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ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AND ACCESSIBILITY TO BUILDINGS: EXPERIENCE OF MOBILITY- CHALLENGED STUDENTS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

One of the intriguing aspects of world population dynamics is increase in the number of people with one form of disability or the other with greater percentage within the school age. The rising number of Mobility Challenged Students precipitates a situation where sizable percentage of people are excluded from school occasioned by inaccessibility to facilities and buildings found in most universities. The present study examined the architectural designs of public buildings and challenges that Mobility Challenged Students face in accessing education in publicly owned universities in River State, Nigeria. Data for the study were gotten from both primary and secondary sources using the survey research design. The findings showed that Mobility Challenged Students in publicly owned universities studied go through harrowing and excruciating experience in their quest to meet their educational needs. All the facilities investigated: lecture halls, library, and entrances to building are not accessible to the Mobility Challenged Students on campus. Since access to education is a matter of right, this study recommends for the inclusion of the needs of Mobility Challenged Students in the design and construction of all buildings and facilities in publicly owned universities. Making public buildings and facilities in our universities physically accessible for the Mobility Challenged Students is one way of enhancing participation and inclusiveness of all irrespective of ability.

Keywords: Accessibility, disability, Mobility Challenged Students, inclusiveness, public facility.

1.0 Introduction

One of the intriguing aspects of world population dynamics is increase in the number of people with one form of disability or the other. Though, there is a rise in the number of disability, the prevalence is unequally distributed across spatial boundaries. According to UN report (2011), more than one billion (15%) people in the world live with some forms of disability, of whom nearly 200 million experience considerable difficulties in functioning. Africa's share of disability is also disturbing as forty percent (300 million) of Africa's population consists of people with disabilities including 10-15 percent of school-age children (African Studies Centre, 2008).

World Health Organization in its 2011 World's Disability Report, indicated that about 15 percent of Nigeria's population, (about 25 million people), have disability of which many of them face stigma, discrimination, violence, and lack of access to healthcare, housing and education. The import of high proportion of people with disability especially among those within the school age in the world, and indeed Africa precipitates situations where sizable percentage of people is excluded from schools and opportunities for work. This situation virtually guarantees that those with disability live as the poorest of the poor as school enrolment for the disable is

estimated at no more than 5-10 percent with as many as 70-80 percent of working age people with disabilities being unemployed (African Studies Centre, 2008).

Related to the prevalence of disability is the fact that persons with disabilities are more likely to experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes such as less education, poorer health outcomes, lower levels of employment and higher poverty rates (World Bank, 2020). The plight of people with disability meeting their day-to-day activities has been indeed harrowing due to community attitudes and physical barriers in the built environment that limit people with disabilities participating fully in society. Accordingly, physically challenged persons are denied access to education, employment, housing, recreation, cultural events, and transportation (World Bank, 2020).

Although, in the past people with disabilities have largely been provided for through solutions that segregate them, such as residential institutions and special schools, Parmenter (2008) observes that there has been a policy shift towards community and educational inclusion, as medically focused solutions have given way to more interactive approaches recognizing that people are disabled by environmental factors as well as by their bodies. In this connection, issue of disability has become a thing of right especially with the

