

# THE FUNCTIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY: A CONSIDERATION OF THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY LIBRARY, KUMASI, GHANA

Isaac Osei

B.A. (Hons) PDLs, PDGE, MPhil, MGLA

## ABSTRACT

The University Library has a very important part to play in the academic life of the University. The collection of books, periodicals and other related materials it contains provide essential background knowledge for study, learning and research. It is against this background that academics worldwide have formed the opinion that a University Library is one of the most important instruments of instruction and research, and hence consider the library basic to learning and the exploitation of our experience and intellectual resources.

Within this perspective, this article highlights the role the U.S.T. Library plays in the academic life of the University Community.

*Keywords: University libraries, University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.*

## INTRODUCTION

The development of scientific and technical manpower is of vital importance to the plans and progress of developing countries. This becomes much more felt at the dawn of independence. There is the task of 'nation building' which when applied to the more concrete aspects of life means the provision of at least the minimum requirements of a modern society: the elimination of hunger and diseases; the alleviation of poverty; the provision of basic services such as clean water supplies and universal education, housing, hospitals, roads, et cetera. This is the situation in which Ghana as a developing country found herself at independence.

## LIBRARY STUDIES

Post independence Ghana saw the urgent need to improve economic, political, technological, social and cultural conditions in the country and it was felt that this breakthrough could be met with the birth of a special crop of indigenous elites. This development objective therefore called for the urgent need for specialists and technocrats such as scientists, engineers, medical practitioners et cetera, who would identify the technical and technological problems of the country, recommend solutions and participate actively in national development and reconstruction.

The University of Science and Technology (U.S.T.) Kumasi, Ghana was therefore founded to meet this need. The emphasis was purely on science and technology. To meet this assigned role, the U.S.T. was given the omnibus responsibility "to provide higher education, to undertake research, to disseminate knowledge and to foster relationships with outside persons and bodies..." [1] The U.S.T. has strived to meet its responsibilities through the services and support of other academic units in the University, and one of such key units is the U.S.T. Library. So far the library has remained the best University unit for collecting and organizing knowledge for effective use, and continues to provide important services, resources, and physical facilities to support the university to meet her noble objectives.

In the main, the U.S.T. Library provides the resources for the pursuit of knowledge, and serves as a source of information to students and the academic staff mainly, for the collection, evaluation and interpretations of scientific data. The role of the library therefore, can be defined within the framework of the University's mission.

## THE FUNCTIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

The University library has a very important part to play in the academic life of the University. For example, the collection of books, periodicals and other related materials it contains provide essential background knowledge for study, learning and research. In addition, it makes provision for informal reading materials on a wide range of topics to enable readers gain a wider knowledge of the world. It is against this background that academics worldwide

Isaac Osei  
UST Library  
UST, Kumasi



have formed the opinion that a University library is one of the most important instruments of instruction and research, and hence consider the library basic to learning and the exploitation of our experience and intellectual resources. This view stems from the fact that the library emerges as the heart or the core agency which directly ensures the success of the aims and objectives a university is committed to achieving. Such aims and objectives may include the provision of higher education, conservation and dissemination of knowledge through teaching, research, publication and extension services. In this direction the University library provides course materials as well as those which supplement textbooks, reference works, standard works and general works. It provides students with an approach to self-education or opportunity for independent work, particularly in their personal and individual search for knowledge and understanding. It makes provision for the day-to-day information needs of lecturers, students and the supporting staff. It is also a place where the acquisition and enlargement of knowledge go side by side. In this sense, the university library can be described as an important adjunct to a university and therefore ably supports the attainment of its objectives. The University library invariably becomes the pillar behind all academic programmes, and hence it is impossible to have a quality university without a quality library. This adds credence to the observation by Professor A.A. Kwapong - former Vice-Chancellor of University of Ghana, and a Vice Rector of the United Nations University in Tokyo, that, a good library is the heart of a good university:

“The university library may aptly be considered the heart, if not the aorta, of any university and its academic health, intellectual vitality and effectiveness, therefore, closely depend on the status of health and excellence of its library which is indeed its very lifeblood. An inert and moribund library invariably means an inert and moribund university.” [2]

It is worth emphasizing that, this all true statement has always provided inspirational guidance to the U.S.T. Library to strive to become a quality library in order to serve the university better. It is in this light that the U.S.T. Library as a sub-system has committed itself to play the following role in the course of the path the University as a larger unit or system has chartered for itself.

## **THE ROLE OF THE U.S.T. LIBRARY**

The U.S.T. Library comprises a Main Library and other branch libraries. The basic role of the U.S.T. Library is strictly and purely educational. The

role is seen as a distinctive and indispensable part in the central purpose of this university. First and foremost, it supports the instructional and research programmes of the university. In pursuance of this, the U.S.T. Library provides services, information, print and non-print materials in the form of books, serials, bibliographies, indexes, abstracts, microfilms and other related materials which it organises for efficient and effective use. It also provides space and relevant equipment. In addition, it provides catalogues and reproduction facilities all of which further extend the use of the library resources for scholarly pursuits. It is clear from the foregoing that the U.S.T. Library is firmly embedded in the academic life of its parent institution.

Since its establishment, the U.S.T. Library has been the chief collector and conservator of knowledge and ideas accumulated over the years in various formats. The significance of this archival role is that, it is through such conserved knowledge and ideas that new ideas and inventions have smoothly gone on in the university. The bibliographic tools - books, journals, newspapers and manuscripts that the library provides enable the undergraduate students to write their project reports, graduate students to write their masters and doctoral theses, and faculty members and research staff to carry out special investigations. Thus indirectly, the U.S.T. Library contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the sense that it provides the necessary reading materials for investigations in government, industry, the sciences, technology and other fields.

Besides its housekeeping functions the U.S.T. Library also provides services at the teaching level, a function which Gelfand (1971) considers to be the most important role of an academic library;

“the fundamental role of the library is educational. It should not be operated as a mere storehouse of books attached to a reading room, but as a dynamic instrument of education.” [3]

The significant thing about this statement is a recognition of the fact that library use makes a maximum contribution to the learning process. In this sense, the library is seen as an extension of the classroom, in that, it supplements from its rich resources what the classroom has failed to supply. This in effect means that the concept of collection building and the preserving of books and related materials must give way to one of maximizing the use made of the stock. What makes its educational function more pressing is the fact that teaching methods these days incline more towards seminars and tutorials and a lot of reading and searching is demanded from the student. The student must therefore be made aware of the potential of the library in both books and periodicals and in addition be efficiently and effectively

instructed in their use. This also demands that librarians be primarily concerned with organizing their books and services to provide the most efficient kind of collection for 'teaching with books', and the reader services personnel always ready to give a helping hand to any student when the need arises. Finally, it also calls for administrators, library and faculty co-operation and collaboration in every possible way, and the reconciliation of their views in a best possible way that will enable the student make a copious use of a library's bibliographic sources.

Significantly, the U.S.T. Library has positively responded to this challenge and has adopted several measures to attain this end. Firstly, it ensures a high degree of relevance of its collection to the needs of the user community. Secondly, it provides a planned programme of library orientation to ensure that maximum use is made of the services, resources and facilities. This is done with the conviction that, the art of using a library means in the first place the art of consulting authorities and comparing results, and therefore warrants imparting instruction skills that provides the key for systematically finding materials in the library.

Thirdly, it gives qualitative reference and information services. Fourthly, it provides current awareness services to keep faculty up-to-date in their respective fields. This invariably enhances research and teaching. Upon request, the professional staff undertake bibliographic and literature searching to support teaching and research. Lastly, it emphasizes on competence and specialisation of staff in the provision of various services in the promotion of scholarship and teaching.

In pursuing these measures, the U.S.T. Library has always kept these defined groups in mind: Students at the undergraduate level, graduate and professional students by ensuring that they get the basic texts and materials central to the curriculum, provides a short loan and inter-library lending and document delivery services for those who wish to borrow; a set of suitable reference texts for staff, and research materials for lecturers and researchers engaged in advanced study and investigation. In addition, a photocopying service is provided which makes it possible for readers to obtain photocopies of materials available in the Main Library at a subsidized cost. Where the materials are not available in the Main Library, photocopies may be obtained for readers from outside libraries and the cost is borne by the Main Library. This latter service is heavily utilized by the academic staff, especially at this time when the library finds it difficult to renew periodicals subscriptions. The U.S.T. Library also mans its reader services points with properly trained and experienced personnel, capable of handling student dealing with books and related materials, queries and all other problems.

In addition to selecting, collecting materials, and providing the necessary guidance in the use of these materials, the library staff also undertake scholarly research themselves. Therefore the library staff do not only perform routine functions but also perform independent intellectual functions of significance.

In the building and development of its collections, the U.S.T. Library encourages its professional staff to recommend books for acquisition by the acquisition department. This is one particular area where library - faculty co-operation and collaboration is forged most, in that, the various faculties, schools, institutes and centres are always urged to recommend relevant books for acquisition.

Under the Books and Newspaper Registration Act (Act 73, 1961) and its amendment (Act 193, 1963) the Library plays the role of a legal depository for copies of all books printed and published in Ghana. However, to a large extent, this role has been undermined by the intransigence of local printers and Government Departments and Ministries to adhere to this law.

Similarly, it is also a depository for the publications of the United Nations and its specialized agencies. The publications of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), and World Health Organization (WHO), in particular, are received regularly. These have enabled the Library to replace some of its outdated materials and to improve the quality and range of subject coverage of its stock.

## FACULTY AND OTHER LIBRARIES

There are libraries in the Faculties of Agriculture, Pharmacy, Science and Social Sciences, College of Art, School of Engineering, School of Medical Sciences, Institute of Renewable Natural Resources, Institute of Technical Education, Land Administration Research Centre and Technology Consultancy Centre.

The Main Library is responsible for the development and stocking of these libraries, which together have a total stock of about 46,243 (1989/90) academic year. These are strictly for in-house use. The resources and services of all these libraries have now been integrated into one library system under the overall control of the Main Library.

With their proximity to the various faculties, these branch libraries provide immediate accessibility of materials to both students and lecturers for studying and teaching, respectively. They also provide personalized services to their readers. To a very large extent, the stock, facilities and services of these branch libraries augment the resources and services provided by the Main Library.

## CONCLUSION

It could be inferred from this discussion that the U.S.T. Library plays a pivotal role in the strive towards the attainment of the aims and objectives of the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi.

From its role, one may discern the service objectives of the U.S.T. Library to be the following:

1. to support the instructional and research programmes of the university by making books and related materials and information available to the university community; and to instruct them about the effective and efficient use of the Library and its resources.
2. to provide the physical facilities, equipment and services that will make possible the most effective use of the library resources.

### References

1. UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, *Calendar 1984-86*, Kumasi: University of Science and Technology, p.28
2. KWAPONG, A.A. (1970): "Libraries in University education in Ghana", *Ghana Library Journal* iv (1) p.42
3. GELFAND, M.A. (1971): *University libraries for developing countries*, Paris: Unesco, pp.24-25