

ASSESSMENT OF SUPPORT NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT IN UNIVERSITIES IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study assessed the support needs of students with hearing impairment in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The study used a survey research design. The target population comprised of 58 students with hearing impairment in both Federal University Lafia and Nasarawa University Keffi, Nasarawa State. The researchers used a purposive sampling technique to sample the respondents. The researchers used a structured questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. The instrument was validated by experts from Special Needs Education and Measurement and Evaluation, Federal University of Lafia to ensure its validity. Reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha. The reliability value ranged from 0.79 to 0.84. The data collected were analyzed using frequency count, percentages and mean score. The findings revealed that support needs such as sign language interpreters, note-taking services, assistive technology, counselling services and captioning services were not available in universities in Nasarawa State. However, those that were available were not enough to meet the needs of students with hearing impairment. The findings revealed the challenges experienced by students with hearing impairment such as non-availability of interpreters, difficulty in accessing note-takers, communication challenges, poor maintenance of assistive technologies and non-availability of timely captioned materials. The study concluded that the current status of services is significantly below the stipulations of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018. Recommendations were made to enforce the act, develop minimum service standards and create a quality assurance framework by stakeholders.

Keywords: Assessment, Hearing impairment, Support Needs and Students

Background to the Study

Education, as a fundamental human right, must be accessible to all learners including those with hearing impairment. Within global inclusive education frameworks, the provision of appropriate support services is established as a critical variable for academic success, directly influencing comprehension, participation and achievement (Marschark et al., 2016). In Nigeria, the integration of students with hearing impairment into mainstream universities necessitates comprehensive support systems encompassing academic, social, psychological and communication assistance (Adeoye, 2021). However, significant challenges persist, as students with hearing impairment often face multiple barriers when support services are inadequate, leading to unclear communication, limited access to information, social isolation and hindered academic progress (Bature, 2022). Without qualified sign language interpreters, note-takers, counselling services and assistive technologies, these students experience profound exclusion from lectures, discussions and the social fabric of university life.

At the institutional level, universities in Nasarawa State admit students with hearing impairment into various academic programmes but the availability, adequacy and quality of support services remain variable and often unstandardized (Dauda, 2022). The Federal University of Lafia has demonstrated commitment to inclusive education through its Centre for Disability Studies and Department of Special Needs and Rehabilitation Education. However, Ozegya (2024) lamented that inclusive education implementation in Nigeria is hampered by ill-equipped schools, inadequate specialist teachers and lack of political will. Ozegya further noted that children with special needs in inclusive schools still pay fees at all levels, highlighting persistent financial barriers. The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and Federal University of Lafia have strengthened their partnership to promote inclusive education with proposals including a National Access to Work Scheme and compulsory sign language as a General Studies course across universities, yet the specific support needs of students with hearing impairment in Nasarawa State universities remain unassessed.

The psychological dimensions of supporting students with hearing impairment are equally critical. Isaiah and Amaize (2023) found that social support and counselling were positively correlated with quality of life among adolescents with hearing impairment, accounting for approximately 89% of the total variance. Olufemi-Adeniyi (2021) demonstrated that cognitive behavioural therapy significantly reduced psychological distress among in-school adolescents with hearing impairment, underscoring counselling as a critical support service. Support needs are multidimensional, encompassing academic support (interpreters, note-takers, assistive technologies), communication support (visual alert systems, induction loops), social support (peer mentoring, inclusive activities), psychological support (counselling, emotional support groups) and institutional support (disability-friendly policies, trained personnel). Oyawole (2021) found that some instructional supports are available, others including lip-readers, communication support workers and radio microphone systems are not utilized with self-efficacy, learning style and ICT use significantly related to performance.

Despite national policies such as the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018 mandating equal access, implementation remains inconsistent. The National Association of Nigerian Deaf Students reports that most universities admit deaf students without adequate support, citing examples of Bayero University Kano with one interpreter for 30 deaf students, University of Jos with one interpreter and Federal University Lokoja with no support services. These nationwide challenges necessitate this study to investigate the support needs of students with hearing impairment in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the enrolment of students with hearing impairment in universities across Nasarawa State and the existence of national policies promoting inclusive education, there is a critical lack of empirical evidence assessing their specific support needs and whether current provisions adequately meet those needs. The Federal University of Lafia has established a Centre for Disability Studies and partnered with the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, the actual experiences of these students regarding access to interpreters, note-takers, counselling services and assistive technologies remain undocumented. Reports indicate that students with hearing impairment across Nigerian universities face exclusion, lack of information access and insufficient support services. The psychological consequences include poor quality of life, withdrawal and anxiety. Without systematic assessment of support needs in Nasarawa State universities, evidence-based policies and resource allocation cannot be developed. Therefore, this study investigates the support needs of students with hearing impairment in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to assess the support needs of students with hearing impairment in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. identify the types of support services available for students with hearing impairment in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.
2. assess the adequacy of existing support services in meeting the needs of students with hearing impairment.
3. examine the challenges faced by students with hearing impairment in accessing support services in universities in Nasarawa State.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of support services are available for students with hearing impairment in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria?

2. How adequate are the existing support services in meeting the needs of students with hearing impairment?
3. What challenges do students with hearing impairment face in accessing support services in universities in Nasarawa State?

Methodology

Design of the Study: This study adopted a survey research design to investigate the support needs of students with hearing impairment in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, and examine the implications for counselling. The design was appropriate because it allowed for the collection of information from respondents regarding the availability, adequacy and accessibility of support services in the university environment.

Population of the Study: The population of this study comprised of 58 students with hearing impairment enrolled in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. According to records obtained from the Center for Disability Studies, Federal University of Lafia, there are 45 students with hearing impairment in the university and Nasarawa State University Keffi has 13 students with hearing impairment. These students were considered appropriate for the study because they were direct beneficiaries of institutional support services and could provide reliable information on their experiences and needs.

Sample and Sampling Technique: The sample size for this study was the 58 students with hearing impairment. A purposive sampling technique was used for this study. The study required participants who had direct, first-hand experience with the support services provided by their universities to students with hearing impairment. Purposive sampling ensured that only those with the same characteristics were included in the study.

Instrumentation: Data were collected using close-ended questionnaire titled "Support Needs and Counselling Implications Questionnaire for Students with Hearing Impairment" (SNCIQSHI). The questionnaire was divided into five sections. The first section identified the types of support services available for students with hearing impairment. Respondents were required to indicate Yes or No for each item. In the second section, respondents were required to respond on a 4-point scale: Highly Adequate (4), Adequate (3), Inadequate (2) and Not Available (1). Section three, the respondents were required to respond on a 4-point scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1).

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument: The instrument was validated by two experts in Special Needs Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation from Federal University Lafia. The recommendations by the experts were implemented in the final version of the instrument. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted with 15 students with hearing impairment from a university outside Nasarawa State. The reliability coefficients obtained with the use of Cronbach Alpha were: Section A (Availability) $\alpha = 0.82$,

Section B (Adequacy) $\alpha = 0.79$, Section C (Challenges) $\alpha = 0.84$. The values were above the minimum threshold value of 0.70, thus the instrument was reliable for the study.

Method of Data Collection: The data collection process took a period of four weeks. Before proceeding with the administration of the questionnaire, the researchers took an opportunity to inform the participants about the objectives of the study in their most preferred form of communication. Informed consent was sought from all participants with the assurance that confidentiality, anonymity and the freedom to pull out at any stage were guaranteed. Participants were given enough time to fill in the questionnaires and the researchers were available to assist in case of any difficulties.

Method of Data Analysis: Closed-ended items were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Sections A (availability) and C (challenges) were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages with a 50% criterion for significance. Sections B (adequacy) was analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations with a criterion mean of 2.50 for decision-making.

Results

Research Question 1: What types of support services are available for students with hearing impairment in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Availability of Support Services for Students with Hearing Impairment

S/N	Item Statement	Yes	No
1	My university provides sign language interpreters during lectures.	12(20.7)	46(79.3)
2	Note-taking services are available for students with hearing impairment.	8(13.8)	50(86.2)
3	Assistive technologies such as hearing aids or FM systems are provided by my university.	5(8.6)	53(91.4)
4	Counselling services specifically designed for students with hearing impairment are available.	10(17.2)	48(82.8)
5	My university provides captioning or transcription services for recorded lectures.	3(5.2)	55(94.8)

Table 1 showed the result of support service availability for students with hearing impairment in the universities in Nasarawa State. The result showed that 79.3% of the respondents said that there were no sign language interpreters provided. The percentages of respondents who said there were no support services provided in items 2, 3, 4 and 5 were 86.2%, 91.4%, 82.8% and 94.8%,

respectively. This showed that there were no support service facilities provided for students with hearing impairment in the universities in Nasarawa State.

Research Question 2: How adequate are the existing support services in meeting the needs of students with hearing impairment?

Table 2: Adequacy of Existing Support Services

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
6	The sign language interpretation services in my university are sufficient for my academic needs.	1.28	0.52	Inadequate
7	The note-taking support provided meets my requirements for understanding lectures.	1.21	0.44	Inadequate
8	Assistive technologies available are adequate to facilitate my learning.	1.16	0.41	Inadequate
9	Counselling services adequately address the emotional and psychological needs of students with hearing impairment	1.24	0.48	Inadequate
10	The captioning and transcription services provided are sufficient for accessing lecture content.	1.09	0.32	Inadequate

Table 2 showed the result of the adequacy of existing support services for students with hearing impairment in the universities in Nasarawa State. The result showed that the sign language interpretation service has a mean value of 1.28 (SD = 0.52). The mean value of the rest of the items, which ranged from 7 to 10, were 1.21, 1.16, 1.24 and 1.09, respectively, with their corresponding standard deviation being (0.44, 0.41, 0.48 and 0.32). The result showed that it is less than 2.50 which means there is a lack of adequacy. This means that the existing support service has been seen as inadequate in meeting the needs of the students in the universities in Nasarawa State.

Research Question 3: What challenges do students with hearing impairment face in accessing support services in universities in Nasarawa State?

Table 3: Challenges Faced by Students in Accessing Support Services

S/N	Items descriptive	SA	A	D	SD	%	Decision
11	Sign language interpreters are often unavailable when I need them for lectures or discussions.	32 (55.2)	18 (31.0)	5 (8.6)	3 (5.2)	86.2	Significant
12	I face difficulties accessing note-takers due to insufficient numbers provided by the university.	30 (51.7)	20 (34.5)	5 (8.6)	3 (5.2)	86.2	Significant
13	Assistive technologies are often broken or not properly maintained	28 (48.3)	19 (32.8)	7 (12.1)	4 (6.9)	81.1	Significant
14	Counselling services are not easily accessible because of communication barriers with counsellors.	35 (60.3)	15 (25.9)	5 (8.6)	3 (5.2)	86.2	Significant
15	Captioned materials for lectures are rarely provided in advance or on time.	33 (56.9)	17 (29.3)	5 (8.6)	3 (5.2)	86.2	Significant

Table 3 indicated the results of challenges faced by students with hearing impairment in accessing support services in universities in Nasarawa State. Items 11 to 15 with percentages of respondents who agreed were 86.2%, 86.2%, 81.1%, 86.2%, and 86.2%. From this study, using 50% as a criteria for significance, all the five items agreed that unavailability of sign language interpreters, difficulties in accessing note takers, poor maintenance of assistive technologies, communication barriers with counselors and lack of timely captioned materials are challenges that students with hearing impairment face in accessing support services in universities in Nasarawa State.

Discussion

One of the objectives of this study was to identify the types of support services available for students with hearing impairment in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that support services were largely unavailable. The majority of respondents reported that sign language interpreters, note-taking services, assistive technologies, counselling services specifically designed for students with hearing impairment and captioning or transcription services were not available in their universities. The result agreed with Bature (2022) who assessed sign language interpretation services in Nigerian tertiary institutions and found that interpreter-to-student ratios were grossly inadequate with some institutions having one interpreter serving over 30 deaf students. Bature further noted that in many institutions, sign language interpreters were either completely absent or available only on an irregular basis, making

consistent access to lecture content impossible for students with hearing impairment. The present study corroborates these findings by demonstrating that the absence of interpreters is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a systemic issue affecting the majority of students in Nasarawa State universities. In the same vein, Oyawole (2021) stated that some instructional supports existed in theory in institutions across Oyo State, many supports such as lip-readers, communication support workers and radio microphone systems were not utilized in practice. The present study extends these findings by providing empirical evidence from Nasarawa State specifically, confirming that the national pattern of inadequate support service provision is replicated in this context. The absence of captioning services is consistent with Oyawole's observation that digital accessibility tools are often the most neglected category of support services. The absence of counselling services specifically designed for students with hearing impairment is particularly concerning given the psychological vulnerabilities of this population.

The second objective of this study was to assess the adequacy of existing support services in meeting the needs of students with hearing impairment. The findings revealed that even where support services existed, they were perceived as inadequate for meeting students' academic and psychological needs. All adequacy items had mean scores substantially below the criterion mean, with captioning services recording the lowest mean adequacy score and sign language interpretation services recording the highest, though both remained well below the adequacy threshold. These findings are consistent with the work of Dauda (2022), who assessed support services in Kaduna Polytechnic and found that available services were insufficient in both quality and quantity to meet students' needs. Dauda reported that students rated interpretation services as inadequate because interpreters lacked subject-specific vocabulary and could not effectively convey complex academic concepts. The present study similarly found that even where interpreters were present, students did not consider them sufficient for their academic needs. The lack of note-taking support aligns with findings from Marschark, et al. (2016) who stressed that postsecondary success for deaf students depends critically on access to complete and accurate lecture content. Note-taking services must be provided by individuals trained in the specific needs of deaf learners, as generic notes often fail to capture the nuances of lecture content that students with hearing impairment would otherwise miss. The present study observed that note-taking services do not exist in universities in Nasarawa State.

The study also examine the challenges faced by students with hearing impairment in accessing support services in the universities situated in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that all five identified challenges were reported by the majority of respondents, indicating pervasive barriers across all service domains. Communication barriers with counsellors, unavailability of interpreters, difficulties accessing note-takers, and lack of timely captioned materials were reported by a large majority of respondents, while assistive technology maintenance issues were also reported by a substantial proportion. These findings resonate strongly with the work of Adeoye (2021), who identified communication barriers as the primary obstacle to inclusive education in Nigerian universities. Adeoye argued that without effective communication support, students with hearing impairment are effectively excluded from lectures, discussions, and the

social fabric of university life. The present study extends this by identifying the manifestation of these barriers across multiple service domains including counselling services which have received less attention in previous research. The finding that the majority of respondents reported that sign language interpreters are often unavailable when needed aligns with Bature's (2022) assessment, which found that interpreter shortages mean that many students with hearing impairment attend lectures without any interpretation support. Bature documented instances where students relied on peer interpreters who lacked formal training, resulting in inaccurate or incomplete information transmission. The present study confirms that this challenge persists in Nasarawa State universities with students reporting that interpreter unavailability is a routine rather than exceptional occurrence.

Conclusion

This study investigated the support needs of students with hearing impairment in universities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The findings conclusively demonstrate that support services across academic, communication, technological and psychological domains are largely unavailable and inadequate where they exist. Students face significant challenges in accessing these limited services. The study concludes that the current state of support services in universities in Nasarawa State falls substantially short of the provisions mandated by the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018 and fails to meet the needs of students with hearing impairment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities should enforce compliance with the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018 by conducting annual audits of support service availability in universities and publishing the results to ensure accountability.
2. Universities should establish minimum service standards that define adequacy, including a ratio of one sign language interpreter to every ten students with hearing impairment, availability of captioning for all recorded lecture materials, and mandatory annual training for interpreters in subject-specific vocabulary.
3. The Centre for Disability Studies at Federal University of Lafia should develop a quality assurance framework that includes regular feedback from students with hearing impairment on the adequacy of support services, with findings used to continuously improve service delivery.

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