

Mobility-Challenged Students and Access to Facilities in Selected Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT: One of the primary concerns of urban design is to ensure inclusiveness and provide accessibility to facilities for everyone, regardless of physical abilities or financial resources. This is hinged in realization that mobility is an important prerequisite for equal participation in social life and the satisfaction of basic human needs. The importance of creating access for Mobility Challenged Persons in policy issues informs its inclusion as one of the Sustainable Development Goals Number 17. The present study sought to examine the challenges of access to building by mobility challenged students in the three publicly owned tertiary institutions in Rivers state. Adopting the cross-sectional design, data were sourced from both primary and secondary sources. Our finding revealed that many public facilities especially high-rise buildings such as hostels, library, school clinic, faculties, and playgrounds within publicly owned tertiary institutions in Rivers state cannot be accessed by Mobility Challenged Students on wheelchair and crutches. Out of the 29 buildings surveyed, only six had ramp gradients falling within the Americans with Disability Act Accessibility Guidelines of 1:12. This implies that mobility challenged students who use mobility aid to get around in these selected universities can only independently access 21% of these buildings and will require help to access the remaining 79%. Though, most entrances/doorways (815mm) and route widths (915mm) of buildings in all three institutions were within the required dimension for wheelchair accessibility, this may have been a matter of coincidence and were not necessarily targeted to meet the needs of Mobility Challenged Students on campus. The research concluded that the absence of mobility aid devices in most buildings subjects the MCS to serious psychological trauma that militate against their productivity and performance

which in turn affects their capacity to realize their social, economic, and educational aspirations with implications on their socio-economic wellbeing. It was therefore recommended that there should be policy intervention and the implementation of measures to remove barriers that impinge on the ability of students with special needs to access and fully function in the campuses of universities.

Key word: Mobility Challenged; Disable, Physically Challenged Persons; Mobility Aid.

I. INTRODUCTION.

Although, there appears to be rising cases of mobility challenged persons (MCPs), more worrisome, is the fact that the geographical distribution of MCPs is not even among countries of the world. According to Lang and Upah (2008), the prevalence rate of MCPs is higher in developing countries compared to the developed ones. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019), observed that two billion people of the world's population live with great functional difficulties in their day-to-day lives.

Mobility challenge is a type of disability and describes people with varying types of physical disability, manual dexterity, and disability in coordination with different organs of their body (Disabled World, 2019). WHO (2020) sees disability as 'a problem in the body function or structure; an activity limitation, has difficulty in executing a task or action; with a participation restriction. For Wood and Dolmage, (2018). Disability refers to "persons with physical, mental and intellectual health issues that hindered them from fully participating in a normal community way of life".

A review of literature shows that Nigeria has its fair share of the disabled populations which is on the rise. The 2006 Nigerian census reported the number of people living with disability to be

3,253,169 representing 2.32% of the country's total population (Nze, 2016). In 2011, 25 million Nigerians had at least one disability related issue (World Report on Disability, 2011), while 3.6 million of the 25 million had very significant difficulties in functioning (Umeh, & Adeola, 2016). The number of disabilities in Nigeria in 2020 is put at over 27 million people (Lang, 2016).

Since mobility is an important prerequisite for equal participation in social life and the satisfaction of basic human needs (Gerd, et al., 2012), the increase in the number of mobility challenged person with a greater proportion of this group in the school-age brackets calls for concerted efforts to emphasize the inclusion principle in the design of public buildings and facilities. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2006) acknowledges that disabled people should have unrestricted access to mobility systems. Article 9 of this convention states that measures should be taken "to ensure that persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public"

The importance of creating access for MCPs in policy issues informs its inclusion as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 17 of the SDGs seeks to transform the world for persons with disabilities by promoting active dialogue among stakeholders on the SDGs with a view to create a better world for persons with disabilities (UN, 2015). A careful observation indicates that public facilities especially high-rise buildings such as hostels, libraries, school clinics, faculties, and playgrounds within public educational institutions in Rivers state, Nigeria cannot be accessed by Mobility Challenged Students (MCS) on wheelchair, crutches and those with people-aided devices. Public buildings in these institutions are erected without mobility aids for the MCS. This inadvertently excludes their use by MCS with attendant negative implications on their socio-economic well-being.

The questions here are: How accessible are the buildings in public Universities in Rivers

state to the MCS? What provisions are in place to ensure that MCS meet their day-to-day educational activities? Are the accessibility needs of MCS with mobile aids different from those without aids? The present study seeks to assess the challenges faced by MCS in public universities in Rivers state, Nigeria.

II. STUDY AREA

Rivers state is one of the 36 states of Nigeria with Port-Harcourt as its capital. Rivers state is traversed by latitude 4°44'59.06" N and longitude 6°49'39.58" E. It is bounded by the state of Anambra and Imo on the North, Abia and Akwa Ibom on the East and Bayelsa and Delta on the West. Rivers State is among the biggest states in Nigeria, blessed with natural resources. The state houses several public tertiary institutions offering a wide range of professionally accredited programmes and qualifications. The presence of oil and gas in the state exerts centripetal force pulling both firms and people into the state with a large percentage of the immigrants been physically challenged.

Universities and colleges administered by the Government of Rivers State are also located in the city. They include Rivers State University, Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Rivers State College of Health Science and Technology. The notable private institutions are Catholic Institute of West Africa and Eastern Polytechnic. The latter is the first and only private polytechnic established in the state.

The public universities of interest are the University of Port Harcourt (Uniport), Rivers state University, and the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Uniport was established in 1975 as a University College, and in 1977, it attained full university status. University of Port-Harcourt is a second-generation federal university located in the Niger – Delta region of Nigeria with over 50,000 students and a strong focus on Petroleum Engineering. Uniport has been ranked amongst the top ten universities in Africa and as the first in Nigeria by Times Higher Education (THE); a UK-based source for higher education information.



Figure 2: Map of Nigeria showing Rivers state.

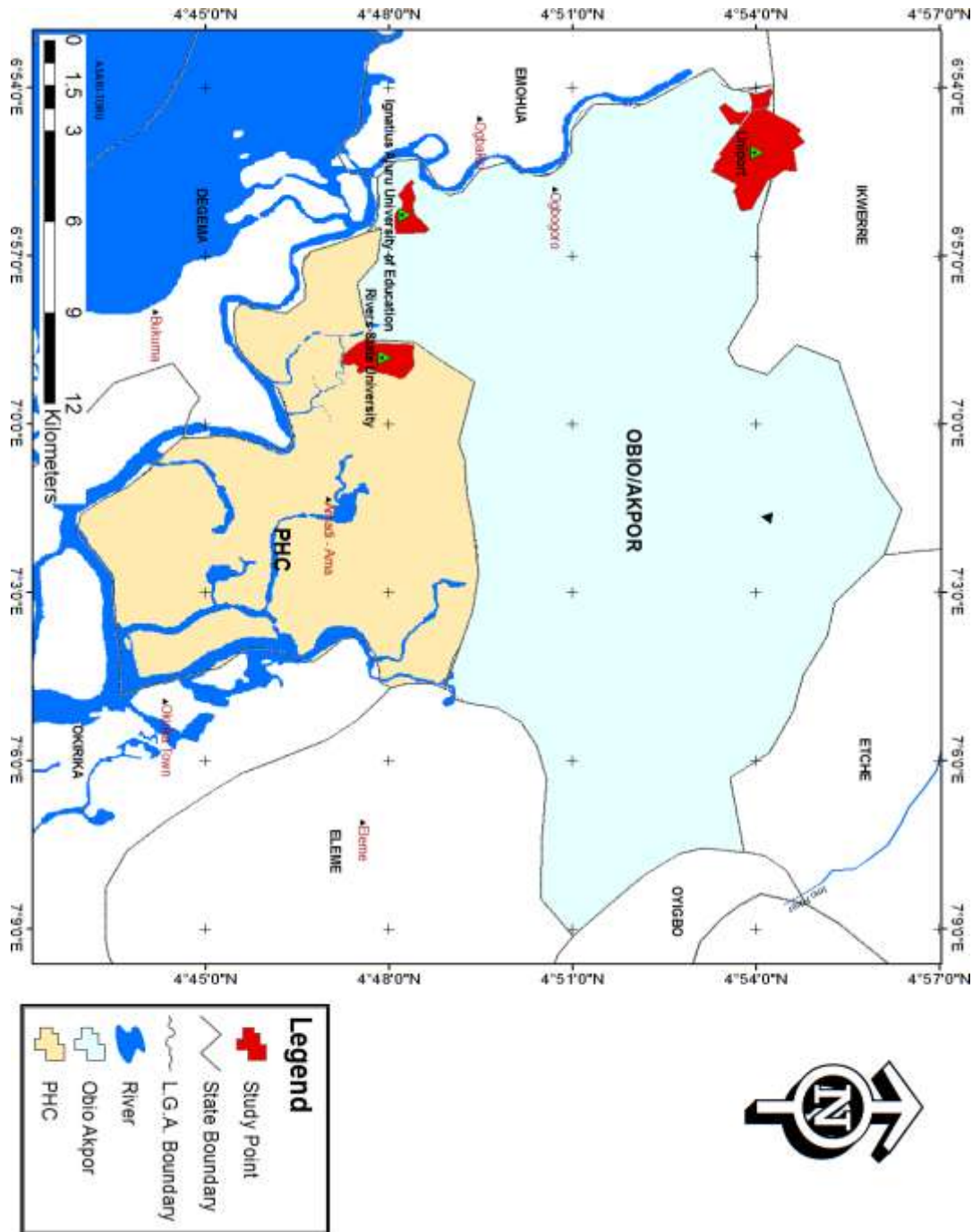


Figure 2: Map of Rivers State showing study locations

The Rivers State University Port Harcourt was established in 1980 from the Rivers State College of Science and Technology and formerly called Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt (RSUST) which was itself established in 1972. It is located at Nkpolu – Oroworukwo in Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State, Nigeria. It is the first technological university

in Nigeria and the first state university in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The University has seven faculties; Agriculture, Engineering, Environmental Sciences, Law, Management Sciences, Science and Technical and Science Education; and a Postgraduate School. RSU has five Institutes: Institute of Foundation Studies, Pollution Studies,

Education, RIART, Geosciences and Space Technology.

III. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The research approach adopted is the Mixed Methods Research (MMR) approach; as both quantitative and qualitative data were used contemporaneously, (Cresswell, 2014). The cross-sectional survey research design was used, and the study belongs to the passive-observational class as research subjects (Mobility Challenged Students) were studied at one point in time, in situ, without experimental manipulation (Cook and Campbell, 1979). The public facilities (buildings) of interest are: Cafeteria, Faculty buildings, libraries, hostels, medical clinics, and lecture theatres/halls. To measure University facilities with reference to accessibility by MCS, the study employed the Physical Access Audit Checklist (PAAC) of the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) Checklist for buildings (United States Government (USG), 1994). A matrix with predetermined criteria was employed and weights were assigned 1, 2, 3, and 4 to measure “never”, “sometimes”, “often” and ‘always’ respectively (see Table 1). Aspects measured included entrance ramps, stairways, passageways; conveniences, designated seating areas, and parking space for mobility challenged users. Physical measurement was taken and recorded to the nearest 0.1 centimeter for the following facilities:

The doorway width: the horizontal distance across the doorframe.

- i) **Width of route:** the horizontal distance between the edges of a corridor, passage, and passageway.
- ii) **Height of ramp:** the vertical distance from the bottom to the top of the ramp at the highest point.
- iii) **Length of ramp:** the distance between the beginning and the end of the base of ramp.
- iv) **The grade of ramp** is deduced by finding the ratio of the height and the length of the ramp, that is: $\text{Grade of ramp} = \frac{\text{height of ramp}}{\text{Length of ramp}}$
- v) **ATM (Automated Teller Machine) OR Service Point Maximum Height above the finished Floor:** the vertical distance from the level of the finished floor to the lower border of the machine.
- vi) **Width of the lecture Hall/ Theatre:** the horizontal distance between any projections of

a tenant space bordering them all.

- vii) **Clear exit width of the lecture Hall/ Theatre:** the horizontal distance between the edges of a corridor, passage, and passageway at the exit.
- viii) **Security Doors Metal Detectors:** presence with alternative entrance route for the physically challenged persons.
- ix) **Seating arrangements in places of assembly and education:** the seating arrangements for persons in wheelchairs were observed for whether it was provided or not.
- x) **Platform Lifts (Wheelchair Lifts) in Faculty High rise building** was observed for presence or absence.

Accessibility or otherwise, of each building and facility was determined by comparing the measurements taken with the required dimensions as highlighted by Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) Checklist for buildings. A building was considered accessible when at least a ramp and its linking route(s) were found accessible.

IV. CONCEPTUAL/ THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The Concept of Disability

According to the WHO, a disabled person is “one who is restricted or lacks ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being of comparable culture, age and sex” (Ityavyar, 1984). In a layman’s context, a disabled person hardly moves about except with the aid of walking crutches, canes and/or wheelchairs. This view is narrow as physical impairment in which mobility-challenge is a form is only one among many forms of disabilities. A mobility-challenged person is disadvantaged in performing a social role or function (handicapped), which is expected of a normal person. Man, experiences physical disability at some time in life. The disability may be permanent or temporary. In Ward (1979) disability means to have an impairment that takes away certain abilities that the sufferer would otherwise have enjoyed. The disabled people include, those confined to wheelchair, people with limited walking abilities (i.e., only able to move with the aid of sticks or crutches), the sightless, the partially sighted, Down’s syndrome, the deaf or epileptic. It could be temporary disability such as broken limbs, strained muscles, pregnancy, or old age (Ward, 1979 and United Nations, 2003-04).
Models of disability

The concept of accessibility

According to the International Standards Organisation (2009), accessibility includes ease of independent approach, entry, evacuation, and or use of a building and its services and buildings by all of the building's potential users with an assurance of individual health, safety, and welfare during the course of those activities. The main public entrance or route to a building should be accessible to all persons, regardless of disability. Accessibility to buildings or part of buildings, into them, within them and exit from them should be a prime consideration in the design and construction of a building. An accessible barrier-free environment is the first step towards fulfilling the right of People with Disability (PWD) to participate in all areas of community life. Article 9 of the Unconventional Rights of PWD on accessibility notes that, to enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, appropriate measures should be taken to ensure persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, transportation systems, and other buildings and services open to or provided for the public, both in urban and in rural areas (Anunobiet al.,2015).

Persons/students of modern societies have different opportunities to exercise their rights for participating in public life that are frequently obstructed and limited by different barriers to access public and residential environment, buildings, and services. The aspect of equal accessibility to buildings becomes especially important in the face of recent demographic shifts (Stauskis, 2017).

Quality of access to building and a facility is estimated in planning, design, construction, and maintenance of buildings. For this reason, the accessibility requirements of different building codes and standards, regulations, and guidelines as well as design and construction practices of different countries are important. Better accessibility in public, residential and labour sectors could be achieved by precisely following requirements of building code as well as integrating good practices and research-based solutions into planning and design process. This leads towards more safe, sustainable, functional, and welcoming urban and rural environment with specific climatic, cultural, and social tradition (Stauskis, 2017).

The Medical Model of Disability

Also referred to as the "individual model", it focuses on the individual's medical condition and

locates disability within the person. Here disability is defined by the underlying medical condition of the person involved. This model assumes that with medical treatment or intervention the individual can be helped to overcome their limitations. People with disabilities have generally rejected this model. They say it has led to their low self-esteem, undeveloped life skills, poor education, and consequent high unemployment levels. Above all, they have recognized that the Medical Model requires the breaking of natural relationships with their families, communities, and institutions (Crabtree,2013).

The Social Model of Disability

The social model of disability, which supported Equality Act 2010 states that barriers are viewed as disabling the person and are external to the individual. It views disability as an artifact of the way an institution is organized (Crabtree, 2013). This viewpoint shifts the focus to the rights of disabled people and the requirement for the institution to change. Disabled people developed the social model of disability because the traditional medical model did not explain their personal experience of disability or help to develop more inclusive ways of living. The social model of disability starts from a different perspective; it ignores how "bad" a person's impairment is. Instead, it establishes that everyone is equal and demonstrates that it is the institution which erects barriers that prevent disabled people from participating and restricts their opportunities in the process (Crabtree,2013).

The disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities. Physical disability is, therefore, a form of "social oppression" (Barking & Dagenham,2001).

Disabilities Prohibition Act, 2018

In 2018, the Nigerian government passed a law called the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018. This was passed by the National Assembly and signed in law by President Muhammadu Buhari on 23rd January 2018. The law was promulgated to protect the group of persons categorised as disabled persons in the country after 9 years of advocacy by disability rights groups and activists (Ewang, 2019).

However, to ratify and domesticate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007 and its Optional

Protocol in 2010 this law was passed to be in line with the international communities. The law prohibits against discrimination disabled persons and imposes sanctions such as fines and prison sentences on those who contravene it. The law has also stipulated a five-year transitional period for modification of public facilities, structures, and automobiles to make them easily accessible for people with disabilities. The law further establishes a National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, that is responsible for ensuring that people with disabilities have access to housing, education, and healthcare buildings and services and receive complaints of rights violations and support victims to seek legal redress amongst other duties in the country.

The enactment of the Disability Act in Nigeria meant that the mobility challenged students ought to be considered when planning, designing, and constructing public facilities in reference to accessibility of such structures and development so as to eliminate the issue of neglect and abuse suffered by these persons in the Nigerian institution. In this same light, development agencies and practitioners are increasingly recognizing disability as a key issue, inexorably linked to poverty, the extension of human rights and persons/studentship.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

Tables 1-3 are the results of findings with respect to selected criteria in the three publicly owned tertiary institutions under study. Regarding width of door, all the buildings surveyed in the three institutions met the required minimum standard of 815mm set by ADA. The measured figures for width of door range from 900mm-1800mm. For width of route all buildings surveyed also met the required standard of 915mm minimum. The case is different in terms of gradient for ramps. Of the public buildings/facilities surveyed, only 35.6% were accessible using the accessibility criteria of ramp and linking routes.

Regarding ramp slope the ADA Standard provides for ramps with gradients not greater than 1:12, and required that any buildings above three floors should be provided with an elevator or lift while buildings that are less than four floors should be supported with accessible ramps that are user friendly for the mobility challenged students. Out of the 29 buildings surveyed in the three publicly

owned tertiary institutions in Rivers state, only one in every nine-facility surveyed was accessible based on the presence of the recommended standard of ramp gradient of by ADAAG. This implies that mobility challenged students who use mobility aid togetheraroundintheselected universitiescanonlyindependently access22.2%. of these buildings.

With exception of the automated Library that has a ramp gradient of 1:13, no building in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education had ramps provided for use by the MCS. The situation at the University of Port Harcourt is even worst and precarious as no public building in the university has ramp as part of its design component. At the Rivers State university, only four of such buildings (faculty of engineering 1:12, medical center 1:13, faculty of education 1:13, central library 1:15) met the required minimum ramp gradient of 1:12. (table 3)

For height of ATM, only the ATM at Ecobank student friendly center at the University of Port Harcourt had an ATM height of 405 mm. All the other buildings investigated in the three universities had no ATM machines attached to them. The findings also showed that there were alternative routes in most of the buildings studied in the three universities.

The findings from this survey showed generally, that MCS cannot access most buildings in the three public universities under references. Though, mostentrances/doorways (815mm) androutewidths (915mm) of buildings in all three institutions were within the required dimension for wheelchair accessibility, it may have been a matter of coincidence and not necessarily targeted to meet the needs of Mobility Challenged Students on campus.

The inaccessible nature of most buildings in these institutions subjects MCS to lots of stress in their quest to get education. The finding of this investigation is compatible to a similar study conducted in Africa's second largest city, Ibadan by Hamzat and Dada (2005) which also reported a very low accessibility of public building in Oyo State. The similarity in the findings for Rivers state and Ibadan may not be doubted especially when viewed against the backdrop that both states are yet to enact a state law on accessibility of persons living with disability.

S/N	FACILITY	ADA GUIDELINES	ICT CENTRE	FACULTY OF HUMANITIES	POSTGRADUATE BLOCK	MATHS LAB	FAC. OF MGT.SCIENCES	AUTOMATED LIBRARY
1	Doorway width (minimum)	815mm	900mm	1200mm	1200mm	1500mm	1000mm	1000mm
2	Width of Route (minimum)	915mm	1100mm	1100mm	1000mm	Not applicable	Not applicable	1000mm
3	Grade of ramp (maximum)	1:12	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	1:13
4	ATM height above finished floor level	405mm- Maximum height 1285mm	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
5	The horizontal distance between any projections of a tenant space bordering the mall.	Not more than 100 mm)	No projections	No projections	No projections	No projections	No projections	No projections
6	Clear exit width of the lecture hall	-	2400mm	-	-	-	-	-
7	Security door metal detector (Presence with alternative entrance for physically challenged people)	A service entrance shall, alternative route	Alternative route present	Alternative route present	Alternative route present	Alternative route present	Alternative route absent	Alternative route present
8	Seating arrangement in places of assembly and education	Wheelchair areas shall be an integral part of any fixed seating plan and shall be provided people with physical disabilities a choice of admission comparable to those for members of the public	Provided	Provided	Not applicable	Provided	Provided	Provided
9	Wheelchairs lift in faculty high rise building	Must be provided for high rise buildings	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable

Table 1: Characteristics of selected public Buildings at the Ignatius Ajuru University

Source: Authors Field work, (2020)

S/No	Facility	Ada Guidelines	Senate Building	Face of Environmental Sciences	Faculty of Law	Faculty of Engineering	Medical Centre	School Cathedral	Faculty of education	Central Library	ICT Centre	PG. School
1	Doorway width Minimum	815mm	1800mm	1800mm	900mm	1200mm	1200mm	900mm	900mm	1200mm	900mm	1200mm
2	Width of Route Minimum	915mm	1200mm	1200mm	1200mm	1200mm	1200mm	1300mm	1200mm	1500mm	1200mm	1200mm
3	Grade of ramp Maximum	1:12	Not provided	1:6	1:8	1:12	1:13	1:5	1:13	1:15	1:6	1:5
4	ATM height above finished floor level	405mm/Maximum height 1285mm	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not applicable	Not available
5	The horizontal distance between projections of a mall	Not more than 100 mm)	No projections	No projection	No projection	50mm	80mm	20mm	No projection	80mm	No projection	No projection
7	Security door metal detector with alternative entrance for physically challenged people)	A service entrance alternative route	alternative route present	alternative route present	alternative route present	alternative route present	alternative route present	alternative route present	alternative route present	alternative route present	alternative route present	alternative route present
8	Seating arrangement in places of assembly and education	Wheelchair areas shall be an integral part of any fixed seating plan and shall be provided people with physical disabilities a choice of admission comparable to those for members of the public	Not provided	Provided	provided	Provided	Provided	Provided	Not provided	provided	Provided	Not available
9	Wheelchairs lift in faculty high rise building	Must be provided for high rise buildings	Not applicable	Not Provided	Not Provided	Not Provided	not applicable	Not applicable	Not provided	Not Provided	Not applicable	Not applicable

Table 2: Characteristics of selected public Buildings at the Rivers state University

S/ No	FACILITY	ADA GUIDELINES	SENATE BUILDING	SEASIDE THEATRE	SCHOOL CAFETERIA	UNIPORT MALL	PHARMACY HOSTEL	PG. HOSTEL	FAC. OF SCI.	BEANGO HALL	MGT. SCI.	STUDENT FRIENDLY CENTER
1	Doorway width (minimum)	815mm	1800mm	1100mm	1500mm	900mm	1300mm	1000mm	900mm	900mm	1200mm	900mm
2	Width of Route (minimum)	915mm	1200mm	1200mm	1000mm	1200mm	1200mm	1000mm	1000mm	Not applicable	1500mm	1200mm
3	Grade of ramp (maximum)	1:12	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not applicable	Not provided	Not provided	Not applicable	Not provided	Not provided
4	ATM height above finished floor level	405mm- Maximum height 1285mm	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Less than 405mm, height (1200mm)
5	The horizontal distance between any projections of a tenant space bordering the mall	Not more than 100 mm)	No projections	No projections	No projections	30mm	No projections	No projections	No projections	No projections	No projections	No projections
7	Security door metal detector (Presence with alternative entrance for physically challenged people)	A service entrance shall have alternative route	Alternative route present	Alternative route present	Alternative route present	Alternative route present	Alternative route present	Alternative route present	Alternative route present	Alternative route present	Alternative route present	Alternative route present
8	Seating arrangement in places of assembly and educated	Wheelchair areas shall be an integral part of any fixed seating plan and shall be provided people with physical disabilities a choice of admission comparable to those for members of the public	Not applicable	Provided	Provided	Provided	Not applicable	Provided	Provided	Provided	Provided	Provided
9	Wheelchairs lift in faculty high rise building	Must be provided for high rise buildings	Not provided	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not provided	Not applicable	Not provided	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not provided	Not applicable

Table 3: Characteristics of Public Facilities at University of Port Harcourt

Source: field work, (2020)

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the primary concerns of urban design is to ensure inclusiveness and provide accessibility to facilities for everyone, regardless of physical abilities or financial resources. This is hinged in the realization that accessibility is a matter of right and determines the freedom and ease of individuals to participate in different activities' (Moyo, Munyonga & Useh, 2001). The increasing number of physically challenged persons many of whom are within the school age bracket calls for deliberate efforts at mainstreaming design friendly approaches that enhance access and use of public buildings by students with special needs in our tertiary institutions of learning.

This study examined the challenges faced by MCS while accessing facilities in the three public tertiary institutions in Rivers State. Available evidence shows that most, public buildings in all the institutions studied lack facilities that will enhance the daily activities and functioning of the MCS. Mobility-challenged student undergoing various academic studies in publicly owned tertiary institutions in Rivers State are subjected to untold stress and social exclusion. The absence of mobility aid devices in most buildings subjects the MCS to serious psychological trauma that militate against their productivity and performance which in turn affects their capacity to realize their social, economic, and educational aspirations with implications on their socio-economic wellbeing.

Little wonder that the World Health Organisation (WHO) and World Bank have variously acknowledged that persons with disability (PWD) from poverty-stricken areas are the "poorest of the poor" and the largest marginalized groups because a majority of them are relying on the institution for their daily necessities (Stauskis, 2017). Since access to education is a matter of right, no person ought to be discriminated against and prevented from achieving his/her educational goals. The realization of fundamental human rights requires an inclusive society, in which every individual is treated equally, has freedom of expression, and may participate fully in social, economic, and political life. The realization of the fundamental rights of mobility challenged students requires policy intervention and the implementation of measures to remove barriers that impinge on the ability of students with special needs

to access and fully function in the campuses of universities.

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