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# Access to library facilities and services for users with disabilities: a study of Aligarh Muslim University in India

Mohammad Nazim , Areeba Beg, and Mayukh Sarkar

Department of Library and Information Science, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the convenience and accessibility of library services to users with disabilities at Aligarh Muslim University in India. The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods through questionnaires, interview and remarks applying the IFLA checklist to investigate the scenario. The study established that AMU has a purpose-built library to accommodate users with disabilities; however, additional funds were not allocated for developing library facilities, assistive technologies and collections in the accessible formats that lead to the delivery of inadequate services to users with disabilities. Despite the availability of some specialized services, the study found that users with disabilities face numerous obstacles when using library services due to unavailability of library materials in convenient formats, lack of assistance from the trained library staff and lack of adequate training to users. The paper concludes with the recommendations to implementing guidelines of IFLA and UNESCO regarding access to library services for users with disabilities.

## KEYWORDS

Access services; Aligarh Muslim University; assistive technology; disability; India; library services; Maulana Azad library; users with disabilities; library services

## Introduction

Disability applies to all of these in emotional, physical, biological, cognitive, and high-brow or composite expressions. Though men are getting greater civilized with the time, then additionally the conventional society always recall disability as a curse and they discriminate them from the ordinary person. Merriam-Webster (2019) defined disability as “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.” The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) stipulated that “Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various

barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (United Nations, 2007). India is one of the first nations to ratify the convention, and it had turned out to be compulsory to result in an amendment inside the existing legal guidelines governing disability rights to make sure that the identical embodied the spirit and object of the UNCRPD. Therefore, the Disabilities Act of 2016 became enacted by the Government of India following the principles codified inside the UNCRPD and changed the previous legislation – Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunity Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 prohibits discrimination regarding the disabled men and women in India from various kinds of discrimination and ensures their access to education, employment opportunities, and enhances their societal participation (Ministry of Law and Justice, India, 2016).

On the way to strategic progress, the Government of India has formulated and brought out the National Policy in 2006 with a view to creating an environment that provides equal opportunities to persons with disabilities for the protection of their rights and full participation in society. The national policy recognized persons with disabilities as a valuable human resource for the country associate degree seeks to form a setting that gives those equal opportunities, protection of their rights, and involvement in society. Additionally, to the assorted focus areas, the policy document expressly expressed that buildings, approaches, toilets, playgrounds, laboratories, libraries, etc. ought to be barrier-free and accessible for all kinds of disabled persons. Teaching/learning tools and aids equivalent to academic toys, Braille/talking books, software, etc. ought to be offered. Incentives should be lean to increasing facilities for fitting general libraries, e-libraries, Braille-libraries and talking books libraries, resource rooms, etc. (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, India, 2006).

Libraries play a crucial role in providing an atmosphere that enables people to acquire knowledge, information and education. Unlike the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of disabled persons focused on inclusion, equality and nondiscrimination, access to library facilities is also a right of persons with disabilities. Libraries are vital service institutions, and they provide their users with different kinds of resources to benefit them and satisfy their information needs. Besides, users are of different types with different requirements and needs for information, and the libraries have to meet all of their obligations to achieve user satisfaction goals. It is particularly valid for individuals with disabilities who have limited access to buying books through traditional shops due to numerous barriers including lack of physical access to shops, lack of availability of books in accessible formats such as Braille, etc. Depending on their disability,

Persons with Disabilities have varying degrees of problems in accessing libraries and the material available at libraries. Since the buildings themselves are not accessible, they cannot access the premises of libraries. People who are blind or have low vision cannot access reading material in libraries since the reading materials are not in accessible formats.

UNESCO (2016, 2019) and IFLA (2019) have issued guidelines for providing equal access to library facilities and services to all, including the person with disabilities. The government of India and UGC has also issued guidelines in this regard (Ministry of Human Resource Development, India, 2016). But in India, less than 0.5% of books are available in the formats that are accessible by people who are blind or have low vision (Rao, 2009). It is, therefore, essential that libraries in India should be inclusive of becoming accessible by a person with disabilities. In India, access to libraries for persons with disabilities is not yet available. It is essential to look at the physical state of library facilities, to provide equal access for people with disabilities as well as services and programmes through the perspective of these specific user groups.

It is quite distressing that persons with disabilities are of the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized persons in India. Despite the constitution guaranteed human rights to all persons without discrimination, they are not getting the enjoyment of many of these rights. Although in recent years, there have been profound and positive changes in the perception of society toward persons with disabilities in India, the situation continued to be unfavorable and unequal. An adequate response to this problem does not exist in India. Persons with disabilities face numerous challenges when they come to use the library. The issue of access to libraries for disabled people has not been extensively discussed in India so far.

The Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) is a bright star shining in the courtyard of the Indian higher education and field of research since its foundation in 1875 (Former Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, renamed as AMU in 1920), spread over 467.6 hectares (1155 acres) in the city of Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India (27° 54' N latitude, and 78° 05' E longitude). It has maintained the position of 801–1000 in the QS World University Rankings from 2018 to 2021, 214 in Asian University Ranking 2019, and ranked 18th in India by the National Institutional Rankings System in 2017. It has also achieved 80th place amongst the “Best Universities in Asia,” 50th “Best Universities of BRICS Nation,” 17th “Emerging Economies,” 9th “Best Indian Higher Education Institute” and 2nd “Best University in India” in Times Higher Education (THE), UK Ranking of 2016. AMU has accredited “A” status in the grading of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and maintained its rank 10th–11th from 2016–2019 by National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) Ranking of Indian universities.

AMU's central library, Maulana Azad (MA) Library (inaugurated in 1960), not only houses a rare collection of manuscripts, books, artifacts, but also has an extensive physical and digital collection of contemporary books, academic papers, and databases aimed at providing its users with world-class library facilities. The MA Library also does its utmost to meet its general user's needs. It holds over 1.3 million books and subscriptions to popular research journals and databases. Through its modular building and campus facilities, skilled personnel and assistive technologies, the library claims to provide support to the disabled users with a specific concern. Therefore, the paper attempts to evaluate the availability of library facilities and services for persons with disabilities at AMU and portray its significance in the larger canvas of India.

## Objectives

The broad purpose of the study was to evaluate the accessibility of library facilities and services for users with disabilities at AMU. The specific objectives are;

- To identify and assess the availability of services offered to students with disabilities at AMU.
- To assess the physical access to the library and the study material available to disabled students at AMU.
- To evaluate the disabled user's opinion/point of view and check their responses about the facilities, collections and services those are being provided by the Maulana Azad Library at AMU.
- To recognize the shortcomings of the library services and collections and get suggestions from the users with disabilities for further improvement in the library facilities and services at AMU.

## Review of literature

Much research has been conducted so far on access to library facilities for people with disabilities. Still, the number of available literature is comparatively very limited, particularly in the Indian context. The available kinds of literature is reviewed and categorized under relevant themes to analyze the insights of library services and access to information with the persons of disabilities in India, such as Information Needs of Persons with Disabilities, Accessibility to the Library Building and Communication for Persons with Disabilities, Availability of Library Resources for Disabled Users, Availability and Use of Assistive Technologies in Libraries, Relevant Library Services and Policies for Different Categories of Disabled Users. A

comprehensive state of the art study would offer a snapshot of the contributions to this field of research based on these categorizations.

Babalola and Yacob (2011), in their paper, observed that access to information and knowledge has never been more important than in the current information era. Many who lack access to critical knowledge are thus prohibited from fully participating in social, political, and economic practices. Scholars accept that university students with disabilities have different requirements for reading materials but face the continuing issue of failing to access materials in acceptable formats in a timely manner. Their information needs are radically different from those of the general student. A study by Solanki and Mandaliya (2016) focused on the current scenario of the accessibility of library services to users with disabilities in university libraries in India. The findings showed that the services that offered to users with disabilities are not adequate.

Pionke (2020) analyzed library employees' attitudes toward disabled people and accessibility to assess the training needs of existing library employees. The study results showed that librarians across types of libraries typically felt unprepared to work with users with disabilities. Based on the findings, the study recommended for change within the profession, including developing a more comprehensive training curriculum based on accessibility and disability, updating policies from local to national levels and enhancing the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities into the profession. Datta, Halder, Talukdar, and Aspland (2019) tried to identify the problems and enablers faced by disabled university students of India and Australia to accessing information and figuring out the strategies to overcome those constraints. They have gone through several policies, reports, and literature related to disability study and adopted a qualitative methodology (semi-structured open-ended interview) based on the thoughts and experiences of the participants. The authors have suggested modifying the infrastructure and buildings and increasing the supports based on user needs.

Results from a survey conducted in the UK by Harris and Oppenheim (2003) found that only 45.8 % of libraries in their survey had unique features to help visually disabled students access the library and its collections physically. Nevertheless, more recent research in the United States and the United Kingdom have shown that significant measures have taken to facilitate the accessibility of libraries to disabled people (Beaton, 2005; Bishop & Rhind, 2011; Samson, 2011). In the Indian context, the services and collections accessible through National Library, National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (NIEPID) or Sugamya Pustakalaya of TCS, Daisy Forum of India and NIEPVD etc. trying their best to making them self-sufficient and recognize the role played

by the Institute in disseminating information to them (Dodamani and Gedam, 2017; Verma and Arora, 2016; Yadav and Arora, 2019).

Kaunda and Chizwina (2019) examined the services and tools that were available at the North-West University (NWU) in South Africa. The study found that the NWU had limitations in terms of material and assistive technologies. They recommended authorities for formulating a legislative framework promoting information access for the disabled people establishing partnerships to improve material and access to resources. Tripathi and Shukla (2014) surveyed the university libraries of India, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada to find out how they had used assistive technologies to meet the information needs of visually challenged students. The results showed that the use and implementation of assistive technologies in India are still in a nascent stage while the libraries in developed countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada are routinely using them. Further, the study recommended that government, universities, and libraries must play a proactive role in providing visually impaired students with the access they need and demand.

Institutional policies and attitudes of staff members are identified as another hindrance to students with disabilities. For instance, policies of most of the libraries concerning print disabilities fail to protect users with learning disabilities or those with physical disabilities. These users don't suffer from vision issues, but they also have trouble using print and don't get the help they need. Further, Epp (2006) suggested that administrative attitudes which prioritize high efficiency and rapid service do not take into account the specific needs of disabled students. It is contrary to Booth's (1993) rhetorical argument that 'libraries are about people, not books'. As a result, as previous studies have stated, many libraries are merely paying lip service to people with disabilities. Dwivedi and Tripathi (2018) described the concept and nature of disability directed from the Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2016. They illuminated the necessity of an inclusive ecosystem for protecting their rights and accessibility. Ayong, Baada, and Baayel (2020) tried to extract the insights of Ghana's (Upper East Region) academic libraries to what extent they have made information accessible to disabled users. Their paper analyzed the data collected from 11 tertiary institutions followed by a method of an interview with the respondents and reveals the pathetic situation of the region that most of them are incapable of implementing Persons with Disabilities Act and providing physical and intellectual access to the users with such disabilities. The authors recommended adequate funds, staff training, and policy implementation to overcome these scenarios and empower users with a disability.



A study by Chaputula and Mapulanga (2017) carried out to investigate the provision of library services to people with disabilities in Malawi. The study highlighted the lack of library and information services to disabled people and acknowledged possible barriers. The research has revealed a lack of equipment to support disabled access to library and information resources. Similarly, despite an increase in the number of people with disabilities, the majority of the libraries do not offer specialized training such as induction sessions or market services that cater to those with disabilities. The study, among other suggestions, recommends that equipment deemed necessary for people with disabilities (such as Braille books) procured. Libraries should also take steps required to address the accessibility challenges faced by people with disabilities when using their libraries.

The literature survey shows that the access to library facilities and services for persons with disabilities is a topic of considerable attention across the world. The first world countries like the UK and US way ahead in this matter than the developing countries like India, where progress rate is relatively slow, need research initiatives to address the predicaments, especially in the academic libraries. Followed by a descriptive research methodology, the paper investigates the issues and challenges of disabled persons in Aligarh Muslim University for accessing knowledge in the higher education system of India and concluded with the recommendations for enhancing the accessibility to library services in terms of accessing the multi-stakeholder approach, science and technology, learning ecosystem, capacity building, societal solicitude, safety networks, and policing.

## Methodology

The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods through questionnaires, interview and remarks applying the IFLA checklist to investigate the scenario. Two sets of questionnaires (one for librarian responsible for the disabled students' unit and other for disabled users) were prepared following a process of the intended referential and connotative meaning of each question and used as a primary source for collecting data for the study. The questionnaire set validated through piloting, sample testing and the feasibility study of gathering the requisite data from the libraries. The investigators also observed the availability of facilities and services and assessed levels of accessibility to buildings, materials and services utilizing a checklist developed by IFLA (Irvall & Nielsen, 2005).

A total of 90 students with disabilities get registered for library membership for the academic year 2017–2018 counted as the population of the study. The list of students with disabilities was obtained from MA library. Since the total population was less than 100, all 90 students with disabilities



were requested to participate in the study voluntarily. However, only 35 students were agreed to participate in the study. Therefore, questionnaires were distributed to 35 students who gave their consent for participation were selected as the study sample. Users those were unable to complete the questionnaire their own (specifically visually impaired), were interviewed using the questionnaire as it was not possible to convert the questionnaire in Braille format, and their responses were manually recorded. During the process of collecting data, some users specified problems and gave ideas for improving library services, which were also recorded for analysis. The data was analyzed using the MS-Excel software to obtain the desired results that further discussed following a method of inferential statistical technique.

## Results

A total of 35 questionnaires were distributed, and 33 questionnaires, comprising 94%, were returned from 33 respondents who participated in the study, 18 were undergraduate, and the remaining 15 were postgraduate students. The respondents represented three major categories of disabilities: Visually Impaired (person who has lost complete sight concerning both near and distance vision, more particularly their visual acuity is worse than 6/60–3/60, N6 or M.08), Partially Visual Impaired (person with partial sight, either in one or both eyes or visual acuity worse than 6/12–6/18) and Physically Disabled (persons with locomotor and auditory disability). The degree of availability and accessibility to different facilities and services library offered measured in three distinct levels: Available (particular material/facility/service criterion exists completely or return with 100% match), Partially Available (particular material/facility/service criterion does not exist completely, exists to some extent or return with a substitute match) and Not Available (no existence of particular material/facility/service criterion or return with 0% match). The study analyzed the results based on the investigators' observations through the IFLA checklist and responses received from disabled users and librarian of the disabled student unit. The outcomes have been categorized and evaluated under four significant headings stated below where the term access refers to the construction of goods, equipment, facilities or environments to be accessible by individuals with different types of disabilities played a crucial role in the sole context of the present study.

### *Physical access to library building and facilities*

Smooth access to library services depends on the physical accessibility of libraries to all users and library services should also be adequately adapted to meet their special needs. A visit to the MA library, response from the

**Table 1.** Facilities around the library campus and inside the library entrance.

Checklist points	Available	Partially available	Not available
Parking space close to the entrance.	✓	–	–
Signs/symbols for users with disabilities	✓	–	–
Passage to the entrance with smooth and non-slippery ramps	–	✓	–
Ramps with railings	✓	–	–
Enough space between doorways for wheelchair to enter	✓	–	–
Ramps/slides without steps	–	–	✓
Stairs/steps with marked signs in bright colors (preferably yellow)	–	–	✓
Elevator signs/ buttons in Braille	✓	–	–
Audio/Speech system	–	–	✓
Buttons under reach	✓	–	–

librarian responsible for disabled unit and investigators' observations using IFLA checklist revealed that although AMU has a purpose-built library for persons with disabilities, but does not have an additional funding provision for developing collections and facilities for users with disabilities.

Facilities around the library campus and inside the main library building are almost satisfactory as parking space was close to the entrance of the library and there were clear Signs/Symbols for users with disabilities at the entrance of the library. Ramps with railings are available at the main gate of the library. However, there is no proper passage to the entrance with smooth and non-slippery ramps.

There is enough space between doorways for wheelchairs and reachable Braille buttons/signs inside the Elevators under reach are available. However, ramps/slides without steps, stairs/steps with marked signs in bright colors and audio/speech system are not available (Table 1).

The library has clear and easy signs but not with pictograms. The library has got tables of different heights for the ease of physically disabled users. The library has visible and audible fire alarms, and the service desk was also close to the entrance, but shelves were not totally under reach as observed by the investigators (Table 2).

As indicated in Table 3, toilet/washroom facilities were also very much adequate in the library building at AMU. The library has wide enough doors for the ease of entering, and quite spacious toilet rooms, door handles and flushing levers are also under reach and washbasins/mirrors are also at appropriate heights for anyone to reach. However, the library had no proper signs for the location of toilets/washrooms. These facilities were observed by investigators and also confirmed by the librarian. The disabled user's response also meets the investigators' observation.

As may be seen in Table 4, Circulation and reference desks were a bit high and not easily reachable. The library had suitable chairs to sit if a user has to wait but did not has a proper queue system for the issuing of books.

The MA Library at AMU maintains a separate Braille Section for Visually Impaired Users. It is very separately located at the back of the

**Table 2.** Space inside the library building.

Checklist points	Available	Partially available	Not available
Clear and easy signs with pictograms	–	✓	–
Shelves under reach	–	✓	–
Tables of varying heights	✓	–	–
Visible and audible fire alarm	✓	–	–
Service desk close to entrance	✓	–	–

**Table 3.** Toilet/washroom facility.

Checklist points	Available	Partially available	Not available
Signs for the location of the toilet/washroom	–	✓	–
Wide doors/spacious toilet room	✓	–	–
Handles and flushing lever under reach	✓	–	–
Washbasin and mirrors at appropriate height	✓	–	–

**Table 4.** Facilities at circulation and reference desk.

Checklist points	Available	Partially available	Not available
Reachable desks	–	✓	–
Organized queue system	–	✓	–
Suitable chairs to sit	✓	–	–

main library building, making it a bit hard to access. The data collected through the IFLA checklist depicts provisions for various facilities for blind/partially blind users. As shown in Table 5, comfortable seating areas and computers with adaptive technology and a separate Reference Desk for the users with disabilities are available in the Braille Section of AMU. At the same time audiovisual collections are partially available, and Lines (preferably yellow) leading to the section are not available.

### ***Access to library materials***

One of the objectives of this study was to examine the availability of library materials in different formats for students with disabilities. Information obtained from the librarian indicates that the MA Library provides study materials in alternative formats, including Braille, large print, audio and electronic books. Furthermore, MA Library itself produces study materials in alternative formats and some prescribed Braille and large print books, as well as electronic copies, were procured from the reputed national and international publishers, but some online databases, including the OPAC, did not have a Zoom Text facility. The librarian also indicated that MA Library received some complimentary copies of Braille and large print books from the National Institute for Visually Handicapped located at Dehradun. However, investigators observed (as indicated in Table 6) and cross-checked partial availability or no availability of some of the materials that were indicated by the librarian as available in MA library.

**Table 5.** Facilities for Braille or visual impaired users.

Checklist points	Available	Partially available	Not available
Centrally or separately located section	✓	–	–
Separate Reference Desk	✓	–	–
Lines (preferably yellow) leading to the section	–	–	✓
Comfortable seating area	✓	–	–
Audiovisual collection	–	✓	–
Computers with adaptive technologies	✓	–	–

When respondents were asked to indicate the accessibility of library materials to them in the required format, 65% of the respondents indicated that they always found the materials in the required format from the library, whereas 35% respondents indicated that they did not always find the materials they required from the library. The reason mentioned by respondents who did not always get access to library materials was that some library materials were not available in the format appropriate to them as they prefer to use talking books, large print books, Braille books, video/ DVD books, online databases, and OPAC with Zoom Text facility.

### ***Access to library services and facilities***

One of the objectives of this study was to identify library facilities and information services offered to users with disabilities. The Librarian of the MA library cited the following services and facilities offered to students with disabilities:

- Computers with the Internet for the use of students with disabilities
- Jaws Assistive technology programs for the blind
- Online journals and eBooks databases
- A scanner that scans and enlarges study material
- Books enabling the material to be captured on the Computer
- Braille books
- Enlargement of study material
- Reference services
- Reading room services
- OPAC.

The obtained data was also validated by observation using the IFLA checklist. As seen in [Table 7](#), the MA Library provides information through its official AMU website, but it does not provide information by sign language to users with hearing or auditory impairments. The library does not has the facility to provide required information through SMS/telephone or Email. Also, there were no provisions for providing books in large printed

**Table 6.** Access to library materials in usable formats.

Checklist points	Available	Partially available	Not available
Audiobooks/magazines/newspapers/periodicals	–	✓	–
Braille books	–	✓	–
E-books	–	✓	–
Video/DVD books with sign languages	–	–	✓
Fast and reliable technical support for equipment	–	✓	–
Computers under reach	✓	–	–
Adaptive keyboards	✓	–	–

**Table 7.** Information services offered to users with disabilities.

Checklist points	Available	Partially available	Not available
Through the library website	✓	–	–
Through sign language	–	–	✓
SMS/Telephone/Email	–	–	✓
Large Print Books	–	–	✓
Videos with subtitles	–	–	✓

fonts to the partially blind users, and videos with subtitles for users with hearing impairments.

Regarding special services, MA Library did not offer adequate special services like home delivery service, Dropbox facility and Email/SMS services. However, facilities such as adjustable furniture and drinking water under reach were available at MA library (Table 8).

As observed by the investigators and indicated in Table 9, the design of the library website is logical and easy to navigate, so in a way, it is quite helpful for ordinary users. Still, alternate formats are not available on the library website. Search option available for the library website but audio for the text (audio searching) is not available, and it could only be made available through JAWS. However, text enlarge software is not available on the MA Library webpage of AMU.

### **Usage of library services**

The recorded responses of the users, cross-checked by observation using the IFLA checklist indicate, the authenticity of their responses. As indicated in Table 10, 24.24% of disabled users in AMU visit their library more than five times a week as opposed to only 12.12% users who reported that they visit the library once a week. 21.21% reported that they visit the library twice a week and remaining 30.30% visit library 3–4 times a week.

As seen in Table 11, 48.48% of the total disabled users used the library for the preparations of semester/annual and competitive examinations, compared with just 9.09% who used library for writing papers and preparing presentations. 45.45% respondents indicated that they used the library to update their required information, whereas 36.36% stated that they used

**Table 8.** Special Services offered to users with disabilities.

Checklist points	Available	Partially available	Not available
Home delivery service	–	–	✓
Dropbox facility	–	–	✓
Adjustable furniture	–	✓	–
Drinking water under reach	✓	–	–
Email/SMS services	–	–	✓

**Table 9.** Website design and Web-based services.

Checklist points	Available	Partially available	Not available
Logical and easy to navigate design	✓	–	–
Text enlarge software	–	–	✓
Alternate formats	–	–	✓
Search option capability	✓	–	–
Text + Audio	–	–	✓

**Table 10.** Library visits by users with disabilities.

How often do you visit the library?	No. Responses	Percent (%)
Once a week	4	12.12
Twice a week	7	21.21
3–4 times a week	10	30.30
More than 5 times a week	8	24.24

**Table 11.** Purpose of library use.

Purpose of using library	No. of responses	Percent (%)
To plan and prepare for class	12	36.36
To update required information	15	45.45
To prepare for tests/ exams	16	48.48
To write papers and presentation	3	9.09
For research works	8	24.24

the library to plan and prepare for class. 24.24% of visually impaired users reported using the library for research purposes.

Respondents asked to list library services that were offered to users with disabilities at MA library. Respondents mostly indicated that the MA library offered Reference Services, Reading Room Service, Current Awareness Services (CAS), Reprographic Service, Inter-Library Loan, Lending Service, Braille Library Service, OPAC, Computer and Internet facility with the Adaptive Keyboard to users with disabilities. When they asked to indicate the services they mostly used, as shown in [Table 12](#), 90.90% of disabled users stated that they used the Reading Room Service, Computer and Internet facility used by 48.48% of users, and 69.69% claimed that they used Lending Service and OPAC. Reprographic service, reference service and CAS were used by 66.67%, 48.48% and 33.34% users respectively. Almost all the visually impaired students (72.72%) indicated that they used Braille Library Service, but none reported that they used Inter-Library Loan.

**Table 12.** Use of library services.

Special services	No. of responses	Percent (%)
Reference Service	16	48.48
Reading Room Service	30	90.90
Current Awareness Services (CAS)	11	33.34
Reprographic Service	22	66.67
Inter Library Loan	–	–
OPAC	23	69.69
Braille Library Service	24	72.72
computer and Internet facility	16	48.48
Lending Service	23	69.69

Most of the respondents (around 70%) indicated that library services offered to users with disabilities are inadequate as opposed to 30.30% of users who reported that library services provided to them are adequate. They were most satisfied with the library services, and those who indicated library services as inadequate the reason they mostly cited that they did not always get access to library materials as they were not available in the format convenient to them. They prefer to use talking books, large print books, Braille books, video/DVD books, online databases and OPAC with Zoom Text facility.

On the question of whether the library and its services are easily accessible to them, most of the respondents (66.67%), as shown in Table 13, indicated that library services are accessible to them. They do not face any hindrance in accessing library services as opposed to 33.33% of respondents indicated that the library and its services are not easily accessible to them. Those who faced hindrance in the access to library services mentioned that the library does not has proper ramps at the main entrance and in the Braille section as well. The Braille section of MA Library is also hard to access because of its weird location. There is also an issue with the upgrading of syllabus materials/inventory because most of the available materials or research set are out of date.

The MA library assists disabled users with recorders, CDs, talking and audiobooks, Braille printers, scanners, papers and earphones. When respondents inquired whether they used assistive devices, as shown in Table 14, 39.39% of users replied that they used these assistive devices for their personal use. However, 30.30% of respondents confirmed that they provided with assistive devices for personal use but with applied charges. Remaining 3.03% of respondents were never used such assistive devices. As shown in Table 15, most of the library users (81.81%) used pen-drive as a storage device, while only 18.18% of users indicated that they used CDs. Apart from that, 72.72% used recorder and 57.57% used audiobooks as their primary assistive devices.

Respondents asked to indicate whether they need the assistance of library staff for using library services. As shown in Table 16, of the total



**Table 13.** Hindrance in use of library services.

Are the library and its services accessible?	No. of responses	Percent (%)
Yes	11	33.33
No	22	66.67

**Table 14.** Personal use of library supplements.

Do you use assistive devices?	No. of responses	Percent (%)
Yes	13	39.39
No	1	3.03
With applied charges	10	30.30

**Table 15.** Use of assistive devices.

Use of assistive devices	No. of Responses	Percent (%)
Pen Drive	27	81.81
Recorder	24	72.72
CDs/DVDs/Cassettes	6	18.18
Talking Books/Tapes	10	30.30
Audio Books	19	57.57

**Table 16.** Need of assistance of library staff.

Do you need assistance of library staff?	No. of responses	Percent (%)
Yes	17	51.51
No	16	48.48

respondents, 51.51% indicated that they require the assistance of library staff as opposed to 48.48% who were able to use library services without the assistance of library staff. Those who require the assistance of library staff were mainly visually impaired students. However, most of the respondents who need the assistance of the library staff in the use of library indicated that the assistance from the library staff was not always available to them, as there was lack of sufficient trained staff.

When respondents asked whether they received training or attended orientation in how to use the library, as shown in [Table 17](#), almost all respondents replied that library did not arrange any training or orientation for them in how to use library resources and services. Further, inquired which services they want to receive training. Respondents mostly stated that they want to receive training in how to search the library catalogue and online databases.

## Findings

The primary function of any library is to serve its users to its fullest extent. Libraries can be a helping hand in delivering the appropriate resources to disabled people. However, as emerged from the review of literature, services offered by libraries, particularly by academic libraries in India, to users with disabilities are not adequate, and library staff is not adequately trained

**Table 17.** Training/orientation program.

Did you receive training on the use of library services?	No. of responses	Percent (%)
Yes	—	—
No	33	100

to assists users with disabilities. Besides, people with disabilities have specific and distinct needs than general users. Therefore, a need is identified to design library services, specifically tailored, for users with disabilities, and to make library services more specialized in delivering better user satisfaction results.

While assessing physical access to the library, it can be seen that there is ample space inside the library building and the numerous facilities available across the library campus, the entrance, the reference-circulation desk and inside the washrooms. In comparison, upgrades to the audio/speech system, ramps/slides, stairs/steps and Braille indications have yet to be introduced. As far as accessing library materials is concerned, most of the materials are entirely or partially accessible in the library, but the materials in the user's chosen formats (talking books, Braille books, video/DVD books with sign languages, Zoom Text facility) are still not accessible. Referring access to library access and facilities, even if the library provides information through its official Website, it does not have Current Information Services (SMS/telephone or email-based), special services (Home Delivery, Dropbox) and Web-based services (text-enlarge software, Alternate formats) to serve disabled users better. Finally, considering the use of library services, users with disabilities have used different library services, except Inter-Library Loan Service, to fulfill their purpose by visiting the library frequently. Though for the majority of the users (66.67%), library services are accessible, there are some students (33.34%) facing obstacles to access those services.

## Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that MA library at AMU is committed to providing its users with disabilities with facilities and resources that it can afford but lag in certain respects. The study established that AMU has a purpose-built library to accommodate users with disabilities to an extent but more modifications are needed needed only then justice will be done to this claim. However, additional funds were not allocated for developing facilities, assistive technologies and library materials in the accessible formats as confirmed by the librarian, lead to the delivery of inadequate services to users with disabilities. Despite the availability of some specialized services, the study findings revealed that users with disabilities face numerous obstacles when using library services. Obstacles occur because of the

unavailability of required library materials in convenient formats, lack of modern assistive technologies or equipment to support access to library resources and services, unsatisfactory assistance by trained library staff and inadequate training or orientation to users with disabilities in how to use library resources and services. Similar barriers (lack of funds, trained staff, and outcome evaluation) were identified by Bolt and Wyber (2017) in a survey of 470 libraries of all types from 92 countries sponsored by IFLA's section on Libraries Serving Users with Special Needs. Despite an increase in demand, MA library at AMU does not offer specialized services such as Braille and large print books, videos with subtitles for users with hearing impairment, home delivery and SMS/email services and Dropbox facility that leads to negative impacts on the use of library services by users with disabilities. The librarians indeed have to perform their responsibilities under administrative constraints, but adoption of some proper plans can fix the issues faced by the disabled users with improved library services.

### **Recommendations and suggestions for further research**

Based on the findings, this study recommends that the library should:

1. Collect proper feedbacks from the users with disabilities for identifying their requirements and potential use of special services for establishing priorities for implementing improved services.
2. Arrange training/orientation for students with disabilities for the effective use of library services.
3. Implement guidelines designed by IFLA and UNESCO regarding access to library services for users with disabilities.'
4. Offer users with disabilities Dropbox facility, home delivery and SMS/email services.
5. Empower users with disabilities with modern assistive technology support.
6. Ensure proper facilities like ramps, secure and accessible pathways, evident symbols and signs for locations, accessible elevators and accessible section/reading rooms and prescribed library materials in convenient formats.
7. Provide essential staff-training in collaboration with the domain experts from disability-related national institutions, to offer better services to users with disabilities in terms of gaining knowledge, experience and responsibility to offer practical assistance.
8. Arrange additional funds and allocate a separate budget for developing modern assistive technologies and library collections in convenient formats.

9. Build a partnership with publishers or other libraries to enrich library resources and services for users with disabilities.

Since this study is limited to AMU only, its findings may not be generalized to other academic libraries across India. Therefore, a further study is suggested for accessing facilities and services in all Indian academic libraries. In the present study, the majority of respondents were visually and physically disabled users. Since considerable differences exist between their needs, further investigation also suggested that it should focus on each group to meet homogeneity.

### Declaration statement

We declare that we do not have any commercial or associative interest that represents a conflict of interest in connection with the work submitted.

### ORCID

Mohammad Nazim  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9658-2217>

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