



## **Educational Library and Communication Services Provision to the Deaf and Hearing Impaired Patrons in Nigerian Libraries**

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### **Abstract:**

*Ideally, libraries should be accessible to all potential users without regard to any disabling condition. As depositories of information, libraries constitute a key institution of democratic societies, yet people with hearing impairments often discover that communication difficulties can be a serious barrier to their using the library to its full potential. This paper provides insights on deafness, deaf and hearing-impaired people, the varied means of communication they use, and basic communications skills useful in communicating with deaf patrons in the library. A summary of IFLA's Guidelines for Library Services to deaf people is presented. It also examines library services available for group of users. Hearing enhancement systems are listed with a brief description of each of them. Recommendations are given on how to improve library and communication services to the deaf and hearing-impaired library patrons in Nigerian libraries.*

**Key words:** Special education, hearing impairment, library services, Nigerian libraries

### **Introduction**

For a number of reasons, most libraries have not considered focusing particular attention on the provision of

services to persons who are deaf. Deafness has been called, with good reason, the “invisible handicap” because deaf people are not identifiable as deaf by casual observation and they tend to blend into the larger community. Additionally, people who are deaf from birth or from an early age often have difficulty in reading and have a tendency to not use libraries. As a consequence, libraries and deaf people have mostly been unaware of each other; however, a substantial portion of the population is deaf and libraries have a responsibility to ensure that their collections and services are accessible to deaf people and that deaf people are aware of the services libraries can provide them.

The primary issue involved with the provision of services to deaf people is that communication often requires additional effort, knowledge, patience, and (where available) technological aids. The degree to which communicating with any individual deaf person requires these additional skills usually depends on the degree of hearing loss and the age at which the person experienced it, i.e., age of onset. Central to an understanding of these individual differences is an understanding of the difference that the age of onset can make. Generally, the older an individual is when the hearing loss is experienced, the more comfortable that individual is likely to be with indigenous oral and written languages. However, individuals who are born deaf or become deaf before acquiring speech may have speech that is difficult to understand or may use no speech at all, and may have difficulty with reading (IFLA 2000).

### **Concept clarifications**

Because of this variation, and the variations in educational approaches, deaf people frequently have been arranged and rearranged into assorted categories under assorted labels. Librarians need to be aware of this variation and of the controversies regarding education and communication modes in order to build comprehensive and impartial collections of materials about deafness and of related materials otherwise of concern and interest to both deaf and hearing people. In designing library programs for deaf people, it is often useful to have one term to encompass all of the persons

affected. Therefore, for that purpose, the term “deaf community” will be used in this paper to refer to the following groups as a whole: native sign language users; users of native sign language and written language of the general public; moralists; late-deafened adults; hearing impaired elderly people; minimal language users; hard of hearing individuals; and hearing members of deaf persons’ families.

It is important that the librarian or special educator acquaint themselves with the terminologies associated with hearing-impaired and deaf people with whom they have to do. Goldmann (2010, 1442) explains these terms in brief:

*Hearing impairment* – is the most general term used to describe all types and degrees of hearing defects, ranging from slight loss to profound deafness. “Deaf” individuals can discern no meaning in perceivable sounds. Additionally, the capitalized word *Deaf* is used by some authors to refer to profoundly deaf people whose community and culture are based on both common experiences (such as attending institutions or programs for deaf students) and a common language, American Sign Language (ASL).

*Hard-of-hearing* – describes individuals whose sense of hearing, while deficient, is still somewhat functional. They can comprehend speech to some extent with or without a hearing aid, and generally depend on speech reading, facial expression, and gestures (sometimes including sign language) to supplement what they do hear.

*Congenitally deaf* – those who are born with profound deafness.

*Adventitiously deaf* – having lost part or all of their hearing later in life at any time from infancy onward.

*Prelingual deafness* – describes the loss of hearing before the acquisition of language, usually before three years of age.

*Postlingual deafness* – describes hearing loss occurring after (often long after) language acquisition.

## **Library Services to the deaf and hearing impaired**

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 mandates that public accommodations, including libraries, must strive to provide auxiliary aids and services to clients and consumers without charges. Such aids and services appropriate for deaf

and hearing-impaired clients include quality interpreters, note takers, written materials, telephone communication devices for the deaf (TDDs), assistive listening devices, and closed or open captioning (MCAHIP 1993).

Although there have been library services offerings by a good number of libraries overseas, however, relatively little is available in the way of skilled personnel or adapted facilities to meet the needs of deaf and hearing-impaired patrons. Librarians (particularly in Nigeria) still tend to be unprepared to cope with the special and varied communication needs of these patrons or to promote action toward making their facilities accessible to them. In spite of the prevalence of hearing loss in this country, that disability still remains a serious barrier to communication in the use of libraries.

## **Guidelines for Library Services to Deaf People**

IFLA (2000) presents Guidelines for Library Services to Deaf People. A summary of the Guidelines is grouped into four categories: Personnel, Communication, Collections and Services as follows:

### ***Personnel***

Responsibility for the development, implementation, and operation of library services to the deaf community should be assigned to a professional librarian holding the degrees, certification, and/or training pertaining to such professional status. Library staff should receive training focusing on the issues involved in providing services to the deaf community.

When selecting staff to be involved with the provision of services to deaf people, libraries should attempt to employ persons who have or are likely to be able to obtain credibility within the deaf community.

Schools of librarianship should provide training in the provision of services to the deaf community as a normal part of their basic curriculum to prepare librarians for their professional qualifications and as a part of their continuing education programs for all levels of library staff.

Libraries having responsibilities at the national level, or where applicable at an appropriate regional level, should

establish an office or department responsible for provision of advisory and consultation services to all libraries within their geographical boundaries in order to assist them in the provision of services to the deaf community.

Each national library association should establish a group within its structure that would function as that portion of its membership focusing on the provision of library services to the deaf community.

### ***Communication***

1. All library staff should receive training in how to communicate effectively with deaf people.
2. A text telephone (TTY) should be available at each main service point, e.g., the reference desk, in each library. Additionally, at least one TTY should be available for use by library clientele to make telephone calls from the library if the making of such calls is available to hearing clientele.
3. Telephones for use by library clientele or staff should be equipped with amplification.
4. Libraries should ensure that their Internet presence is wholly accessible.
5. Libraries should use the latest advantages in technology for communicating with deaf people where such technology has proven beneficial within the deaf community.
6. Libraries should have communication aids such as assistive listening systems and equipment that can be used to support computer-assisted real-time captioning or computer-assisted note taking. These services should be available for meetings and programs upon request.
7. Libraries with television viewing facilities should provide closed caption television decoders for use by their clientele.
8. Libraries should offer to provide sign language and oral interpreters, computer-assisted real-time captioning, or computer-assisted note taking services for all library-sponsored programs upon request.
9. Libraries should install visible warning signals in order to alert deaf clientele to problems and emergencies.

## **Collections**

1. Libraries should collect materials related to deafness and Deaf culture that will be of interest to both deaf and hearing clientele.
2. Libraries should collect, maintain, and offer information about educational options, referral agencies, and programs for deaf people in a wholly unbiased fashion.
3. Libraries should assemble and provide access to a collection of high interest / low reading level materials of interest to deaf people.
4. Visual non-print materials should form an integral part of any library's collections acquired in support of services to deaf clientele. Television video programs and other such media with audio portions should be captioned or signed so that they may be understood by persons unable to hear.
5. Libraries should assemble and maintain a collection of videotapes and/or films in sign language and provide sufficient equipment necessary to view them.

## **Services**

1. All of the library's collections, services, and programs should be made accessible to its deaf community.
2. Members of the library's deaf community, as defined in these guidelines, should be involved in the design and development of the library's services o deaf people, including the development of services and collections, and in the establishment of advisory committees, service organizations, and networks.
3. Libraries should offer programs conducted in sign language.
4. Libraries should provide information on local literacy programs that are accessible to deaf non-readers. Libraries should ensure that library sponsored literacy programs meet the needs of deaf individuals.
5. Libraries should include local deaf-related information in its online community information and referral database.

6. Libraries should include an unbiased variety of deaf-related electronic links in their online databases.

## **Communication Services to the deaf and hearing impaired**

Adding to the diversity previously described are disparate communication modes strategies, and preferences. In the United States and elsewhere, communication methodology has been hotly debated among both deaf and hearing people for over a century. Even today, educators, doctors, and other professionals, parents, and deaf people themselves still argue over whether deaf children should be encouraged and taught or communicate orally (i.e., through speech and speech reading only), in ASL, in signed English, or through a combination of methods.

In describing the disparate communication strategies used by Deaf and hard-of-hearing people, respectively, certain generalizations may be made. Deaf people, particularly those who are prelingually deaf and/or born to deaf parents, rely primarily on vision, although some may use residual hearing to supplement their communication. According to Goldmann (2010, 1443) members of this group:

- Communicate through sign language and/or speech reading
- Use sign language interpreters
- Use Telecommunication Devices for the Deaf (TDDs) and Telephone Relay Services
- Use visual signaling devices for doorbell, telephone, sounds of baby crying, etc.
- Sometimes use specially trained “hearing dogs”
- Use closed-caption decoders for television viewing
- Generally are members of the Deaf culture.

Hearing impaired people rely primarily on hearing supplemented by amplification, and use their vision to supplement their communication. Members of this group:

- Generally do not use sign language
- Generally do not use interpreters
- Generally do not use TDDs or Telephone Relay Services

- Communicate using amplification and through speech reading
- Use hearing aids
- Use Assistive Listening Devices, such as induction loops. FM and infrared systems, and telephone speech and hearing amplifiers
- Use visual signaling devices
- Generally are not members of the Deaf culture

With regard to communicating with deaf people, Goldman and Mallory (1992) present the following techniques:

- Speaking and facial expression
- Speech reading
- Sign language
- Fingerspelling
- Simultaneous communication and total communication
- Writing to communicate

A good number of different factors determine the impact of deafness or hearing loss on the individual. These include the type and severity of the loss, the age of onset of hearing loss, and whether the loss is sudden or gradual. Schooling, life experiences, personality, and communication preferences are other determinants of an individual's adjustment to deafness and the communication style and skills developed.

## **Hearing Enhancement Systems and their Brief Descriptions**

Hearing Enhancement Systems	Brief Descriptions
Assistive Listening System	A hearing enhancement system consisting of a transmitter and a receiver - generally a hearing aid or a device connected to a hearing aid - designed to eliminate the background noise interference caused by extraneous factors. There are several different types of communication access systems, e.g., audio loop systems, AM systems, FM sound systems, and infrared systems.
Captioned	Refers to films, or video programs, where the dialogue is also shown, in print, on the screen along with the rest of the picture. The printed dialogue may be either always visible (open captioned) or visible only with the addition of a decoder machine (closed captioned) that translates the invisible signal into visible print.
Computer-Assisted	A system whereby a note taker types on a computer keyboard



Note Taking	what is being said during a meeting. After a short lag time, the notes are displayed on a projection screen or a monitor.
Computer-Assisted Real-Time Captioning	A system whereby a highly skilled court reporter uses a shorthand machine and a computer to translate spoken language into written text. The verbatim text may be read on a video monitor

Libraries are basically visual environments, so usually deaf persons have no special problems of accessibility to most of the material in the libraries.

Omar (2005) gives tips for making libraries accessible to the deaf. This too will serve as part of the recommendation for this article.

1. Visual alarm devices (for fire and other emergencies).
2. If your library has an absolute silence policy, then a device which indicates a level of unintentional noise someone makes could (if properly designed and placed) prevent some embarrassing situations.
3. If taped lectures are not forbidden from the library, then provide also a written transcript of their contents.
4. If there are video tapes, then make sure that they are subtitled or at least make a written transcript available.
5. Train some of the librarians in Sign Language.
6. Provide written information for helping people find their way in the library, and make the information accessible to people who are not proficient in the language of your library.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Libraries typically communicate with people of diverse backgrounds and characteristics. Inevitably, some of these people will be deaf or hearing impaired. Hearing impairment is one of the prevalent chronic disabilities in Nigeria and those concerned should not be ignored. As this article demonstrates, there are many things librarians and educators can do to facilitate communication with hearing-impaired people who constitute part of the library patrons. Library services should be provided equally as much with their hearing counterparts. In order to meet the information needs of this group of library users and to make the library accessible by deaf patrons the following are recommended:

- Reference librarians should specialize in services to deaf and hearing-impaired students.
- Specialized training should be offered to other librarians in meeting the needs of these patrons.
- Sign language development proficiency skill acquisition should be encouraged.
- Instruction in the use of the library for deaf students should be offered.
- Provision of library orientation tours in sign language.
- To write and distribute information and public relations flyers about library services available to deaf patrons
- Weekly sign language classes for other librarians.
- Telephone communication devices for the deaf (TDDs) should be procured for students use.
- Purchase of other hearing enhancement systems for the use of the deaf patrons who do not have.
- Maintain an extensive collection of books and information about deafness.

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