



A Study of Library Usage and Satisfaction by Visually Impaired Students: Special Reference to the Audio Book Project

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Abstract

Acquiring knowledge can be identified as one of the basic needs of individuals. Visually impaired individuals encounter significant obstacles in both academic and daily life contexts. These challenges include difficulties in accessing print materials and navigating physical spaces. While there are many ways for normal people to explore knowledge, the opportunities available to visually impaired people are limited. Accordingly, the main objective of this was to study the library use and reading satisfaction of visually impaired students, especially the students' satisfaction with audio books and their successes and challenges. Purposive sampling method was used to select 15 visually impaired students for the research. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. Results revealed that the students are highly satisfied (100%) with the audio book project. However, there are some issues such as insufficient availability of existing audio books in English and Tamil medium and insufficient technical equipment for them to access the books easily were highlighted. More book readers need to be trained to produce required number of audio books in Sinhala, English and Tamil mediums.

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Introduction

Knowledge is updated very rapidly in the world which is growing and changing very fast day by day. People use different methods to explore knowledge. According to Kemp (1976) ^[7] individuals have only a few limited needs. After food, water and shelter, knowledge is the most basic need of people. From the past to the present, people have used various methods to seek knowledge. Among them, the library had a special place. According to Bhatti (2013) ^[2], a library is an institution that helps in promoting education and research by providing updated information and knowledge.

Considering university students, they are largely knowledge seekers. Libraries owned by universities contribute to the development of students' knowledge as well as improve the quality of the university (Okpa *et al.*, 2022; Jayasinghe *et al.*, 2023) ^[9, 6]. Accordingly, a university cannot ensure the smooth operation of education without a properly functioning library.

Especially students with average functioning can use the library without any problems to explore the knowledge they need. But visually impaired students who belong to the special needs category have to face many problems in using the library (Jayasinghe *et al.*, 2024) ^[5]. According to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2005) ^[4], libraries should be designed so that people with physical or mental disabilities can easily access and use the library. Accordingly, this research has been conducted to examine the satisfaction of using library facilities by the visually impaired students in the universities.

With the advancement of technology along with globalization, everything in the world started digitization. Accordingly, library services were developed through the use of technology beyond the traditional library process in the universities. Accordingly, e-library systems have been developing.

Although the libraries are digitized, visually impaired students cannot get the benefit from the existing system. These students find it difficult to read normal books due to their visual impairment. As a solution to that, the development of audio book projects was done using new techniques. Accordingly, the primary objective of this research was to study the satisfaction of visually impaired students' audio book facilities available in their university libraries. There has been researches on various aspects of library use such as the use of libraries in universities and the use of libraries by students with special needs. However, there have been no studies of student satisfaction with audiobooks offered through libraries specifically aimed at visually impaired students. Therefore, this research was conducted to fill that research gap.

Methodology

This research was aimed to study the library usage and satisfaction of visually impaired undergraduate students. Samples consisted of 15 visually impaired students in the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Students were selected using convenience sampling method. A structured interview method was used for data collection. Also, data was collected by conducting in-depth interviews with 5 students as case studies. Microsoft Excel software was used to statically present the data.

Results and Discussion

The results obtained through the interviews were categorized into several factors. Students were fully satisfied about the audio book project (Table 01).

Table 1: Students' Opinions about the satisfaction of the audio book service

Opinions	Frequency	Percent
Yes	15	100%
No	0	0%
To some extent	0	0%
Total	15	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

This research examined student satisfaction with audiobooks provided to visually impaired students through the online library system. It could be seen that all the students were satisfied with the service. The audio book project was initiated in 2016 by the Faculty of Arts, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. About 630 audio books were prepared since then (up to May 2023) and about 1500 audio books were donated by the Daisy Lanka Foundation. According to visually impaired students, these audio books have enabled them to explore knowledge easily not only academic books but also novels and other books.

According to one student, "During my school days, I

faced a lot of problems in doing my studies. There were only a few of the books we needed in the braille media. We didn't have audio books. Also, there were only a limited number of books in braille media. But when I joined the university, I got the opportunity to use audio books. Through that, I got the opportunity to explore the knowledge that is needed for educational activities very easily. I am very satisfied with this audio book project".

Student A –

There are no facilities to prepare all categories of books into an audio format. Study reveals the necessity of different categories of book for them to use (Table 02).

Table 2: Students' Opinions about the satisfaction of Audio book Collection

Library collection	Fully Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Strongly Satisfied	
Sinhala Books	Educational Book	-	-	20%	80%	-
	Novels	-	-	-	66.67%	33.33%
	Research Papers	26.67%	73.33%	-	-	-
Tamil Books	Educational Book	100%	-	-	-	-
	Novels	100%	-	-	-	-
	Research Papers	100%	-	-	-	-
English Books	Educational Book	13.33%	60%	-	26.67%	-
	Novels	46.67%	40%	-	13.33%	-
	Research Papers	100%	-	-	-	-

Source: Field Survey, 2023

It could be recognized that the students are satisfied with the books available in Sinhala language. However, dissatisfaction was noted for the books available in English and Tamil languages. This is because currently only 5 books are available in English although they have to learn compulsory English course units in the university. Only 02 books available in Tamil and it is not affected much because they are following the degree programs in Sinhala medium. But the Tamil students would like to read books in Tamil language. Further, it could be identified that especially the English books are not available to suit the needs of the students although they have to follow the compulsory English

course units at the university.

A Tamil student stated that; "I am a Tamil student. I am doing education in Sinhala language. But I like to read books, articles and magazines written in Tamil in my leisure time. But with the visual condition I can't do that. At present there are limited number of Tamil books as audio books. So, it would be worthwhile if these audio books can be created in Tamil language as well".

Student B –

Also, it could be recognized that the students are not satisfied

with the audio book project due to the fact that there are no research publications for them to refer. This is mainly affect to the honors degree students because they need to do independent research for the degree. However, students showed high satisfaction to the books that are related to the main subject units they are leaning. Also, students are highly satisfied with the available facility to provide access to the visually impaired community outside the university.

One student said, *“We are very happy that not only our university students, but also other university students as well as school children can use these audio books in free of charge. Really thank you for all who are engaging this audio book project”*

Student C -

In this way, the students expressed overall satisfaction with the audio books provided to visually impaired students by the university. However, there is an issue with the limited number of available books as well as a shortage of books in English and Tamil languages. The lack of audiobooks in English medium and books relate to the IT, create significant challenges for visually impaired students in studying compulsory course units in the faculty.

Another student said, *“We should study English as a compulsory subject in the first three years of our curriculum. But the audio books available in English medium are very limited. We have only a limited number of books even in Braille medium. Further, we don't have reading materials for the compulsory IT course units too. It is also a big challenge for us. So, it is highly grateful if the university concern about those challenges we are facing to fulfil the degree program.”*

Student D –

Several limitations can be identified in the process of creating these audiobooks. Specifically, they are prepared using DAISY technology, but there is a significant issue with inadequate human resources for production. Additionally, a shortage of necessary technical equipment poses another major challenge.

Conclusion

This research study highlights the audio books that play an essential role in supporting the visually impaired students' academic experience. While the audiobook project has positively impacted students' satisfaction with library services, there are notable areas for improvement. The limited availability of audiobooks, particularly in English and Tamil languages restricts access to essential course materials and affects students' ability to fully engage with their studies. Enhancing the library's resources to include a broader range of audiobooks in diverse disciplines would significantly improve educational equity for visually impaired students. Continued efforts to expand these services are crucial to fostering an inclusive academic environment where all students can thrive. It is important that the creation of these audiobooks, combined with advanced technology, opens a new and efficient avenue for knowledge sharing for visually impaired students, reducing their reliance on manual book reading. Research indicates a generally high level of satisfaction among visually impaired students regarding the available library resources. Findings highlight the necessity

for libraries to prioritize inclusivity and address the specific needs of visually impaired users to improve overall satisfaction.

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