information sourcing but the respondents were of the view that relevant stakeholders can solve a better part of these problems. Mention must also be made that since the information sources are mostly reliable, the specialists would always patronize the library for their information needs whenever there is need for such patronage since these professionals found textbooks as useful information source just like the Internet. This implies that the library has not lost its relevance even in this present information age. Internet facilities only play complementary role. It can then be concluded that the available information sources have not fully met the various information demand of the professionals.

About 67 percent of their respondents remarked that they are only satisfied occasionally and not always. This suggests that the library can still do better to meet their information quest at all times. A total of 13 percent respondents expressed their non-satisfaction with available information sources. Other information needs of these professionals are those that will make them become more important. They were also of the opinion that the library should provide such facilities that will facilitate the individuality of handicapped students being matched by individual approaches in a wide range of learning media.

Also, they need instructional support resources that will provide a new insight into the handicapped student-need

profiles, as well as into the level and format of various media. They reasoned that this would give them new role to play instead of being 'a mere gatekeeper or filter through which information passes to the handicapped students'. They will become 'responsible for guiding and managing the handicapped students' learning, providing through personal contact inspiration, encouragement and orientation'. If provision is made for these resources, the professional will not only rely on routine factual materials but will also be free from merely repetitive tasks.

If the library can successfully undertake the new responsibilities, it may be possible to establish a new relationship with those responsible for teaching within educational institutions, and so reduce the gap, which sometimes exists. The need for close co-operation, in place of mutual suspicion or critical antagonism, between professional instructors and librarian is likely to become more important. The involvement of the professional in the library as a 'model learner' is essential if the library is to fulfill its role, and, conversely, the librarian has a major contribution to make in supplying information and materials required by the professionals working with the otherwise-able students.

### **Suggestions to the Library**

The following suggestions are made for the improvement of library services provision to the professionals employed to work with the otherwise-able students:

- The college should make effort at developing an all round acquisitions policy. This would also permit selection and acquisition of learning resources other than print media available in book form and periodicals. A range of library information services required by the professionals would also be provided through the use of a functional acquisition policy.
- There is need for the library to provide Internet facilities for its patrons. Specifically, certain number should be



allocated and reserved for these otherwise-able learners and their instructors.

- Audio rooms and viewing hall should also be provided for the specialists by the library. In fact the equipment found in the Resource room could be brought into the library premises. This would facilitate transcription of text to Braille materials. Text readers can also assist the visually impaired individuals here in the area of note taking and/or dictation.
- It is necessary for the college to provide electronic facilities such as radio and television satellites that would encourage communication of matters of interest to the otherwise-able students.
- The library should endeavour to obtain publication information about workshop/seminar proceedings from professional groups. This would guarantee selection and acquisition of relevant occasional publications (otherwise referred to as professional publications) of various specialists studies.
- Integration of all the information resources/hardware found in the resource room with the library learning support materials is strongly recommended for optimum utilization and achievement of desired results. This would further strengthen the relationship and cooperation that exists between these professionals and the library.

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