Equitable Library Service for Differently Abled User

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Abstract:- The number of differently abled library users is increasing day by day with the increase of the world population. Librarians should provide specialized library service to them; so that they can work independently, efficiently and effortlessly. The author provides an overview on Equitable Library Service. The author tries to throw light on several other related concepts.

Keywords:- Assistive Technology, Barrier-free building, Disability Etiquette, Equity. Print Disability.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the Census report of 2001, more than 21 million people are having disability problems. Such persons should not be ignored. Special arrangements are need for the differently able library users; otherwise they cannot extract desired information from plethora of information. Librarians should take the challenge to provide special service for that category of users. The eminent theoretical physicist and cosmologist - Stephen Hawking said "Disability need not be an obstacle to success." Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web said "The power of the Web is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect".

II. UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY

There are various definitions of the term disability. Some of them are as follows –

Merriam Webster: "a physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and interactions"

World Health Organization: "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being".

Disability Etiquette advocates us to show respect to the persons having some disabilities by using polite words. Offensive or harsh words like handicapped, crippled, vikalanga should not be used; in lieu of that we should use soft spoken words like – specially abled, differently abled etc. Narendra Damoder Modi, the honorable Prime Minister of India, suggested to use the term Divyang.

There are wide varieties of disabilities, which may be broadly classified into following categories

1. Physical disability: It includes Multiple Sclerosis, Muscular Dystrophy, Chronic Arthritis, Cerebral Palsy etc.
2. Visual disabilities: It occurs due to low vision, blindness, colour blindness. Some common eye diseases are – Cataracts, Glaucoma, Retinal Detachment, Retinitis Pigmentosa .
3. Hearing disabilities: Deaf, Deaf blind, hard of hearing fall under this category.
4. Mental health disabilities: it occurs due to - Schizophrenia, Mood Disorders, Anxiety Disorders, Eating Disorders, Personality Disorders, Alzheimer's, Stroke, Dementia etc.
5. Hidden Disabilities or Non-visible Disabilities (NVD) are disabilities which are not immediately apparent. Some examples of hidden disabilities are - Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, AIDS, Cancer, Hypertension, Autism etc. It occurs due to dysfunction of Central Nervous System resulting to disabilities like Dyslexia (find difficulty in speaking, listening, reading, writing), Dysgraphia (arithmetic disorder), and memory disabilities (difficulty in remembering).

Depending on the different degree of disabilities; it may be classified as - mild, moderate, marked and total.

III. DISABILITY ACTS / LAWS

An Act is a sub-set of Law. Different countries have their own acts or laws relating to disability. A short list has been given below in table no. 1.

Sl. No	Country	Acts / Laws
1.	Australia	The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) (DDA)
2	Bangladesh	Disability Welfare Act (2001)
3	China	The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Disabled Persons (2008)
4	Germany	Book IX of the Social Code 'Integration and Rehabilitation of Disabled People (SGB IX, 2001)
5	India	Persons with Disabilities Act 2016
6	Japan	Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities (August 2011)
7	Netherlands	Act on Equal Treatment on the Grounds of Disability or Chronic Illness
8	Russian Federation	Law No. 181-FZ of 24 November 1995 on Social Protection of the Disabled (as amended on 02 July 2013)
9	Sweden	Act concerning Support and Service to Persons with Certain Functional Disabilities (LSS)
10	United Kingdom	United Kingdom Equality Act 2010
11	United States	Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended

Table 1: Acts / laws relating to disability

IV. WHY EQUITABLE SERVICE

In equality everybody gets similar treatment. However special treatment is given in case of equity. Specially abled library users should get equitable treatment otherwise they may not properly access the library resources and services. Consequently library resources and services will not be fully utilized. Libraries of many foreign countries are providing Equitable Library Services.

V. ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY PRODUCTS

Assistive technology is an umbrella term which refers to device, software, or equipment. Assistive Technology has been designed to help people with disabilities so that they can work independently. Many libraries are making use of suitable Assistive products for their patrons of disabilities. A short list of Assistive Software has been given below in the following Table (no. 2).

Software	Examples	Remarks
Speech recognition	Braina Pro, Dragon Naturally Speaking Speechlogger	It is also referred to as text-to-speech software
Dictation	Apple Dictation (Free), e-Speaking, Happyscribe, Otter	speech-to-text software that allows dictation
Screen magnification	EzMagnifier, Magnifixer , Moo0 Magnifier, Super Magnifier	Sometimes called screen enlargement software
Braille editors	Braille 2000 US, Index BrailleApp	required to make text to braille documents

Table 2: Assistive Software

Assistive Devices: Example includes - wheelchairs, walking sticks, crutches, hearing aids, wheelchair climber machine

Pic. 1: wheelchair climber machine

Assistive Hardware: Pen reader, digital dictaphone, virtual laser keyboard etc. are found to be used in some libraries

VI. BARRIER-FREE ARCHITECTURE DESIGN

Building may be classified into several categories, namely - Residential, Commercial, Manufacturing, Public and Semipublic, Recreational, Transportation & Communication, Agriculture & Water Bodies etc. Here the discussion will be carried out on Barrier free public building (library falls under this category). Such a building should have following architectural design considerations.

Automatic door opener
Anti-skid floor
Accessible Lift
Escalator
Accessible toilet
Accessible car parking
Corridors
Hand rail
Ramp
Signage
Spacious entrance and corridors
Well illuminated stairway
Spacious corridor
Tactile marking

Elderly people as well as people differently abled people can move very safely and independently within barrier-free environment. Library building should have barrier-free environment so that nobody should have any difficulty to access library resources as well as library services.

VII. ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

A print disability is a difficulty or inability to read printed material because of visual, physical, perceptual, developmental, cognitive, or learning disability. Many persons round the globe are facing this challenge. However this deadlock situation may be overcome using different accessible formats. Several initiatives have been taken, Some of those are as follows;

Accessible Book Consortium: The Accessible Books Consortium produce e-books in accessible formats (braille, audio or large print) for print disabled persons.

Bookshare: Bookshare is the accessible online library for people with print disabilities.

Sugamaya Pustakalaya: Sugamya Pustakalaya is an online library that provides huge accessible books to people with print disabilities. Books can be downloaded in accessible formats like - DAISY audio, DAISY full text, EPUB, Word format (DOC/DOCX), HTML, BRF (Braille ready files), Text and RTF (Braille ready files), Text and RTF.

Divyang Sarathi Mobile App: The Central Government of India has launched accessible Divyang Sarathi Mobile App for the specially abled users. Here written information is converted into an audio file.

Utilizing Internet platform and various accessible formats, librarians can offer greater promise to render Equitable Library Service.

VIII. ACCESSIBLE WEB DESIGNING

Accessible web site should be designed very carefully; so that people having some disabilities may enjoy equal access and equal opportunity. WCAG is the abbreviation for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. WCAG2.0 standard defines how to make Web content more accessible.

IX. SOME IMPEDIMENTS

Some barriers are – Financial crunch, apathetic mentality, inadequate Assistive Technology products, not having barrier-free architecture, inadequate manpower, and lack of awareness.

X. LIBRARIANS PAVING A NEW PATH

Librarians are rendering various types of service. However traditional library services are not sufficient enough to win the hearts of the potential library users. Users can access their desired information using numerous modern tools and techniques. Librarians should work hard to render equitable library service for their specially abled users. Librarians need to identify, who are the Target group and what they are wanting basically. Basing on their need a library needs to be equipped with suitable Assistive Technology products. Initiative is to be taken to convert the library into a barrier-free building. Accessible web site is to be designed so that specially abled library users may access information effortlessly. Of course librarians should arrange for Library Orientation Program otherwise the library resources as well as library services would be underutilized.

XI. PANDAMIC CHALLENGES

COVID 19 has created a great turmoil throughout the world. Acquisition librarians should plan to buy documents in accessible formats to provide support to print disabled persons. Paper books should be issued for longer period of time in order to avoid frequent library visit. Maintenance of social distancing is very important. Hence the concept of Rush Management is to be taken into consideration. Librarians can organize webinar or conduct Library Orientation Program using software like – Google Meet, CISCO Webex, Zoho Meeting, Zoom etc.

XII. CONCLUSION

People with disabilities are a large and vibrant part of a society. They should neither underestimate nor ignored. The role of a library in providing Equitable Library Service is still at its infancy in Indian context. The need to provide Equitable Library Service should unequivocally spell out in the Mission statement of a library. Under such circumstances, specially abled library users will work independently and ultimately they will become productive members of society.

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