

INCLUSIVENESS IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES PROVISION IN NIGERIAN LIBRARIES

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Abstract

The principle of equitable information access is foundational to library and information science, yet its realisation across many Nigerian library contexts remains constrained by institutional, structural, and professional shortcomings that are systemic rather than accidental. This paper presents an exploratory qualitative investigation into the state of inclusiveness in library and information services provision in Nigerian libraries, concentrating thematically on four major categories of underserved users, namely persons with disabilities, rural community dwellers, adult non literate populations, and elderly users. Drawing on a systematic thematic analysis of peer reviewed studies and institutional literature published between 2020 and 2025, the study interrogates the barriers to equitable access across these groups and evaluates the extent to which Nigerian libraries have designed and delivered services that genuinely accommodate user diversity. The analysis is grounded in social reproduction theory, which is used to explain why patterns of exclusion persist across funding cycles and advocacy campaigns rather than appearing as episodic or accidental events. The study also engages explicitly with the intersectionality of exclusion, examining how users who simultaneously occupy multiple disadvantaged categories experience compounded barriers that single category analysis cannot adequately capture. The findings indicate a recurring pattern of infrastructural inaccessibility, a policy translation gap between professional commitment and operational practice, professional unpreparedness, and the structural amplification of exclusion through unreflective digital transformation. The paper concludes by proposing stakeholder differentiated and operationally specific recommendations addressed separately to national policy bodies, government, training institutions, and individual library institutions.

Keywords: Inclusiveness; Library services; Nigerian libraries; Disability; Rural communities; Adult non literacy; Elderly users; Information access; Intersectionality; Policy translation gap

1. Introduction

Libraries are among the most democratically conceived public institutions in any society. Their foundational purpose rests on the conviction that access to information is a universal right rather than a privilege contingent on education, geography, economic standing, or physical ability. This conviction is enshrined in the professional frameworks of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2021), it is reflected in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal on inclusive and just institutions, and it is operationalised through national library legislation across much of the world. In Nigeria the same commitment is echoed in institutional mission statements, professional association pronouncements, and policy documents. Yet the evidence drawn from existing scholarship presents a considerably more complicated picture, one in which the aspiration of universal access has not been matched by the institutional conditions necessary to realise it.

Nigeria presents a demographic and social context in which the demand for inclusive library services is both acute and complex. With a population exceeding 220 million people distributed across highly unequal urban and rural environments, a significant proportion of Nigerians face barriers to conventional information access that are rooted in disability, geographic remoteness, low functional literacy, or the vulnerabilities associated with old age. Abdullahi, as cited in Ibegbulam (2024), estimated that approximately 35.1 million Nigerians live with some form of disability, while data from the World Bank (2025) indicate that adult literacy stood at 70.41 percent in 2024, leaving roughly one third of the adult population functionally unable to engage with standard print based library resources. These figures underscore the scale of the challenge confronting Nigerian libraries and the urgency of understanding how current service structures either respond to or perpetuate these conditions of exclusion. The magnitude of the challenge is summarised in Figure 1.

The scholarly literature on Nigerian library services contains a growing body of work that addresses aspects of inclusiveness, but no recent study has undertaken a comprehensive thematic synthesis focused specifically on the four user categories most consistently identified as underserved. The present study addresses that gap. Through exploratory qualitative inquiry grounded in thematic analysis of the existing literature, the paper maps the current landscape of inclusive service provision in Nigerian libraries, identifies the structural conditions that produce and sustain exclusion, and proposes evidence informed directions for reform.

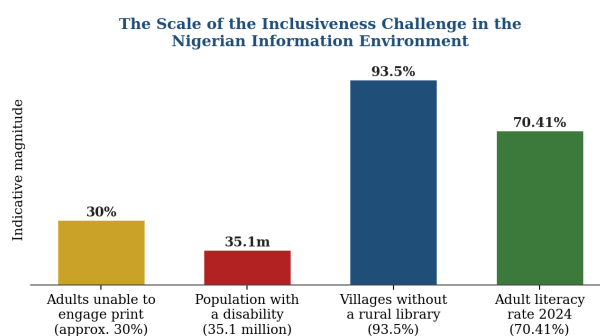


Figure 1: The scale of the inclusiveness challenge in the Nigerian information environment.

Source: Authors' synthesis of Ibegbulam (2024) and World Bank (2025) data.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite professional commitments to equitable access and a growing literature documenting its importance, Nigerian libraries continue to operate within service frameworks that marginalise significant portions of their potential user communities. Ibegbulam (2024) documented that service provision to persons with disabilities in Nigeria is persistently hampered by dependence on traditional service models, inaccessible physical environments, and chronic underfunding for disability responsive resources. Okafor and Omorinkoba, as cited in Iwhiwhu and Eyekpimi (2023), observed that similar systemic deficits characterise provision for rural communities, where branch coverage is sparse and outreach programmes are underfunded and inconsistently implemented. The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non formal Education, as cited in Mangwat and Meshak (2022), estimated that 35 percent of the adult population remains illiterate, a reality that public libraries have been slow to address through adapted programming and alternative format provision.

What makes this state of affairs particularly significant is its persistence across time and institutional type. Studies conducted over the past decade have repeatedly identified the same deficits and proposed many of the same remedial responses, yet the structural conditions that produce exclusion have not fundamentally changed. This points to what the present paper terms the policy translation gap, namely the measurable distance between the profession's articulated commitments to inclusiveness, expressed in IFLA frameworks, in conference themes of the Nigerian Library Association, and in institutional mission statements, and the observable realities of service practice. This gap is not merely administrative. It reflects the absence of binding enforcement mechanisms, accountability structures, and dedicated resource commitments that would compel institutions to move from rhetoric to operational reform. The 2024 conference theme of the Nigerian Library Association, which addressed the promotion of diversity and inclusiveness through innovative service delivery, signals that the profession has recognised these deficits (Nigerian Library Association, 2024), yet the persistence of the documented conditions confirms that professional discourse, however well intentioned, does not by itself produce systemic institutional change. Closing the policy translation gap is therefore the central challenge this paper addresses.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study pursues five specific objectives. The first is to examine thematically the state of inclusive library service provision for persons with disabilities in Nigerian public and academic libraries. The second is to investigate the structural and policy conditions that limit meaningful library access for rural community dwellers. The third is to assess the extent to which Nigerian libraries have developed services appropriate to adult non literate users and to identify the barriers that constrain such provision. The fourth is to explore the information needs and access experiences of elderly users and to evaluate the adequacy of current institutional responses. The fifth is to propose operationally specific and stakeholder differentiated recommendations for embedding inclusiveness as a core operational standard across Nigerian library institutions.

4. Research Questions

The study is guided by five research questions. What thematic patterns emerge from the existing literature regarding the accessibility of Nigerian library services for persons with disabilities? How do infrastructural, policy, and funding factors shape the library access experiences of rural community dwellers? To what extent have Nigerian libraries developed service models responsive to the needs of adult non literate users, and what barriers have prevented more comprehensive provision? What does the literature reveal about the experiences of elderly users, and how adequately are their information needs being addressed? Finally, what cross cutting institutional and professional changes are needed to advance inclusive provision across all four user categories?

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative research design operationalised through systematic thematic document analysis. The approach is appropriate to the research objectives, which seek to surface patterns, interrogate recurring discourses, and generate conceptual insight rather than to produce statistically generalisable empirical findings. The exploratory character of the design is consistent with the relative absence of synthesised scholarship that addresses all four target user groups simultaneously within a unified analytical framework specific to Nigerian library contexts.

5.2 Search Strategy

A systematic literature search was conducted across four electronic databases, namely Scopus, Google Scholar, Library and Information Science Abstracts, and African Journals Online. A structured set of search terms and Boolean combinations was applied, covering inclusive library services in Nigeria, disability library access, rural library provision, adult literacy and the library, elderly users in Africa, assistive technology in Nigerian libraries, and public library outreach. The reference lists of all provisionally retained sources were also hand searched to identify further relevant works not captured through the database search.

5.3 Source Screening and Eligibility

The initial database search returned a combined total of 187 candidate sources after deduplication. These were subjected to a two stage screening process. In the first stage the titles and abstracts of all candidate sources were reviewed against three

inclusion criteria. The source had to address library or information service provision in Nigeria or a directly comparable West African context, it had to engage substantively with at least one of the four target user groups or with inclusiveness as a cross cutting theme, and it had to have been published between 2020 and 2025, except for foundational policy documents of earlier provenance retained for contextual purposes. A total of 75 sources were excluded at this stage because they addressed non Nigerian contexts without transferable relevance, fell outside the temporal scope, or contained no substantive engagement with the inclusiveness dimensions of interest. Sixty eight sources proceeded to full text assessment, of which a further 27 were excluded, comprising 14 for insufficient engagement with access barriers, 8 as duplicates identified across databases, and 5 because their evidential basis could not be adequately verified. Forty one sources ultimately met all inclusion criteria and were retained for thematic analysis. The complete screening pathway is presented in Figure 2.

The attrition across the screening pipeline can be expressed compactly as Equation 1, in which the retained set is the identified set less the records excluded at the abstract and full text stages.

$$N_{\text{retained}} = N_{\text{identified}} - (E_{\text{abstract}} + E_{\text{fulltext}}) = 187 - (75 + 27) \approx 41 \quad (1)$$

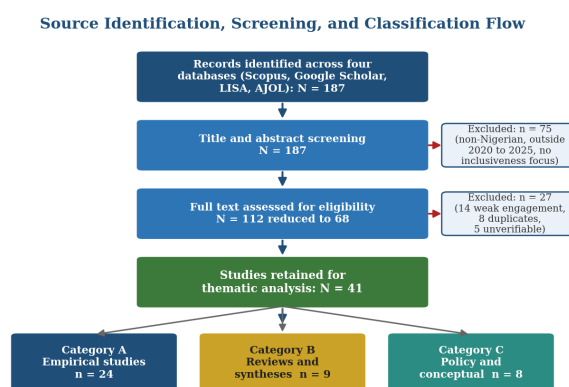


Figure 2: Source identification, screening, and classification flow, adapted to the present synthesis.

Source: Authors' construction.

Composition of the Retained Evidence Base by Source Category

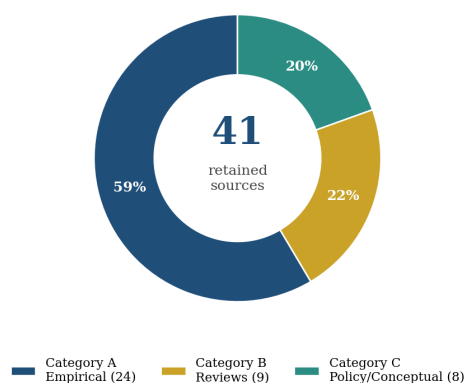


Figure 3: Composition of the retained evidence base by source category.

Source: Authors' classification of the 41 retained sources.

5.4 Source Classification and Quality Appraisal

To support transparent quality appraisal and to enable a clear distinction between empirical and conceptual evidence, all 41 retained sources were classified into one of three categories before thematic coding began. Category A comprises primary empirical studies that report original data collected through surveys, interviews, observation, or primary document analysis, and 24 of the sources fall into this category. Category B comprises systematic or thematic reviews and literature syntheses, and 9 sources are classified here. Category C comprises conceptual frameworks, professional guidelines, policy documents, and government reports, accounting for the remaining 8 sources, as visualised in Figure 3. Throughout the findings and discussion the evidential basis of each cited claim is indicated in the prose, so that claims supported by empirical studies are identified as such while claims resting primarily on reviews or policy material are qualified accordingly.

The methodological quality of the empirical sources was appraised against three criteria, namely the clarity of the research design and its appropriateness to the stated objectives, the transparency of the data collection and analysis procedures, and the explicit acknowledgement of study limitations. Sources meeting all three criteria were treated as providing stronger evidence, while those meeting only one or two criteria are cited with appropriate qualification. No sources were excluded on quality grounds alone, since exclusion would have produced an artificially narrow evidence base in a field where methodological reporting standards vary considerably across publication venues.

5.5 Thematic Analysis Procedure

Thematic analysis following the framework outlined by Braun and Clarke, as applied in qualitative library research, guided the analytical procedure. Each retained source was examined for its treatment of the target user groups, the access barriers identified, the institutional and policy factors implicated, and any interventions or recommendations proposed. Initial codes were developed inductively from source content and subsequently organised into higher order themes through iterative comparison and revision, from which four primary thematic clusters emerged.

Trustworthiness was enhanced through transparent documentation of the screening and coding procedures, through iterative revision of the coding scheme in response to the full source set, and through the explicit grounding of all interpretive claims in cited textual evidence. Reflexivity regarding the subjectivity inherent in qualitative synthesis informed the analytical process throughout.

6. Theoretical Framework

The structural persistence of exclusion in Nigerian library services demands more than empirical documentation, because it demands theoretical explanation. This paper draws on social reproduction theory, adapted to information service contexts, to account for the durability of exclusion across funding changes, professional advocacy campaigns, and nominal policy reform. In its application to institutional settings, social reproduction theory holds that organisations tend to reproduce the social conditions, user assumptions, and operational logic embedded in their founding design unless those conditions are deliberately and structurally disrupted.

Nigerian public and academic library systems were largely established during the colonial period using institutional models derived from British library practice. Those models assumed a particular kind of user, one who was literate in English, formally educated, physically mobile, and capable of independently navigating a print based and building centred service. These assumptions were not merely contextual starting points. They were inscribed into architectural decisions, collection development policies, staffing models, and service delivery philosophies that have been reproduced across successive institutional generations with only surface level modification.

This invites the deeper question of whether the problem is also epistemological, that is, whether the inherited service model rests on a conception of the library user so fundamentally inappropriate to the Nigerian context that additional funding and training might only reinforce exclusion rather than address it. The social reproduction framework supports and amplifies this concern. If the normative library user is implicitly constructed as literate, mobile, and independently motivated, then investments in staffing and technology designed to serve that user more efficiently will do nothing to reach the elderly rural resident, the non literate adult, or the person with a physical disability who was never imagined as the intended recipient of service.

This epistemological dimension is particularly acute in the Nigerian setting, where more than a third of the adult population cannot engage with print materials, where nearly half the population lives in rural areas with little or no library access, and where millions of users have physical or sensory conditions that standard library environments cannot accommodate. Addressing these exclusions requires not only more resources but a reconceptualisation of who the library is for, a shift in the founding assumptions that social reproduction theory identifies as the deepest source of institutional inertia. This framing carries direct interpretive implications. It explains why the same deficits have been documented for decades without producing systemic change, since the interventions proposed have not disrupted the reproductive logic of the existing model, and it informs the structural orientation of the recommendations offered later in the paper.

7. Literature Review

7.1 Conceptualising Inclusiveness in Library Services

Inclusiveness in library and information services refers to the deliberate institutional effort to identify, acknowledge, and systematically address the structural barriers that prevent certain categories of users from accessing and benefiting from library resources and services. Chisenga (2022), drawing on a conceptual and comparative analysis of service models across Africa, argues that user centred services on the continent must move beyond rhetorical commitment to equitable access and develop concrete strategies for serving populations whose circumstances diverge from the implicit norm of the literate, urban, and physically unimpaired user. This argument is reinforced by the empirical study of Iwhiwhu and Eyekpimi (2023), whose work on digital transformation in South South Nigerian university libraries found that technology adoption, while offering new service possibilities, risks replicating and amplifying existing exclusions unless it is accompanied by a deliberate inclusive design orientation. The IFLA (2021) frameworks for library development similarly emphasise that services must be evaluated by the degree to which they reach and serve the most marginalised members of their communities.

The concept of universal design, which advocates environments and services usable by the widest possible range of people without specialised adaptation, offers a practically useful evaluative lens for assessing inclusiveness in library contexts. Applied to Nigerian services, universal design principles challenge institutions to plan for diversity from the outset rather than retrofitting access after the fact. Agbo, Anozie, and Igwebiuke (2024), in a study that combined empirical observation with framework development, argue that the transformation of academic libraries to serve people with special needs requires a systematic accessibility and inclusivity framework premised on universal design, noting that ad hoc responses to accessibility challenges consistently produce insufficient outcomes.

7.2 Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities represent one of the most consistently documented yet persistently underserved categories in the Nigerian library literature. Ibegbulam (2024), in a systematic review of accessibility and inclusiveness for persons with disabilities, found that Nigerian libraries remain largely dependent on traditional service models that fail to accommodate users with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities. The review identified inadequate librarian knowledge, inaccessible physical environments, and insufficient funding for disability responsive resources as the primary barriers, and it noted that even where assistive technologies are procured their effective use requires staff training that most libraries have not provided. Williams Ilemobola, Adetayo, Buhari, and Omorinkoba (2022) conducted a primary empirical study of the information seeking behaviour of persons with disabilities in selected Nigerian libraries and found that low physical accessibility and attitudinal barriers among staff significantly deterred library use by this population.

Okafor and Omorinkoba (2025) conducted an empirical survey of inclusiveness and accessibility across four academic libraries in Southwest Nigeria and found that, although three of the

four libraries possessed general assistive technologies including Braille books, Braille machines, and text to speech software, none had a comprehensive accessibility policy, and significant gaps existed in the provision of tools for users with hearing impairments. Agbo, Anozie, and Igwebiuke (2024) reinforced this finding by arguing for a formal accessibility and inclusivity framework that incorporates physical design, policy development, staff training, and sustained user engagement. Ayoung, Baada, and Baayel (2021), in an empirical study relevant to the West African context, identified inadequate librarian knowledge as a systemic barrier to inclusive service, a finding echoed by Ibegbulam (2024), who specifically recommended training librarians in artificial intelligence applications including screen readers such as JAWS and NVDA, captioning tools, and document conversion software suited to settings where commercial options may be cost prohibitive. Onifade and Babarinde (2022) proposed mobile library services as a viable strategy for meeting the information needs of persons with disabilities, while acknowledging the logistical and funding challenges associated with sustaining such delivery.

7.3 Rural Community Dwellers

The exclusion of rural community dwellers from meaningful library participation is among the most structurally entrenched dimensions of the Nigerian inclusiveness deficit. Salihu (2023), in a policy oriented review, observed that Nigerian libraries serve as critical agents of social transformation in rural and underserved areas, with the potential to enable lifelong learning and to foster digital inclusion, but that this potential is systematically undermined by infrastructural deficits, limited funding, and the absence of skilled personnel. This assessment aligns with the empirical findings of Olusanya, Balogun, Abdulaziz, and Ajayi (2025), whose survey of library outreach to farmers in Kwara State found that, although outreach produced positive effects on information access and agricultural decision making, inadequate funding, staff shortages, and poor infrastructure severely constrained programme reach and sustainability. Rural libraries are described across the literature as almost non existent in practice, and empirical survey data found that rural libraries were absent in 93.5 percent of villages surveyed in one Imo State study.

Ahmed, Usman, and Danjuma (2022) identified, through an empirical study, the barriers facing library outreach in rural northern Nigeria, noting that low literacy levels, inadequate infrastructure, and ongoing security challenges compound the difficulty of delivering information services to rural communities. Oladokun and Yemi Peters (2021), in a policy analysis, argued that the absence of robust policy frameworks for rural library development leaves many institutions ill equipped to meet community demand. Digital transformation offers potential pathways for extending access beyond physical constraints, as Ogedengbe and colleagues (2023) argue in a cross national review, but the realities of rural connectivity in Nigeria mean that digital services cannot substitute for physical infrastructure investment in the short to medium term (Idhalama, Oredo, and Makori, 2025).

7.4 Adult Non Literate Users

Adult non literacy represents a dimension of the Nigerian inclusiveness challenge that is both statistically significant and institutionally underaddressed. According to the World Bank (2025), the adult literacy rate stood at approximately 70.41 percent

in 2024, implying that roughly 30 percent of the adult population cannot fully engage with written materials. The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non formal Education estimated that 35 percent of the adult population remains functionally illiterate, as cited in Mangvwat and Meshak (2022). This population requires services designed around oral, audio visual, and community based information formats. Yet the empirical literature consistently finds that these adapted models are largely absent. Ntogo Saghanen and Echedom (2023), in an empirical study of public library services in South South Nigeria, found that the resources available were predominantly traditional print materials, with electronic databases, electronic books, electronic journals, and audio visual materials among the least available resource types, a pattern that reflects a service design logic ill suited to users with low or no literacy.

Nkamnebe and Nkamnebe, as cited in the recent literature, argued that promoting literacy through inclusive library and information services requires libraries to position themselves as active agents of non formal education rather than as passive repositories of print materials. This framing is consistent with the assertion by IFLA (2021) that libraries must contribute to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including the goal on quality education and lifelong learning. Obiagwu and Ozioko (2022), in an empirical study, found that technology adoption in Nigerian university libraries has improved service delivery for literate users but has not been accompanied by efforts to reach users who lack the digital literacy required to benefit from these innovations, which effectively widens the gap between technology enabled services and the needs of non literate populations.

7.5 Elderly Users

Elderly users constitute a fourth category whose information needs and access experiences receive insufficient attention in Nigerian library planning. Nigeria is home to the largest population of adults aged sixty years and older in Africa (Ezulike, Lu, and Chiu, 2024), and the Federal Government approved a National Policy on Ageing in 2021, signalling official recognition of the growing needs of this demographic (Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, 2021). Despite this development the translation of demographic awareness into library service design has been limited. Elderly users face multiple intersecting barriers, including age related changes in vision and mobility, reduced familiarity with digital technologies, transportation challenges, and, for many, compound disadvantage arising from the intersection of age with rural residence or low literacy. Mbam, Halvorsen, and Okoye (2022), drawing on demographic and policy analysis, argue that the ageing population requires the urgent implementation of national ageing policies across public service institutions, a call that extends directly to libraries.

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2023) noted in its World Social Report that leaving no one behind in an ageing world requires public institutions to adapt their services to the diversity of older adults' needs, including their information and knowledge access requirements. In the library literature specific to Nigeria, elderly users remain largely invisible as a distinct service population. Ogunniyi and Ajakaye, as cited in the recent journal literature (2024), found that public libraries in

southwest Nigeria provided resources primarily in textbook and reference formats, with audio visual materials, electronic books, and formats suitable for users with low digital literacy or visual limitation among the least available types. This structural mismatch between what libraries offer and what elderly users need represents a significant inclusiveness gap that has not been systematically addressed in policy or practice.

8. Findings

8.1 Theme One: Physical and Infrastructural Inaccessibility

The most pervasive theme to emerge from the reviewed literature is the physical and infrastructural inaccessibility of Nigerian library environments for users with disabilities, for elderly users with mobility challenges, and for rural community dwellers for whom the absence of nearby facilities constitutes an access barrier of equal severity. Okafor and Omorinkoba (2025) documented, through their empirical study of four academic libraries, that none had a comprehensive accessibility policy and that physical features such as accessible entrances, mobility aids, and adapted furniture were inconsistently available even where assistive technologies had been procured. Agbo, Anozie, and Igwebiuke (2024) confirmed that disabled users in Nigerian universities frequently find it difficult to access library spaces and to operate independently within them. For rural users the infrastructural problem takes the form of near total physical absence, since branch networks are grossly underdeveloped and mobile services that once provided partial coverage were largely abandoned because of poor road conditions, vehicle depreciation, and funding shortfalls. The relative intensity of this and the other barriers across the four user groups is summarised in Figure 4.

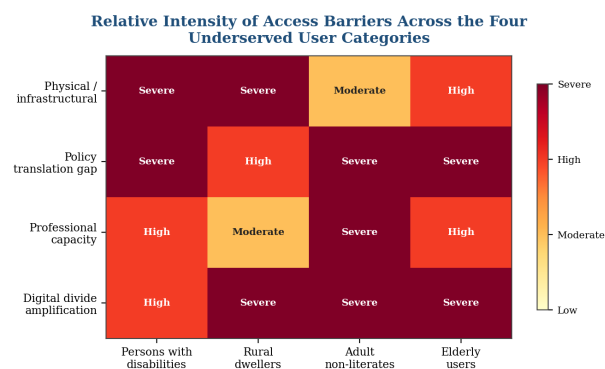


Figure 4: Relative intensity of access barriers across the four underserved user categories, synthesised from the reviewed evidence.

Source: Authors' thematic synthesis.

8.2 Theme Two: The Policy Translation Gap

A second pervasive theme is the absence of enforceable national policy standards mandating inclusive provision across Nigerian library institutions. This is the operational expression of the policy translation gap identified earlier, since professional commitments to inclusion expressed in IFLA frameworks and in conference themes exist without corresponding binding service standards, measurable targets, or accountability mechanisms that would translate them into practice. Ibegbulam (2024) attributed persistent accessibility failures in large part to the fact that libraries continue to depend on traditional models without policy pressure to update them. Oladokun and Yemi Peters (2021) argued that the absence of

robust frameworks leaves libraries institutionally unprepared to deliver inclusive services even where professional awareness and individual motivation exist. For elderly users and adult non literates this policy vacuum means that service design defaults to the interests of the majority literate and mobile population, with no institutional mechanism requiring libraries to account for those who fall outside that profile.

8.3 Theme Three: Professional Capacity and Attitudes

A third theme concerns the professional preparedness of Nigerian library staff to design and deliver services for underserved groups. Williams Ilemobola, Adetayo, Buhari, and Omorinkoba (2022) identified attitudinal barriers among staff as a significant factor deterring persons with disabilities from using library services. Ibegbulam (2024) argued that inadequate librarian knowledge regarding assistive technologies is a critical barrier that must be addressed through targeted training, including training in accessibility tools such as the JAWS and NVDA screen readers, captioning software, and document conversion programmes. Obiagwu and Ozioko (2022) noted that technology adoption has not been accompanied by the user education and digital literacy support needed to extend the benefits of digital resources to a broader range of users. Iwhiwhu and Eyekpimi (2023) highlighted that, although women librarians in South South Nigerian university libraries have shown leadership in inclusive technology adoption, the sector as a whole has not developed systematic continuing professional development structures for inclusive service competencies.

8.4 Theme Four: The Digital Divide as a Structural Amplifier

The fourth cross cutting theme concerns the ways in which digital transformation, in the absence of deliberate inclusive design, has amplified rather than reduced existing exclusions. Idhalama, Oredo, and Makori (2025) found, through an empirical assessment of public university libraries, that although digital resources are increasingly available their accessibility for users with low digital literacy or disabilities remains limited. Adeyemi and Akintayo (2022) found that digital resources in Nigerian university libraries face challenges of inadequate infrastructure and limited accessibility, particularly for users outside major urban centres. The pattern identified across the four categories is consistent. Digital investment is directed towards services for the majority literate and urban user without incorporating the accessibility features, outreach mechanisms, or digital literacy support that would extend its benefits to persons with disabilities, rural residents, adult non literates, or elderly users with limited technology familiarity. In this respect the digitisation of Nigerian library services has replicated in new forms the exclusions that characterised the analogue environment.

9. Discussion

The four themes, considered together, reveal a pattern that is difficult to ignore. While libraries often express a commitment to inclusiveness, this intention rarely translates into practice. The problem is not primarily a lack of professional awareness but the persistence of structural conditions that have not been deliberately addressed, a pattern that the framework of social reproduction explains as the cumulative effect of institutions reproducing the user assumptions of their founding design. Each user group

illustrates this gap in a different way. Persons with disabilities continue to face both physical and attitudinal barriers that restrict meaningful access. Rural communities are underserved because existing structures are either absent or too under resourced to function effectively. Adult non literates encounter services designed almost entirely around print, which in effect excludes them from participation. Elderly users, despite their growing numbers, are seldom considered in service planning and design.

A dimension of the analysis that requires explicit engagement is the intersectionality of exclusion across the four categories. The categorical structure of the thematic review, which examines each group separately, is analytically convenient but does not fully reflect the experiential realities of many Nigerian library users, because the four categories are not mutually exclusive. A person may be elderly, rural, and functionally non literate at the same time, experiencing compounded exclusion more severe than any single category would predict. Consider an elderly woman residing in a rural community in northern Nigeria who has never been enrolled in formal schooling. She faces barriers arising from age related changes in vision and mobility, from the geographic remoteness that places facilities beyond her reach, and from functional non literacy that would prevent her from engaging with print resources even if she could reach them. The compound effect of these intersecting disadvantages is not simply additive but multiplicative, in the sense that each barrier compounds the others and renders access practically impossible under current service frameworks. This relationship is depicted in Figure 5.

Intersectional Compound Exclusion: The Multiplicative Overlap of Disadvantaging Conditions

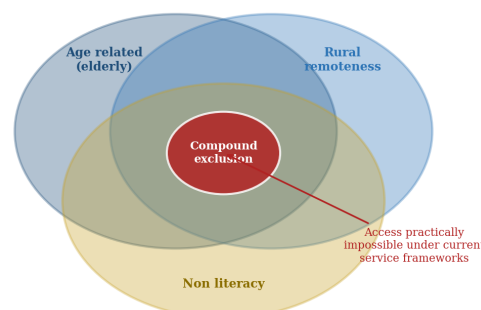


Figure 5: Intersectional compound exclusion arising from the multiplicative overlap of disadvantaging conditions.

Source: Authors' conceptual synthesis.

The intuition that compound disadvantage is multiplicative rather than additive can be expressed heuristically as Equation 2, in which the compound exclusion experienced by a user is modelled as the product, rather than the sum, of the access deficits associated with each disadvantaging condition.

$$CE = 1 - \prod_{i=1}^k (1 - b_i) \quad (2)$$

Here CE denotes the compound exclusion probability, b_i denotes the access deficit associated with the i th disadvantaging condition expressed on a zero to one scale, and k is the number of conditions that a given user simultaneously occupies. The

multiplicative structure captures the central insight of the intersectional reading, namely that a user subject to several moderate barriers may face an effective exclusion approaching certainty, which a single category analysis would systematically underestimate.

The policy translation gap stands out, perhaps more than anything else, as the shared structural condition underlying all four themes. The marginalisation of these groups does not arise from isolated or group specific issues but from the absence of enforceable national standards on inclusion, from persistent underfunding, from gaps in both pre service and continuing professional training, and from the tendency to overlook accessibility in digital service development. In this sense the findings align with Chisenga (2022), who argues that meaningful user centred services in Africa depend on deep institutional reform rather than incremental adjustment. A comparison with the IFLA (2021) framework for inclusive development sharpens the observation further. IFLA presents libraries as key actors in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular the commitment to leave no one behind. Nigerian libraries are well positioned to contribute to this agenda in principle, yet the conditions required to support such a role, including clear policy direction, adequate funding, professional capacity, and mechanisms for accountability, remain underdeveloped. The evidence reviewed in this study consistently highlights this gap, and the call for its urgent attention is at once a professional obligation and a broader national priority.

10. Implications

For library administrators and practitioners the findings suggest that inclusive service delivery cannot be treated as an addition to conventional operations. It needs instead to be embedded within the core functions of the library, including planning, collection development, staffing decisions, physical infrastructure, and digital systems. Even within limited resources libraries can take practical steps, including the conduct of accessibility audits of both physical and digital spaces, the creation of deliberate feedback mechanisms that engage marginalised users, and the adjustment of collection policies to prioritise the consistent provision of alternative format materials.

For training institutions and the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria the implication is structural. Inclusive service design, disability awareness, community engagement approaches, and familiarity with assistive technologies should form an integral part of professional education rather than optional areas of study. The gaps in professional readiness highlighted in the literature point to a training model that has not fully embraced these competencies, and there is a clear need for structured continuing professional development to support practitioners already working in the field. For policymakers and the National Library of Nigeria the issue is fundamental. The lack of enforceable national standards for inclusive services reflects a significant weakness in policy direction, and without clearly defined and binding benchmarks the provision of inclusive services will continue to depend on individual institutional effort rather than on a coordinated national strategy. Developing a comprehensive framework for inclusive library services, with defined targets and mechanisms for accountability, is the most consequential policy

step available at this stage, and such a framework must address intersectional disadvantage by design rather than treating single category provision as sufficient.

11. Conclusion

This study examined the state of inclusiveness in Nigerian library and information services provision through an exploratory qualitative and thematic analysis of the existing literature, focusing on four major underserved categories, namely persons with disabilities, rural community dwellers, adult non literate populations, and elderly users. The analysis demonstrated that each of these groups encounters distinct but structurally related barriers to participation, rooted in the shared conditions of policy incoherence, infrastructural inadequacy, professional unpreparedness, and the exclusionary effects of unreflective digital transformation. These conditions are not recent developments, and their persistence in the face of sustained professional advocacy reflects the social reproduction logic of institutions that were never designed to serve the populations now being asked to include. A further dimension of the analysis, not always surfaced in categorical studies of this kind, is the intersectionality of exclusion, since many users experience compounded disadvantage arising from the simultaneous operation of multiple marginalising factors, and any reform strategy that addresses only one dimension at a time will continue to leave the most severely excluded behind.

What the findings collectively call for is a reconceptualisation of what Nigerian libraries are fundamentally for and to whom they are accountable. A library that cannot be physically accessed by users with disabilities, that has no physical presence in rural communities, that offers only print resources to a population with significant non literate membership, and that designs digital services without regard for the elderly or mobility impaired user has not fulfilled its democratic mandate. Genuine inclusiveness demands that the full diversity of the service community be treated as the design baseline. Realising this standard in Nigerian libraries will require sustained political will, adequate resourcing, professional transformation, and a commitment to accountability towards those who have historically been left out.

12. Recommendations

The following recommendations are differentiated by stakeholder and are stated at a level of operational specificity sufficient to guide implementation.

12.1 National Library of Nigeria and the NLA

These bodies should collaborate to develop and formally adopt a national inclusive library service framework that establishes enforceable minimum accessibility standards for all publicly funded libraries. The framework should specify concrete and measurable requirements. All academic and public libraries should maintain functional screen readers such as JAWS or the open source NVDA, which is free and appropriate for resource constrained settings, together with text to speech converters, at least one fully accessible entrance with ramp access, and accessible signage. Library websites should comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines at level AA, a publicly available international standard. Collections should include a defined minimum proportion of audio visual materials, large print resources, and simplified text materials. The framework should

include an annual institutional reporting requirement and an independent compliance audit every three years, with the findings published openly.

12.2 Federal, State, and Local Government Policymakers

Budget allocations for library services should be revised to include dedicated and ring fenced funding lines for inclusive provision. Government funding should support physical accessibility retrofits including ramps, automatic doors, height adjustable furniture, and Braille and tactile signage, the procurement of contextually appropriate assistive technologies that prioritise open source tools where commercial alternatives are cost prohibitive, the development and acquisition of audio visual collections, community language materials, and simplified text resources for non literate users, and the establishment and operational sustenance of mobile library services reaching the rural communities of each state. Funding for rural outreach should be accompanied by formal road readiness assessments and by partnerships with local government councils to address the transport infrastructure barriers that have historically undermined mobile service sustainability. Budget proposals should include intersectionality assessments that examine whether proposed expenditure will reach users facing compound exclusion.

12.3 Training Institutions and the LRCN

Pre service curricula should be revised to incorporate, as core rather than elective components, the following competency areas. These include universal design principles and their application to service planning, disability awareness and communication strategies for users with physical, sensory, and cognitive impairments, practical training in the operation of assistive technologies available in Nigerian contexts including JAWS, NVDA, open source document conversion tools, and text to speech applications, community outreach methodology for reaching non literate, rural, and elderly populations, and digital accessibility design including the principles of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and accessible document formatting. The Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria should require demonstrated competency in inclusive service design as a condition for the renewal of professional registration, and accredited continuing professional development programmes addressing these competency areas should be developed for practitioners already in service, with the explicit aim of making such programmes accessible and affordable to staff in both urban and rural institutions.

12.4 Individual Library Institutions

Each library should, within an eighteen month timeframe, conduct a systematic accessibility audit of its physical premises and digital services using a standardised instrument. The audit findings should be translated into time bound improvement plans, with progress reviewed annually and reported to the governing authority. Libraries should establish formal consultation mechanisms designed specifically to reach marginalised community members, including persons with disabilities, elderly users, non literate adults, and rural residents where applicable, and such consultation should use accessible formats including oral and community liaison approaches rather than relying solely on written feedback forms that exclude non literate participants. Collection development policies should be formally revised to include annual

procurement targets for audio visual content, large print materials, simplified text resources, and materials in locally spoken indigenous languages. Service planning should include explicit intersectionality checks to identify and address the needs of users who face compounded disadvantage across multiple categories.

13. Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledges several limitations that bear directly on the interpretation of its findings. As a thematic synthesis of published literature rather than a primary empirical investigation, it is bounded by the scope and quality of the available sources. The most significant gap concerns elderly library users in Nigeria, since published empirical studies that directly address the information needs and access experiences of this group within the Nigerian context are sparse, which means that the analysis of elderly users draws more heavily on demographic and social care literature than on library specific empirical evidence. Greater coverage of this group would require dedicated primary research, including participatory studies conducted with elderly community members as co investigators.

The engagement with intersectionality in this paper, while substantive and theoretically grounded, is similarly constrained by the available literature. The studies reviewed address user groups categorically, and none specifically investigates the access experiences of users who simultaneously occupy multiple disadvantaged categories, such as elderly rural non literate women. The intersectional analysis offered here is therefore inferential, constructed by reasoning across single category findings rather than from direct empirical evidence of compound exclusion, and this is a limitation that future participatory research would be well placed to address. The source selection process, although conducted against explicit and documented inclusion and exclusion criteria, involved interpretive judgements about relevance and evidential weight that a different researcher might have applied differently. The focus on the Nigerian context limits the direct transferability of the conclusions to other national settings, though the structural dynamics identified may resonate with library systems in comparable developing country environments. Finally, the rapidly evolving policy environment surrounding disability rights legislation and digital library development in Nigeria means that the specific assessments offered here will require periodic updating as new developments emerge.

Declarations

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