

Digital literacy, information access and lifelong learning for students with visual and hearing impairment in public universities in Kenya

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This study examined the accessibility and availability of digital resources by assessing the digital literacy status and information access infrastructure for students with visual and hearing impairments in public universities in Kenya. The research sought to identify the challenges that are encountered by students with visual and hearing impairments in their pursuit of knowledge and education and ultimately provide valuable insights and recommendations on improving digital literacy, ensuring equal opportunities for access and benefits from online educational materials and resources, thereby promoting inclusivity and enhancing learning experiences of these students. Universal Design for Learning was used as the guiding educational framework because it provides multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all students, including those with disabilities. The study employed a mixed research design to sample, collect and analyse data. The study targeted thirty-five public universities in Kenya, of which five were sampled using convenient sampling. The sample population, which included a total of thirty-two respondents, was selected purposively owing to their few numbers. Out of these, seven chief university librarians and twenty-five digital librarians were selected to provide data on critical digital literacy skills and digital information access procedures of the universities. Data was collected using open and closed-ended questionnaires that were distributed using Google Forms. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the quantitative data resulting from the closed-ended questionnaires. The content analysis employed Microsoft Excel and SPSS data analysis tools to analyse open-ended questionnaires. A statistical tool was also used to analyse and describe data, and it was presented through visualization techniques such as tables, charts, and graphs. The findings established that there are few students with visual and hearing impairments in public universities in Kenya. Moreover, the findings indicated that even though university librarians are aware and are fully participating in disability main streaming, there is a need to review the current policies to optimize the use of ICT, assistive technologies, digital literacy and specific training of staff to enable seamless information access for students with visual and hearing impairments.

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