

Accommodating Inclusive Education in Library and Information Science Research: In the Case of Virtual International Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS)

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Abstract

The library should allow for inclusive education as a crucial component of instruction to ensure quality and equity. In order to investigate the propensity of library and information science researchers to adapt inclusive education in libraries, this paper reviews ten (10) research abstracts and presentations made at the Virtual International Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS), organised by the SLTC Research University Sri Lanka. The sample consisted of 25 papers that were submitted to VICLIS conferences by Library and Information Science (LIS) scholars from eight different countries. Following a screening process, 10 articles from India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka were chosen and subjected to theme analysis. The availability of assistive technology devices in university libraries and themes like improving reading and writing skills in visually impaired students were found to be prevalent in LIS research. Other themes included the difficulties faced by users with disabilities, the role of libraries in supporting students with disabilities and repackaging information to meet user needs. The results suggest that the library service should adopt the new theme of "Inclusive Library Service." In addition to providing Braille books, addressing information access problems, promoting accessibility in library buildings, and putting the Marrakesh Treaty into effect to support students who are blind or visually impaired, LIS researchers have advised doing the following things. Libraries have a significant impact on the empowerment of people with special needs. To improve inclusive education, future LIS research should focus on assistive technologies, information literacy for individuals with disabilities, collection development, and professional development requirements in libraries.

Keywords: *Accessibility, Inclusive Library Services, Library Services, Social Inclusion, Special Needs*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

According to UNICEF, inclusive education makes sure that all children, including those who speak minority languages or have impairments, have equal opportunity to access and participate in school (UNICEF, n.d.). In order to develop social cohesion, promote equality, and enable people to realise their full potential, this principle is based on the belief that every individual has a right to be included and respected within the educational community. In order to facilitate inclusive education, the area of library and information science (LIS) is essential (Moirangthem & Phuritsabam, 2022). Assuring that libraries and information centers are open to everyone, regardless of background or ability, is the duty of LIS professionals to provide equitable access to information resources and services. They support the ideas of inclusivity and equal opportunity in school by doing this.

According to Ayoung, Baada, and Baayel (2020), research in LIS is crucial for resolving the difficulties that different populations have in successfully accessing and utilizing information. It strives to identify gaps, develop strategies, and build inclusive policies and practices that benefit all learners. It looks at the role that libraries and information centers play in fostering inclusive education. Inclusionary education research in LIS helps to promote inclusive learning environments by improving the efficiency of library services, creating usable technology, and constructing user-centered information systems.

Every year, researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers from all over the world congregate for the Virtual International Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS). It acts as a hub for knowledge sharing,

networking opportunities, and developments in LIS-related theory and practice. Information organization, information retrieval, digital libraries, information literacy, information behaviour, the impact of technology on information services, and the library's role in inclusive education were only a few of the themes presented during VICLIS conferences.

The VICLIS conference is usually held online to enable attendees to join from various geographic regions and actively participate in conference activities (VICLIS, 2021). It offers a useful forum for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to stay current on new advancements, share knowledge, and support the development of LIS. To further emphasise the significance of inclusivity and accessibility within library services, VICLIS dedicates a special track to present research findings relating to library services for people with special needs.

Many LIS conferences at the global level have contributed to investigating the role of libraries in enhancing inclusive education. However, it appears that a large number of people attended the conferences in Sri Lanka (Perera et al. 2012). It is crucial to consider how VICLIS has tackled inclusive education through its research as a global conference with a Sri Lankan base. This study focuses on inclusive education in LIS research and conducts a thematic analysis of research abstracts and oral presentations made at VICLIS conferences (VICLIS, n.d.). The study tries to uncover important topics, trends, and views relating to inclusive education from the LIS field by looking at these abstracts and presentations. The study intends to develop inclusive LIS practices, advance equitable access to information sources, and provide guidance for future research practices and directions.

2. Research Methodology

A flexible and organised method called thematic analysis makes it possible to find and understand recurrent themes, patterns, and concepts in qualitative data. It enables in-depth investigation of the research abstracts and gives information on the main ideas and viewpoints about inclusive education in the field of LIS. As a result, the methodology for the investigation in this study was thematic analysis.

The selection and analysis of the research presentations and abstracts took place over the course of various steps. First, a compilation of all available research abstracts from the two VICLIS conferences in 2021 and 2022 was made. The relevance of the research presentations and abstracts to the subject of inclusive education in LIS was then evaluated. The topics of difficulties or initiatives for inclusive education in libraries were the only abstracts and presentations that were taken into consideration for further investigation. To enhance dependability and minimise potential bias, each abstract and presentation was read and coded separately by various researchers. Coding involved systematically identifying and labeling key ideas, concepts, and themes present in the abstracts. The researchers discussed and compared their coding to ensure consistency and addressed any discrepancies through consensus. This collaborative process enhanced the validity and reliability of the thematic analysis. After a vigorous process of reviewing, 10 abstracts out of 25 presented at VICLIS 2021 and 2022 were analysed and compared with a predefined list of themes representing inclusive education extracted from the literature review. The sample represented a variety of countries to provide a global perspective on inclusive education in LIS.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. Identify the key themes related to inclusive education from the literature.
2. Identify the dominant themes related to inclusive education in the research papers presented at the Virtual International Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS).
3. Compare the contribution of VICLIS research with the themes extracted from the literature.
4. Provide recommendations for improving LIS contribution to inclusive education

4. Scope and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyse the role that inclusive education plays in LIS. Despite focusing on LIS research on inclusive education at the worldwide level, this analysis only looked at the abstracts and presentations made at VICLIS conferences. The following findings from this study have important ramifications for the field of library and information science as well as the larger education sector: The study emphasises the significance of including inclusive education in libraries by analysing the recurrent themes in the research papers. It emphasises the necessity for libraries to grant people with special needs fair access to information and services, thereby fostering a more inclusive and accessible learning environment.

The study's conclusions offer insightful information to educators, librarians, and politicians. Practical suggestions for enhancing library services for those with special needs include offering Braille literature, addressing information access problems, increasing accessibility in library facilities, and putting the

Marrakesh Treaty into action. The study acknowledges the crucial function libraries can provide in empowering people with special needs. By putting an emphasis on information literacy, collection development, assistive technologies, and staff training, libraries can better help their users with disabilities, easing their path to education and social inclusion.

Future research should examine accessible technologies, information literacy for people with disabilities, collection development procedures, and professional development requirements for libraries, among other topics. This advice aids in defining the next research and developments in the area of inclusive education in libraries. Overall, the study advances knowledge of inclusive education in library settings and makes actionable suggestions for improving library services for those with special needs, promoting social inclusion, and ensuring fair access to knowledge.

5. Review of the Relevant Literature

The study of inclusive education is becoming increasingly popular in the discipline of library and information science (LIS). This survey of the literature seeks to give readers an overview of the research, essays, and other writings that have already been done on the subject of how libraries might support inclusive education. It will talk about important ideas, philosophies, and frameworks for inclusive education in the context of libraries and highlight the difficulties that users with disabilities have in using the materials available there.

Additionally, it will stress the value of staff education and awareness as well as the topics covered in research abstracts from the Virtual International

Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS) under the subtheme "Library Services for People with Special Needs."

More than 21 million people worldwide suffer from disabilities, and libraries should provide access to the information they need via a variety of techniques, according to Nandi, A. (2021). Many studies have shown how important it is for libraries to provide inclusive education. Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which contends that instructional strategies and materials should be developed to accommodate a range of learner demands, is a crucial idea in this setting. The application of UDL principles in library services helps ensure that all users have access to the resources and information they need (Zhong, 2012). Zhong examines the use of UDL in libraries while emphasizing its advantages for inclusive education.

In the context of libraries, inclusion, and accessibility play crucial roles in ensuring that all users have equitable access to information and services. The importance of accessible e-books in academic libraries is emphasised by Jaeger, Wentz, and Bertot (2015), who also note how they have the potential to improve accessibility and inclusiveness. Their research highlights the significance of including accessible formats to satisfy the requirements of various users.

The use of assistive technologies in libraries is essential for facilitating information access for people with varied abilities. In their study from 2021, Odigie and Okube focused on the role that assistive technology plays in the service delivery for patrons with special needs in academic libraries in Kogi State, Nigeria. Their research's conclusions offer insightful information about how these technologies can improve diversity and accessibility.

The contribution of library staff to improving inclusive education is crucial. To guarantee accessible library services, staff education and awareness are essential. Research on the effects of disability awareness training for library workers was undertaken by Forrest (2005), who focused on the advantages it brings in terms of better attitudes, knowledge, and practices. The study emphasises how critical it is to give library workers the talents and information required to offer inclusive services to people with impairments.

The study by Butler (2020) has drawn attention to the need for librarians to become more culturally competent in order to better serve a variety of user communities, including those who have disabilities. According to the study, increasing cultural competence among librarians is crucial for lowering health inequalities and offering inclusive services (Butler et al., 2016). Twaambo et al. (2022) note that it can be difficult to provide services and materials for people with disabilities in libraries. They claim that while libraries have advanced significantly in some regions of the world, they haven't done so in others, which is regrettable. They provide a standard for libraries in higher education by outlining resources and services for people with disabilities.

Despite the quantity of research on inclusive education in LIS, there are still certain gaps and restrictions. In actuality, LIS literature has tended to place more emphasis on conceptual explanations of inclusive education than on empirical studies (Nilholm, 2021). Lack of study particularly addressing the theme analysis of research abstracts presented at conferences is a notable research gap. Users with disabilities are regarded as a vulnerable group that encounters prejudice and barriers to using the library service. The lack of skilled library workers, accessibility to library premises, and difficulty in

accessing available formats of publications and Web pages are some of the impediments (Tinklin, Hall, 1999; Banks, 2017; Wolf, 2001; Phukubje, & Ngoepe, 2017).

In their article from 2021, Lankathilaka and Perera examine the Marrakesh Treaty's implementation as well as the information services offered to students who are blind or visually impaired. The study's objectives are to look at how visually impaired students use various information sources, identify obstacles to information access, and offer Marrakesh Treaty-based solutions. According to the results of their study, undergraduates who are blind or visually impaired prefer audiobooks over printed materials and must rely on others to find information because there aren't many audiobooks available.

The study calls attention to the necessity of putting the Marrakesh Treaty into practice in Sri Lanka to enhance services for visually impaired students, and it suggests expanding audiobook collections and creating unique mechanisms for delivering information services to suit their needs (Lankathilaka & Perera, 2021).

More research is needed, according to the literature, to better understand the difficulties that users with disabilities have in using library resources. Although the significance of accessibility has been highlighted in numerous studies, further research is required to identify the precise difficulties and constraints that various user groups face.

6. Results and Findings

- Through the literature review, key areas to cover inclusive education by libraries are identified and described under dominant themes:

- **Book accessibility:** This subject emphasises how crucial it is to give people with special needs access to books. The research abstracts place a strong emphasis on the necessity for libraries to offer accessible forms, such as Braille books, and address problems with information access.
- **Improving reading and writing skills in visually impaired students:** This theme examines methods and programmes designed to help visually impaired students improve their reading and writing skills. The abstracts and presentations cover methods, tools, and strategies that libraries can use to assist these students in their academic endeavours.
- **Barriers faced by users with disabilities:** This issue focuses on identifying and resolving the barriers that people with impairments encounter when utilising library services. The research abstracts and presentations highlight the difficulties these users face and provide ways to fix them while maintaining inclusion.
- **The importance of libraries in aiding students with disabilities is highlighted by this theme.** Libraries help by offering resources and support to students with disabilities. The summaries go over the different ways that libraries might support these students' academic endeavors, such as by providing specialised services, adaptable technology, and inclusive learning settings.
- **Information repackaging for individual needs:** This subject emphasises the significance of customizing materials to cater to the unique requirements of users with disabilities. The abstracts and talks examined methods for repackaging information to make it more approachable, comprehensible, and appropriate for a variety of consumers.

- Devices for assistive technology are available in university libraries: This theme emphasises the importance of integrating assistive technologies in university libraries to improve inclusion and accessibility. The papers cover the significance of supplying tools and technologies that help people with impairments access information and use library resources.

These topics show that the adaptation of inclusive education in libraries is the primary emphasis of LIS research as a whole. The themes and areas of coverage by VICLIS research are shown in Table 1. As a result, VICLIS research has mostly focused on boosting support for people with disabilities in library settings, addressing difficulties, and improving access. These topics highlight the contribution that libraries provide to fostering social inclusion, ensuring equity, and empowering users with special needs.

Table 1: Comparison of Inclusive Education Themes of the LIS with VICLIS Research

Themes/areas of inclusive education identified in relation to inclusive education from literature	Areas covered by VICLIS Papers	Areas not covered in literature
Accessibility in library services and facilities.	Accessibility to books and resources for all users.	Sensory and learning disabilities.
Diverse and representative collections in libraries.	The importance of diverse and representative collections in libraries.	Digital accessibility.
Inclusive programming for a diverse range of users.	Development of inclusive programming for a diverse range of users.	Social inclusion and community engagement.
Collaboration and partnerships among libraries, schools, educators, and community organizations.	Collaboration and partnership among libraries, schools, educators, and community organizations.	Universal design.
The user-centered approach in providing inclusive library services.	Adoption of a user-centered approach in library services.	Specific recommendations for information literacy and collection development.
The significance of accessible books and technologies in promoting inclusive education.	The provision of Braille books and addressing access to information issues.	
Staff awareness and training for providing inclusive services.	Promotion of accessibility in library buildings.	
The importance of cultural competence among librarians.	Implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty to support visually impaired students.	
Gaps and limitations in existing research on inclusive education in LIS.	Improvement of staff awareness and training.	
Thematic analysis of research abstracts from conferences on inclusive education.	Collaboration with relevant organizations.	
	The role of libraries in empowering users with special needs.	

However, despite the presence of these themes, there are certain gaps or areas of inclusive education that seem to be lacking in the analysed papers. Some potential areas for further exploration and research include:

- **Assistive technologies:** While there is mention of assistive technologies in university libraries, further research could delve deeper into specific technologies, their effectiveness, and their integration into library services.
- **Information literacy for people with disabilities:** The abstracts briefly mention the repackaging of information, but information literacy programmes created especially for people with disabilities that emphasise empowering them to effectively navigate information resources merit more attention.
- **Collection development:** Techniques for ensuring inclusivity are not thoroughly covered in the research abstracts. Future studies might look into how libraries might create collections that meet the various interests and requirements of people with disabilities.
- **Professional development requirements:** While raising staff awareness and training are briefly mentioned in the abstracts, more thorough research might examine the professional development requirements of library employees in relation to inclusive education. This would ensure that librarians have the abilities and information needed to offer inclusive services.
- **Universal Design:** Without the need for specialised adaptations, universal design aims to create places, services, and resources that are accessible and useable by as many people as feasible. By incorporating universal design principles into library operations, offerings, and resource selection,

libraries may foster diversity and provide advantages to a variety of users, including those with special needs.

Table 2 proposes the possible themes not covered in either LIS literature or VICLIS research papers. This indicates some research gaps related to inclusive education.

Table 2: Research Gap in LIS Literature on Inclusive Education

Themes/Areas	Covered in Literature	Covered by VICLIS	Not Covered in Literature
Accessibility	Yes	Yes	Sensory and learning disabilities, Digital accessibility
Diverse and representative collections	Yes	Yes	N/A
Inclusive programming	Yes	Yes	Social inclusion and community engagement
Collaboration and partnerships	Yes	Yes	Universal design
User-centered approach	Yes	Yes	Specific recommendations for information literacy and collection development
Significance of accessible books and technology	Yes	Yes	N/A
Staff awareness and training	Yes	Yes	N/A
Cultural competence among librarians	Yes	No	N/A
Gaps and limitations	Yes	No	N/A
Thematic analysis of research abstracts	Yes	Yes	N/A
Role of libraries in empowering users with spec	Yes	No	N/A

By addressing these gaps, future LIS research can further contribute to the adaptation of inclusive education in libraries and strengthen the support provided to individuals with disabilities.

7. Conclusions

The importance of providing inclusive library services and attending to the various needs of people with disabilities is emphasised by the thematic analysis of the research abstracts and presentations. The topics that have been emphasised highlight important areas where libraries may support inclusive

education. The conclusions drawn from the analysis serve as a roadmap for future study and actual application.

For libraries to guarantee equal access to books and information sources, improving accessibility is essential. Braille books, accessible digital resource forms, and the removal of physical barriers in library structures can all help with this. Libraries make it possible for people with disabilities to take full advantage of educational opportunities by putting accessibility first.

To fully understand the possibilities of assistive technologies in libraries, more research is required. This includes examining some technologies' efficacy, incorporating them into library services, and gauging how they affect disabled students' educational experiences. To empower users and foster inclusive learning environments, libraries should invest in a wide variety of assistive technology tools. To give people with disabilities the ability to efficiently explore and critically assess information, tailored information literacy programmes are crucial. Libraries may play a significant role in supporting information literacy so that users with disabilities have better information-seeking skills.

Another crucial element is curating inclusive collections that take into account the various needs and interests of people with disabilities. In order to ensure that users with disabilities have access to pertinent and interesting resources, this includes taking into account a variety of forms, topics, and viewpoints. Strategies for collection development should be inclusive and take into account the particular needs and preferences of these consumers.

Libraries must provide their staff with awareness and training on disability inclusion. Offering staff members training and professional development

opportunities can help them better understand their roles, change their attitudes, and acquire the knowledge and abilities they need to deliver inclusive services. In order to create thorough training programmes for library workers, cooperation with pertinent organizations and experts is essential.

By putting these suggestions into practice, libraries may provide inclusive environments that promote equitable opportunities for people with disabilities. Libraries support social inclusion, empower users with special needs, and ensure that libraries are inviting spaces for everyone through embracing accessibility, assistive technologies, information literacy, inclusive collection development, and staff training.

To investigate specific tactics and interventions for increasing inclusive library services, more study and practice are required. Empirical research can examine the efficiency of various strategies for producing inclusive educational results. The promotion of inclusive education and enabling people with disabilities to realise their full potential depend heavily on libraries. In the educational sector, inclusive education is crucial, and the discipline of library and information science is no exception. LIS professionals help to create equitable learning environments by promoting inclusive education and researching the issues. The VICLIS conferences offer a forum for debating and presenting research on inclusive education, encouraging information sharing, and advancing inclusive practises in the LIS industry, ultimately proving beneficial to all students.

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