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EXPLORING DIGITAL EQUITY AND INCLUSIVE ACCESS TO ELECTRONIC LIBRARY RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY LAFIA, NASSARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

[1]Tihyaunin Manji Difur, [2]Dr Joseph John Mawak, & [3]Prof. Lily O. Ezeala
[1]Department of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, University of Jos,
tihyaunindang@yahoo.com, dangt@unijos.edu.ng, +2347015733756
[2]Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Jos,
mawakjoseph74@gmail.com, +2348067773253
[3]Department of SocialScience Education, Faculty of Education, University of Jos,
ezealal@unijos.edu.ng, +2348033930168

Abstract
The study seeks to assess digital equity and inclusive access to electronic library resources for students with visual impairment in Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa State, Nigeria. Guided by five objectives translated into five research questions, the research adopted the descriptive survey design with a total population of 19 respondents who were all included in the study as such, no sample and sampling technique was required. Two instruments were used to gather data for the study, the electronic library resources questionnaire (DEIAELR) and an electronic resources and assistive technology observation checklist (EATOC). The Findings of the study revealed that majority of the electronic resources are available. However, most of the electronic resources are not accessible by the visually impaired students. Inadequate assistive technology, poor internet connection, lack of library website design, insufficient funding and inadequate electronic resources affects access to these electronic resources for the visually impaired students. The study further revealed that students with visual impairment do not experience digital equity to electronic resources as other sighted students and majority of the visually impaired students do not experience inclusivity in access to library resources. To achieve true digital equity and foster an inclusive learning environment, it is essential that the university libraries prioritize the development of accessible electronic resources through structured policies, inclusive initiatives and making available assistive technologies. This also demands ensuring that all digital materials are designed to meet the diverse needs of students, particularly those with visual impairments.

Keywords: Visually impaired., Accessibility, Availability., Universities in Plateau State., Inclusiveness., Digital Equity.

Introduction
Traditionally known for housing print collections, libraries have transformed into technologically driven information centers, offering access to electronic resources, digital media, and virtual services. This evolution demands that academic library in particular respond to the

diverse and growing needs of all users by ensuring inclusive access to electronic resources. Electronic resources are virtual collections of digital materials, accessible online. These resources include e-journals, online databases, repositories, e-books, multimedia content amongst many others. These resources which are integral to modern academic research and learning now have an edge over the traditional print-based media as they are most likely to contain current information, offer advanced search capabilities, greater flexibility in storage and enable access of information without time and location constraints.

In an era where digital resources are integral to academic success, the accessibility of these resources remains a significant concern, particularly for students with visual impairment. For this category of students, it simply means going beyond availability to include accessibility, usability, and support systems that promote full participation in the academic experience. Ensuring digital equity within libraries is essential to fostering inclusive education in higher institutions of learning. Digital equity is a fundamental component of inclusive education and an essential driver of academic success in the digital era. It refers to the fair distribution of technological resources, tools, access, and skills needed to fully participate in a digitally connected society (Gorski, 2019). Digital equity is essential for building inclusive educational systems that ensure all students regardless of their backgrounds or abilities have meaningful access to digital tools, resources, and opportunities for success. It emphasizes not just equal access to technology, but also the support needed to use it effectively for learning and development.

Students with visual impairment (SWVI) face significant challenges in achieving equitable access to electronic library resources in higher institutions. According to Ashikuzzaman (2024), a major challenge faced is the inaccessibility of digital platforms, many of which are not designed in compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), making them incompatible with screen readers and other assistive technologies. As a result, SWVIs struggle to navigate online library catalogs, e-journal databases, and institutional websites often with issues such as inability for these technologies to interpret visual images, which are often developed without inclusive design principles. Other digital equity issues are limited availability of learning materials, inaccessible formats such as audio, DAISY, or EPUB, with most resources provided only in inaccessible PDFs. This effectively marginalizes visually impaired students who rely on specific formats to engage with academic content. To support this point National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Inclusive library services in many Nigerian universities remain either underdeveloped or, in some cases, entirely absent Orlunga, and Alikor, (2023). It is noted that while some institutions have established policies on inclusive education, the implementation of these policies is often weak and inconsistent. As a result, students with visual impairment are frequently denied the necessary accommodations required for equitable access to electronic library resources. This persistent gap in implementation contributes to broader patterns of inequality and exclusion, where students with visual impairments do not enjoy the same level of access, independence, or meaningful engagement with digital academic resources as their sighted peers. The absence of

fully operational inclusive policies further highlights systemic neglect, as insufficient attention is given to the specific needs of visually impaired students within university library systems.

Addressing these challenges requires not only policy commitment but also practical investment in assistive technologies that facilitate inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities across academic environments. Such technologies are essential for bridging the accessibility gap and ensuring equitable access to information resources. The failure to effectively implement inclusive education policies also contradicts the principles of equity and inclusion embedded in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, (UNESCO, 2022). This situation underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions aimed at promoting digital inclusion and equity within university library services. In this context, digital equity becomes a fundamental requirement for ensuring inclusive access to electronic library resources in Nigerian universities. As higher education becomes increasingly dependent on digital technologies, institutions must ensure that their digital infrastructure, services, and resources are designed to accommodate all learners, particularly students with visual impairments.

The study will be significant to Students with visual impairment, it will help this category of students to understand the nature and availability of electronic resources within their university libraries, and possibly enhance its usage. It might further enable them to be able to navigate digital library platforms with greater ease and confidence, this may contribute to a more inclusive academic environment where students with visual impairment can enjoy equitable access to electronic resources similar to their sighted peers. Study will also benefit Library management and staff, findings from the study can guide decision-making creating structured policies on the procurement and deployment of assistive technologies in various formats, such as screen readers, Braille displays, magnifiers, and audio devices in libraries across. In summary, this study will not only advocate for the rights of students with visual impairment to access electronic library resources but will also serve as a catalyst for institutional reforms, policy development, and future research aimed at fostering a more inclusive and equitable higher education system.

Statement of the Problem

Globally, it has been estimated that majority of visually impaired students reported difficulties accessing electronic library resources. Several factors contribute to this profound issue which may range from inadequate institutional support for inclusive education, including the provision of policies for adapted library services. Other factors include non-compliance with Web Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). The guidelines according to World Wide Web Consortium (W3C, 2018) are structured around four key principles: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust (POUR). This means that digital content should be presented in ways that users can perceive through alternative formats such as text alternatives and captions; be fully operable through various input methods including keyboard navigation; be understandable in

terms of clear language and predictable functionality; and be robust enough to function effectively across different technologies, including assistive devices like screen readers making them incompatible with screen readers and other assistive technologies. A study by Aghauche, Ilorah, and Nzewi, (2022**)** found that most Nigerian university websites and electronic library portals do not comply with WCAG 2.1 standards indicating that most e-books and e-journal articles are created in limited accessible formats. For example, PDF format, which are not always screen-reader friendly and some are non-downloadable and readable. According to Okon and Udoudoh (2020), the lack of alternative formats such as universally designed systems contributes to inequitable access. A digital divide exists among students with visual impairment, as many lack access to essential assistive technologies such as screen readers and Braille devices, which are critical for navigating electronic resources such as JAWS, NVDA, or Braille displays), which are critical for navigating electronic resources. This limits their ability to benefit equally from digital academic content.

The consequences of these challenges are profound, as students with disabilities reported feeling marginalized, their confidence is eroded, and there may arise the possibility of losing interest in learning. The need for this study, therefore, lies in the growing demand for accessibility of these resources by the visually impaired, it becomes imperative to examine whether students with visual impairments are being accommodated and their information needs met in Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa State. Therefore, the broader question the research hopes to answer is to identify the extent of digital equity and inclusive access to library resources for the visually impaired, and what interventions are required to promote accessibility.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to assess digital equity and inclusive access to electronic library resources for students with visual impairment in Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

1. determine the availability of electronic resources in Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa State
2. determine the extent of accessibility of electronic resources for students with visual impairment Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa State.
3. identify the factors affecting electronic resource accessibility by the visually impaired students in Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa State
4. assess the extent of digital equity in access to library resources for the visually impaired students Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa State.
5. assess the extent of inclusion in access to library electronic resources for the visually impaired students Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa State

Research Questions

The following research question will be answered in the study:

1. What is the level of the availability of electronic resources in Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa State
2. What is the extent of accessibility of the electronic resources by students with visual impairment Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa State?
3. What are the factors affecting the accessibility of electronic resources by visually impaired students Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa State?
4. What is the extent of digital equity in access to library resources for the visually impaired students Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa State?
5. What is the extent of inclusion in access to library resources for visually impaired students Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa State?

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study will be guided by The Universal Design for Learning propounded by David and Meyer in the 1990s. The Universal Design for Learning emphasizes the importance of designing curricula, teaching methods, and assessments that accommodate various learning styles, preferences, and abilities. It advocates for adaptive and flexible learning environments that address differences in learners' interests, skills, and readiness levels. The theory is guided by three primary principles. The first principle, multiple means of representation, involves presenting information in various formats such as text, audio, and visual aids to help learners access and understand content through different sensory modalities. For students with visual impairments, this means providing electronic resources in accessible formats like audio, braille, and large print. The second principle, multiple means of action and expression, offers learners various ways to demonstrate their understanding and communicate their knowledge.

This study will explore how assistive technologies, such as screen readers, audio texts, and braille displays, enable visually impaired students to access electronic library resources that would otherwise be unavailable in conventional formats. The third principle, multiple means of engagement, focuses on motivating and engaging learners by personalizing learning opportunities, offering choices, and reducing barriers. The Universal Design for Learning framework is important for this study, because it promotes equity and inclusiveness in education by recognizing that learners have diverse abilities, challenges, and experiences. It supports the idea that embracing this diversity benefits all students by breaking down barriers to learning

Literature Review

Digital equity is a fundamental component of inclusive education and an essential driver of academic success in the digital era. It refers to the fair distribution of technological resources, tools, access, and skills needed to fully participate in a digitally connected society (Gorski, 2019). Unlike the general notion of equity, which focuses on broader systemic fairness and inclusion, digital equity zeroes in on the ability of individuals and communities to access and effectively use information and communication technologies (ICTs), including electronic library

resources. Digital equity ensures that all learners regardless of ability, socio-economic status, or geographic location have the means to access digital learning tools and platforms. This includes high-speed internet access, availability of assistive technologies, inclusive digital content, and the digital literacy skills needed to use them. For students with visual impairment, digital equity means having accessible formats (example., Braille, audio, screen reader-compatible text), as well as supportive infrastructure and services that enable full participation in academic life. According to Abubakar and Abdullahi (2020), students with visual impairments frequently encounter screen readers' incompatibility with online catalogues, digital repositories, and e-journal platforms. Lack of universally designed systems contributes to inequitable access. Digital Divide and Assistive Technology Gaps Research by (Ocheibi & Buba (2021) found that a digital divide exists where students with visual impairment often lack access to assistive technologies (such as JAWS, NVDA, or Braille displays), which are critical for navigating electronic resources. This limits their ability to benefit equally from digital academic content.

In many Nigerian universities, inclusive access remains more aspirational than practical. Although some institutions have adopted general inclusive education policies, implementation at the library level is often inconsistent or absent. Students with visual impairment frequently report feeling excluded due to the lack of accessible content, limited user-friendly interfaces, and insufficient personalized support. The absence of inclusive design and delivery mechanisms in these digital systems creates a barrier that prevents full participation and equal opportunity in academic activities. Moreso, inclusion, as it relates to access to electronic library resources, emphasizes the need to actively accommodate the diverse needs of all learners, particularly students with visual impairment. Most electronic library resources are developed with a one-size-fits-all approach, which disregards the unique needs of those who rely on assistive technologies.

Equity and inclusion are critical for promoting social cohesion and addressing systemic inequalities (Adebayo, 2017). Education systems that prioritize equity and inclusion can help to reduce achievement gaps and promote more equitable outcomes (Nusche, 2019). Furthermore, inclusive education systems are better equipped to respond to the needs of diverse learners, including those with disabilities (UNESCO, 2017). The goal of equity is to give the means to all students to achieve at the best of their capabilities. Based on the submission and reviewed studies, students with visual impairment continue to face systemic, technological, and economic barriers that limit their equitable access to electronic library resources. The disparity is not only due to technological design but also due to inadequate policy enforcement, insufficient institutional support, and economic exclusion.

Research Methodology

The research design that was adopted for this study is the descriptive survey research design, Descriptive survey design provides valid useful approaches to data collection that allow for effective generalization of research results and can allow the use of instruments such as questionnaire, interview and observation check list can be used for data collection. The population of this study includes all 19 students with visual impairment in Federal University

Lafia. The sample for this study consists of the entire population of 19 students with visual impairment. The decision to include the entire population, rather than selecting a subset, is informed by the relatively small size of the group. In survey research, utilizing the whole population will enhance the reliability of the results and support broader generalization of the findings. Since the entire population was included in the study, no sampling technique was required. Two instruments were used for data collection. They are the Digital equity and inclusive access to electronic library resources questionnaire (DEIAELR) and an electronic resources and assistive technology observation checklist (EATOC). The DEIAELR was prepared on a four-point modified scale of Strongly agreed (SA)=4, Agree (A)=3, Disagree (D)=2, Strongly Disagree (SD)=1. The participants were instructed to select one of the options as it best describes their opinion. The instrument was be scored in a reverse way when the items are negative. For the structured observation checklist: Each observed item was assigned a binary (Available and Not available) and will be scored 1and 0 respectively. That is, 1 = Available, 0 = Not Available.

Results

Research Question One: What are the available electronic resources in Federal University Lafia?

Table 1: Results of the analysis on available electronic resources.

S/N	Electronic Resources	Available	Not Available
1	E-books	✓	☐
2	Online Journals	✓	☐
3	Databases (example., EBSCOhost)	✓	☐
4	Institutional Repository	✓	☐
5	Open educational resources (OER)	✓	☐
6	OPAC / Online Catalogue	✓	☐
7	Electronic Newspapers	✓	☐
8	Electronic Theses & Dissertations (ETDs)	✓	☐
9	Online courses	✓	☐
10	Audio / Video Learning Materials	✓	☐

Source: Field Data, March 2026

From the results the following electronic resources are available in the various libraries. They are electronic books, (e-books) electronic journals, Databases (examples JSTOR, EBSCOHOST), Institutional repository, Open Educational resources (OER), OPAC/ online catalogue, electronic newspapers, electronic theses & Dissertations (ETDS), Online courses,

Audio/ video learning materials. The results indicate that all of the electronic resources are available. This is in accordance with the findings by Gezie and Dawit (2020) who found that universities had electronic resource but must students with visual impairment hardly utilize them because of inadequate enabling gadgets to assist them in their research. The implication of these findings is that the electronic resources are available, but students with visual impairment find it difficult to utilize the electronic resources

Research Question Two: What is the extent of accessibility of the electronic resources by students with visual impairment in Federal University Lafia?

Table 2: Results showing the extent of accessibility of the electronic resources

S/N	Statement	N	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	X	SD	REMARK
1	I can access the e-resources whenever I visit the library	19	1 (5.3)	0 (0)	2 (10.5)	16 (84.5)	1.30	0.73	Rejected
2	The e-resources are compatible with my assistive technology.	19	1 (5.3)	0 (0)	3 (15.8)	15 (78.9)	1.30	0.75	Rejected
3	Navigating through e-resource is easy and user-friendly	19	4 (21.1)	1 (5.3)	11 (57.9)	3 (15.8)	2.30	1.00	Rejected
4	Library Staff provide support to help me access e-resources.	19	10 (52.6)	0 (0)	8 (42.1)	1 (5.3)	3.00	1.10	Rejected
5	E-resources are available in accessible formats example audio, braile.	19	0 (0)	0 (0)	12 (63.2)	7 (36.8)	1.60	0.49	Rejected
6	I receive regular orientation on how to use electronic resources.	19	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (15.8)	16 (84.2)	1.20	0.37	Rejected
7	I can access the e-resources from home or mobile device	19	0 (0)	0 (0)	12(63.2)	7 (36.8)	1.60	0.50	Rejected
8	There are assistive technology that help access the e-resources	19	17 (89.5)	0 (0)	2 (10.5)	0(0)	3.80	0.63	Rejected
	Total	**19**	**18.1**	**0.12**	**6.63**	**8.13**	**2.00**	**0.69**	

Source: Field Data, March 2026

The findings above revealed that most of the electronic resources are not accessible to students with visual impairment, this is in accordance with the findings by Kiambati (2018) who reported that staff and students with visual impairment find it difficult to access electronic resource because of cost. The study further found that visually impaired students access information with difficulty. The implication of this finding is that students with visual impairment need assistive technologies, inclusive access policies, and other needed support to be able to use the electronic resources that are available in the library.

Research Question Three: What are the factors affecting the accessibility of electronic resources by visually impaired students in the University library Federal University Lafia?

Table 3: showing other factors affecting the accessibility of electronic resources

S/N	Statement	N	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	X	SD	REMARK
1	Inadequate assistive technology hinder my access	**19**	18(94.7)	1(53)	0(0)	0(0)	3.94	0.33	Rejected
2	Poor internet connectivity limits access to e-resources.	**19**	12(63.2)	7(36.8)	0(0)	0(0)	3.63	0.496	Rejected
3	Lack of training on inclusive services affects access.	**19**	19(100)	0(0)	0(0)	0(00)	4	1.00	Rejected
4	Library websites are not designed with accessibility of visually impaired in mind	**19**	19(100)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	4	1.00	Rejected
5	There is insufficient funding for inclusive library services	**19**	17(89.5)	2(10.5)	0(0)	0(0)	3.14	0.89	Rejected
6	Social stigma affects by willingness to use the resources.	**19**	0(0)	0(0)	3(15.8)	16(842)	1.15	0.37	Rejected
7	Lack of institutional policy on inclusive library access.	**19**	1(53)	0(0)	2(10.5)	16(842)	1.36	0.733	Rejected
8	Inadequate availability of electronic resources	**19**	16(84.2)	2(100)	0(0)	0(0)	3.98	0.78	Rejected
	Total	**19**	**12.75**	**7.89**	**3.94**	**21.05**	**3.15**	**0.69**	

Source: Field Data, March 2026

The findings from the study showed that the factors affecting accessibility of electronic resources include; inadequate assistive technology, poor internet connection, lack of library website design, insufficient funding and inadequate electronic resources. This is in agreement with the findings by Aderibigbe and Olajide (2022) who found that visually impaired students usually encounter difficulties in terms of inadequate assistive technology, funding, inadequate electronic resources and library website design that accommodate students with visual impairment. The implication of this finding is that there is the need for libraries to address the issue of funding, website design, train staff to make use of the technologies, internet connectivity among others for the purpose of addressing the problem of students with visual impairment

Research Question Four: What is the extent of digital equity in access to library resources for the visually impaired students in Federal University Lafia?

Table 4: showing extent of digital equity in access to library resources

S/N	Statement	N	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	REMARK
1	Visually impaired students have equal access to electronic library resources as sighted students	19	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	19 (100%)	1	0	Rejected
2	There is fairness in resource allocation for visually impaired students.	19	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	19 (100%)	1	0	Rejected
3	The library websites are designed in such a way that accommodates visually impaired.	19	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (5.3%)	18 (94.7%)	1.52	2.28	Rejected
4	Library staff provide support to help me access e-resources.	19	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12 (53.2%)	7 (36.8%)	1.63	0.49	Rejected
5	I receive regular orientation on how to use electronic library.	19	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (21.1%)	15 (78.9%)	1.21	0.42	Rejected
6	Policies exist to ensure equal access to electronic library resources for visually impaired students	19	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	19 (100%)	1	0	Rejected
	Total	**19**	**0%**	**0%**	**13.3**	**16.1**	**1.22**	**0.53**	

Source: field data March 2026

The findings of the study showed that students with visual impairment do not experience digital equity to electronic resources as other sighted students. This is similar to (Adetoro, 2022) who found out that students with visual impairment do not experience digital equity in accessing electronic resources to the same extent as sighted students. Studies have shown that they often receive inadequate institutional support and face barriers related to their unique needs, resulting in unequal access and participation. The implication of this finding is that libraries need come up with structure, design, policies that can accommodate students with visual impairment for equitable use of the libraries in the Universities.

Research Question Five: What is the extent of inclusion in access to library resources for visually impaired students in universities in Federal University Lafia?

Table 5: showing extent of inclusion in access to library resources for visually impaired students

S/N	Statement	N	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	REMARK
1	The library collaborates with disability support units to enhance inclusion	19	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (42.1%)	11(57.9%)	1.42	0.51	Rejected
2	The library provides inclusive access for students with disability	19	0(0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	19 (100%)	1	0	Rejected
3	I am involved in decision making on inclusive access initiatives	19	0 (0%)	0(0%)	12(63.2%)	7 (36.8%)	1.63	0.49	Rejected
4	There is fairness in resources allocation for visually impaired students.	19	0(0%)	0 (0%)	14 (73.7%)	5 (26.3%)	1.73	0.45	Rejected
5	My university promotes digital inclusion for all students.	19	0 (0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	19 (100%)	1	0	Rejected
6	I am satisfied with the support services available to me.	19	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	19 (100%)	1	0	Rejected
7	Inclusive access to electronic resources has improved my academic work.	19	0 (0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	19 (100%)	1	0	Rejected
8	The university library promotes awareness of the needs of visually impaired students amongst staff	19	4(21.1)	12 (63.2%)	0 (0%)	3 (15.8%)	2.89	0.94	Rejected
	Total	**19**	**3%**	**8%**	**22.40%**	**15.13%**	**1.45%**	**0.29%**	

Source: field data March 2026

The findings from the study revealed that most of the visually impaired students do not experience inclusivity in accessing the library resources. This is in tandem with the findings by Adebayo (2017) who found that equity and inclusivity are critical for promoting social cohesion and addressing inequality between students with visual impairment and other students. The implication of this finding is that Libraries should provide inclusive services, digital inclusive access initiatives in order to address the issue of inclusivity. So as to address the need of students with visual impairment

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study underscore the growing awareness of the need for digital equity in accessing electronic library resources to enhance the learning experiences of all students. However, students with visual impairments at Federal University Lafia, Nassarawa, State, continue to face significant barriers in accessing and utilizing these resources. These challenges are largely attributed to the absence of inclusive, universally designed systems, as well as limited infrastructure and support services that prevent full participation in academic life. To achieve true digital equity and foster an inclusive learning environment, it is essential that the university prioritizes the development of accessible electronic resources. This involves ensuring that all digital materials are designed to meet the diverse needs of students, particularly those with visual impairments. It is also critical to implement assistive technologies, enhance staff training on inclusive practices, and integrate accessibility features into the design of all learning platforms. Furthermore, the university should collaborate with key stakeholders, including technology providers and advocacy groups, to create a more equitable digital ecosystem that ensures inclusive access for all students, enabling them to fully engage in academic life and reach their full potential.

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