BARRIER ON ACCESS TO ARCHIVES BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT: *Access to archives by members of the public is essential in promoting democracy, accountability, good governance and civic engagement. It is normally provided for by archival legislation. It is also vital in fostering an informed society. The International Council on Archives' (ICA) Principles on Access to Archives further also nurtures access to archives by all, regardless of their physical health, race and religious affiliation, just to cite a few. However, literature has shown that people with disabilities (PWDs) are denied access to archives due to existing barriers. These include unfriendly building infrastructure and challenges related to physical disabilities, visual impairment, and hearing impairment or other physical coordination. This study is based on a review of literature, and it seeks to identify barriers on access to archives by PWDs and inclusive solutions geared towards facilitating access to archives. Qualitative in terms of the research approach, the study uses the ICA Principles on Access to Archives as a theoretical lens to identify barriers on access to archives by People with Disabilities (PWDs) and to determine the inclusive solutions required to promote access to archives by PWDs.*

KEYWORDS: *access, archives, persons with disabilities, inclusivity.*

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

According to Nyangwesa (2018), more than a billion of the world population is made up by people with disabilities (PWDs). Even though more PWDs are believed to be residing in developing countries, the study indicated that 40% live in Africa. In Africa, specifically, there are many beliefs that are attached to disabilities, which have contributed to the immense discrimination against PWDs. Supporting this sentiment is Rohwerder (2018, 1), who explains that "misconceptions about the nature and abilities of people with disabilities includes that they are unable to contribute financially; that they are not able to have a normal relationship; that their disability is contagious or brings bad luck; their bodies have magical powers; or they are witches; they also contribute to the stigma, discrimination and abuses they experience." In the view of the above, people with disabilities face many barriers in society, and access to information is one of such challenges. Discrimination prevents people who are discriminated against from exercising their rights to access information resources in libraries and information centers Chaputula and Mapulanga (2016).

The Society for American Archivists (2018), explains that disability is part of the human condition and almost everyone will be temporarily or permanently impaired at some point in life. According to the World Health Organization (2011), disability refers to the negative aspects of the interaction between individuals with a health condition (such as cerebral palsy, down syndrome, depression) and personal and environmental factors (such as negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social supports). Archivists are therefore, urged to recognize that they interact daily with people living with both visible and hidden disabilities Society for American Archivists (2018).

Additionally, the Society for American Archivists (2018) expounds that the term accessibility within the archival profession is often used relating to the discoverability and ease of use of archival collections. In the context of archival facilities and services, accessibility is about minimizing barriers that enable equivalent access for people with disabilities. In addition, the International Council on Archives (2012) explains that an access service links archives to the public as it provides information for users about the institution and the holdings, and influences whether the public will trust the custodians of archives and the service they provide. For people with disabilities, the term 'accessibility' means that all things available to all people should be made available to those with disabilities Kepley (1983).

Toritsyn and Monjurul (2013, 39) emphasise that access is about creating an environment in which systemic barriers to the full participation of PWDs are reduced or eliminated, so that these people can have equal access. Ngulube, Sibanda and Makoni (2013, 123) note that facilitating access and use is fundamental to all core functions of the archives, namely, acquisition, accession, appraisal, arrangement, description and preservation. Through these functions, the archives collection can be easily accessed and used by the society as it is the mandate of their existence.

However, these institutions are not always inclusive in their delivery of service. It has been emphasised that it is only when records get utilised that the archives can justify their utility society Ngulube, Sibanda, and Makoni (2013, 124). This is so, because, people with disabilities in most cases are neglected and their needs are not considered for inclusion when physical infrastructures and other essential services are being designed. According to Society of American Archivists (2018), "Universal Design" is an approach to designing facilities and services that can be accessed, understood, and used by anyone regardless of their ability. Hence, the present study explored the barriers experienced by people with disabilities when accessing archive services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many barriers that are experienced by PWDs when accessing archive services, and some of them include inaccessible buildings, the availability of the collection in print format only and many others. In the sustainable development goals (SDGs), the United Nations (UN) singled out the following as some of the barriers faced by people with disabilities in society, namely, discrimination and stigma on the ground of disability, lack of accessibility to physical and virtual environments, lack of access to assertive technology, essential services, rehabilitation and support for independent living that are critical for the full and equal participation of person with disabilities as the agents of change and beneficiaries of development United Nations (2018).

Winn (2015) in a study entitled "Ethics of access in displaced archives" identified the following as some of the barriers to accessing information, language, distance and lack of description. Lack of access to information for vulnerable groups and people with disabilities have been identified in a number of literatures Ngula (2018); Mnubi-Mchombu and Ocholla (2011); Nakuta and Mnubi-Mchombu (2013). Meanwhile, Ngulube, Sibanda and Makoni (2013) identified office hours, providing services to physically disabled, location of the archive and technology as some of the barriers that hinder access and use of archives. In their study, these scholars also found out that the Bulawayo Archives was not equipped to respond to disability needs because there was no reading room that is equipped to serve that purpose, materials were inaccessible to those with visual impairments (VI) and wheelchair access to the building was also limited Ngulube, Sibanda, and Makoni (2013).

In view of the above, some studies conducted to date have acknowledged that compared to other information sectors, archives are understood to be lagging behind in terms of service provision to people with disabilities Kepley (1983); Jeremy (2017). Kepley (1983, 42) emphasises the importance of adhering to the principle of accessibility; at the time also acknowledging that archives are very slow in recognizing the special needs of disabled people. It is for this reason that Serene (n.d.) indicated that an archive should be prepared to meet and deal with a variety of disabilities that may involve restricted walking, seeing, hearing, and perceiving, understanding or physical coordination.

However, access does not mean the ability to access the physical building, but, it includes the ability to use the collection kept within the archive buildings. Win (2015), posits that access is a product of both physical and intellectual availability, reflecting the ability of researchers to find and explore records both in person and online. Similarly, Chaputula and Mapulanga (2016) who focused on the service provision of PWDs in libraries in Malawi, alluded that apart from its services, the quality of a library is measured by its collection and the equipment that allows patrons access to the collection. Archivists must be content with all these groups if they are to provide equitable access to their collections Ngulube, Sibanda and Makoni (2013).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

Regoniel (2015) opines that a conceptual framework depicts the researcher's understanding of how the particular variables in the study are connected with each other. Thus, it identifies the variables required in the research investigation. It is the researcher's "map" in pursuing the investigation. According to Ngulube (2018), the conceptual framework glues and binds social research together such that without it, the whole research design crumbles. The conceptual framework guiding this study is the International Council on Archives' Principles on Access to Archives (ICA 2012). There are ten principles and they are as follows:

1. The public has the right of access to archives of public bodies. Both public and private entities should open their archives to the greatest extent possible.
2. Institutions holding archives make known the existence of the archives, including the existence of closed materials, and disclose the existence of restrictions that affect access to the archives.
3. Institutions holding archives adopt a pro-active approach to access.
4. Institutions holding archives ensure that restrictions on access are clear and of stated duration, are based on pertinent legislation, acknowledge the right of privacy and respect the rights of owners of private materials.
5. Archives are made available on equal and fair terms.
6. Institutions holding archives ensure that victims of serious crimes under international law have access to archives that provide the evidence needed to assert their human rights and to document violations of them, even if those archives are closed to the general public.
7. Users have the right to appeal a denial of access.
8. Institutions holding archives ensure that operational constraints do not prevent access to archives.
9. Archivists have access to all closed archives and perform necessary archival work on them.
10. Archivists participate in the decision-making process on access ICA (2012, 8-11).

However, this study uses only four (4) principles as the conceptual framework guiding the study and these are Principle 1, 3, 5 and 8. The next section presents the research objectives which have been developed using the three aforementioned principles which serve as the constructs in the conceptual framework. Archival agencies take deliberate steps to promote access to archival material in their holdings. Archival public programming activities are undertaken for that purpose. For example, the national archives in Botswana, South Africa and Tanzania have archival public programmes to promote the usage of archives Kamatula, Mnkeni-Saurombe and Mosweu(2013). Furthermore, the National Archives of Zimbabwe also has a dedicated archival public programme through which members of the public are afforded an opportunity to have access to and use archives Chaterera and Rodrigues (2019). Access to archives is a human right hence archival agencies have to satisfy this right Onyancha and Ngoepe (2011). It is also a public right which should not be limited by bureaucracy Smart (2011).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

ICA principles on access to archives, among others indicate that the public has the right of access to archives of public and private bodies, and such access should be on equal and fair terms. In addition, the principles say that institutions holding archives should adopt a pro-active approach to promote access to archives. Any operational constraints that prevent access to archives should also be removed ICA (2012). Following on this, it suffices that collections in memory institutions such as archival agencies need to be used by the public to justify their existence Chaterera and Ngulube (2019); Mosweu (2019). Usage of archives becomes even more a necessity as literature indicates that archives are underutilised in Africa, such that there is a need to lure users to the archives and even make them more visible and thus accessible Mnjama (2008); Ngoepe and Ngulube (2011); Murambiwa and Ngulube (2011); Mosweu (2019). These users of archives include PWDs who like every member of society are entitled to have unhindered access to archives Onyancha and Ngoepe (2011); ICA (2012). The main purpose of this study was to identify barriers to access to and use of archives by PWDs and suggest inclusive solutions geared towards usage.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The first steps of any study are developing the research questions, aims and objectives. The researchers' choice of population, setting, data to be collected and time allocated for the study have their entire cue from the research questions, aims and objectives Doody and Bailey (2016). It is thus important to define the research question the prior to the commencement of the study. Scholars such as Creswell (2014), and Johnson and Christensen (2014) aver that defining a research question narrows the aim and objective down to specific areas that the study intend to address. According to Lipowski (2008), research questions determine the methodology, methods, sample, sample size, data collection instrument and data analysis techniques to be adopted for a study. This study asked the following questions to find out and identify barriers on access to archives by PWDs and to suggest inclusive solutions geared towards facilitating archives to archives by them.

- What are the barriers to access to archives by people with disabilities?
- What inclusive solutions can be suggested to enhance to archives by people with disabilities?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research approach Creswell (2014) and collected data from available literature on access to archives by people with disabilities. Content analysis was conducted on the identified literature and the analysis was guided by the research objectives which turned into themes for a focused analysis. The use of secondary data in research is an acceptable methodology and this has been used in studies in Library and Information Science research. For example, studies by Khayundi (2011), Ngoepe and Saurombe (2016), Khumalo, Bhebhe and Mosweu (2017), Mosweu (2019), and Chaterera and Ngulube (2019), respectively investigated existing records and archival programmes to the job market in South Africa, the

provisions for managing and preserving records created in networked environments in the archival legislative frameworks of selected member states of the Southern African Development Community, compared the freedom of information legislation in Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe, assessed factors to be considered for collaboration on public programming by memory institutions in Botswana, and determined global perspectives on the challenges and prospects of accessing and using documentary heritage all used secondary sources in their investigation.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This section presents the findings of the study in accordance with research questions. First to be presented are the barriers to access to archives by people with disabilities.

Barriers to access to archives by people with disabilities

Although archives and the use of archives is a human right and honourable undertaking in the archives' community, it faces several challenges and for the purpose of this study, these have been termed barriers to access to archives. These barriers are briefly presented in the next sub-sections.

Physical condition of archival holdings

The state of archival holdings can become a barrier in accessing the archives. Ngulube (2003, 11) avers that "preservation activities facilitate continued availability and access to public records and archives." According to Gordon (1992), a survey in the 1990s revealed that up to 20% of researchers who took part in a study voiced a concern that they were prevented from accessing material because of its poor physical condition. Greene (2008) notes that it is likely that even over the passage of time, the figure cited was likely not to have changed significantly because of a relative dearth of funds for conservation compared to the size of the conservation problem. Ngulube (2003) states that making archives accessible and knowable across space and time is a good enough reason to avail resources for undertaking research into their protection. This view is shared by Graf (2000) who indicates that access to archives and records is not possible without preservation in as much as preservation should be focused on providing access.

Unprocessed archives

For archival records to be processed, described and made available to users with the assistance of finding aids, they are first appraised to select the archive from the mass of records, normally 20 years and older, in the context of Botswana. Ramokate, and Moatlhodi (2010) lament that due to unappraised backlog of records, users have been denied the right to consult the archives, contrary to the provisions of the National Archives and Records Services Act, Section 12(1), which guarantees that access once archival records reach 20 years Government of Botswana (1978). The denial of the right to information occasioned by unappraised backlog of records is thus a barrier to access to archives. It is not peculiar to Botswana only. The Society of American Archivists (2019) argues that some collections need to be examined, identified, and organised for researchers to use and the collection is yet to be processed, then access is impossible. Mnjama (2006) revealed that archival institutions in eastern and southern Africa were faced with the problem of a backlog of unprocessed archival material which had accumulated for periods of up to a hundred years. Similarly, Ngulube, Makoni and Sibanda (2013) also found that users complained about the difficulties they endure in accessing archival materials because of the backlog of unprocessed materials.

Unfriendly infrastructure for PWDs with limited movement abilities

Since access to archives is a human right Onyancha and Ngoepe (2011), it follows therefore that archival agencies should ensure that the building infrastructure accommodates the needs of PWDs with limited movement. Chaterera and Rodrigues (2017) argues that despite the provision of physical access by a national archival institution being an essential component of improving access to and use of its archives, the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) neither had facilities to assist the physically challenged visitors nor explicit

procedures in place for responding to their disability needs. Chaterera and Rodrigues (2017) add that in overall terms, the NAZ does not have provisions to cater for the physically challenged. For example, "nowhere in the interior and exterior of public spaces is there the international symbol of accessibility to identify the facilities, elements and spaces to be used by the physically challenged" Chaterera and Rodrigues (2017, 88). The archives building at the NAZ does not have parking space designed for PWD and the rest rooms do not accommodate wheel chairs. Similarly, Ngulube, Makoni and Sibanda (2013) also state that wheelchair access in the BA building was limited. Furthermore, Kepley (1983) noted that in archives, persons with mobility problems encounter many physical barriers, including lack of wheelchair access to the building, research room, and restroom facilities; reference room tables that cannot accommodate a wheelchair; and difficulty in lifting large volumes or simply turning the page of a document. Lack of public elevators are some of the infrastructures that hinder access to archives.

Distance from users

The location of the archival repository in terms of distance from users is a barrier to the access and use of archives Greene (2008). According to Chaterera and Rodrigues (2017), distance is among one of the well-known barriers that prevent accessibility of archives by members of the society. Archival institutions in Zimbabwe and Kenya are found in the capitals, Harare and Nairobi respectively, compelling anyone who desires to use the archives to physically go to those centres. The two scholars add that some archival institutions have tried to meet the challenge of distance by digitising their materials and making them available on the Internet. Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) (2019) acknowledge distance as a barrier to access to archives, and it has made efforts to improve the situation by building three records centres across the country. The records centres document the histories of the people in the regions, and serve as regional archival repositories for such documentation.

Elsewhere, Winn (2015) notes that at times the location of such archives may not be unknown, and even located in a foreign country. Winn (2015) observes that general users of archives may be hindered from getting access because the archives have been misplaced and located in remote areas in areas that are undisclosed. Former imperial countries such as Britain took away many archival materials from former colonies, and even denied having them in possession for 50 years and only admitted possession after Kenyans obtained a court order to provide access Winn (2015). Still, access is difficult as the archival materials are located at the UK National Archives in Kew while the citizens of Kenya and other former British protectorates remain physically detached from their own history. Taking archives away from people denies them to have access to their documentary heritage, and this is a denial of their human rights.

Copyright issues

The endeavour to observe copyright provisions may serve as a bottleneck to accessing and using archival materials. This has been particularly with PWDs who have what Roos (2004) refers to as people with print disabilities. Roos (2004, 3) defines people with print disabilities as "...those who, due to blindness, partial sight, dyslexia or physical impairments, cannot access visually represented information in the ordinary course. They require the conversion of such information into an alternative format which renders it accessible via their remaining senses, either through touch, hearing or increased visibility. Formats which are currently accessible are Braille, audio, larger print or digital text in some formats, but we should not try to list them more accurately, since we may blindfold ourselves before a proper examination of the problem".

Clearly, the need to comply with copyright provisions can become a barrier to access to information in archival holdings such as books. For instance, open and free access to moving image archives clashed with some copyright law provisions for some copyrighted materials. Secondly, providing access to some private collections was against the law due to prevailing agreements with donors Prelinger (2007). Dryden (2014) observes that in their duty to obey the law as it pertains to copyright, archivists struggle to find the appropriate balance between their fundamental mission to make their holdings available for use and the constraints of relevant laws and contractual agreements. While the observance of copyright laws for access to information

has proven a daunting task for archivists, it is notable that attention has been given to copyright issues that block access to information and this has seen a number of countries making moves to remove such legislative barriers (Roos 2004). This move will greatly remove the barriers related to copyright provisions.

Language barriers

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2003), language barriers impede access to archives. For archives displaced from their country of origin, as has been common with former colonial masters, the archives are described using the language of the host country and institution. If such descriptions are not translated to the language of the people from where the archives originated, access would be impossible due to the language barrier Montgomery (2014). In addition, if the finding aids are prepared in a different language than the materials themselves, members of the originating community are likely to be excluded by the language barriers from accessing the archives. The following indicates the reality faced by archival institutions as they make attempt to accommodate PWDs in the archives:

As disabled children and young adults matriculate through high school, college, and graduate school, and as disabled adults endeavour to pursue their own interests in history, government and legal research, or genealogy, it is clear that they will be seeking access to archival collections in greater and greater numbers. Archivists should be prepared to welcome them into their facilities. Kepley (1983, 43)

PWDs, especially those who use Braille to communicate would be denied the use of archival resources simply because no one in the archives may understand Braille. This is in spite of the fact that for PWDs, access to archives means that "all things available to all other people should be available to those with disabilities" Kepley (1983, 43). At NAZ, Chaterera and Rodrigues (2017, 8) noted that the NAZ "does not have Braille, and that no employee is able to properly converse in sign language." This goes against the ICA Principle on Access to Archives which states that archives should be made available on equal and fair terms ICA (2012).

Lack of staff members who specialises on disability issues

It has been found that archives and other information agencies such as libraries do not employ staff members who specialise on disability issues Whiteside (2002); Ezeani et al. (2017). Ezeani et al. (2017) found that students with disabilities wanted qualified and trained personnel that is employed to serve them. Ezeani et al. (2017) further pointed out that employing staff with special abilities in the library should serve as a motivation for people with special abilities and to enhance their education. Similarly, Ngulube, Makoni, and Sibanda's (2013) study found that staff members at BA revealed that procedures for responding to disability needs were not established mainly because staff members in a reading room were not prepared to respond to users with various needs.

Inclusive solutions to enable access to archives by people with disabilities

Inclusive archive services are very vital for a progressing society. The United Nations through the SDGs also pledges the need to ensure that none is left behind, and this includes those that are the most vulnerable in the society, namely, women and children, people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups. In archive settings, to ensure accessibility is to remove physical and design barriers and ensuring that the content is available in the alternative formats apart from print. All areas of the archive must be accessible including parking lots, entrance to the buildings, and it must be able to accommodate users who are wheelchair bound and routes within the building and outside must be free of obstruction for the safety of those with visual impairments Serene (n.d.); Chaterera and Rodrigues (2019). Similarly, Todd (2016), as cited in Ezeani, Ukwoma, Gani, Ingwe and Agunwamba (2017) emphasise that the Disability Act passed in 1990 in the United States puts emphasis on the importance of availing the following services to users with disabilities. These include access to ramps, elevators, more convenient shelf light, large print books, closed captioned films, braille, audio books, and picture communication systems Ezeani et al. (2017).

In addition to the entrance, archives must have at least one automatic opening door which is wide enough (i.e. 36 inches) to accommodate wheelchairs and scooters, and users with disabilities must be allowed to use the employee elevators in case there is no public elevator that is available Society for American Archivists (2019). Furthermore, all service points such as reference areas and reading rooms must be accessible. Kepley (1983, 45) also recommends that there are many adjustments that can be made to buildings including research rooms to make them easily accessible to the disabled, making sure restrooms can accommodate those with wheelchairs and providing adjustable tables in the reading rooms. For users with visual impairments, the door and its features should be easily distinguishable from the surrounding structure.

Archives should make provisions for materials in braille, acquire talking books as well as large print books. Additionally, archives should also consider scanning to braille for the deaf-blind, audio access can also be achieved by scanning print Andrew (2002, 76). Furthermore, the research area must include soundproof facilities as some researchers take notes orally using Dictaphones or tape recorders as they would have difficulties reading handwritten notes Andrew (2002, 76).

Archival agencies are also challenged to employ staff with specialised knowledge on disability issues in order to attend to their needs wholeheartedly. It is for this reason that Whiteside (2002) states that the process of facilitating the employment of visually impaired archive staff would necessarily bring with it much of the facilitation that is essential for the provision of services to the visually impaired. It has been shown in this study that reference archivists struggle to assist PWDs, specifically those that use sign language for communication Chaterera and Rodrigues (2019). It is therefore recommended that archival agencies should capacitate archivists to learn and use sign language in order to ensure that users who use it for communication are able to converse with archivists and be assisted. This explains why archival institutions should train employees to be flexible and sensitive to accessibility requests relating to using assistive devices, allowing extra time on machines and providing additional employee assistance SAA (2018).

With the integration of technologies in our environments, there are many ways through which people with disabilities can access archive services to overcome some of the barriers such as those posed by inaccessible archive buildings. Jeremy (2017) provided an example of accessible websites as some of the tools by which those with disabilities can engage with information about the service in a format that can be adapted to suit their needs. These websites can also provide the opportunity for comments or feedback so that archive users might engage in commenting about the service they have received. Archivists must also ensure that the content is available in digital format so that it can be accessed when using a screen reader or screen magnification programme. It is also important to ensure that it can be navigated using a keyboard without a mouse American Society for Archivists (2018).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that there is a gap in terms of the provision of information by archivists to people with disabilities. It is evident that in the design of archives and other information sector buildings, the inclusion of those with disabilities is limited. It is however, worth noting that users with or without disabilities should be treated equally in terms of information use and access. Kamatula (2011) puts the importance of access to archives into context by saying that it is an undeniable fact that access to records and archives is a very important aspect in the society and there is a need for the general public to be aware of the treasures the archival institution is holding on behalf to the society.

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