

Reaching Out: A Case Study of Jadavpur University

Swaguna Datta and Shrabani Majumdar

In today's modern world, where everybody is trying to make a living or working towards achieving a goal, we often forget the difficulties of people who are not exactly like us. They need some kinds of assistance to lead a so-called normal life. There are many kinds of disabilities. Amongst them, this paper studies the accessibility of documents by the visually impaired students in a university environment. The things we do without batting an eyelid, they find it difficult to study a simple text. They are called print-disabled person - a person having difficulty in reading printed document due to some physical or visual disability. In this context a case study has been prepared for the Accessible Library for Persons with Disabilities, Jadavpur University. This paper studies in depth the role and function of this accessible library for the visually impaired students of Jadavpur University.

Introduction

In today's modern world, where everybody is trying to make a living or working towards achieving a goal, we often forget the difficulties of people who are not exactly like us. They need some kinds of assistance to lead a so-called normal life. According to The Oxford English Dictionary the term 'Disability' denotes "Want of ability" (Simpson and Weiner, 1989). The overview of World Health Organization (WHO) says that "almost everyone temporarily or permanently experience disability at some point in their life" (World Health Organization (WHO). Earlier the term 'Handicap' was most commonly used to denote disabled person, but it is now considered offensive and old-fashioned.

There are many kinds of disabilities. Among them this paper studies the accessibility of documents by the visually impaired students in a university environment. The things we do without batting an eyelid, they find it difficult to study a simple text. They are called print-disabled person - a person having difficulty in reading printed document due to some physical or visual disability.

2. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill – 2016

Often, in our society, we find that disabled people are unnecessarily discriminated and excluded from full participation in society. We treat these persons with some kind of pity and prevent them from obtaining equal opportunity and accessibility in all walks of life. To ensure them a normal life, their legal rights must be ensured. In this context, in India 'The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill – 2016' was passed by the Parliament on 16 December 2016. This Bill replaced the existing act entitled 'The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995' (Press Information Bureau, 2016). In the new bill, twenty-one types of disabilities are recognized extending from earlier seven categories. It includes blindness, low vision, loco-motor disability, mental illness, etc. The Government of India has further notified that it will review the twenty-one types of disabilities from time to time and do the changes accordingly.

2.1 National Education Policy (NEP 2020)

The latest development in the NEP 2020 approved by the Government of India in July, 2020 encourages “Barrier-free access to education for all children with disabilities” (Kumar and Singh, 2022). This inclusion certainly gives hope to thousands of disabled students.

3. Persons with Visual Disability and their Challenges

The number of disabled persons in a vast country like India is significant, and visually challenged comprise a significant portion. Table-1 shows the latest available statistics in this regard according to 2011 census for India in general and state of West Bengal in particular (Census of India, 2011).

Table 1: A Brief Statistics of Disability in India as per Census, 2011

| Location | Total Disabled Population | Disability in Seeing | Urban Graduate and Above |
|-------------|---------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| India | 26814994 | 5033431 | 830538 |
| West Bengal | 2017406 (7.52%) | 424473 (8.43%) | 66453 (8.00%) |

Apart from other difficulties, visually impaired people have to face many challenges in the field of education. It becomes extremely difficult for them to directly acquire information from the surrounding environment which others can do rather easily. This impacts their education and the main challenges faced are:

- ❖ Lack of inclusive education
- ❖ Lack of teaching methods
- ❖ Negative and stereotype attitude
- ❖ Lack of resources
- ❖ Rigid curriculum
- ❖ Other challenges like low lighting in classroom

These challenges can be overcome by effective teaching methods, proper use of hearing technology, assisted devices and collection development for visually impaired persons. Above all, the mindset of the teachers and other abled students should be changed. (Kapur,2017).

4. Government Initiative for the Visually Impaired Persons

National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD) hosts the National Accessible Library established in the year 1963 as National Library for the Print Handicapped. This library caters the need of the visually impaired people and fulfils of the aim of ‘Sarva Siksha Abhiyan’ of the braille and talking book library in different parts of the country. So far 103 extension counters have been running successfully (National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD)).

5. The Steps Taken by Jadavpur University

Jadavpur University, West Bengal has been imparting quality higher education since its very inception in 1955. Apart from the brilliance in education, it has never turned away from fulfilling social responsibilities. It is no surprise that in the latest NIRF ranking it has ranked 4th amongst all the universities in India and became topper amongst the state funded universities. The university has taken many steps in creating an environment where everybody enjoys equal opportunities in every sphere. The university has also provided ramps in every building, arranged for scholarships for the needy students, Wi-Fi connection in hostels, remote access to library patrons, and an Accessible Library for visually impaired students. (Jadavpur University, 2014).

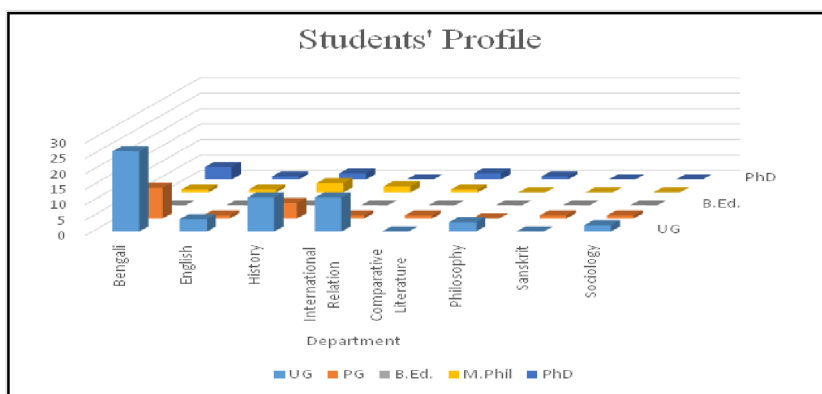


Figure 1: Statistics of Visually Impaired Students of Jadavpur University at Present

At present about ninety-five visually impaired students are studying in different departments of Jadavpur University as shown in Figure-1. The university is taking many steps to facilitate their education as described briefly below.

During pandemic where everybody struggled to make a living, the University funded twenty-two visually impaired student to stay at a rented place with good internet connectivity and helped them to attend online classes. These students were mostly from remote areas where internet connectivity is very poor and for that reason were unable to attend online classes otherwise.” (Chowdhury, S., 2021, February 9).

In 2020 one student of the Jadavpur University launched an online museum entitled ‘The Ephemeriad Project’ especially for the visually impaired students. Ephemera items are those items which are printed for a specific occasion and are not meant for longer shelf life, for e.g. it could be matchbox cover, poster, political leaflets, photographs etc. One can visit the following URL to access the website <https://www.ephemeriad.com/>.

Another achievement of this university is creating Braille graffiti for the first time in any University (January 2020). The Graffiti joint of the MA final year students of the English Department created something unique where the visually impaired students could feel the object of art and thus succeeded the motto of ‘making art accessible’ (Sengupta, 2020, March 19).

6. The Accessible Library for Persons with Disabilities, Jadavpur University

The University used to have a Special Education & HEPSN Cell, which started its journey in 2004 as a service centre for the visually challenged and other differently-abled students. The cell used to operate through two different wings, viz., the Social Service Wing and the Disability Studies Wing. Presently this centre is known as “Centre for Studies in Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing” (Jadavpur University (2014).

The **Accessible Library for Persons with Disabilities** was inaugurated at the ground floor of the Jadavpur University Central Library on 5th September 2018 emerging from the centre mentioned above. This was an important step towards inclusion of students who have visual impairment and are equally eager to study like any other young, energetic student. These students have access to various audio books, e-resources of the main library and to braille books. This library uses various software to access the e-resources, namely Jaws and NVDA (Free) for Screen Reading Software, MAGIC-14 Large Print for Low Vision use, and Read Braille. They also access e-books from SugamPustakalaya, Bookshare, Jstor, Project Muse and RNIBBookshare. A few photographs of the Centre are shown below.



Accessible Library



Stacks of Braille Books



Recording of Audio Books



A Braille Book

Photograph 1: Photographs of the Accessible Library, Jadavpur University

The collection of the accessible library is growing fast. Table-2 and Figure-2 shows the details of present status of the collection. The in-house collection of the university has been further enriched by generous gifts from various institutions in Kolkata like Third Eye, Society for the Visually Handicapped and Blind Persons Association.

Table 2: The Details of Collection of Accessible Library for Persons with Disabilities, Jadavpur University (2018-2021)

| Type of Collection | In House Resources | Gifted and Purchased Resources | Total |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| Audio Books | 589 | 1705 | 2294 |
| Braille Books | 85 | 1199 | 1284 |
| Scanned Books | 150 | 49 | 199 |
| Accessible E-Books | 79 | - | 79 |

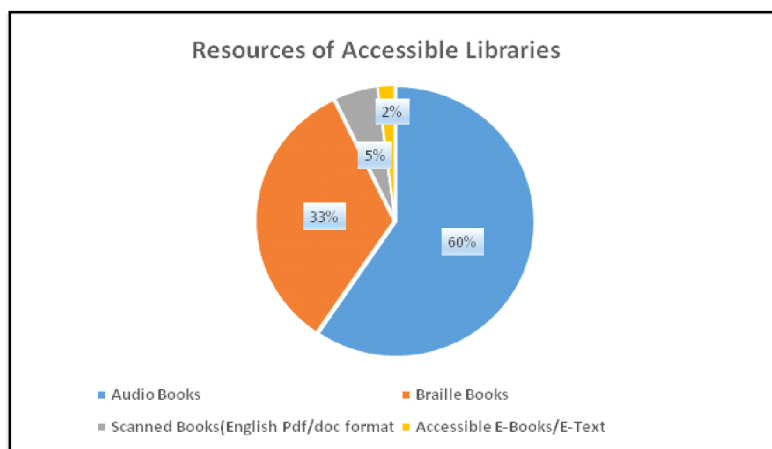


Figure 2: Distribution of the Resources of Accessible Library for Persons with Disabilities, Jadavpur University

The collection includes the entire literary works of Rabindranath Tagore (in 300 braille volumes), Works of Swami Vivekananda, Bertrand Russell, M.N. Roy, Vladimir Lenin, William Shakespeare, translation of Pablo Neruda's poetry etc. In the audio format, the centre has copy of Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez's No one writes to Colonel, translation of Albert Camus, etc. It may be noted that the centre produce audio and braille books for the students. The Accessible Library also prepare class lecture notes in braille and audio book format.

6.1 Software Used for Accessibility

The library uses various software and modern technologies for collection development and easy accessibility of the resources available at this centre. For audio books recording and editing, SOUND FORGE SOFTWARE

(Free) is used. The Duxbury SOFTWARE with Index Basic D Braille Embosser is used for braille books. A Thermoforming Machines is used for Braille Cover Page. For scanned books an Open Book 9 Software with Pearl Camera is used. For E-Book/E-Texts Microsoft Word, Bangla Barnamala and Kathak Bengali typing and text to Speech Software is used to convert the same into HTML file format. The software used to access E-Resources are Jaws and NVDA (Free) for Screen Reading Software use 5 Machine, MAGIC-14 Large Print for Low Vision and Read Braille. Accessible browsers such as Sugam Pustakalaya, Bookshare, Jstor, Project Muse, RNIB Bookshare are used for Digital E-Books.

6.2 Ongoing Projects

At present a project named 'Accessible Digital Archive of Bengali Renaissance Text' is presently underway under Centre for Persons with Disabilities. Two important books namely Akshay Sudha (278 pages) and Rammohan Rachanabali edited by Prasadranjan Roy (829 pages) have been transformed to e-book under the project so far. Another ongoing research project has been started on February 2011 with the fulltime engagement of a Research Assistant on "Preparation of Critical Directory on Disabilities". A database of the differently-abled students of Jadavpur University for the period 2008-2012 is nearing completion (Jadavpur University, 2019).

6.3 International Braille Day Celebration

On the occasion of International Braille Day (4th January), the University organizes various cultural activities and competitive programmes. In 2022 the University has organized a reading and writing competition and quiz contest to promote braille literacy among the University community. This programme was jointly organized by Blind Persons' Association (Kolkata) and National Service Scheme (NSS, Jadavpur University).

7. Suggestions for Improvement of Accessibility

For the betterment of accessible library services and optimum use of facilities following recommendations are made:

- a. While building new academic library, the needs of the print disabled students should be kept in mind, like the ramp with signage, adaptive equipment etc.
- b. User survey should be carried out on a regular basis to assess their actual needs.
- c. A consortium with other similar accessible libraries should be developed for collection development.
- d. A proper coordination with Blindness agencies should be there for technological advancement.
- e. Proper training programmes should be there for librarians of such special libraries for Braille reading and writing and associated skills.

- f. Orientation programmes for the visually impaired students should be organized every academic year.
- g. Adequate additional funding should be provided for print disabled students along with the regular annual library budget.

All the efforts and initiatives could only be successful when the University community as well as the librarians be sensitive enough to include these students in every activity of library without barriers (Rayini, 2017).

8. Conclusion

Estimates suggest that there are around 500 million disabled people in the world population. 80% of them live in the developing world with poor infrastructure (Darity, 2008). International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the Public Library Manifesto (1994) gave emphasis on inclusion of library services for every person, and especially for those who do not have easy access, such as the mentally and physically disabled, the ill and the imprisoned. Keeping this motto in mind we have studied the Accessible Library of Jadavpur University.

The Accessible Library of the Jadavpur University, with its limited infrastructure and services has successfully launched its library services and caters to a niche population of the University community. Specially during pandemic, when the whole world had been shut off, the students were encouraged to use e-resources of the university through remote access. This remote online service has really helped the students to access the University resources. The library staff also helped them to use and access these resources and circulated pdf version of text through WhatsApp groups. This COVID pandemic also taught us to be more technologically sound to help these user groups in future. As we know the primary objective of any library is to provide information to all users at the right time, the primary responsibility of the university community and other stakeholders is to create an all-inclusive academic environment for all categories of students, which will create an obstacle-free society.

On a broader perspective, the Government and various NGOs are working towards the development of the scenario and active participation of the people are also needed for an inclusive equal opportunity society. The annual festival of Durga Puja celebrated by the state of West Bengal has been recognized by the UNESCO as 'Intangible Cultural Heritage'. The good news about this year's Durga Puja in Kolkata is that for the first time three puja organizers of the city have installed Braille display stands within their pandals to spread the puja and festival vibe whole heartedly. With active participation of the society, all kinds of persons with different kinds of disabilities can enjoy the cultural festival to the fullest.

References

1. Census of India (2011). Available at <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/> (Accessed on 22.8.2022)
2. Chowdhury, S. (2021, February 9). Jadavpur University funds for 22 visually impaired students. The Telegraph Online. Available at <https://www.telegraphindia.com/west-bengal/calcutta/jadavpur-university-funds-for-visually-impaired-students/cid/1806099> (Accessed on 24.8.2022)
3. Darity, W.A. (2008). International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (Vol.4, pp.377) (2 nd ed.). Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning.
4. Jadavpur University. (2014). Equal opportunity cell. Available at http://www.jaduniv.edu.in/templates/newpages/equal_opportunity_cell.html (Accessed on 26.8.2022)
5. Jadavpur University. (2019). Annual Report: 2018-2019 (Pp.73). Kolkata.
6. Kapur, R. (2017). Challenges experienced by visually impaired students in education. International Journal of Professional Studies. 4(Jul-Dec). Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323833804_Challenges_Experienced_by_Visually_Impaired_Students_in_Education (Accessed on 30.8.2022)
7. Kumar, D. and Singh, M. (2022). India's New Education Policy (NEP) 2020: Catering for Children with Disabilities. International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology (IJARSCT). 2 (1). Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358451339_India's_New_Education_Policy_NEP_2020_Catering_for_Children_with_Disabilities (Accessed on 28.8.2022)
8. National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD). (n.d.). Available at <http://nivh.gov.in> (Accessed on 26.8.2022)
9. Press Information Bureau. (2016). Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill - 2016 Passed by Parliament. Government of India. Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment. Available at <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=155592> (Accessed on 21.08.2022)
10. Rayini, J. (2017). Library and information services to the visually impaired persons. Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal). Available at <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4313&context=libphilprac> (Accessed on 23.9.2022)
11. Sengupta, M. (2020, March 19). Making Art Accessible': India's First Braille Graffiti at Jadavpur University. Livewire. Available at <https://livewire.thewire.in/campus/making-art-accessible-indias-first-braille-graffiti-at-jadavpur-university/> (Accessed on 20.8.2022)

12. Simpson, J.A. & Weiner, E.S.C. (1989). The Oxford English Dictionary (Vol.4, pp. 713) (2nd ed.). Oxford :Oxford University Press.
13. World Health Organization (WHO) (n.d.).Disability. Available at https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1 (Accessed on 15.08.2022)

Keywords: Special libraries; Visual Impairment; Visually Impaired Students; Library for Persons with Disabilities; Jadavpur University

About Authors

Dr. Swaguna Datta

Assistant Librarian (Gr-I)

Jadavpur University, Kolkata, West Bengal

Email: swaguna.datta1@gmail.com

Ms. Shrabani Majumdar

Assistant Librarian (Gr-I)

Jadavpur University, Kolkata, West Bengal

Email: sm210764@gmail.com