

**INCLUSIVE ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MZUZU UNIVERSITY LIBRARY AND
ST. JOHN OF GOD COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARY IN
MZUZU, MALAWI**

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Abstract

Provision of library services to all users without discrimination is crucial to libraries in this century. Inclusive academic libraries provide services to all users regardless users' disabilities. They enhance access and increase meeting the needs of all library users. The purpose of this study was to determine how inclusive are library services to the physically challenged students at Mzuzu University Library and St. John of God College of Health Sciences Library and how are these services similar or different. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from library staff and students at Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences and semi-structured interview questions were used to collect data from Librarians in both institutions. Observation checklist was also used to identify the physical infrastructures, media formats, and services provided in both institutions. The findings revealed that visual impairment was the major physical challenge amongst students in both institutions. Although physical infrastructures like ramps were available in both institutions, there is no policy that guides provision of library services to physically challenged students in both institutions. The study therefore concludes that inclusive library services provided to physically challenged students are limited in both institutions due to

lack of policies. The study, therefore, recommends that both institutions need to take proactive measures in development of policies that can guide the provision of library services to physically challenged students.

Keywords: *inclusive library services, physically challenged students, academic libraries*

Introduction

Information is crucial to all people and provision of library services to all users without discrimination is one of the main agenda of libraries in this century. Inclusive libraries provide services to all people including pensioners, the un employed, the hospitalized, prisoners and the physically challenged (Forrest, 2006). This paper focuses on inclusiveness of academic library services to physically challenged students. The term “physically challenged” refers to anyone who has a problem with their body that makes it difficult for them to do things that other people can do easily (Longman Dictionary, 2017). In other words, the term is a euphemism for “disabled”. Physically challenged people include people with physical or mobility impairment, visual impairment, hearing impairment, dyslexia, medical conditions and mental health difficulties (Forest, 2006 p.14). Inclusive academic libraries provide services that enhance access, increase meeting the needs of all library users and improve use of information for their academic tasks. One of the target goals under Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to “build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive, and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all (United Nations, 2015). According to American Library Association (ALA) code of ethics, one of the ethical principles that guide the work of librarians is to provide “the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous response to all requests”. In addition, ALA bill of rights states that “a person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views” (ALA,1939). In response to this, libraries have been tasked to provide inclusive library services in order to accommodate all library users. This calls for libraries to ensure that physical structures, resources and services meet the needs of all users regardless of one’s condition and ability (Majinge and Stilwell, 2013). Library users who are physically challenged require special, convenient access to library services as compared to library users who are able-bodied. Libraries Serving Disadvantaged Persons (LSDP), a section of the International Federation Library Association (IFLA), championed the promotion of the development and adoption of standards and guidelines that ensure equal access to library services to all groups of people on society who are unable to make use of conventional services (Forrest, 2006 p.13). These groups include people who have a disability. Irvall and Nielsen (2005) prepared an accessibility checklist which was published

by IFLA. The aim of the checklist was to support libraries in making their services more accessible to patrons with disabilities. The checklist involves three main sections which are the physical access, media formats and service and communication. Similarly, guidelines for best practices have been provided through United Kingdom government legislation on the Special Educational Needs (Disability Discrimination Act, 2005) and the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) (2007). All these have been formulated to promote and enhance equity and inclusiveness in library service provision in academic libraries all over the world. However, diverse users' characteristics have caused some challenges on how academic libraries can serve all its users without discrimination.

Inclusive library services in Malawi

The constitution of the Republic of Malawi states that discrimination of a person in any form is prohibited and all persons under any law guaranteed equal and effective protection against discrimination on ground of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, nationality, ethnic or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status (Malawi Government, 1994). In an attempt to respond to disability related inequalities in education, Malawi adopted a policy of inclusion and education for all. As a result there is increased access to mainstream schools for pupils with disabilities. According to Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), the number of students with special learning needs at primary school level was 93,664, secondary school level was 2,911 and 61 at tertiary level (MoEST, 2013 p. 113). Despite provisions in education policy on inclusive services in education sector, physically challenged students face different challenges when accessing information in academic libraries. Most of the time libraries do not plan and provide services that serve the physically challenged students (Chaputula and Mapulanga, 2016).

Contextual setting

Mzuzu University is the second national university after University of Malawi. It was enacted by the Parliament of Malawi in May 1997 and was officially opened in 1999. This idea was conceived by Government in 1994 so as to increase access to higher education and contribute to the nation's future through education, training and research. Since its first intake in 1999, the university has steadily grown from a single faculty to six more faculties and three centres. Its mission is "to provide high quality education, training, research and complimentary services to meet the technological, social and economic needs of individuals and communities in Malawi and the world" (Mzuzu University, 2017). Mzuzu University Library provides different services to students and has several sections. These include electronic resources, books, print journals, videos, CDs, and internet services. As of 2017, Mzuzu University Library serves about 4,067 students, which includes generic and open and distance learners; these are undergraduates and postgraduates learners.

Northern Region of Malawi. It was established in 2003. Its mission is “to be a centre of excellence in education, training and research for the enhancement of quality of mental health services in Malawi and the sub region” (St. John of God Hospital Services, 2017). St. John of God College of Health Sciences Library provides internet services, books, print journals, videos, and CDs to students. As of 2017, the student population was 280 and these are undergraduate learners.

Statement of the problem

Academic libraries in Malawi have been responsive to government and international library associations’ policies of providing inclusive library services to its patrons. Mash (2010) states that libraries have always been in a state of change to accommodate diverse needs of users. Mzuzu university library has made strides in the provision of inclusive library services which include collection development and provision of physical structures for easy access and use. However, the University encounters some challenges in the process. St. John of God Library has also made some strides in the provision of inclusive library services to physically challenged students as required by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE). This study, therefore, intends to determine how inclusive library services are to the physically challenged students at Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences libraries and how are these services similar or different.

Specific Research Objectives

The specific research objectives of the study were as follows:

- To identify types of physically challenged students that Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences libraries serve.
- To identify strategies that Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences libraries use when assisting physically challenged students.
- To determine challenges that Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences libraries face when serving physically challenged students.
- To determine differences and similarities on how Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences libraries help physically challenged students to access library services.

Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted to understand the library services provided to physically challenged students. Findings have shown that there are many people who are physically challenged like those in wheelchairs, hearing impairment, and visual impairment who seek information services from libraries (Chiparausha and Mavhunduse, 2014; Haumba and Kamusiime 2014; Musoke, 2014). A study conducted by Ekwelem (2013) at Nnandi Azikiwe University Library in Nigeria with the aim of exploring the use of electronic resources by physically challenged library users, identified 194 physically challenged students whose composition was 101 visually impaired and 93 mobility challenged.

According to Haumba and Kamusiime (2014), the high income countries have managed to make accessible their education establishments to the physically challenged or disabled students. However, this is in contrast with the low income countries where the physically challenged continue to experience barriers to access education establishments. For instance, Phiri (2014) states that physically challenged users in developing countries face challenges such as unfriendly academic library buildings that are inaccessible due to lack of lifts to carry them to upper floors to access information services. Chiparausha and Mavhunduse (2014) in their findings of a survey research study conducted at University of Zimbabwe reported that the University Library faced challenges such as lack of appropriate infrastructure which could support physically challenged people to access library facilities, obsolete information and communication technology appliances and lack of trained staff to assist the users. Bodaghi and Zainab (2013) conducted a study in Public and University Libraries in Zanjan in Iran where findings revealed that 53.8% of the libraries did not provide ramps while 63% had no parking space for the disabled. Similarly, a study by Ekwelem (2013) from Nnandi Azikiwe University Library in Nigeria indicates that only visually impaired resources were taped books and online public access catalogue while the mobility challenged had no resources available for their use. In Malawi, a study conducted by Chaputula and Mapulanga (2016) shows that there is lack of library services for physically challenged students, lack of equipment to support the physically challenged to access the library and information resources, and that librarians do not provide specialized training and market their services to physically challenged people. While Phukubje and Ngoepe (2017) in their study at Limpopo University in South Africa found that students with physical challenges were not satisfied with library services provided due to inability to access certain information not being available in appropriate formats. In addition, Chaputula and Mapulanga (2016) indicated that libraries failure to procure materials in other formats contribute to failure of provision of information resources to physically challenged people.

Scholars have provided recommendation for libraries to follow in order to provide inclusive library services. Irvall and Nielsen (2005) has recommended checklist which include clear signposting and guiding, entrances which are wide enough to allow a wheel chair to pass through, automatic doors, toilets that are friendly to people with physically challenged, book shelves reachable by wheelchair users, reading computer tables of varying heights to suit all, staff trained to assist physically challenged library users. In addition, Phiri (2014) adds that for a library to be inclusive, information materials such as Braille, large print books, special software to enable people with visual impairment to type with ordinary letters of the alphabet and escalators in buildings with higher floors has to be available. Haumba and Kamusiime (2014) have recommended implementation and enforcement of laws and policies that can help in achieving real change in the provision inclusive services to the physically challenged. In a study conducted by Chiparausha and Mavhunduse (2014) revealed existence of different policies that guided provision of information services to physically challenged people at the University of Zimbabwe. The study revealed that only six libraries out of nine had policies on library services to the physically challenged users.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methods approach, thus mixing both qualitative and quantitative research approaches (Creswell, 2014). In order to achieve the aim and objectives of the study, the researchers employed a survey research design. Connaway (2010) stipulates that survey research design collects data from all or part of a population to access the relative incidence, distribution and interrelations of naturally occurring variables. Survey research is useful in determining the present status of given phenomenon and in this case to identify the type of physically challenged students the libraries serve. The population of the study included the library staff members who serve the students in the service counters, Librarians, and students who frequently used the library. In this study, a structured questionnaire was administered to library staff and students in order to collect quantitative data. In order to get more clarifications in the provision of inclusive library services, follow-up interviews were conducted with the Librarians in order to collect qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather such narrative data. These interviews gave an opportunity to probe or allowing new questions to be brought up during the interviews as a result of what the interviewee said. In order to get more insight, observation checklist of the physical infrastructure, media formats and services was done in both institutions in order to identify the inclusive library services provided to physically challenged students.

The study used non-probability purposive sampling to select 12 library staff members at Mzuzu University Library and a total of 3 library staff members were from St. of God College of Health Sciences Library. Convenience sampling was used to identify 135 students who frequently used the library at Mzuzu University

and 40 students were identified at St. John of God College of Health Sciences library including students with visible physical challenges. The quantitative data collected from the respondents was analysed using Microsoft Office Excel and the qualitative data was analysed thematically.

Presentation of data and Discussion

A total of 135 questionnaires were administered to students at Mzuzu University library and out of these 77 were returned representing a response rate of 57%. A total of 40 questionnaires were administered to students at St John of God College of Health Sciences library and out of these 30 were returned giving a response rate of 75% as shown in Table 1 below. A total of 12 questionnaires were administered to all library staff who serves students at the service counters at Mzuzu University library and out of these 12 were filled and returned representing 100% response rate. Three (3) questionnaires were administered to St. John of God College of Health Sciences library staff who serves students at the service counters and out of these 3 were returned representing 100% response rate as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Breakdown of library staff respondents

University/College	Number of Expected Respondents	Number of Actual Respondents	Percentage (%)
Mzuzu University	135	77	57%
St. John of God College of Health Sciences	40	30	75%
Total	175	107	61%

Table 1: Breakdown of student respondents

University/College	Number of Expected Respondents	Number of Actual Respondents	Percentage (%)
Mzuzu University	12	12	100%
St. John of God College of Health Sciences	3	3	100%
Total	15	15	100%

Physically challenged students at Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences

Students were asked to indicate the type of physical challenge they have. The purpose of this question was to identify what type of physically challenged students does Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences have. Results presented in Figure 1 below shows distribution of the type of physically challenged students at Mzuzu University and Figure 2 below shows distribution of the type of physically challenged students at St. John of God College of Health Sciences. The majority of the students with physical challenges 13 (17%) of the total respondents at Mzuzu University indicated that they were visually impaired, and 8 (10%) students were of short height. The majority of students with physical challenges 7 (23%) of the total respondents at St. John of God College of Health Sciences indicated that they were visually impaired, 6 (20%) students were left handed. The respondents who selected ‘other’ 56 (73%) and 9 (30%) of the total respondents, were the students who did not have any physical challenges from Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences respectively. It was interesting to note that visual impairment was the highest impairment in both institutions and some students had multiple physical challenges. This finding concurs with Ekwelem (2013) who found out that out of 194 identified physically challenged students at Nnandi Azikiwe University library, the majority 101 were visually impaired. From these figures in the study findings, it can also be suggested that not many students living with physical challenges do make it to higher education institutions in Malawi.

Figure 1: Type of physically challenged students at Mzuzu University N=77

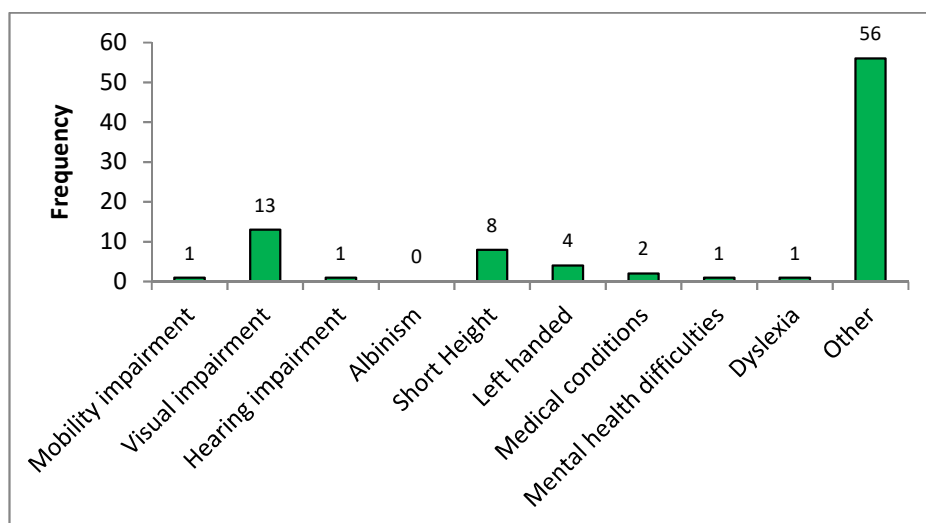
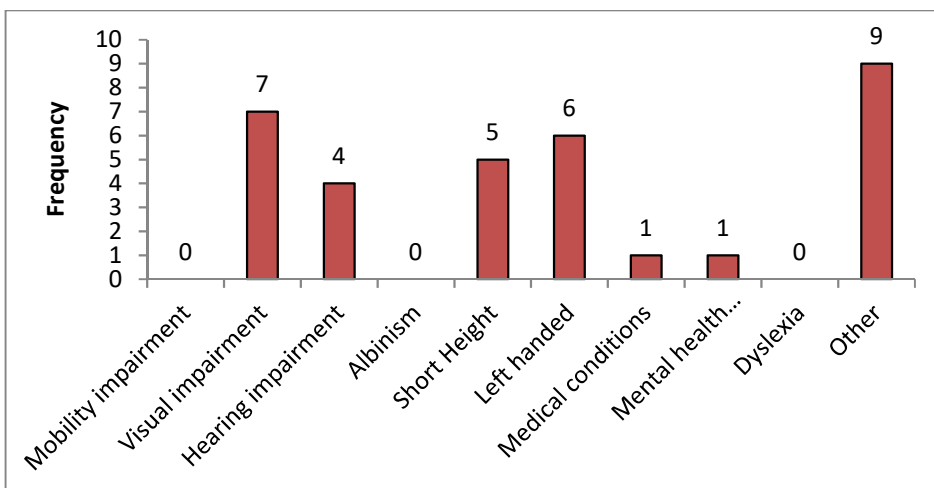


Figure 2: Type of physically challenged students at St. John of God College of Health Sciences N=30



Additionally, the study sought views from library staff to indicate the type of physically challenged students that they do serve in the library. In response, out of 12 library staff, 11 (92%) library staff at Mzuzu University indicated mobility impairments. This could probably be attributed to the physical appearance of the mobility challenged students while library staff at St. John of God College of Health Sciences indicated negative response on mobility impairment. This could be due to the non-availability of the mobility challenged students at the institution. These results also point to another interesting fact that maybe Mzuzu University is more inclusive than St. John of God College in enrolling students with physical challenges.

Strategies used in assisting physically challenged students

Physical infrastructures, information resources and equipment's being provided by any institution are some of the very important factors which do facilitate inclusiveness in a library. On this, the students were asked to indicate the physical infrastructures, media formats and equipment's available at the institutions that assist the physically challenged students when they are using the library. The question allowed multiple responses. Majority of students 53 (69%) indicated ramps, 41 (53%) enough lighting, and 40 (52%) tables with good height at Mzuzu University library as shown in Figure 3 below. Furthermore, at St. John of God College of Health Sciences library, the majority of students 21 (70%) indicated tables with good height, 21 (70%) enough lighting, and 20 (67%) chairs with good height as shown in Figure 4 below. Negative responses were indicated at both institutions of Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences libraries on availability of toilets accommodating physically challenged students, automatic doors, and Braille materials. Major finding to note was that both institutions do not have toilets that accommodate physically challenged students. This is worrisome indeed in a country which has a population of 4.18% of its

people living with physical challenges and may as well mean that most institutions of higher learning in Malawi are not ready to accept students living with physical challenges (Munthali, 2011).

Figure 3: Physical infrastructures, media formats and equipment's at Mzuzu University N=77

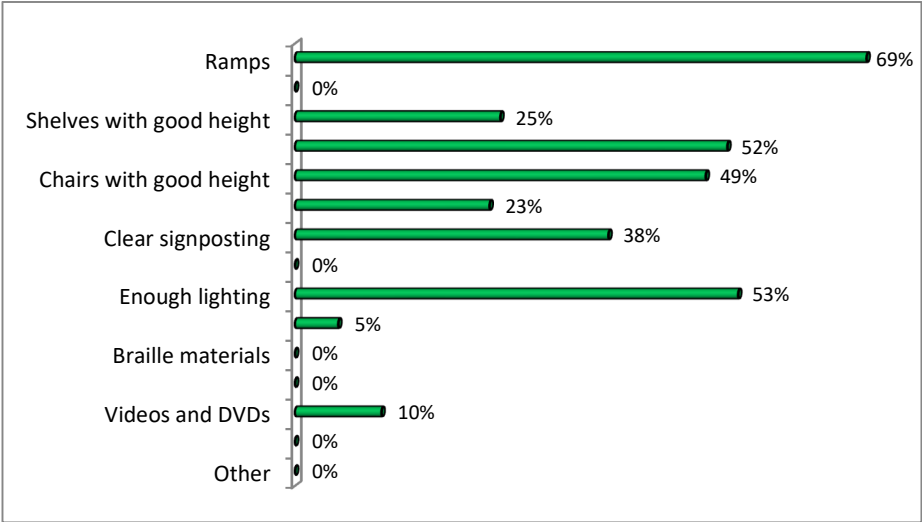
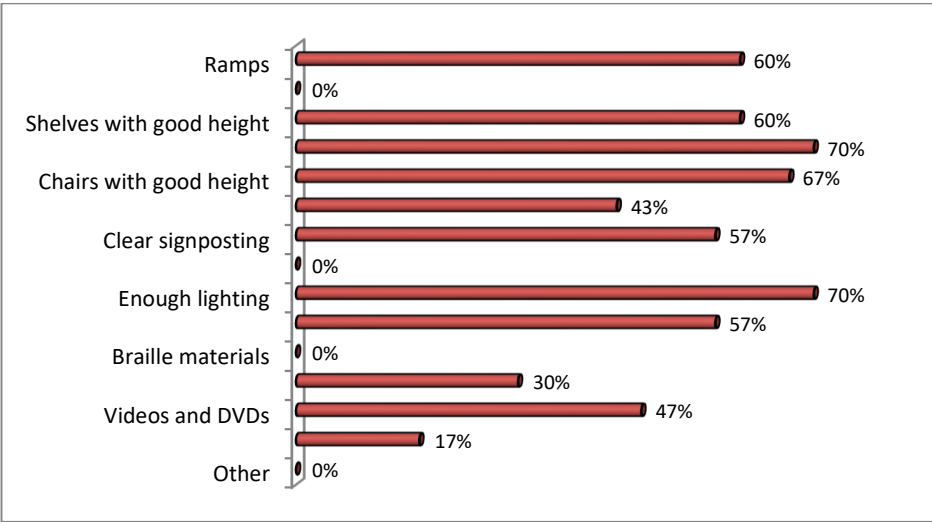
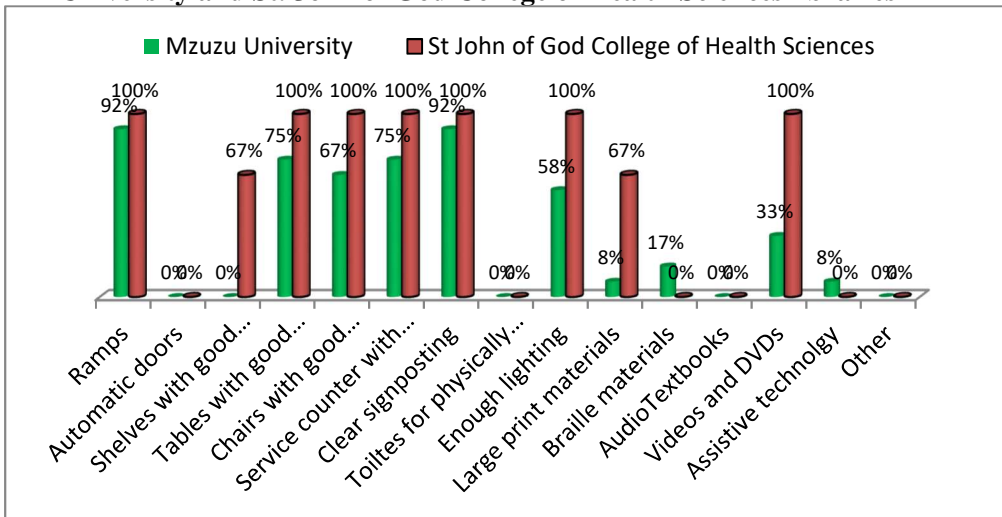


Figure 4: Physical infrastructures, media formats and equipment's at St. John of God College of Health Sciences N=30



The same question on physical infrastructures was also posed to library staff to find out the physical infrastructures, media formats and equipment's that were available at Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences libraries. Figure 5 below show negative responses from library staff on availability of automatic doors, shelves with good height, toilets accommodating physically challenged, Braille materials, audio textbooks and assistive technology.

Figure 5: Breakdown of responses by library staff on physical infrastructures, media formats and equipment's available at Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences libraries



It is evident from the above findings that, although both institutions provide physical infrastructures to physically challenged students, the services are limited. This finding concurs with Phukubje and Ngoepe (2017) who observed that, at Limpopo University, students with physical challenges were not satisfied with library services due to non-availability of information in appropriate formats. And again this questions both institutions on how ready they are to accept physically challenged students in their institutions who quests for higher learning.

Availability of policies used

Librarians from both institutions were asked in an interview whether the libraries had policies that guide them to provide inclusive library services to physically challenged students. The findings indicated negative responses from both institutions as they indicated that there were no policies in place although one librarian indicated that they use personal initiative and experience to support physically challenged students.

The researchers further asked the Librarians whether the institutions had any policies that guide the institutions in terms of supporting physically challenged students. The responses were negative from both institutions. The finding differs with a study conducted by Chiparausha and Mavhunduse (2014) at the University of Zimbabwe who indicated that there was existence of different policies that guided provision of information services to physically challenged people at six out of nine libraries. It is evident from these findings that deliberate measures are needed to be urgently undertaken in these institutions to accommodate physically challenged students if they are to benefit from library services being provided in both institutions.

Challenges students with physical challenges face in using the library

Librarians from both institutions were asked in an interview to indicate whether they face challenges in assisting physically challenged students. One librarian indicated that:

“Materials are not suitable for visually impaired, the use of stairs to go to computer laboratory impede mobility challenged students, and lack of money to procure necessary equipment”

Another librarian indicated that:

“The library does not have materials that are in different formats”

In addition, the same question was also asked to students to indicate challenges that they face when using the library services. The question allowed multiple responses. The majority of students 54 (70%) and 22 (73%) of the total respondents from Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences libraries respectively indicated lack of toilets that could accommodate physically challenged students was the major challenge. A further analysis of the results show that 44 (57%) indicated lack of equipment and 37 (48%) indicated lack of assistive technology at Mzuzu University library while 16 (53%) indicated most materials were in printed form at St. John of God College of Health Sciences as shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6 respectively below.

Figure 6: Challenges students with physical challenges face in using the library at Mzuzu University N=77

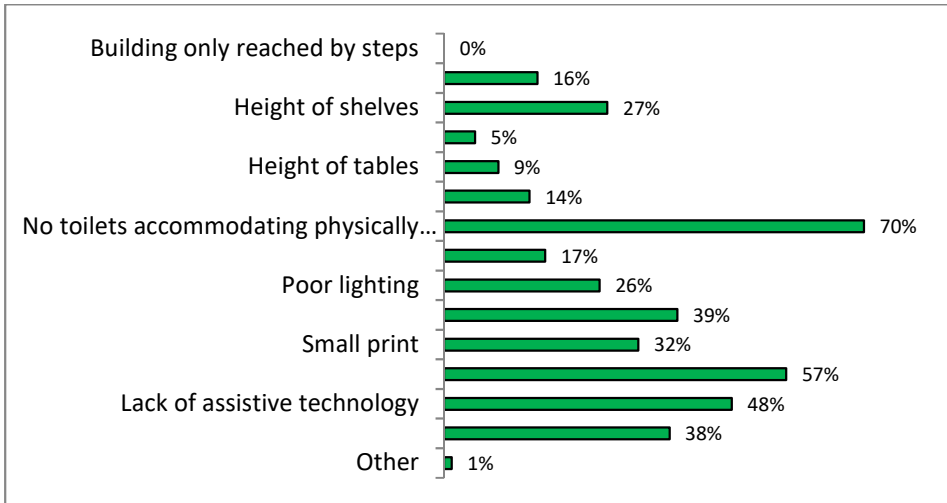
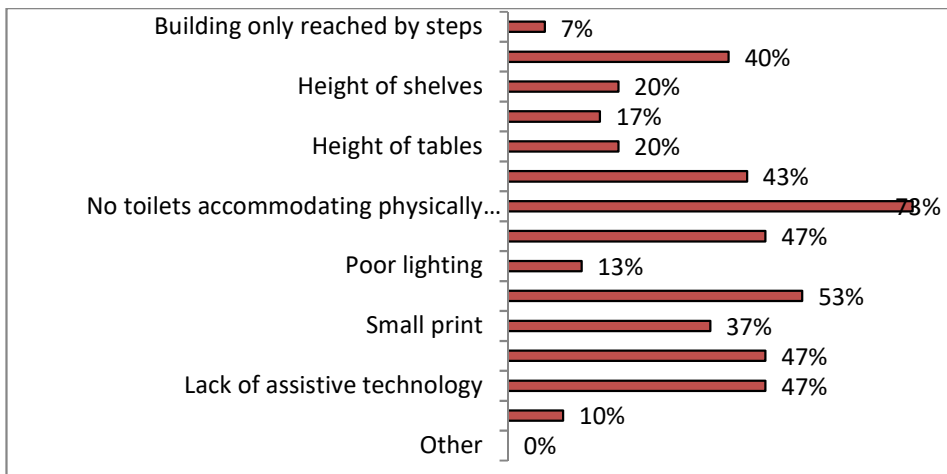


Figure 7: Challenges students with physical challenges face in using the library at St. John of God College of Health Sciences N=30



This finding concurs with Chaputula and Mapulanga (2016) who indicated that one of the challenges of libraries in providing services to physically challenged people was failure by libraries to procure materials for physically challenged students. This could be due to low budgets which are provided to institutions from government and lack of policies to guide inclusive services in the institutions. In addition, this finding concurs with that of Phiri (2014) who argues that for a library to be inclusive, information materials such as Braille, large print books,

special software to enable people with visual impairment to type with ordinary letters of the alphabet, and escalators in buildings with higher floors has to be available. From this finding it is clear that students with physical challenges are being marginalized unknowingly by libraries of these two institutions.

Conclusion and recommendations

It is clear from the above findings that physically challenged students are indeed available in the two institutions of higher learning with the majority being the visually impaired students. Although the two libraries provide physical infrastructures like ramps, enough lighting and tables with good height, several challenges have been noted which are impeding inclusive library services. These include lack of toilets that physically challenged students can use when using the library, lack of materials in different formats and equipment's that can assist attain their goal when they are using the library without problems, and lack of policies that guides provision of library services. It can be concluded that the services that the two libraries are providing have not taken care of the physically challenged users who will one day find themselves studying at these institutions, and inclusive library services provided to physically challenged students in both institutions are limited due to lack of policies. It can also be concluded that proactive measures are needed if physically challenged students are to benefit from library services provided in both institutions. The synthesis of the findings has led us to make the following recommendations which we believe if implemented by Mzuzu University and St. John of God College of Health Sciences libraries, can help alleviate the challenges physically challenged students face when using the two libraries:

- Provision of materials in different formats like Braille, large print materials and audio textbooks so that the visually and hearing impaired can use whenever they are using the library.
- Provision of toilets that can accommodate physically challenged students especially the mobility impaired.
- Provision of shelves, tables and chairs of good height especially for the mobility impaired and those with short height.
- Development of policies that will guide the provision of library services to physically challenged students.
- Allocate enough money in the budgets for the procurement of equipment's and resources for the physically challenged students.

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