

# Provision of Accessible Buildings for People with Disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities

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## Abstract

The study ascertained how to provide accessible buildings for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The study was carried out in four public Universities in South-East Nigeria which include: University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Federal University of Technology Owerri and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike. The population for this study is 250 subjects, consisting of 43 building technology lecturers and 207 building technology first-year students in the four public universities. No sampling was used for this study since the total population is of manageable size. A 23-item Questionnaire was used in answering research questions. The Reliability of the instrument was subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability method to determine the internal consistency which yielded a coefficient of 0.782. Data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions. For the test of significance, the probability (p) value was used in comparison with the alpha value of 0.05, and at 90 degree of freedom (df). Based on the research findings, provision of ramp, at each lobby entrance or vehicle drop off area and provision of toilet for the disabilities, with a size that fits wheelchair users will enhance easy access for PWD to buildings within the public universities. The study recommends that the government should establish a particular building licensing agency, whose task is to supervise the implementation of the provision of accessible facilities for PWD in buildings and especially in Nigerian public universities.

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**Keywords:** Accessible Buildings, Public Universities, Disability, People with Disabilities (PWD) and Students with Disabilities (SWD).

## 1. Introduction

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The purpose of higher education of learning such as the universities is to strengthen, deepen academic and scientific knowledge as well as to meet the social needs of all students. A university is a type of tertiary education establishment which provides academic programme leading to an academic degree (Abaa, & Ihuoma, 2019). University according to Salihu, and Razak, (2020), is a postsecondary education institution which specializes in active teaching and learning through the conduct of regular classes or distance education systems leading to the award of degree or diploma. Universities could be public or private institutions and either not for profit or a profit based entity. The construction of accessible building design in Universities is an important part of creating a welcoming and comfortable environment for people with disabilities (PWD) (Cosmos, Evans, & Emmanuel, 2017).

Disability may mean any form of physical or mental condition that restricts a person's way of life. Aleh and Idom, (2016) stated that disability ranges from visual impairments, lameness to complex intellectual or mental health challenges. Disabilities include physical, learning or psychological types (Morgado, Melero, Molina, & Dolores, 2016; Kaputa, 2013). Physical disabilities include difficulties with mobility, seeing and hearing problems, and other illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, chronic fatigue syndrome; brain injury and other debilitating conditions which are physical or organic in nature (Prince, and Regina, 2019). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) describes visual impairment as problems that have to do with seeing and they include loss of central and peripheral vision, blurred vision, generalized haze, extreme light sensitivity, night blindness and in some cases, total blindness. Learning disabilities include reading

difficulties, attentional disorders and dyslexia (Coate, 2014). Psychological disabilities include anxiety disorders, phobias depression and other bipolar disorders that hinder students from gaining from a learning experience (Obiakor, & Eleweke, 2014). The most common types of disabilities in Nigeria are, visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical impairment, intellectual impairment, and communication impairment. Hearing disability has to do with total or significant loss of hearing which may range from mild or moderate to severe or profound. United Nations (UN), (2020) reports that as at 2020, there are reportedly over 27 million Nigerians living with one form of disability or another.

In a typical Nigerian context, disability, most times, is viewed as a curse or punishment from God. As such, People With Disabilities (PWD) are faced with a lot of problems ranging from neglect, discrimination and exclusion, to marginalization, poverty, abuse, among others. This exclusion and discrimination lead to a cycle of more poverty, greater exclusion and further discrimination (The World Bank, 2005). Studies by Massengale and Vasquez (2016) have shown that PWDs constitute one of the poorest, marginalized and socially alienated groups. Eric, John, and Danso, (2017) observed that taking care of the special needs of PWD always tasks people without disabilities and prevents them from engaging in meaningful occupations that could enhance the well-being of the family. In some cases, the breadwinner might have to forgo working in order to take care of the disabled. Disability and poverty, therefore, go hand-in-hand to increase the vulnerability of People with Disabilities (PWDs) and make accessing higher education very difficult, if not impossible, for them. The ones who managed to gain admission in higher institution of learning are regarded as Students With Disabilities (SWD).

Similarly, student communities including Students With Disabilities (SWD) are facing many unsolved problems and necessities in many campuses of Nigerian tertiary institutions. SWD are students identified with some form of physical or mental impairment that limits them to perform in one or more major life and school activities (Obiakor, & Eleweke, 2014). SWD are physically challenged people who are active students and also studying in any educational level such as primary, secondary and post-secondary school level. Mijatović, (2018) in Ozohu-Suleiman, (2012) stated that among many

problems, SWD are encountering additional challenges such as inappropriate university infrastructure, social and economic difficulties, need for accommodation, mobility, transportation, and lack of leisure activities, career opportunities, and employment prospects. The number of universities offering services for SWD has been growing considerably worldwide over the last decade, as the rights of this community are made a must by The Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 24 (1) of this Convention provides that states must ensure an inclusive education system at all levels, including the Higher Education System (CRPD, 2016). Nevertheless, not all students with disabilities are getting an adequate level of support, especially in Nigeria (Eleweke, 2013).

Making sure that university buildings are designed to meet the accessibility requirements set by disability access laws ensures that everyone has equal access to all the facilities within the buildings. The university environment needs to be accessible, inclusive, and to have reasonable adjustments for all, creating organizational and personal means that enable all students to be developed professionally. That requires universities to be inclusive and responsive to the needs of the entire student community including students with disabilities (SWD) (Dada, & Eni-Olorunda, 2014). Providing effective academic services for students with disabilities remains a difficult process in higher education especially in public universities in Nigeria. Report indicates that SWD are facing problems of inadequate auditoriums, inaccessible classrooms and stairs, narrow walkways, heavy doors, elevator doors without delay mechanism in most public universities. Others include the absence of ramps and signs, ineffective regulations and other common barriers for SWD (Charles, Russo, Allan, & Osborne 2015: Adelaja, 2009). Also, academic issues for SWD consist in not only physical accessibility to university and faculty offices, laboratories, class location, and time restrictions to schedule classes, but also in limited participation in social and political activities. In this sense, most public universities are not fulfilling all requests of the community of special needs' students. Data from Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) (2011) indicate that most SWD tend to leave higher education programs without adequate qualifications. In addition, the building and infrastructural challenges, there are fewer people with

disabilities in the workforce which could help or support SWD in most public universities. The institutions of higher education lack the policies and strategies to increase inclusion of disabled students (CRPD, 2016).

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

The purpose of higher education of learning such as the universities is to strengthen, deepen academic and scientific knowledge as well as to meet the social needs of all students. The construction of accessible building design in Universities is an important part of creating a welcoming and comfortable environment for people with disabilities (PWD). Making sure that University buildings are designed to meet the accessibility requirements set by disability access laws ensures that everyone has equal access to all the facilities within the buildings. The university environment needs to be accessible, inclusive, and to have reasonable adjustments for all, creating organizational and personal means that enable all students to be developed professionally. That requires universities to be inclusive and responsive to the needs of the entire student community including students with disabilities (SWD).

However, providing effective academic services for students with disabilities remains a difficult process in higher education especially in public universities in Nigeria. Reports shows that most public universities in Nigeria have inadequate auditoriums, classrooms and stairs, narrow walkways, heavy doors, elevator doors without delay mechanism, the absence of ramps and signs, ineffective regulations are among the common barriers for SWD. Academic issues for SWD consist in not only physical accessibility to university and faculty offices, laboratories, class location, and time restrictions to schedule classes, but also in limited participation in social and political activities. Because of these challenges encountered by SWD in most public institutions of learning many disabled students tend to leave higher education programs without adequate qualifications. These issues show that institutions of higher education especially public universities are not fulfilling all requests of the community of special needs' students. These problems inspired the researchers to conduct the study to find out how to provide accessible buildings for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities.

### 1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out how to provide accessible buildings for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. Find out how to provide accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities.
2. Find out the challenges hindering the provision of accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities.

### 1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. In what ways will the buildings and infrastructures be made accessible for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities?
2. What are the challenges hindering the provision of accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities?

### 1.4 Hypotheses

The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of lecturers and students on how to provide accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of lecturers and students on the challenges hindering the provision of accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities.

## 2. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey research design is used for those studies which aim at collecting data and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population (Nworgu, 2015). The study was carried out in four public Universities in South-East Nigeria. These Universities include University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Federal University of Technology

Owerri and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike. The population for this study is 250 subjects, consisting of 43 building technology lecturers and 207 building technology first-year students in the four public universities. The first-year building technology students were captured from the 2023/2024 academic session. No sampling was used for this study since the total population of 250 subjects is of manageable size.

A 23-item Questionnaire was used in answering research questions. The title of the Questionnaire is: Questionnaire on Provision of Accessible Buildings for People with Disabilities (Q.P.A.B.P.W.D). The questionnaire was made up of two parts. Part 1 which elicited information from the respondents on their demographic data, and Part 2 which was made up of two clusters. Clusters A, elicited information on how to provide accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities, while cluster B elicited information on the challenges hindering the provision of accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities. The clusters were structured on a five-point likert response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by three experts. The experts' comments and suggestions were used in modifying the questions and items. The Reliability of the instrument (Q.P.A.B.P.W.D) was subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability method to determine the internal consistency which yielded a coefficient of 0.782. This shows that the instrument was reliable.

The administration and retrieval of the Q.P.A.B.P.W.D questionnaire was carried out by the

researchers with the help of two research assistants. Two hundred and fifty copies of the questionnaires were administered on the respondents, which were retrieved within one week after administration. Data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions. Decision on research questions were taken based on real limits of numbers. Thus, mean rating of 3.50 and above were considered as agreed, while items with mean rating below 3.50 were considered as disagreed. Consequently, any item with a mean range of 0.50 – 1.49 was interpreted as strongly disagree, any item with a mean value ranging from 1.50-2.49 was regarded as disagree, any item with a mean value ranging from 2.50-3.49 was regarded as agree, while an item with a mean value of 3.50 and above was interpreted as strongly agree. For the test of significance, the probability (p) value was used in comparison with the alpha value of 0.05, and at 90 degrees of freedom (df). If any item has a probability value greater than 0.05 (P>0.05) it will be concluded that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Data for answering research questions 1 to 2 were presented in table 1 to 2

**Research Question 1:** In what ways will the buildings and infrastructures be made accessible for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities?

**Table 1:** Mean responses and t-test analysis of lecturers and students on how to provide accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities. N= 250

S/N	Items:	X <sub>G</sub>	SD <sub>G</sub>	X <sub>1</sub>	SD <sub>1</sub>	X <sub>2</sub>	SD <sub>2</sub>	t-cal	Sig (2-Tailed)	Rmks RQ Ho
1	Provision of assistive technology in doorways such as automatic door openers in buildings and infrastructure within the campus.	3.59	1.16	2.99	1.13	4.98	1.19	0.03	A	NS
2	Provision of ramps that allows individuals using wheelchairs or walkers to easily enter and exit faculty buildings.	4.13	0.92	4.14	0.91	4.11	0.93	0.13	SA	NS

3	Provision of wide doorways at least 32 inches wide that will allow for easy passage of wheelchairs for SWD.	3.74	0.62	4.47	0.60	4.40	0.63	0.46	A	NS	
4	Provision of clear and well-lit travel paths to ensure that individuals with visual impairment can navigate buildings safely/easily.	4.49	0.90	4.54	4.44	0.97	0.97	0.48	SA	NS	
5	Installing compliant lever handles, setting appropriate door pressures, and creating low-threshold doorways will make it easier for individuals with disabilities to enter and exit the building.	3.54	0.50	4.43	4.44	0.50	0.50	0.50	A	NS	
6	By installing grab bars, you can provide a safer and more supportive environment for individuals with mobility impairments, reducing the risk of falls and promoting independence.	3.74	0.76	4.49	4.44	0.80	0.80	0.27	A	NS	
7	Provision of accessible parking will ensure that individuals with mobility impairment have safe and convenient access to the buildings.	3.59	0.57	3.49	4.48	0.57	0.57	0.07	A	NS	
8	Provision of accessible toilets, accessible sink, toilet fixtures, appropriate counter, basin heights, knee and toe clearances will make restrooms accessible for PWD.	3.56	0.50	4.56	4.55	0.50	0.50	0.05	A	NS	
9	Provision of accessible showers, seats and roll-in showers are among the features that make restrooms in faculty buildings accessible for SWD.	4.37	0.73	4.38	4.37	0.74	0.74	0.05	SA	NS	
10	Provision of well-lit, easy to navigate and spacious toilet that will be easy to maneuver with ample space for turning radius and compliant ingress/egress for SWD.	4.07	0.89	4.40	4.33	0.96	0.96	0.34	SA	NS	
11	For buildings with multiple levels, provision of accessible elevator or lift is crucial to making the facility accessible for individuals with mobility impairments.	3.54	0.50	4.43	4.44	0.50	0.50	0.50	A	NS	
12	Provision of grab bars installed near the toilet and in the shower or bathtub that provides additional support for individuals who need help with balance and stability when using a lavatory.	3.74	0.76	4.49	4.44	0.80	0.80	0.27	A	NS	
13	Remodeling an existing building with a fully accessible design may be the most comprehensive approach to making it accessible for individuals with impairments.	3.57	0.89	4.43	4.33	0.96	0.96	0.34	A	NS	
<b>Grand X and SD</b>		<b>3.87</b>	<b>0.88</b>								

**Note:**  $X_t$ = Total mean;  $SD_t$ = Standard deviation total;  $X_1$ =mean of lecturers;  $SD_1$ = Standard deviation of lecturers;  $X_2$  = mean of students;  $SD_2$  =Standard deviation of students;  $N_1$  = Number of lecturers (43);  $N_2$  = Number of students (207).

Table 1 revealed that all the 13 items had their mean values ranging from 3.54 to 4.99, which were above the criterion mean of 3.50. This indicates that the respondents agreed that all the 13 items are how to provide accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities. The t-calculated values of all the items ranged 0.03 to 0.50 which were lower than the t-

critical value of 1.96 at an alpha level of 0.05. The result therefore indicated that no significant differences exist in the mean response of two groups of respondents. It was therefore concluded that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of lecturers and students on how to provide accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities. So, the hypothesis was retained.

**Research Question 2:** What are the challenges hindering the provision of accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities?

**Table 2:** Mean Responses and t-test analysis of lecturers and students on the challenges hindering the provision of accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities.

N= 250

S/N	Items:	$X_G$	$SD_G$	$X_1$	$SD_1$	$X_2$	$SD_2$	t-cal	Sig (2-Tailed)	Rmks RQ Ho
1	The lack of awareness among real estate developers and professionals about the specific needs and requirements of PWDs.	4.09	1.16	4.99	1.13	4.98	1.19	0.03	A	NS
2	Construction of buildings that are not designed with accessibility in mind, making it difficult for PWDs to live independently and comfortably.	4.13	0.92	4.14	0.91	4.11	0.93	0.13	A	NS
3	Many existing housing structures have physical barriers such as narrow doorways, steep staircases, the absence of ramps or elevators, and inadequate bathroom facilities that hinder accessibility of PWD.	4.44	0.62	4.47	0.60	4.40	0.63	0.46	SA	NS
4	Inaccessible housing and obstacles prevent PWDs from freely navigating faculty offices and can lead to increased dependence on others.	3.92	0.90	3.54	4.44	0.97	0.97	0.48	A	NS
5	Developers tend to overlook the potential demand for accessible buildings, resulting in a scarcity of suitable options for PWDs.	3.59	0.57	2.49	4.48	0.57	0.57	0.07	A	NS
6	Evidence of implementation of the provisions in the policies (United Nations 'Declarations on the Rights of the Disabled', and in particular the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) is lacking in many institution.	4.41	0.63	4.42	4.40	0.63	0.63	0.09	A	NS

7	Cost considerations and cost constraints are often experienced in planning facilities for PWD.	3.57	0.89	3.40	4.33	0.96	0.96	0.34	A	NS	
8	Weakness in implementing facilities for PWD is sometimes caused by the absence of the obligation to fulfill requirements in the construction permit.	4.44	0.50	4.43	4.44	0.50	0.50	0.50	SA	NS	
9	Management's attention is more focused on business needs with the relatively insignificant percentage of people with special needs	4.44	0.62	4.47	0.60	4.40	0.63	0.46	SA		
10	Procurement requirements facilities for people with special needs are relatively neglected because costs are allocated more to business interests.	3.92	0.90	3.54	4.44	0.97	0.97	0.48	A		
<b>Grand X and SD</b>		<b>4.27</b>	<b>0.75</b>								

Table 2 revealed that all the 10 items had their mean values ranging from 3.57 to 4.44, which were above the criterion mean of 3.50. This indicates that the respondents agreed that all the 10 items are the challenges hindering the provision of accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities. The grand mean of 4.27 with standard deviation of 0.75 suggested that the items were perceived highly by the respondents as the challenges hindering the provision of accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD). The t-calculated values of all the items ranged 0.03 to 0.48 were lower than the t-critical value of 1.96 at an alpha level of 0.05. The result therefore indicated that no significant differences exist in the mean responses of two groups of respondents. It was therefore concluded that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of lecturers and students on the challenges hindering the provision of accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities. The hypothesis was therefore retained.

#### 4. Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study in table 1 revealed how to provide accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities. Some of them include: the provision of assistive technology in doorways such as automatic door openers in buildings and infrastructure within the campus and the provision of ramps that allows

individuals using wheelchairs or walkers to easily enter and exit faculty buildings. These findings are in line with Mijatović, (2018) who stated grab bars are simple effective hardware that provides additional support for individuals who need help with balance and stability when using a lavatory. They are typically installed near the toilet and in the shower or bathtub to provide additional support when getting up or sitting down. Grab bars can be made of various materials, including metal, plastic, fiberglass, and composites. They are available in multiple sizes and styles to suit different needs and preferences. They can be easily installed by a handyperson or contractor and are a relatively inexpensive way to make a building or facility more accessible. By installing grab bars, universities can provide a safer and more supportive environment for individuals with mobility impairments, reducing the risk of falls and promoting independence. Cosmos, Evans, and Emmanuel, (2017) also assert that installing compliant lever handles, setting appropriate door pressures, and creating low-threshold doorways will make it easier for individuals with disabilities to enter and exit the building. Lever handles are easier to use than round knobs and are specified for individuals with limited hand dexterity. Low-threshold doorways reduce the step height at doorways, making it easier for individuals with mobility impairments to enter and exit the building. In addition to these specific features, it is crucial to ensure that doorways are well-lit, easy to navigate, and have clear floor space for maneuvering. This includes providing ample space

for a turning radius that is not obstructed by furniture or other obstacles. Morgado, Melero, Molina, and Dolores, (2016) stated that upgrading door hardware is important in making a building or facility accessible for individuals with mobility impairments. By providing accessible doorways, universities can ensure that individuals with disabilities have safe and convenient access to all areas of the building.

The study in table 2, also investigated the challenges hindering the provision of accessible buildings and infrastructures for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities. Some of them include: the lack of awareness among real estate developers and professionals about the specific needs and requirements of PWDs and the construction of buildings that are not designed with accessibility in mind, making it difficult for PWDs to live independently and comfortably. These findings are in line with Morgado, Melero, Molina, and Dolores, (2016) who stated that Accessible housing options are often limited in the real estate market. Developers tend to overlook the potential demand for accessible homes, resulting in a scarcity of suitable options for PWDs. This scarcity further exacerbates the problem and forces individuals to compromise their independence and quality of life. Also Mijatović, (2018) stated that one major issue is the lack of awareness among real estate developers and professionals about the specific needs and requirements of PWDs. This results in the construction of university buildings that are not designed with accessibility in mind, making it difficult for PWDs to live independently and comfortably.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to find out how to provide accessible buildings for people with disabilities (PWD) in Nigerian Public Universities. Based on the research findings, here is the resume of provisions that should be made in each building in public universities for accessibility of SWD: provision of ramp, at each lobby entrance or vehicle drop off area. It is the primary support for access to the building for wheelchair users, provision of toilet for the disabilities, with a size that fits wheelchair users and the provision of special parking for the PWD. The constraints faced by the public universities in planning accessible facilities for PWD include:

lack of management's awareness and understanding on the specific design for SWD; sometimes the management's attention is more focused on business needs with the relatively insignificant percentage of SWD; procurement requirements facilities for PWD are relatively neglected; procurement of space prioritizes the needs of ordinary people, assuming that greater profits result from visits of ordinary people; Costs are allocated more to business interests.

## 5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings made and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government should establish a particular building licensing agency, whose task is to supervise the implementation of the provision of accessible facilities for people with disabilities in buildings and especially in Nigerian public universities.
2. The enforcement of provision of accessible facilities for PWD should be taken seriously by all building construction stakeholders in Nigeria. The government in particular should issue periodic sanctions or warnings to university management and building owners/managers who ignore the provision of accessible facilities for PWD in public buildings and especially in Nigerian public universities.
3. The architect and other building construction stakeholders should help university management and other building owners/public to realize the need to provide accessible facilities for PWD in public buildings and especially in Nigerian public universities.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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