

“If You Can't See Go and Start the Weekend”: Towards the Provision of Information Resources to Students with Visual Impairments in Tanzanian Academic Libraries

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Abstract

This article reports on an empirical study which examined information resources provision to people with visual impairments in five Tanzanian academic libraries. A pragmatism paradigm and Oliver's social model of disability were employed as well as the International Classification of Functioning model. Quantitative and qualitative methods, including questionnaires, interview schedules and an observation checklist were used to collect data. The study population of 196 respondents comprised library directors, other professional library staff, disability unit staff, students with visual impairments and staff from the Ministry of Education's Special Needs Unit. This paper adds to the small body of current literature on this group. The study found that there were no alternative materials for this group in Tanzanian academic libraries; hence they used normal print information resources with the aid of volunteer readers. Information resources in Braille and large print, as well as other assistive technologies are required for people with visual impairments. Students' practical suggestions give some pointers to how services to diverse and dispersed target audiences of people with visual impairments could be improved. The data gathered could be used in collaboration with regional lobby groups to address the immense gaps in service.

Keywords: information resources; people with visual impairments; academic libraries; Tanzania; social model of disability

Citation: Majinge, R. M., & Stilwell, C. (2017). “If You Can't See Go and Start the Weekend”: Towards the Provision of Information Resources to Students with Visual Impairments in Tanzanian Academic Libraries. In *iConference 2017 Proceedings* (p. 400-414). <https://doi.org/10.9776/17211>

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