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Emmanuel Ehimen Ehikioya

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From Compliance to Inclusion: Reframing Web Accessibility Practices in Academic Libraries

Emmanuel Ehimen Ehikioya
University of Birmingham, United Kington

ABSTRACT

Web accessibility in academic libraries is frequently approached as a compliance exercise: meet a standard, pass an audit, reduce legal exposure. While legal and technical standards remain essential, a narrow compliance orientation can result in "checkbox accessibility," which fails to enhance the everyday experiences of disabled students, staff, faculty, and community users who rely on library websites, discovery tools, guides, repositories, and vendor platforms. This paper reframes web accessibility in academic libraries as an inclusion practice anchored in user experience, disability justice, and continuous service improvement. Drawing on international human rights principles, evolving regulatory requirements, and library-focused research documenting persistent accessibility failures in academic library web environments, the paper distinguishes between conformance and inclusion and explains why the difference matters. It synthesises key findings from recent studies of academic library websites, accessibility webpages, and LibGuides, as well as procurement scholarship that highlights the accessibility risks embedded in licensed digital resources. Building on this literature, the paper proposes an inclusion-oriented framework for accessibility work that emphasises co-design with disabled users, institutional accountability, transparent communication, and a shift from retrofits to accessibility-by-design. The recommendations section offers actionable strategies for academic libraries, governance structures, accessible content and design systems, testing programs that combine automated and manual methods, procurement and vendor management practices, and metrics that align accessibility with educational equity and student success. The conclusion argues that treating accessibility as an ongoing public service obligation rather than a periodic compliance task strengthens academic libraries' missions of equitable access to information and knowledge.

Keywords: Academic libraries; web accessibility; inclusive design; disability justice; WCAG; digital inclusion

INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries are now primarily digital service organisations. Even where physical collections and spaces remain central, core library interactions, catalogue discovery, database selection, research help, instructional materials, course reserves, institutional repository deposits, and event participation are mediated by websites and web-based systems. When these interfaces are not accessible, disabled users encounter barriers at the point where academic work increasingly

happens online. The result is not only inconvenience, but also exclusion from learning opportunities, scholarly participation, and the everyday benefits of library services.

Globally, disability is common and diverse. The World Health Organisation estimates that 1.3 billion people experience significant disability, approximately 16% of the world's population (World Health Organisation, 2023). In higher education, disability includes visible and non-visible impairments and conditions, and the digital environment can be a barrier or an enabler depending on design choices. Libraries, therefore, face an ethical and practical imperative to ensure that their web presence supports equitable access to information for all users.

In practice, however, web accessibility in many institutions has been driven primarily by compliance pressures. Recent U.S. regulatory developments illustrate this trajectory. In April 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice issued a final rule under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requiring state and local government entities to ensure that web content and mobile applications meet technical standards, identified as WCAG 2.1 Level AA, with compliance dates in April 2026 for larger entities and April 2027 for smaller entities (U.S. Department of Justice, 2024). Public universities and their libraries must interpret and operationalise these requirements in conjunction with other obligations, such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and, where relevant, Section 508 standards, as applied through procurement and institutional policy.

Compliance is necessary but not sufficient. Libraries can achieve partial conformance on a subset of pages, pass an automated scan, or publish an accessibility statement, yet still deliver a frustrating or unusable experience for users of screen readers, alternative input devices, captions, or custom display settings. Studies of academic library web environments continue to document widespread accessibility errors. For example, Liu, Bielefield, and Beckwith (2024) assessed academic library websites at top U.S. universities using automated tools and reported that accessibility errors were prevalent, including low colour contrast and missing labels. These findings align with research across regions showing that high-ranking institutions can still fail basic accessibility checks (Asok & Rekha, 2025).

This paper argues that academic libraries need to move from a compliance mindset to an inclusion mindset. In a compliance frame, accessibility work is triggered by audits, complaints, or legal risk and is evaluated primarily by conformance to a standard. In an inclusion frame, accessibility becomes a continuous service commitment integrated into design, content governance, procurement, and community engagement. This reframing draws on disability studies and disability justice scholarship that emphasise access as a collective responsibility rather than a problem located in individual bodies. Kumbier and Starkey (2016), for example, criticise approaches that treat access mainly as a means of solving problems after barriers are encountered; they instead call for an ethic of accessibility grounded in justice, shared responsibility, and collaboration.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 outlines conceptual and regulatory foundations, distinguishing accessibility from usability and inclusion, and summarising key standards that shape academic library practice. Section 3 reviews library and information science literature on

web accessibility, including studies of library websites, accessibility webpages, LibGuides, and procurement-related research on licensed resources. Section 4 proposes an inclusion-oriented framework for web accessibility in academic libraries. Section 5 provides recommendations for implementing this framework through governance, design systems, testing, procurement, training, and accountability. Section 6 concludes by emphasising accessibility as a core expression of academic libraries' mission of equitable access to information.

Conceptual And Regulatory Context

Accessibility, usability, and inclusion

Web accessibility is commonly defined as whether a person with a disability can perceive, operate, understand, and interact robustly with digital content. The WCAG framework expresses these ideas through the four principles of Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, and Robust (W3C, 2023). In library settings, "accessibility" is sometimes treated as a technical attribute of pages (for example, passing contrast checks or providing text alternatives) rather than as a lived experience of using services. This technical emphasis is understandable because standards and audits often focus on measurable criteria, yet a purely technical framing can obscure whether users can actually accomplish their goals efficiently and independently.

Usability overlaps with accessibility but is not identical. A page can meet a subset of technical criteria while remaining confusing, inconsistent, or cognitively demanding. Conversely, a highly usable interface for sighted mouse users may be inaccessible to keyboard-only users or screen reader users. An inclusion-oriented approach treats accessibility as a minimum quality threshold and then extends beyond it to consider user diversity, context of use, and the cumulative burden of small frictions across complex research workflows.

Inclusion, in this context, refers to design and service practices that anticipate disability as a normal dimension of human variation and build environments in which disabled users can participate without special accommodations. This aligns with the social model of disability, which locates disability in the interaction between impairments and environmental barriers rather than in the individual alone (Oliver, 1990). It also aligns with rights-based perspectives expressed in international human rights instruments. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) frames disability as an evolving concept shaped by barriers and recognises accessibility to information and communications as foundational for participation (United Nations, 2006). Libraries, as public knowledge institutions, are well-positioned to adopt this rights-based and barrier-removal orientation.

Standards and legal drivers shaping academic library practice

Several overlapping standards and legal frameworks shape expectations for web accessibility in academic libraries. Internationally, WCAG is the dominant technical standard for web content. WCAG 2.2 became a W3C Recommendation in 2023 and extends earlier versions by adding success criteria focused on areas such as authentication, focus appearance, dragging movements,

and consistent help, among others (W3C, 2023). While WCAG 2.2 is the latest version, regulatory systems often adopt a specific version to ensure stability and enforcement.

In the United States, the ADA has long been interpreted through enforcement actions and litigation to require accessible digital services in many contexts, even before explicit technical standards were incorporated into regulation. The 2024 ADA Title II rule clarified these expectations for state and local government services, including many public academic institutions, by adopting WCAG 2.1 Level AA as the baseline technical standard (U.S. Department of Justice, 2024). The rule's requirement that services be "readily accessible to and usable by" individuals with disabilities also underscores that accessibility compliance must support practical use, not only formal technical conformance.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act establishes accessibility requirements for federal agencies and for the procurement and development of information and communication technology. The Section 508 standards incorporate WCAG 2.0 Level A and AA criteria and are widely used as benchmarks beyond federal agencies, especially in procurement and vendor evaluation (U.S. General Services Administration). In Europe, EN 301 549 specifies accessibility requirements for ICT products and services and is referenced in public procurement and accessibility policy contexts (European Telecommunications Standards Institute, 2021). Academic libraries that operate in transnational consortia or procure vendor platforms used across borders increasingly encounter these standards in licensing and product assessment workflows.

Standards matter because they provide shared language, testable criteria, and an accountability foundation. However, standards also have limitations. They are typically applied to discrete artefacts (pages, documents, components), whereas library user journeys span multiple systems: library websites, discovery layers, vendor databases, authentication flows, learning management systems, and embedded media. A more inclusion-focused approach, therefore, treats standards as a baseline and extends practice across whole user journeys, shared organisational responsibility, and clear accessibility information for users.

Table 1. Comparing compliance-oriented and inclusion-oriented accessibility approaches

Dimension	**Compliance-oriented approach**	**Inclusion-oriented approach**
Primary goal	Meet legal/standard requirements; reduce risk	Enable equitable participation; improve lived experience
Primary trigger	Audit findings, complaints, deadlines	Service design and continuous improvement
Success measure	Conformance score; number of errors	Task completion and satisfaction for disabled users
Methods	Automated scans; retrofits	Automated + manual testing + co-design and user research

Ownership	Small specialist team or IT	Shared governance across content, design, procurement, and services
Scope	Library-managed pages	End-to-end journeys across library + vendor platforms
Communication	Statement as legal protection	Statement as transparency and feedback mechanism

Professional library values reinforce this broader stance. The American Library Association's interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights regarding services to people with disabilities states that libraries should be fully inclusive and work to remove barriers to access (American Library Association, 2024). Similarly, IFLA's guidelines for making libraries accessible emphasise a human-rights approach, leadership responsibility, staff education, and collaboration with disability groups (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2024). These statements position accessibility as an expression of librarianship's equity commitments rather than solely as a matter of risk management.

Evaluation practices and the limits of automation

Academic libraries commonly rely on automated evaluation tools to identify accessibility errors at scale. Tools such as WebAIM's WAVE and Deque's axe are widely used in studies and institutional audits because they can quickly detect issues such as missing form labels, low colour contrast, and missing alternative text. Many published assessments of library websites use these tools as primary methods (Liu et al., 2024; Asok & Rekha, 2025).

Automated tools are valuable, but they do not replace human judgment. Many barriers are contextual: for example, whether alternative text is meaningful, whether a heading structure communicates information hierarchy, or whether interactive components are operable with a screen reader. The WCAG-EM evaluation methodology, developed by W3C, assumes a mix of automated and manual checks and emphasises sampling and structured evaluation rather than relying on a single scan result (W3C, 2014). In an inclusion-oriented program, automated testing is therefore treated as one component of a broader quality assurance and user testing strategy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Accessibility Of Academic Library Websites

Research evaluating academic library websites repeatedly finds substantial accessibility shortcomings. Liu, Bielefield, and Beckwith (2024) evaluated public university academic library websites selected from top-ranked U.S. institutions and reported that accessibility errors were common, with low colour contrast identified as a growing issue. Although the study relied on automated tools, its findings align with broader trends in web accessibility research: contrast, text alternatives, and form labels remain persistent problems even on high-profile sites.

Beyond the U.S. context, Asok and Rekha (2025) examined best-ranked Asian university library websites and reported widespread failures to meet WCAG 2.1 requirements, identifying contrast issues and missing text alternatives and form labels. The authors also note that institutional ranking and website performance indicators do not necessarily correspond to accessible user experiences. Accessibility instead appears to depend on sustained governance, skills, and attention to inclusive design.

The literature also emphasises that accessibility is not limited to "the website" as a single entity. Academic libraries often operate a constellation of platforms with different owners and technical constraints. When libraries host content across content management systems, discovery layers, institutional repositories, and third-party guides, accessibility gaps in any one part of the ecosystem can disrupt a user's ability to complete research tasks.

User Perspectives And The Gap Between Conformance And Experience

A key limitation in compliance-centered approaches is that they may not reflect user priorities. Brunskill (2020) addressed this gap by interviewing 12 university students with disabilities about their needs and preferences for academic library accessibility webpages. The study highlights that students value clear navigation, predictable labeling, and practical information presented in ways that reduce the need for disclosure. Importantly, the work illustrates that "accessibility information" is itself part of accessibility: users need to know what accommodations exist and how to obtain support without encountering additional barriers.

Mulliken's qualitative study of 18 blind academic library users further underscores the experiential dimension of accessibility. Participants described barriers encountered when using library websites and search tools and highlighted how time-consuming navigation can become when interfaces are not designed with screen reader workflows in mind (Mulliken, 2019). Such findings suggest that inclusion requires attention to efficiency and cognitive load, not merely the absence of explicit technical violations.

Disability justice scholarship in librarianship provides a conceptual lens for understanding these experiences. Kumbier and Starkey (2016) critique approaches that treat access mainly as a matter of solving isolated problems after disabled people encounter barriers. Instead, they argue for an ethic of accessibility grounded in justice, collective responsibility, and collaboration with disabled people. For web accessibility work, this shifts attention from fixing individual failures to redesigning systems so disabled users can complete tasks with dignity, independence, and reasonable effort.

Accessibility Webpages, Transparency, And Institutional Communication

Libraries are increasingly publishing dedicated accessibility webpages to describe their services, assistive technologies, and pathways for accommodation requests. Ezell, Pionke, and Gunnoe (2021) conducted a large-scale content analysis of 85 academic library accessibility webpages across major U.S. research library consortia. They found that pages most commonly prioritised information about assistive technologies, services, and facilities, but varied substantially in size,

detail, and maintenance indicators. The authors recommend foregrounding accessibility pages, improving transparency, and demonstrating currency as ways to strengthen communication with users.

These findings matter because transparency is a core mechanism for moving beyond compliance. An accessibility statement can signal commitment, clarify standards applied, and offer a feedback route. W3C's accessibility statement guidance recommends including basic organisational information, standards followed, conformance status, and contact options, and notes that dating a statement helps users judge whether it is being maintained (W3C, n.d.). When libraries treat accessibility statements as living documents, they can support accountability and create clear pathways for reporting barriers.

Libguides, Instructional Content, And Distributed Authorship

Academic libraries are major producers of instructional web content through research guides, tutorials, and embedded learning objects. This content is often created in decentralised workflows by many authors with varying technical expertise, which can magnify accessibility inconsistencies. Hopper (2021) examined the accessibility of LibGuides in an exploratory case study at the University of Mississippi Libraries and combined automated evaluation with a manual rubric, concluding that accessible LibGuides require intentional adherence to best practices and guidance for creators. The study also recommends deeper engagement with the voices of disabled users and community stakeholders.

The challenge of distributed authorship is not only technical but organisational. Without shared templates, content standards, and training, well-intentioned librarians can inadvertently produce inaccessible guides through missing headings, poor link text, inaccessible PDFs, or uncaptioned media. The literature, therefore, supports interventions that treat accessibility as a shared responsibility supported by design systems, editorial processes, and ongoing professional development.

Licensed Platforms, Procurement, And Shared Responsibility

A defining feature of academic library web ecosystems is the heavy reliance on licensed vendor platforms: databases, e-book collections, streaming media, discovery services, and research analytics tools. These platforms are integral to library services, yet libraries may have limited control over their design. Procurement scholarship, therefore, frames accessibility as a licensing and vendor-management issue as much as a local web development issue.

Falloon and O'Reilly (2020) document how two public university libraries incorporated Voluntary Product Accessibility Templates (VPATs) into acquisitions and remediation workflows, noting that VPATs can be difficult to interpret and are not always reliable without verification and functional testing. The Library Accessibility Alliance similarly argues that "accessible" should be more than adherence to standards and emphasises embedding accessibility and usability into procurement processes (Library Accessibility Alliance, n.d.).

These studies signal an important shift in accountability. Within a compliance framework, libraries may treat vendor accessibility as outside their remit. Within an inclusion framework, libraries recognise that licensed platforms are part of their service delivery and therefore require active management: requesting documentation, conducting testing, negotiating remediation, and providing alternative access when barriers cannot be quickly resolved.

From Compliance to Inclusion: A Reframing Framework

An inclusion-oriented accessibility program starts by accepting conformance as necessary but incomplete. It asks not only whether a page meets WCAG criteria, but also whether the library's digital environment enables disabled users to participate in research, learning, and community life without disproportionate effort. The literature suggests three reframing moves that can guide practice: (1) shifting the unit of analysis from pages to user journeys; (2) shifting evaluation from errors to outcomes; and (3) shifting responsibility from specialists to the organisation as a whole.

First, focusing on user journeys highlights points where accessibility barriers accumulate. A user may begin on a library homepage, authenticate through a campus system, search a discovery layer, open a vendor platform, export citations, and use chat or email reference. If any step fails for assistive technology users, the journey breaks. Standards and audits should therefore be paired with journey mapping that explicitly includes disabled user pathways.

Second, outcome-based evaluation emphasises whether people can accomplish tasks. Brunskill's (2020) study suggests that users want practical, navigable information about accessibility resources, while Mulliken's (2019) work emphasises efficiency and predictability in web navigation. Inclusion-oriented evaluation prioritises a small set of high-value tasks (for example, requesting research help, locating accessible study spaces, finding articles, renewing items, and accessing course materials) and tests them using assistive technologies and diverse user groups.

Third, organisational responsibility requires governance. Accessibility is affected by content authorship, design systems, procurement decisions, and vendor relationships. IFLA's guidelines highlight leadership responsibility and staff education as key enablers (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2024). Similarly, ALA's interpretation of services to people with disabilities frames accessibility as an inclusion obligation (American Library Association, 2024). An inclusion-oriented framework, therefore, embeds accessibility into routine decision-making, communications, web governance, instructional design, acquisitions, and service delivery.

Table 2. A practical maturity model for shifting from compliance to inclusion

Level	Orientation	Typical practices	Risks and limitations
1	Reactive compliance	Fix issues after complaints, sporadic scans, and minimal documentation	High risk; repeated retrofits; inconsistent user experience

2	Proactive conformance	Regular audits; WCAG-based checklists; accessibility statement; some training	Focus on pages not journeys; limited user input
3	Integrated accessibility	Design system and content standards; procurement checks; mixed automated/manual testing; governance	Requires sustained resourcing and cross-unit coordination
4	Inclusive-by-design	Co-design with disabled users; journey-based metrics; continuous improvement; vendor accountability.	Ongoing work needs institutional commitment and culture change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish Governance And Accountability

Create an accessibility governance structure that aligns with the library's digital footprint. A single "web person" cannot sustain accessibility across multiple platforms and distributed authorship. A practical approach is to appoint an accessibility lead or coordinator who partners with a cross-functional working group comprising web/content staff, instruction librarians, electronic resources staff, and representatives from campus disability services and IT. Governance should clarify decision rights (who can approve templates, publish content, and negotiate vendor requirements) and include a documented accessibility policy aligned with institutional obligations under the ADA and related frameworks (U.S. Department of Justice, 2024).

Assign responsibility at the point of work. For example, guide authors should be accountable for accessible headings, links, and documents; acquisitions staff should be accountable for collecting accessibility documentation and testing critical e-resources; web developers should be accountable for semantic HTML and keyboard interaction; and leadership should be accountable for resourcing and prioritisation.

Develop Accessible Templates And A Library Design System

Reduce variability by providing accessible templates for common library content types, such as homepages, service pages, database lists, event pages, and research guides. A design system that

includes accessible components (navigation, search widgets, forms, alerts, modals) helps authors avoid repeating mistakes and makes remediation more efficient. Where interactive components are needed, use established WAI-ARIA authoring patterns for custom components so that interaction behaviour and assistive technology support follow recognised guidance (W3C, n.d.).
Standardise content practices. Establish editorial rules for heading hierarchy, meaningful link text, alt text conventions, table use, and media captioning. Provide short, role-specific job aids so that accessibility is embedded into routine publishing rather than treated as a separate step.

Implement A Layered Testing Program

Adopt a layered testing approach that combines automated checks with manual review and user-informed evaluation. Automated tools such as WAVE and axe can be integrated into routine workflows for quick feedback (WebAIM, n.d.; Deque Systems, n.d.). However, manual testing is required for keyboard navigation, focus order, screen reader announcements, form error handling, meaningful link and media text, and the accessibility of PDFs and other linked documents. In practice, developers may lead checks for interaction patterns, announcements, and error handling, while content authors and editors should review link text, media alternatives, and attached documents whenever content changes. The WCAG-EM methodology provides a structured approach to sampling and reporting and can be adapted for library contexts (W3C, 2014).

Prioritise task-based testing. Build a small set of "critical journeys" for typical users and test them regularly with assistive technologies. Include both library-controlled and vendor-controlled steps (for example, database access and article download flows). Where possible, include disabled users in evaluation. Brunskill's (2020) and Mulliken's (2019) findings show that user perspectives reveal needs and barriers that are not visible in technical scans.

Treat Procurement As An Accessibility Intervention

Strengthen accessibility requirements in procurement and licensing. Require vendors to provide an up-to-date Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) and, where available, the completed Accessibility Conformance Report (ACR) derived from it, and to identify known issues and remediation timelines. Falloon and O'Reilly (2020) caution that VPATs are not always reliable and should be verified through functional testing. These documents are best treated as a starting point for accessibility review and negotiation rather than as a complete response. Libraries can therefore adopt a practice of testing high-impact products before purchase and during renewal, focusing on the workflows that matter most to users (search, navigation, reading, exporting, authentication).

Negotiate accessibility clauses and escalation paths. Contracts can include commitments to meet WCAG standards, respond to reported barriers within a specified timeframe, and provide alternative access when remediation is delayed. Consortial approaches, such as the Library Accessibility Alliance, illustrate how libraries can pool expertise and leverage collective bargaining power in vendor negotiations (Ezell et al., 2021).

Maintain an accessibility risk register for licensed resources. This internal record can document the accessibility status of major platforms, evidence reviewed, issues discovered, vendor contacts, and interim mitigations. Such a register supports transparent decision-making and helps the library respond quickly to user reports.

Make Accessibility Information Visible And Current

Publish and maintain an accessibility statement and related accessibility webpages as living service documents. W3C's guidance recommends including standards followed, conformance status, contact options, and a publication date to demonstrate currency (W3C, n.d.). Ezell et al. (2021) similarly recommend increasing transparency and evidence of currency on library accessibility pages. In practical terms, this means using plain language, organizing information around user questions (What support exists? How do I request help? What assistive technologies are available? What should I do if a database is inaccessible?), and reviewing the page at least annually.

Design feedback channels for low-friction reporting. Offer multiple contact options (email, form, phone) and acknowledge requests promptly. Reporting mechanisms should not require users to disclose detailed personal information; instead, they should focus on the barrier encountered and the user's goal. Transparent communication builds trust and supports iterative improvement.

Invest In Staff Capacity And Inclusive Culture

Accessibility requires skills across roles, content creation, web development, instruction, acquisitions, and public services. IFLA's guidelines emphasise staff education and the role of leadership in enabling accessible services (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2024). Libraries can implement tiered training: short onboarding modules for all staff, deeper training for frequent content creators, and advanced training for developers and e-resources staff. Where possible, libraries can support professional development through recognised training programs and communities of practice.

Culture matters as much as skill. An inclusion orientation is strengthened when libraries treat accessibility work as an ordinary public service and as part of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility commitments. ALA's interpretation of services to people with disabilities explicitly frames inclusion and barrier removal as library responsibilities (American Library Association, 2024). When leaders communicate that accessibility is a shared value and resource it accordingly, staff are more likely to integrate accessibility into everyday decisions.

Use Metrics That Reflect Inclusion Outcomes

Move beyond counting automated errors as the primary metric. Error counts can help prioritise remediation, but they do not directly measure user outcomes. Inclusion-oriented metrics can include: completion rates for critical journeys using assistive technologies; response time to accessibility reports; percentage of high-traffic pages reviewed manually; vendor remediation progress; and qualitative feedback from disabled users. Reporting these measures internally supports accountability and reinforces accessibility as continuous service quality.

When compliance deadlines are relevant, align metrics with them while maintaining a broader inclusion focus. The 2024 ADA Title II rule establishes clear expectations for web and mobile accessibility for public entities (U.S. Department of Justice, 2024). Libraries can use these deadlines to build momentum for sustained programs rather than treating accessibility as a one-time remediation project.

CONCLUSION

Academic libraries' digital environments are now core sites for accessing knowledge. When library websites, guides, discovery tools, and licensed platforms are inaccessible, disabled users face barriers that undermine educational equity and scholarly participation. Standards such as WCAG and legal requirements such as the 2024 ADA Title II rule provide important and enforceable baselines, but a narrow focus on conformance can result in accessibility work that is reactive, fragmented, and insufficiently attentive to user experience. It can also allow problems to re-emerge as websites, content, and vendor platforms change over time.

The literature reviewed in this paper shows both the persistence of accessibility errors in academic library web environments and the value of user-centred perspectives. Studies of library websites and accessibility pages (Liu et al., 2024; Ezell et al., 2021; Brunskill, 2020) demonstrate that technical issues, communication practices, and organisational assumptions all shape access. Work on LibGuides and procurement (Hopper, 2021; Falloon & O'Reilly, 2020) further illustrates that accessibility is a shared responsibility that spans local content creation and external vendor ecosystems.

Reframing accessibility from compliance to inclusion shifts the goal from passing checks to enabling participation. It encourages libraries to treat accessibility as ongoing public service work, governed, resourced, and evaluated through real user outcomes. This reframing is consistent with disability justice scholarship that calls for collaboration with disabled people and attention to structural barriers (Kumbier & Starkey, 2016).

The recommendations offered here, governance, design systems, layered testing, procurement interventions, transparent communication, staff development, and outcome-oriented metrics, are feasible steps toward an inclusion-first accessibility practice. Ultimately, accessibility-by-design strengthens academic libraries' missions by making digital services more usable for everyone and by aligning library practice with the principle that disability does not prevent access to information.

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About the author

Emmanuel Ehimen Ehikioya is a librarian, researcher, and information professional with over nine years of experience in academic and school libraries. He is currently associated with Library Services at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom, where he provides user support and contributes to the effective management of library resources. Previously, he served as Assistant Librarian at Anchor University, Lagos, and held library positions at St. Saviour's School and the Federal College of Education, Abeokuta.