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Short communication

Lack of Digital Accessibility and its Impact on Persons with Disabilities in Libya

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Abstract
Digital accessibility refers to enabling people with disabilities to easily access and use digital services and platforms on an equal basis with others. Libya is considered to be lagging in the implementation of digital accessibility across its public and private institutions; while nations worldwide began adopting digital accessibility standards at the turn of the millennium, Libya did not effectively initiate this process until 2024. When the National Digital Accessibility Policy was issued in Libya in December 2024, this guideline document laid out the necessary foundations for implementing digital accessibility standards. It is presented with a clear and specific timeline to achieve full implementation of these standards across the country. This study focuses on the impact of the lack of digital accessibility on the lives of persons with disabilities in Libya. Data were collected from individuals with disabilities through questionnaires and personal interviews, alongside direct observation of the platforms and applications citizens use daily. The aim was to examine how this lack of accessibility affects their daily lives and to generate findings that clearly illustrate the extent of the challenges they face, thereby helping to accelerate the full implementation of digital accessibility and improve their well-being.
Keywords. Digital Accessibility, Disability, Digital Platform, WCAG: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. W3C: World Wide Web Consortium.

Introduction

People with disabilities represent 16% of the world's population, meaning one in six people has some form of disability [1,2]. Older adults, specifically those over 60 years of age for women and 65 for men, are also considered to have disabilities and should be treated accordingly [3]. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006, stipulates in Article 9 that "To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to the physical environment, transportation, information and communications, including information and communication technologies and systems, and other facilities and services open to or provided to the public, whether in urban or rural areas[1].

Countries around the world have started implementing the (WCAG 2.2) guide issued by the W3C. [4]. It sets out the basic rules for creating digital platforms and websites in a way that is easily accessible. This policy establishes the fundamental rules for creating accessible digital platforms and websites. In Libya, the National Digital Accessibility Policy was adopted in December 2024, outlining a six-year timeframe divided into three two-year periods: the first from 2025-2026, the second from 2027-2028, and the third from 2029-2030 [1]. This study provides an assessment of the current state of digital accessibility by looking at digital platforms and websites, and we found that they still lack proper accessibility standards. People with disabilities still can't easily access these platforms and websites, which isolates them more from society and makes it harder to include them.

General Definitions

Digital Accessibility
Enabling people with disabilities to easily access digital platforms and websites.

People with Disabilities
Any person with a partial or total disability that prevents them from performing their daily tasks.

Elderly individuals
Anyone over the age of 60 for women and 65 for men.

Digital Services
Any service provided by public and private institutions to citizens via the internet.

Mobility Disability
Any person who has difficulty moving one or more of their limbs normally.

Visual Disability: Any person who has difficulty seeing, whether partially or completely.

Hearing disability: Any person who has difficulty hearing, whether partially or completely.

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Research Problem

The research problem is the lack of sufficient information on the extent of the Libyan state's commitment to applying digital accessibility standards in various governmental and private institutions, which leads to the inability of researchers in this field to conduct the necessary research and studies to advance in this field, as well as the inability of the competent authorities to classify Libya within the global classification in this field. [7][9].

Research Objectives

The main purpose of conducting this research is to determine the current state of digital accessibility in Libya and the extent to which government institutions, including ministries, agencies, and universities, are committed to everything stated in the National Digital Accessibility Policy in Libya. This will provide researchers with the minimum information in this field to conduct the necessary studies. Through this information, universities and higher institutes can also be urged to carry out their tasks of training individuals and entities on the principles of digital accessibility.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The most important government websites that provide services to citizens through online platforms and websites were reviewed. These include: the Social Security Fund and the Social Security Mobile Application. 1. Prime Minister's Office: My State application. 2. Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research: Unified system for Libyan universities (academic number) 3. Ministry of Education: Website not easily accessible. 4. General Authority for Endowments: Hajj platform. 5. Central Bank of Libya: Foreign currency reservation platform for individuals. 6. National Center for Disease Control: Link to health certificate results. 7. Brega Oil Marketing Company: Cooking gas cylinder reservation system. Commercial Banks: 8. Aljumhuria Bank (Masrafi Plus application), 9. North Africa Bank (Nab Mobile application), 10. Alsahari Bank (Sahara Mobile application), 11. Aman Bank (Aman Mobile application), 12. Nouran Bank (Nouran Mobile application), 13. Wahda Bank (Wahda Bank application), 14. National Commercial Bank (MobiMal application), 15. Trade and Development Bank (Digital Banking) and Telecommunications Companies, 16. Almadar Aljadid Company (Almadar Aljadid) App 17. Libyana Company (My Libyana) App. The research questions focused on determining the extent to which these entities have implemented digital accessibility standards; in cases where implementation was limited or non-existent, the study sought to identify the reasons preventing their adoption.

Previous Studies

Among the most important previous studies in this field is the issuance of the Technical Guide to the National Digital Accessibility Policy and the National Digital Accessibility Policy in Libya in December 2024. [1]. A study was also conducted on the state of digital accessibility in Libya in February 2026, examining the current situation and the desired goals, and it produced valuable recommendations for progress in this area. [5].

Methodology

Sensing and Defining the Problem

The main problem is the digital gap caused by the complete lack of implementation of digital standards in all state institutions, which significantly and directly affects the lives of people with disabilities, prevents their integration into society, and makes them unequal in rights compared to other members of the community [6].

Data and Information Collection

Direct observation was conducted on digital platforms and websites of direct interest to citizens, totaling more than 20 governmental and private sites and platforms. The questions focused on two main principles: first, whether the platform or website owner was aware of the adoption of the National Digital Accessibility Policy in Libya; and second, whether the platform or website adhered to the standards outlined in the National Digital Accessibility Policy, which is based on the global protocol WCAG2.2.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis reveals that the majority of platforms and websites fail to comply with the digital accessibility standards outlined in the National Digital Accessibility Policy. This is attributable to several factors: 10% of designers and users of digital platforms and websites (Category 1) are entirely unaware of digital accessibility principles; 70% (Category 2) are familiar with these principles but are unaware of the issuance of Libya's National Digital Accessibility Policy (which is mandatory); and 20% (Category 3)are fully conversant with both the principles and the policy itself but lack the sufficient expertise to implement the policy's standards, as illustrated in (Figure 1).

Tangible Impacts on People with Disabilities

Violation of individual privacy: Individuals are required to share their banking or other personal information with another person to complete any transaction through one of the aforementioned platforms. Unequal opportunities: Sometimes, a person with a disability cannot find someone without a disability to assist them with their requests on the platform or website, as some platforms are only open at specific times. Economically: The lack of digital accessibility standards means that paid advertisements on websites and platforms do not reach people with disabilities, resulting in lower viewership.

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In the digital world: The lack of digital accessibility standards isolates people with disabilities, especially on social media, as they cannot communicate with the rest of society.

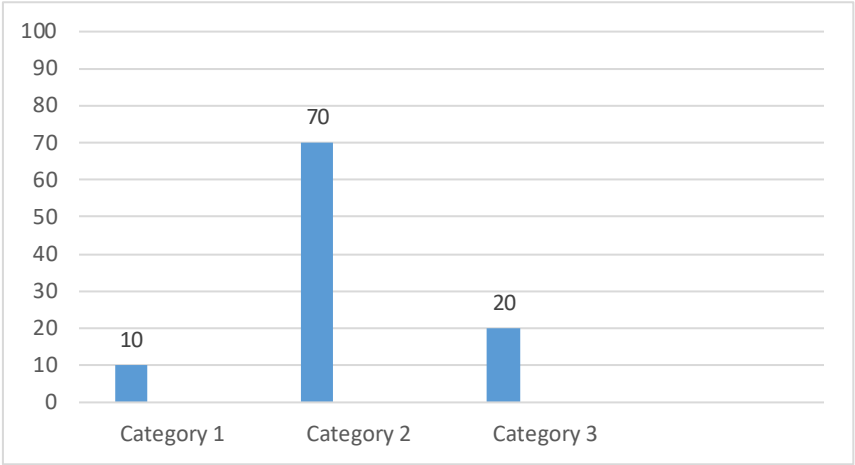

Figure 1. Results of a survey of website and digital platform designers' opinions

Drawing Conclusions

Based on the results of the survey and personal interviews, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- There is a clear weakness or deficiency in the generalization of the national digital accessibility policy across all public and private institutions.
- There is a lack of sufficient expertise in the field of digital accessibility, which is essential for developing digital platforms and applications that directly benefit citizens.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, and to achieve the following:

- Generalize the National Digital Accessibility Policy to all public and private institutions and raise awareness through intensive media campaigns on digital accessibility.
- Train individuals working on the design of digital platforms and applications on digital accessibility standards through workshops and training courses both domestically and internationally.
- Monitor digital platforms periodically and suspend any platform or application that does not comply with the standards, while encouraging compliant platforms and applications.

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