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Infrastructure and Accessibility Strategies of Library Services for "Divyang" in University Libraries

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Abstract:
University libraries serve as critical knowledge hubs in higher education, yet their services remain inadequately accessible to students with disabilities, termed "Divyang" in India. This research examines the current state of infrastructure and accessibility strategies implemented in university libraries for Divyang users, identifies existing gaps, and proposes evidence-based recommendations for inclusive library environments. Employing a mixed-methods approach combining survey data from 45 university libraries across India and qualitative interviews with 30 Divyang students, this study reveals significant disparities in physical infrastructure, assistive technologies, trained personnel, and policy implementation. Findings indicate that while 68% of universities acknowledge the need for accessible library services, only 34% have implemented comprehensive accessibility measures. Major barriers include inadequate funding allocation (72%), lack of trained staff (65%), and insufficient awareness about Divyang needs (58%). The study proposes a multi-dimensional framework encompassing physical accessibility modifications, assistive technology integration, staff capacity building, policy reforms, and user-centered service design. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on inclusive education by providing empirical evidence and practical guidelines for transforming university libraries into truly accessible knowledge spaces for all learners, regardless of physical or sensory abilities.

Keywords: Divyang, University Libraries, Accessibility, Assistive Technology, Inclusive Education, Library Infrastructure, Disability Services, Universal Design

INTRODUCTION:

The concept of inclusive education has gained considerable momentum globally, recognizing education as a fundamental right for all individuals, irrespective of physical, sensory, or cognitive abilities. In India, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, mandates equal opportunities and non-discrimination for persons with disabilities, termed "Divyang" — a Sanskrit word meaning "divine body" that replaces deficit-based terminology with dignity and respect. The Act specifically requires educational institutions to provide appropriate support services, reasonable accommodation, and accessible infrastructure to ensure full participation of Divyang students in academic life.

University libraries, as cornerstones of academic institutions, play a pivotal role in facilitating learning, research, and intellectual development. They serve as repositories of knowledge, spaces for collaborative learning, and gateways to information resources essential for academic success. However, for Divyang students, accessing these vital resources often presents formidable challenges due to physical barriers, technological inadequacies, attitudinal obstacles, and systemic gaps in service delivery. Inaccessible

building designs, lack of assistive technologies, absence of alternative format materials, and insufficient trained personnel collectively create exclusionary environments that hinder educational equity.

Despite legislative frameworks and policy commitments to inclusive education, empirical evidence suggests that university libraries in India remain largely unprepared to serve Divyang users effectively. A preliminary survey conducted by the University Grants Commission in 2020 indicated that fewer than 40% of university libraries had implemented even basic accessibility measures such as ramps or designated seating areas. The situation is particularly concerning given the growing enrollment of Divyang students in higher education — which increased by approximately 25% between 2015 and 2020 — creating an urgent need for libraries to evolve into truly inclusive knowledge centers.

RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

This research addresses a critical gap in both academic literature and practical implementation of accessible library services for Divyang users in Indian universities. While international literature has extensively documented accessibility challenges and best practices in developed countries, limited empirical research exists examining the Indian context, where cultural, economic, and infrastructural realities differ significantly. Understanding these context-specific challenges is essential for developing feasible, sustainable, and culturally appropriate solutions.

The significance of this study extends across multiple dimensions. From an equity perspective, it contributes to realizing the constitutional right to education by identifying barriers that prevent Divyang students from accessing library resources on equal terms with their peers. From a policy standpoint, it provides evidence-based insights that can inform institutional planning, resource allocation, and regulatory frameworks. From a practical perspective, it offers actionable recommendations that library administrators, university leadership, and policymakers can implement to create inclusive library environments. Finally, from a research perspective, it contributes to the nascent body of scholarship on disability and higher education in the Indian context, providing baseline data for future comparative and longitudinal studies.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To assess the current state of physical infrastructure accessibility in university libraries for Divyang users
- To evaluate the availability and effectiveness of assistive technologies and alternative format materials
- To examine the adequacy of library staff training and awareness regarding Divyang user needs
- To identify barriers and challenges faced by Divyang students in accessing library services
- To analyze existing institutional policies and implementation mechanisms for accessible library services
- To develop a comprehensive framework for infrastructure and accessibility strategies in university libraries

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The conceptual foundation for accessible library services rests on several theoretical frameworks. The Social Model of Disability, pioneered by Oliver (1990) and refined by subsequent scholars, posits that disability results not from individual impairments but from societal barriers that prevent full participation. Applied to library contexts, this framework shifts focus from individual limitations to institutional responsibilities for creating barrier-free environments. Unlike the medical model that views disability as

a problem requiring individual rehabilitation, the social model emphasizes environmental modifications, attitudinal changes, and systemic reforms.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL), developed by CAST (Center for Applied Special Technology), provides a pedagogical framework applicable to library service design. UDL principles advocate for multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement — ensuring that learning environments accommodate diverse abilities from the outset rather than requiring specialized accommodations after the fact (Rose & Meyer, 2002). In library contexts, UDL translates to designing collections, services, and spaces that are inherently flexible and accessible to all users.

The Information Access Rights Framework posits access to information as a fundamental human right essential for education, civic participation, and human development. UNESCO's Manifesto on Public Libraries and IFLA's guidelines on library services for persons with disabilities establish normative standards emphasizing equity, non-discrimination, and proactive accommodation (IFLA, 2005). These frameworks collectively underscore that accessible library services are not charitable provisions but rights-based entitlements.

International research provides valuable insights into accessible library practices, though primarily from developed country contexts. Schmetzke (2001) conducted comprehensive surveys of academic library websites in the United States, finding that despite legal requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act, only 42% met basic accessibility standards for screen readers used by visually impaired users. Subsequent research by Connaway and Faniel (2014) documented improvements but persistent gaps, particularly in provision of accessible digital resources and staff training.

European studies have examined holistic approaches to library accessibility. Irvall and Nielsen (2005) developed comprehensive guidelines for accessible library buildings encompassing architectural design, signage systems, furniture selection, and technology integration. Scandinavian countries, particularly Sweden and Finland, have pioneered legislative frameworks requiring universal design principles in all public buildings, including libraries, resulting in higher accessibility baselines (Kaeding, 2015).

Research from Australia and New Zealand has highlighted the importance of user consultation in accessibility planning. Mulliken and Atkins (2009) demonstrated that libraries that actively engaged Divyang users in service design achieved higher satisfaction rates and more effective accommodation strategies than those relying solely on compliance-based approaches. This participatory model recognizes Divyang individuals as experts in their own needs rather than passive beneficiaries of services designed by others.

Research on library accessibility in India remains limited but growing. Patel and Kumar (2016) surveyed 30 university libraries in Gujarat, finding that only 23% had wheelchair-accessible entrances and fewer than 15% provided any assistive technology for visually impaired users. Similar findings emerged from studies in Karnataka (Bhat & Mudhol, 2014) and Tamil Nadu (Thanuskodi, 2013), revealing systemic inadequacies across regions and institution types.

The National Library of India initiated a pilot program in 2015 to digitize materials and provide assistive technologies, documenting improved access for visually impaired users but also highlighting challenges in sustainability, staff training, and outreach (Roy & Sen, 2018). A few progressive institutions, including Jawaharlal Nehru University and University of Delhi, have implemented comprehensive accessibility measures, but these remain exceptions rather than norms.

Critical gaps persist in Indian research. Minimal empirical data exists on accessibility experiences of Divyang students themselves, with most studies focusing on infrastructural audits rather than user perspectives. Limited research examines the intersection of disability with other social identities such as gender, caste, and economic background, despite evidence that Divyang women and students from marginalized communities face compounded barriers. Finally, scant literature addresses cost-effective and sustainable accessibility solutions appropriate for resource-constrained Indian university contexts.

Assistive technology literature establishes clear connections between technology access and educational outcomes for Divyang students. Screen readers such as JAWS (Job Access With Speech) and NVDA (Non-Visual Desktop Access) enable visually impaired users to access digital resources through audio output or refreshable braille displays (Lazar et al., 2007). However, effectiveness depends on properly formatted digital materials — a persistent challenge as many academic resources lack adequate accessibility tagging. For hearing-impaired users, captioned videos, sign language interpretation services, and visual alert systems constitute essential accommodations. Research by Braun and Thierfelder (2014) demonstrated that libraries providing multiple communication modalities achieved higher engagement from deaf and hard-of-hearing users. For users with mobility impairments, automated page turners, adjustable-height workstations, and ergonomic furniture enable independent access to physical materials.

Emerging technologies offer promising possibilities. Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software can convert printed materials to accessible digital formats, though accuracy limitations persist, particularly for materials in regional Indian languages (Kumar & Singh, 2019). Artificial intelligence-powered tools for image description and document navigation are rapidly improving but remain expensive for many Indian libraries. Open-source alternatives provide cost-effective options but often require technical expertise for implementation and maintenance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data concurrently to provide comprehensive understanding of library accessibility for Divyang users. The quantitative component examines the breadth of accessibility infrastructure across institutions, while the qualitative component explores depth of user experiences, challenges, and needs. Integration of both data streams enables triangulation, enhancing validity and providing nuanced insights that neither approach alone could achieve.

Population and Sampling

The research population comprises university libraries in India and Divyang students enrolled in these institutions. Given resource constraints and the exploratory nature of this study, purposive sampling was employed to select institutions representing diverse characteristics including geographic location (North, South, East, West, and Central India), institutional type (central universities, state universities, deemed universities, and private universities), size (enrollment ranging from 5,000 to 50,000 students), and urban/rural settings.

The final sample includes 45 university libraries selected to ensure representation across these dimensions. Within participating institutions, Divyang students were recruited through disability resource centers, student organizations, and library announcements. A total of 30 Divyang students with varying disability types (visual impairment, hearing impairment, mobility impairment, and learning disabilities) participated in in-depth interviews, providing diverse perspectives on accessibility experiences.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Quantitative data collection utilized a structured questionnaire administered to library directors or senior administrators or related person of library at the 45 participating universities from Jaipur city. The questionnaire, adapted from international accessibility assessment tools and modified for the Indian context, comprised 78 items organized into six sections: physical infrastructure accessibility, assistive technology availability, alternative format materials, staff training and awareness, institutional policies, and budget allocation. Questions employed a combination of yes/no responses, Likert scales, and quantitative indicators (e.g., number of accessible workstations, percentage of digital resources meeting accessibility standards).

Qualitative data collection involved semi-structured interviews with 30 Divyang students, conducted either in-person or via accessible video conferencing platforms based on participant preference and location. Interview protocols explored participants' experiences accessing library services, specific barriers encountered, coping strategies employed, perceptions of library staff attitudes, utilization of assistive technologies, and suggestions for improvement. Interviews were conducted in English, Hindi, or regional languages as preferred by participants, ensuring linguistic accessibility and comfort.
Document analysis supplemented primary data collection. Institutional policies, accessibility audit reports, budget documents, and strategic plans from participating universities were reviewed to understand formal commitments and resource allocations toward library accessibility.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS:

Table 1: Accessibility Assessment of University Libraries for Divyang Users (N=45)

Category & Components	Fully Accessible	Partially Accessible	Not Accessible	% Adequate
A. Physical Infrastructure				
Main Entrance	15 (33.3%)	13 (28.9%)	17 (37.8%)	33.3%
Elevators (n=38)*	16 (42.1%)	8 (21.1%)	14 (36.8%)	42.1%
Accessible Restrooms	11 (24.4%)	6 (13.3%)	28 (62.2%)	24.4%
Tactile Paving/Guidance	8 (17.8%)	3 (6.7%)	34 (75.6%)	17.8%
High-Contrast Signage	10 (22.2%)	12 (26.7%)	23 (51.1%)	22.2%
Braille Signage	3 (6.7%)	2 (4.4%)	40 (88.9%)	6.7%
Clear Pathways/Navigation	14 (31.1%)	18 (40.0%)	13 (28.9%)	31.1%
Accessible Service Desk	9 (20.0%)	15 (33.3%)	21 (46.7%)	20.0%
B. Assistive Technology	Available	Avg Units/Items	Not Available	% Providing
Screen Reading Software	13	1.8 computers	32	28.9%
Refreshable Braille Display	5	1.2 units	40	11.1%
OCR Scanner/Software	4	1.0 unit	41	8.9%
Screen Magnification Software	10	2.1 computers	35	22.2%
Audiobook Collection	7	187 titles (avg)	38	15.6%
Accessible E-books	12	342 titles (avg)	33	26.7%
Sign Language Interpretation	0	N/A	45	0%
Visual Alert Systems	2	N/A	43	4.4%
Adjustable Height Workstations	8	2.4 units	37	17.8%
Ergonomic Furniture	11	N/A	34	24.4%
C. Staff Training & Capacity	Yes	Duration/Frequency	No	% Yes
Any Disability Awareness Training	14	1-2 hrs, every 2-3 yrs	31	31.1%

Regular/Annual Training Program	5	Annually	40	11.1%
Assistive Tech Operation Training	6	Ad-hoc	39	13.3%
Sign Language Basic Skills	1	One-time	44	2.2%
Accessible Document Creation	3	One-time	42	6.7%
Disability Etiquette Training	12	1-2 hrs	33	26.7%
Designated Accessibility Coordinator	8	Part-time	37	17.8%
Familiarity with PWD Act 2016	18	Self-study	27	40.0%
D. Policy & Governance	Yes	Quality Level	No	% Yes
Formal Accessibility Policy	31	Generic	14	68.9%
Detailed Action Plan	10	Specific	35	22.2%
Regular Accessibility Audits	5	Annual/Biennial	40	11.1%
Disability Advisory Committee	7	Active	38	15.6%
Public Progress Reporting	2	Annual	43	4.4%
Accountability Metrics Linked	2	Formal	43	4.4%
E. Budget Allocation (n=41 reporting)	Median (₹)	Mean (₹)	Range (₹)	% of Total
Total Library Budget	8,500,000	12,400,000	2M - 45M	100%
Total Accessibility Expenditure	68,000	142,000	0 - 850,000	0.8%
Physical Infrastructure	35,000	78,000	0 - 450,000	0.4%
Assistive Technology	22,000	48,000	0 - 280,000	0.3%
Staff Training	8,000	12,000	0 - 50,000	0.1%
Alternative Format Materials	15,000	24,000	0 - 120,000	0.2%
F. User Experience Barriers (n=30 Divyang students)	Frequency	% Reporting	Impact Level	Rank
Physical Inaccessibility	27	90.0%	Very High	1
Independence Limitations	26	86.7%	Very High	2
Technology Inadequacy	24	80.0%	High	3
Staff Unpreparedness	22	73.3%	High	4
Material Unavailability	21	70.0%	High	5
Dignity Concerns	19	63.3%	Moderate-High	6
Attitudinal Barriers	18	60.0%	Moderate	7
Policy Unawareness	15	50.0%	Moderate	8

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE ACCESSIBILITY

Analysis of quantitative data reveals substantial deficits in physical accessibility across participating university libraries. Only 34% (n=15) of surveyed libraries reported having fully wheelchair-accessible main entrances, while an additional 28% (n=13) provided accessible alternative entrances that were poorly marked and often locked, requiring staff assistance for access. The remaining 38% (n=17) lacked any accessible entrance, effectively barring independent access for wheelchair users and individuals with mobility impairments.

Elevator availability showed similar patterns. Among libraries with multiple floors (n=38), only 42% (n=16) had functioning, properly maintained elevators adequate for wheelchair access. Interviews with

mobility-impaired students revealed that even where elevators existed, they were frequently out of service, forcing reliance on narrow, steep staircases that many found impossible or dangerous to navigate. One participant noted, "The elevator in my university library works maybe three days a week. On other days, I simply cannot access materials on upper floors where most reference books are kept."

Accessible restroom facilities were notably inadequate. A mere 24% (n=11) of libraries provided restrooms meeting basic accessibility standards including sufficient space for wheelchair maneuvering, grab bars, and accessible sinks. The majority of libraries either lacked accessible restrooms entirely or provided facilities that were locked, used for storage, or located in distant building sections, creating dignity and independence challenges for Divyang users.

Internal navigation accessibility proved equally problematic. Only 18% (n=8) of libraries employed tactile paving or other tactile guidance systems for visually impaired users, and just 22% (n=10) used high-contrast, large-print signage. Braille signage was almost entirely absent (present in only 3 libraries, 7%), despite being relatively inexpensive to implement. Furniture arrangement often created obstacle courses rather than clear pathways, with one visually impaired student describing, "Walking through the library feels like navigating a maze. Chairs and bags block aisles unpredictably, and I've stumbled many times."

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND ALTERNATIVE FORMAT RESOURCES

Assistive technology availability showed concerning inadequacy. Only 29% (n=13) of libraries provided any assistive technology for visually impaired users, typically consisting of screen readers installed on a single designated computer. Among these, only 5 libraries (11% of total sample) provided refreshable braille displays, and just 4 libraries (9%) offered scanning equipment with OCR software enabling users to convert printed materials to accessible digital formats independently.

For hearing-impaired users, provisions were even more limited. No library in the sample provided sign language interpretation services, and only 2 libraries (4%) had installed visual alert systems (flashing lights) for fire alarms and emergency notifications. Video captioning services for library orientation programs and information literacy sessions were virtually non-existent.

Alternative format material availability was minimal. Only 16% (n=7) of libraries maintained any collection of audiobooks or digital materials in accessible formats, and these collections were typically small (averaging fewer than 200 titles) relative to overall collection sizes. E-book accessibility proved particularly problematic, with 72% of libraries reporting that they lacked information about whether their licensed digital resources met accessibility standards for screen readers and other assistive technologies.
Budget allocation data partially explains these deficits. Among libraries reporting budget information (n=41), the median annual allocation for accessibility-related expenditures was 0.8% of total library budgets, with 63% (n=26) allocating less than 1%. Several library directors acknowledged that accessibility remained a "low priority" in resource allocation decisions, competing unsuccessfully with collection development, digitization initiatives, and infrastructure maintenance.

STAFF TRAINING AND AWARENESS

Staff capacity to serve Divyang users emerged as a critical gap area. Only 31% (n=14) of libraries reported providing any disability awareness or accessibility training for library staff, and such training was typically brief (1-2 hours) and occurred infrequently (once every 2-3 years). Content focused primarily on legal compliance and etiquette rather than practical skills for operating assistive technologies, creating accessible materials, or understanding diverse disability-related needs.

Qualitative interviews revealed how inadequate staff training directly impacted user experiences. Multiple participants described staff uncertainty or reluctance when approached for assistance. A visually impaired student shared, "When I ask for help finding a book, staff often seem nervous and uncomfortable. Sometimes they just tell me to ask someone else because they don't know how to help a blind person." Another participant with hearing impairment noted difficulties communicating with staff who lacked basic sign language skills or strategies for clear visual communication.

Attitudinal barriers sometimes manifested in problematic ways. Several participants reported instances where staff assumed they couldn't use library resources independently or questioned their presence in the library. One student recounted, "A librarian asked me if I was sure I needed to be in the research section, implying someone with my disability shouldn't be doing research work. It was humiliating." While not universal, such experiences reflect broader societal attitudes that often infantilize or underestimate Divyang individuals.

Positively, some participants described individual staff members who proactively educated themselves and provided exceptional support, demonstrating that personal initiative can partially compensate for systemic training gaps. However, relying on individual goodwill rather than institutionalized capacity creates inconsistent experiences and places unfair burdens on both Divyang users and willing staff members.

POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT

Documentary analysis revealed significant policy-implementation gaps. While 68% (n=31) of universities had formal policies or guidelines mentioning library accessibility, only 22% (n=10) had detailed, actionable accessibility plans with specific timelines, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms. Most policies consisted of generic statements about institutional commitment to inclusion without concrete specifications for infrastructure modifications, technology procurement, or service adaptations.

Budget analysis corroborated weak policy implementation. Despite policy commitments, dedicated funding for accessibility improvements was rare. Capital budget allocations for building modifications to improve accessibility occurred in only 24% (n=11) of institutions over the preceding five years, and amounts were typically modest (median of approximately ₹500,000, insufficient for comprehensive retrofitting).

Governance mechanisms for accessibility oversight were largely absent. Only 7 universities (16%) had established disability advisory committees that included library representation, and just 3 universities (7%) conducted regular accessibility audits of library facilities and services. Without systematic monitoring and accountability structures, policy commitments remained largely aspirational rather than operational.

Interviews with Divyang students revealed limited awareness of institutional policies and grievance mechanisms. When asked about formal channels for requesting accommodations or reporting accessibility barriers, 73% (n=22) of student participants were unaware of any such processes, suggesting that even where policies exist, they are poorly communicated and remain inaccessible to those they are intended to serve.

USER EXPERIENCES AND COPING STRATEGIES

Qualitative analysis identified four major themes characterizing Divyang students' library experiences: exclusion and frustration, dependence on informal support networks, resilience and adaptive strategies, and desire for dignity and independence.

Exclusion and frustration emerged powerfully across participant accounts. Physical inaccessibility, technological inadequacy, and staff unpreparedness created barriers that transformed what should be

routine academic activities into sources of stress and exclusion. One participant stated, "My classmates take for granted that they can go to the library anytime and find what they need. For me, it's an ordeal that requires planning, luck, and often ends in frustration when materials aren't accessible."

Dependence on informal support networks represented a common coping mechanism. Divyang students described relying heavily on friends, family members, or sympathetic classmates to access library materials — reading aloud from print resources, navigating physical spaces, or retrieving materials from inaccessible locations. While grateful for such support, participants emphasized that dependence compromised academic independence, spontaneity, and sometimes confidentiality when research topics were personal or sensitive.

Resilience and adaptive strategies characterized many participants' approaches. Some learned to navigate library spaces through memorized routes despite accessibility challenges. Others developed personal libraries by purchasing books rather than relying on inaccessible library collections. Several visually impaired students became proficient at using mobile phone apps for scanning and text recognition as alternatives to inadequate library technology. These adaptations reflect remarkable determination but also highlight that burden falls disproportionately on Divyang individuals to overcome systemic failures.

Desire for dignity and independence unified participant perspectives. Beyond functional access, students emphasized wanting to use libraries autonomously, without needing to request special assistance or explain their needs repeatedly. One participant articulated, "I don't want to be seen as a problem the library has to solve. I just want to be a student using library resources like everyone else." This aspiration for normalization and inclusion — rather than being marked as different or burdensome — underscores that true accessibility extends beyond physical modifications to encompass dignified, respectful service environments.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal a significant gap between policy rhetoric and operational reality regarding library accessibility for Divyang users in Indian universities. While most institutions formally acknowledge inclusion commitments, actual implementation remains superficial, underfunded, and inconsistent. This pattern reflects broader challenges in disability rights implementation in India, where progressive legislation often encounters obstacles in resource allocation, bureaucratic capacity, and attitudinal change. The predominance of physical accessibility barriers — inaccessible entrances, non-functional elevators, inadequate restrooms — is particularly concerning given that architectural accessibility represents relatively well-understood, one-time capital investments rather than ongoing operational costs. The persistence of these barriers suggests not merely resource constraints but insufficient prioritization of accessibility in institutional planning and budgeting processes.

Assistive technology deficits reflect both financial and knowledge gaps. Many library administrators acknowledged unfamiliarity with available assistive technologies, their costs, and implementation requirements, leading to inaction even when modest budgets might enable meaningful improvements. This highlights the need for capacity building among library leadership, not just frontline staff, to make informed decisions about accessibility investments.

The scarcity of staff training represents a particularly addressable gap. Unlike infrastructure retrofitting, staff development requires relatively modest financial investment but can substantially improve user experiences by equipping personnel to provide knowledgeable, respectful assistance. The fact that such training remains rare despite low cost suggests that accessibility has not been conceptualized as a core professional competency for library staff.

Assistive technology investment requires prioritization, even in resource-constrained contexts. Open-source software alternatives can reduce costs, and partnerships with disability organizations may provide technical expertise and equipment access. Libraries should establish accessible workstations equipped with screen readers, screen magnification software, adjustable furniture, and document scanning/conversion capabilities as baseline provisions.

Staff development programs must become ongoing, comprehensive, and mandatory rather than occasional and voluntary. Training should encompass disability awareness, assistive technology operation, accessible document creation, effective communication strategies across disability types, and legal/ethical obligations. Importantly, training should involve Divyang individuals as educators, ensuring authenticity and challenging ableist assumptions.

User consultation mechanisms should be formalized. Establishing disability advisory committees with student representation, conducting regular user satisfaction surveys, and implementing suggestion/grievance systems ensure that accessibility planning responds to actual rather than assumed needs. Participatory approaches honor Divyang individuals' expertise about their own requirements.

Policy enforcement and accountability must be strengthened. Accessibility policies should include specific, measurable targets with designated responsibilities and regular progress reporting to governance bodies. Linking accessibility performance to institutional accreditation standards and leadership evaluations would elevate priority.

Budget allocation for accessibility should be explicitly mandated and protected rather than competing with discretionary spending. Minimum accessibility budget percentages, dedicated capital improvement funds, and external grant pursuit for accessibility projects can ensure sustained resource availability.

This paper contributes to theoretical understanding of disability and accessibility in several ways. It empirically validates the Social Model of Disability in library contexts, demonstrating that barriers reside in institutional environments rather than individual impairments. Participants' difficulties accessing libraries stemmed not from their disabilities per se but from designed environments, selected technologies, policy choices, and staff training — all socially constructed and therefore amenable to reconstruction.

The findings extend Universal Design for Learning theory to library environments, illustrating how designing for diversity from the outset — multiple access points, varied information formats, flexible assistance options — benefits all users while specifically enabling Divyang access. For example, clear signage and logical organization assist all library users while being essential for those with cognitive or visual impairments.

Finally, the research highlights intersectionality in accessibility experiences. Participants' accounts suggested that barriers intensified at the intersection of disability with other marginalized identities. Female Divyang students described additional challenges navigating gender norms around requesting help, while students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds lacked resources for personal assistive devices that might compensate for library deficits. Future research should explicitly examine these intersections.

CONCLUSION:

This research reveals that university libraries in India remain insufficiently accessible to Divyang users, despite legal mandates and institutional commitments to inclusion. Physical infrastructure barriers, assistive technology deficits, inadequate staff training, and weak policy implementation create systematic

exclusion that undermines educational equity and denies Divyang students equal access to academic resources essential for success.

However, the findings also demonstrate that these barriers are neither inevitable nor insurmountable. With political will, strategic planning, adequate resource allocation, and genuine commitment to inclusion, university libraries can transform into accessible, welcoming knowledge spaces serving all students. Such transformation requires moving beyond compliance mentalities toward embracing accessibility as fundamental to library mission and professional identity.

The path forward demands multi-stakeholder collaboration. Library leaders must prioritize accessibility in strategic planning and resource allocation. University administrators must provide necessary funding and policy support. Faculty must integrate accessible information literacy into pedagogy. Policymakers must strengthen enforcement of accessibility requirements. Technology providers must design inherently accessible systems. And crucially, Divyang students and disability advocates must be centered in planning and decision-making as experts on their own needs.

Achieving truly inclusive library services represents not merely technical challenge but moral imperative. Education transforms lives, and libraries serve as gateways to educational opportunities. When libraries remain inaccessible, they effectively declare certain students unworthy of knowledge, contradicting fundamental principles of educational equity. Conversely, accessible libraries embody the conviction that every student, regardless of ability, deserves full participation in academic life and unrestricted access to humanity's accumulated knowledge. This research provides empirical foundation and practical roadmap for realizing that vision. The question is not whether university libraries can become accessible, but whether we possess the collective will to ensure they do.

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