

GHANAIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES AND THEIR IMAGE PROJECTION

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ABSTRACT

The poor image of Ghanaian University Libraries can be attributed to low funding of the libraries. All the inadequacies of poor stock, lack of current journals, obsolete equipment and out-moded practices are the off-shoot of insufficient financing. The Ghanaian University Library staff have also been identified as a contributory factor to the poor image of the libraries.

Recommendations are made as to how to redeem the image of the libraries.

Keywords: *Image Projection, University Libraries, Resource Allocation.*

INTRODUCTION

The primary function of a university library is to bring together information or knowledge in the form of books, journals, CD-products, etc. that will enhance teaching, learning and research in its parent institution. The role of the university library is so vital in the achievement of the university's general objectives and aspirations that Thompson and Carr (1987) have this to say: "The library is the core of a university. As a resource, it occupies the central and primary place because it serves all the functions of a university - teaching and research, the creation of a new knowledge and the transmission to posterity of the learning and culture of the present and the past".

They further contend that "the character and efficiency of a university may be gauged by its treatment of its central organ - the library. We regard the fullest provision for library maintenance as the primary and most vital need in the equipment of a university. An adequate library is not only the basis of all teaching and study; it is the essential condition of research, without which additions cannot be made to the sum of human knowledge"(Thompson and Carr, 1987).

The foregoing has established the indisputable importance of the university library without which an institution cannot be classed as such. It is for this central role that the university library has been variously regarded as the "heart"; "the pivot"; "the central organ"; "the nerve centre" and, "the core" of the university.

Ghanaian Universities

The University of Ghana (UG), Legon, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi and the University of Cape Coast (UCC), Cape Coast have been the three dominant state universities in Ghana. In 1992 the University for Development Studies (UDS), Tamale and the University College of Education of Winneba (UCEW), Winneba were added. Other private universities have also started springing up. This write-up will concentrate on the three oldest universities and their libraries, leaving out the new generation universities which are still in formation.

Ghana's first university, the University of Ghana was founded in 1948 as the University College of Gold Coast (UCGC) on the recommendation of the "Asquith Committee on Higher Education in the Commonwealth." It attained full university status on October 1, 1961. The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology came into existence in 1951 as the Kumasi College of Technology and became a full fledged university in 1961. The University of Cape Coast became an autonomous institution in 1971 even though it started as University College of Cape Coast in 1962.

The Libraries

Mindful of the central position of the library in a university, the three state universities of Ghana were established together with their libraries. These libraries all started in temporary structures. The library of the University College of Gold Coast started in Achimota and occupied one large room with no space for expansion. Later, a beautiful library with facilities for

future expansion was designed and built. The new building had a capacity for 250,000 books and could sit 300 readers. The library moved into its new and permanent building on Legon campus in 1959. Having out-grown its capacity, an extension was recently made to it in the year 2000.

Balme Library, as it is called (after David Mowbray Balme, first Principal of UCGC) is a real architectural beauty. Its central position and imposing edifice, no doubt, makes it the "nerve centre" of academic work in University of Ghana. It is now the single most important and best equipped library in Ghana. The Library of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi came into being in 1951 when the institution was established. The library holding of the Teacher Training Department of Achimota School which was transferred to Kumasi with the College to start the Kumasi College of Technology formed the initial stock.

The library of KNUST initially was housed in one of the temporary prefabricated buildings from which the University was started and had a seating capacity for 135 readers. In April, 1961, it moved into its present permanent building with a capacity for 100,000 volumes and 250 readers. However, by 1992, the stock had grown to 150,000 and the seating capacity far exceeded, thus putting much strain and stress on the facilities. An extension has, therefore, been made to the existing building increasing space for books to 350,000 and 1,200 seats for readers.

The KNUST Library has grown into what is referred to as the University Library System; this consists of the main library and eleven (11) Faculty, School, Institute, and Centre Libraries.

The KNUST Library is the best stocked science and technology library in Ghana today. University of Cape Coast Library started in 1962 with a nucleus collection of books from the erstwhile Department of Education at KNUST and Legon. The Library started like the others, in a temporary prefabricated building; the science collection was housed in the Science Faculty, separate from the others.

The inadequacy of the temporary building of UCC Library became quite evident as early as the 1970s when the problem of space, both for readers and the stock started showing. A new library building was then started in 1976. As at 1999 when the library started moving into the new building, the project had not been fully completed. When fully completed, the

library could sit 2000 clients and stock over 200,000 books. The new library will be ultra modern and magnificent.

Resource Allocation

Reviewing the total cost of resources used between the period 1982 to 1986 in the first three Ghanaian State Universities, the University Rationalization Committee, 1988, discovered that the libraries were receiving the lowest share of universities' grants. The University of Ghana, Legon, within the said period spent only 3% of her resources on the library. KNUST allocated only 1.62%, and UCC had a low percentage of 1.16. In the economic depression, in Ghana in the early 1980s, the library became a ready choice for sacrifice in the university, in order to save other units. In 1985, the Balme Library of the University of Ghana received 2.59% of the University's vote. The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology was hit hardest in 1982 and thus could afford to give the library only 0.94% of its vote for the year. An all time low of 0.84% was granted the UCC library in 1984. These figures appear to be dated but not much has changed to date. The KNUST Library in 1997 had a total allocation of 3.94% which still turned out to be the lowest in the University's allocation disbursement.

State of the Libraries

The low funding of university libraries in Ghana has made the libraries ill-equipped for serious academic work. The books are few and out-dated. You will be surprised to see students still making reference to science and technology books published in the 1970s and 1980s. Current journals are non-existent except the few which are sponsored by benevolent institutions and societies. The libraries themselves cannot afford to subscribe and sustain the subscription of journals because of their high costs. CD-ROMs which were introduced to salvage the poor journal collection also collapsed after the pilot period in 1997 because of lack of funds to up-date the CDs.

This state of affairs has carved a very low image for the libraries in their universities because they are not living up to expectations. Statements like, "there's nothing in that library;" "I go there to read my notes;" "Your books are too old;" "there are no books in my field"; and others are often expressed by the clients and members of the university. Lecturers tend to acquire the dominant textbooks in their subject areas in addition to one or two journals and do not fancy the library much.

Ghanaian academics and administrators do not hesitate to point out the inadequacies of our university libraries. References are easily made to university libraries of

the developed countries; their rich stock (current and varied); prompt services; and modern equipment. The fact that the library is a spending institution and must be generously funded with a sustained zeal is always lost on them.

Munn (1968) points out that the barriers to a library receiving a higher percentage of university income are three: first, the library is seen as a bottomless pit, being infinitely expandable and therefore, always in pursuit of "an undefined and presumably unattainable goal"; second, the library cannot exert pressure; and third, nobody has yet succeeded in making a cost-benefit of the contribution of a library to its university. Hence, the percentage of university income devoted to library purposes tends to stick to its traditional level.

Munn's observation was made in 1968, but it is still relevant in the case of Ghanaian university libraries. The attitude of "you can never satisfy the needs of the library and so let's give them what we can afford" is rife. There was this famous case in one of the universities. When new vehicles were received and were being allocated to departments and units, the library which needed a vehicle badly to facilitate its services applied for one. A shocking response from a high-ranking officer of the university was that "the more sensitive areas must be satisfied first; the students can go on rampage but not the library". This example is a clear case of library's inability to exert pressure.

It is not easy to establish the cost-benefit analysis of the library to its university. Nevertheless, the statement of Thompson and Carr (1987) that "the character and efficiency of a university may be gauged by its treatment of its central organ - the library", is worth noting. Surely, a lot of factors go into turning out good marketable graduates from a university but the role of a well stocked library is outstanding.

University Librarians

The University Librarian in some of the Ghanaian Universities such as the KNUST is not a principal officer, and librarians in general seem to have a low image in the eyes of the university community. Librarians who are lecturers in the Department of Information Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, where librarians are trained, enjoy more recognition than their counterparts who practise the profession in the Balme

Library, in spite of the fact that they may be holding the same academic qualifications.

The Principal Officers of KNUST in 1965 were made up of the Chancellor, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the Chairman of the Interim University Council, Mr. Kwaku Boateng, and the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. R.P. Baffour. The others were the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Prof. C. Levine, the Registrar, Mr. E.A. Ulzen, and the Librarian, Mr. G.M. Pitcher. This order has since changed with the Librarian losing ground.

The poor state of the university libraries is usually blamed on the librarians, oblivious of the fact that the libraries do not enjoy a favourable financial support.

Librarianship today is scientific and academic, drawing much on the dynamism of the librarian and available modern technology. Librarianship has long passed the age of the curator and custodianship. A librarian in the university library is first a university graduate and then a trained librarian. The librarian is thus a very resourceful person, first in his/her specialised field of graduation at the first degree level, and then a general knowledge in other fields by virtue of his training as a librarian. Students and researchers who discover the resourcefulness of librarians often tap into this rich repository of knowledge in their research endeavours.

Image

The concept image has to do with the impression, perception or conception the public holds about a person or a thing. A person or a thing which has a good image is held in esteem by society. Such a person or a thing is viewed as to have made and/or continues to make positive or virtuous contributions to the well-being of society.

Their importance notwithstanding, libraries tend to have a generally low image in Ghana, even in academic circles. Much as librarians in Ghana can be blamed for poor image projection, much can also be blamed on external factors such as inadequate funding and an unfriendly University environment. University libraries in Ghana are poorly funded and regarded as a support service and not the "heart" of the University.

Image Projection

Projecting their good image to the university community is also the task of the library staff. Blunden - Ellis (1992) points out that "library personnel themselves are vital to image, and this should be acknowledged in staff training. 'PR', telephone manners, personality and individual attitude are all important, which means that staff motivation must be high. Successful commercial organisations attach great importance to

their reception areas, and their appearance and quality of their up-front' staff. Scruffy interiors with dirty walls, noise, litter, etc. (and in libraries, unshelved or untidy books) immediately create a poor impression, and do not foster confidence in the service itself. The intimate relationship between the client and the service personnel is a key factor in services marketing".

Libraries are so designed and organised in such a way that readers scarcely have any encounter with the "background staff" - Technical Services and Clerical Staff. The 'up-front' staff at the circulation desk, especially, and those at the other Reader Services points such as the Lending, Reference and Serial Sections, are the only staff library patrons assume to be working in the library. Whatever impression these staff, therefore, make on the clients go a long way to form their opinion about the library.

Ideally, the 'up-front' staff of the library should be smartly dressed gentlemen and ladies and well versed in the art of public relations. A poorly dressed officer does not exude confidence and trust. Rude and ill-mannered staff scare patrons. Some of our staff who come into contact with users lack the qualities of a good 'PR' and are sometimes seen hotly exchanging words with some of them. I am, in no way, advocating for the non-enforcement of library regulations.

In the words of Esteve-Coll (1985), "the library is not an abstraction. It has an identity, an identity created by the staff contact with users. The quality of the library's service is judged by the users' perception of the individual member of staff. Dusty shelves and books are not uncommon. So also are insect and lice-infected books and journals. Sometimes, readers have to compete for space with unshelved books on the desks. All this lends credence to Blunden-Ellis' "scruffy interior" which brings down the image of the library.

Blunden-Ellis (1992) further believes that "the service customer will, in part, judge the quality and nature of the service he is using by its outward appearance; he is affected and influenced by his immediate environment, and first impressions rapidly become fixed. Image is regarded as the utmost importance to most service firms. Corporate image is seen to be the result of the customer's perceptions built up over time, and reflects the technical quality and functional quality of the services.

Gummesson (1979) in a research, declared that functional quality (how a service is delivered) is more important to the perceived service than is technical quality - provided that technical quality is at an acceptable level. He adds that functional quality is a clear method of differentiating a particular service and enhancing image, and depends almost entirely on "contact personnel" - the staff.

Blunden-Ellis (1992) and Gummesson (1979) appear convinced that in spite of everything, librarians can enhance their image by the way they discharge their services and handle their clients.

The advice of Lippman (1993) is worth taking. In his article, "The Library as an Information Producer: the case of the University of Health Library and Documentation Centre in Malawi", he stated that "efforts must be made to improve the image of libraries and librarianship in Africa. The image problem of the library not only affects the monetary resources allocated in libraries, but also hinders access to locally produced materials even within the institutions".

It is, thus, a fact that libraries in Africa in general, not only Ghanaian University libraries, have a low image. Lippman raises an issue, which hinges on a vicious cycle. African libraries have a low image resulting in the allocation of low financial resources. The low financial resources allocated to the library in turn results in poor stock and service and thus a low image. To break the cycle and redeem libraries, it means library staff, in spite of resources available, must raise the quality of their service to impress their institutions in order to attract more funds.

I could not have agreed more with Lippman when he says the image of African libraries also hinders access to locally produced materials even within the institutions. It is not easy collecting research papers from even academic members of the universities. Some bluntly refuse and tell you, "it will be safer in my care"

Is it the fear of plagiarism or plain mistrust?

The three oldest University Libraries in Ghana, by an Act of Parliament are deposit libraries. This act, "Books and Newspapers Registration Act," Act 73, 1961, entitles the university libraries to a free copy of all published materials emanating from Ghana, except Government publications. Many publishers flagrantly disregard this law, because even the cost of postage of the book is by far higher than the penalty for default; a law that has been neglected in the statute books.

Conclusion

Undisputably, the library is the "live-wire" of a university, bringing together information that will facilitate teaching, learning and research. For the university library to be able to perform this function satisfactorily and enjoy the trust and confidence of the users, a number of factors come into play, including adequate funding. University libraries in Ghana are under-funded. This stems from the fact that the universities themselves do not receive enough funds to run the universities. Thus, the present low allocation to the libraries becomes highly inadequate resulting in poor stock and the lack of vital modern equipment; giving the library a poor image.

The library staff of the university themselves some times do not do much to project the good image of the library. Most of the contact personnel lack the qualities of a good public relations officer and at times tend to be extremely hard and harsh on clients. "Scruffy interiors" resulting from unshelved books, torn and hanging spines of books, dirty and dusty shelves and walls project a low image.

Waned confidence in the libraries resulting from poor image does not give (faculty members) the urge to deposit their research works in the libraries. Local publishers too, wilfully flout the depository law for lack of regard for the libraries.

There is the need for University Libraries in Ghana to prop up their image.

Recommendations

Thompson and Carr (1987) regard the fullest provision for library maintenance as the primary and most vital need in the equipment of a University. A well-stocked and furnished library, they add, is not only the basis of all teaching and study; it is the essential condition of research, without which additions cannot be made to the sum of human knowledge.

It is recommended, therefore, that the financial provision for the libraries be increased substantially for them to upgrade their stock and performance. The University Rationalisation Committee in 1988 suggested that the University Libraries needed revamping in order to provide reading materials and ancillary equipment, furniture and reading space. This, the Committee considered a high priority and, thus, recommended that the libraries be allocated 10% of the institutional grant, but this has since been ignored. This should be seriously considered.

If the sentiment of Thompson and Carr,(1987) is anything to go by, then Ghanaian Universities must give serious financial attention to their libraries. A well-stocked and equipped library is a status enhancement for the University itself and gives image and confidence to the library as well.

The libraries should pay particular attention to orderliness and a good first impression to readers. The 'up-front' staff should exhibit a high standard of professionalism heavily laced with courtesy and amiability in dealing with patrons.

It is also of utmost importance for the libraries to organise orientation for all newly recruited members of staff, regardless of their individual qualifications. This training should incorporate professional as well as house practices. But most importantly, management techniques with emphasis on staff-client relationship and regular in-service training sessions, seminars and short courses for staff at post are considered essential for performance enhancement.

The University Libraries should also consider designing their special logos, which should go with their correspondence and SDI deliveries.

Surely, the University Libraries cannot be left out in this era of computerization. Invariably, it adds to the library's recognition and admiration by her clientele. Librarians in the University Libraries are too modest and quiet. "If you don't say here I am", nobody will say thou art". The University Libraries should organize a "Library Week" each academic year like the faculties do and present papers. The libraries can organize public seminars on topical issues; show academic and current affairs films and generally make "noise". With this, the University Libraries and their Librarians cannot be easily overlooked.

Lastly but not the least,

“Every librarian ought to double the circulation of his books and triple the circulation of himself let him grow big enough to fill the great space it is his duty to assume”. [Foss, 1909]

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