Library facilities in the polytechnics of Ghana in view of their new roles as tertiary institutions

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Abstract

In 1993, all of the six polytechnic institutions in Ghana were elevated to the status of tertiary-level institutions. This study is an assessment of the state of polytechnic libraries in relation to their new roles as libraries of tertiary institutions. It seeks to investigate the adequacy or otherwise of personnel, finance, materials, accommodation, equipment and services in these libraries. The writers conclude that these facilities are woefully inadequate and have to be improved in order to enhance the academic performance of the students and staff of the polytechnics.

Background

There are six polytechnics in Ghana located at Accra, Cape Coast, Ho, Kumasi, Tamale and Takoradi. Of these, except for Cape Coast Polytechnic, the rest had their beginnings as technical institutes. The oldest of these technical institutes – Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi – were merely redesigned polytechnics by a government order in 1963. Between 1986-1988, Ho and Tamale became polytechnics.

In 1987 the Government of Ghana embarked upon a series of educational reforms which among other things were aimed at reorienting the structure and content of education.

To achieve this objective it was widely accepted that tertiary level education must be rationalized to ensure its relevance to national development. Consequently the government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, in December 1986 commissioned a six man University Rationalization Committee (URC). This committee was charged to provide the basic information which will enable a medium term university sector development plan to be formulated for Ghana.[1]

The URC, noting the decline in enrolments of the three Universities since 1980, high student-staff ratios, no availability of teaching materials and support services such as libraries, recommended a new tertiary educational system.[2]

Such a system was to be made up of three main groups, namely, the universities and university colleges, polytechnics and a unified comprehensive college system.

This recommendation meant that the committee had taken cognizance of the role of other institutions were playing in the country's manpower development. The position of the polytechnics in their turn-out of middle level manpower especially for industry and commerce, was particularly noted.

Thus their conversion to tertiary status requires a great deal of careful planning in terms of infrastructure requirements. The recommendations stated specifically that the existing facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, workshops and library services of the polytechnics at Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi must be examined and refurbished and new ones provided where they do not exist in order to meet the demands of their upgraded status.

It was also felt that in the absence of these facilities the polytechnics' prime aim of educating students who will contribute effectively to the nation's economy will not be achieved.[3]

The most important of these facilities which will promote independent learning in the students and encourage private study is libraries. Such libraries will be expected to serve as 'learning resource centres' with books and periodicals covering, in embryo, the whole range of recorded knowledge. They should play a central role in the educational programme of the polytechnics and would serve as a major teaching tool which will counteract the specialization inculcated by teaching courses.

Objective of the study

The main objective of this study is to assess the state of polytechnic libraries in relation to their new roles as libraries of tertiary institutions. It seeks to bring out their problems in terms of physical facilities, stock, staffing, finance and services. From these, suggestions are made in an attempt to find solutions to some of these problems.

Methodology

Two sets of questionnaires based on structured interviews were developed. One set was administered to the Principals of all the Polytechnics and another set administered to the Librarians of the Polytechnics.

Personal visits were also made to Ho, Kumasi and Accra Polytechnics where discussions were held with the Principals and Librarians.

The on-site visits also enabled the writers to make a closer survey of the libraries including the buildings, materials, equipment, and other facilities and services.

Accra Polytechnic

This Polytechnic was established in 1949 and raised to tertiary level status in 1993. It provides Technical, Vocational and Commercial courses, among others. It had 12 Departments with 103 teaching staff. The staff are mainly holders of BA/BSc degrees and a few with postgraduate qualifications. Total number of students is 3,500.

Library staff

The library has one professional librarian with a Graduate Diploma in Library Studies and two sub-professionals, both having the Undergraduate Diploma in Librarianship. These were all trained at the University of Ghana, Legon.

Library committee

Although there is a Library Committee, it was not functioning at the time of the interview.

Library materials

There are 8,000 books and no academic journals. The users are mainly staff and students of the Poly-technic. The main areas of subject emphasis are Management, Accounting and Engineering. The materials are mostly acquired through direct pur-chase and donations. According the Librarian, the materials are adequate and he is able to meet the needs of the users. There is no system of inter-library loan with other libraries.

Library budget

On paper, the library has a separate budget. Accord-ing to the Librarian, although he is aware that 10% of the institutional budget is allocated to the library, he does not know how much this amounts to. How-ever, the library budget is inadequate.

Accommodation

The building presently accommodating the library is inadequate. However, there are plans for a new library building. Funding is now being sought for the new building.

Equipment

There is no equipment in the library although the Librarian has some training in information technol-ogy and also believes that this makes access to materials easier.

Vision about the library

According to the Librarian, the polytechnic staff have a very good impression of the library. He is of the view that with the present status of polytechnics as part of the tertiarylevel education system, there is the need for more usereducation to take care of more complex information needs and requirements. He is also of the view that the Ghana Library Association and the Committee of University Librarians should monitor the Polytechnic libraries in order to get them prepared for their new status as information support for tertiary level study and research.

Views of the Principal

The Principal is of the view that a tertiary institution needs a library as an important centre for the dis-semination of knowledge. In order to carry out these perceptions, he suggests that a completely new build-ing suitably designed for a library should be built for the Polytechnic. This would be able to accommodate about one third of the student population. He also suggests that the library must include various equip-ment and new technologies in order to enhance its status and enable it to perform its functions more effectively.

In order to achieve his aims, he intends to find solutions to some of the problems already encoun-tered in the library such as space, staff, materials and equipment.

Ho Polytechnic

Ho Polytechnic was established in 1987 and raised to tertiary level status in 1993. It provides training for middle-level engineers and technicians, among oth-ers. There are 8 Departments with 80 members of teaching staff. The staff are mainly holders of bach-elors degrees with a few postgraduates. There are 1,800 students.

Library staff

As at the time of the interview, the library had only one semiprofessional staff with an Undergraduate diploma in Library Studies obtained from the Uni-versity of Ghana, Legon. There are four other Library Assistants with GCE 'O' Level Certificates. (An interview had just been held for the appointment of a Professional Librarian).

Library committee

The library has a committee which was not function-ing at the time of the interview.

Library materials

The Library has 10,000 books with no academic journals. The users are mainly students and staff of the Polytechnic. There is no collection development policy and the main areas of emphasis are technical and scientific materials. Materials are acquired mainly through direct purchase and donations. According to the Librarian, the resources are inadequate. Users are often referred to the Ho Public Library as there are no other libraries nearby and the library has no inter-library loan arrangement with any other library.

Library budget

There is no separate budget for the library and the Library Assistant is unaware of how much of the institutional budget is allocated to the library. Ac-cording to the Library Assistant, the library budget is inadequate.

Accommodation

The library is operating in a temporary building. However, at the time of the interview, a new building had been completed with would hopefully reduce the congestion in the present building. It was suggested to the Principal that the present temporary block be retained to serve as the Students' Reference Library while the new block would be used for circulation, reference materials and journals.

Equipment

The library has no equipment and none of the staff has any training in information technology. The Library Assistant agreed that the introduction of information technology in the library will improve information provision.

Vision about the library

According to the Library Assistant, the staff have a very good impression of the library, especially in the area of Engineering where the Principal is particularly interested. He hopes that there will soon be an increase in the number of staff so that an evening shift will be introduced in the library.

Views of the Principal

The Principal was most appreciative of the role of the library in the Polytechnic. According to him, the library is the nerve-centre of the Polytechnic and no tertiary institution can function without one. He hopes that very soon the Librarian who has been appointed will assume duty to improve upon the services of the library. He also hopes that information technology will soon play its proper role in the library to enhance information provision. He intends in the near future, to introduce 'Library Use' as a compulsory course for all first-year students in the Polytechnic.

Kumasi Polytechnic

This Polytechnic was established in 1954 and elevated to tertiary status in 1993. It provides training in middle-level management and vocational courses, among others. It has 14 Departments with 93 teaching staff. The staff are mainly bachelor degree holders with a few postgraduates. The total number of students is 3,104.

Library staff

The staff of the library include two professionals with a Graduate Diploma in Library Studies and five sub-professionals with an Undergraduate Diploma in Librarianship, all from the University of Ghana, Legon.

Library committee

The library has a committee which deliberates on all issues concerning the library and makes recommendations to the Principal on behalf of the library.

Library materials

The library has 7,374 books and no academic journals. The users are mainly the Polytechnic staff and students. There is a collection development policy and the special subject emphasis includes Engineering, Management and Fashion Design. Materials are acquired mainly through direct purchases, orders and donations. According to the Librarian, the resources are inadequate. Users are often referred to either the University of Science and Technology or British Council Libraries in Kumasi as there is no system of inter-library loan.

Library budget

There is no separate budget for the library and the Librarian is not even aware of what percentage of the institutional budget is allocated to the library. All the same, the amount allocated to the library is adequate.

Accommodation

Although the location of the library is very central and convenient, the present building housing the library is inadequate. The library is separated into three different rooms which makes organization and supervision difficult. However, there are plans for a future library which would be funded from World Bank sources.

Equipment

There is no equipment in the library and none of the staff has any training in information technology. The Librarian is, however, of the view that the introduction of information technology will enhance the services in the library.

Vision about the library

The Librarian is of the view that the staff of the Polytechnic, especially the Principal, are very interested in the library. He is hoping that the library will soon be fully computerized and the subject areas of documentation broadened. He also requests that staff of the library be trained in information technology.

Views of the Principal

The Principal is of the view that the library is the backbone of the Polytechnic. He hopes it will therefore be expanded to accommodate more students and materials. This is to be achieved through the proposed World Bank Project of providing a five-storey block for the library. It is his intention to computerize the monitoring and searching process in the library.

Takoradi Polytechnic

Takoradi Polytechnic was established in 1955 and elevated to tertiary status in 1993. It provides training in Business, Engineering and Craft courses, among others. There are 10 Departments with 73 full-time and 17 part-time teachers. The teaching staff are mainly bachelors degree holders with a few postgraduates and Higher National Diplomates. There are 2,561 students.

Library staff
The library has one Temporary Library Assistant with an Undergraduate Diploma in Librarianship from the University of Ghana, Legon. There are four other staff who are permanent and mostly hold GCE 'O' Level Certificates.

Library committee
The library has a committee that meets to take decisions concerning the development of the library.

Library materials
The library has 6,000 books and no academic journals. The users are mainly staff and students of the Polytechnic. There is no collection development policy and the special areas of emphasis are Business and Engineering. Materials are obtained mainly through direct purchase and donations. In the view of the Librarian, the materials are inadequate but they make do with what is available. They have no inter-library loan agreements with any library.

Library budget
There is no separate budget for the library and the Library Assistant had no knowledge of the amount of money allocated to the library. Anyway, the library budget is inadequate.

Accommodation
The building presently housing the library is inadequate. But there are plans by the government to put up a new library building.

Equipment
There is no equipment in the library and none of the staff has any training in information technology. However, the Library Assistant agrees that information technology will enhance information delivery in the library.

Vision about the library
The staff of the Polytechnic have a good impression of the library. However, it is the view of the Library Assistant that the library can only play the important role expected in the Polytechnic if adequate funding is provided for materials and equipment. He also hopes that the much talked about introduction of information technology in the library will not just be lip-service.

Views of the Principal
According to the Principal, the role of the library in the Polytechnic should include supporting students' learning and promoting research by keeping and providing up-to-date information for users. This can only be carried out with the expansion of space in the library; acquisition of core journals; establishing a computerized network system; intensive staff recruitment for the library and the creation of departmental libraries. Efforts are being made to

seek assistance from the Ministry of Education to carry out these objectives.

Tamale Polytechnic
Tamale Polytechnic was established in 1951 and elevated to tertiary status in 1993. It provides training for middle-level manpower in Engineering, Building/Construction and Business, among others. There are 9 Departments with 48 teaching staff. Most of the teaching staff are holders of bachelors degrees and Higher National Diplomas (HND). There are 1,500 students.

Library staff
There are three members of staff in the library. The most senior among them has only the GCE 'O' Level Certificate. There is neither a professional nor a sub-professional librarian. The only training obtained by the staff is a few months' attachment with the Regional Library at Tamale.

Library committee
There is no library committee.

Library materials
The library has about 10,000 books and 5 academic journals. The users are mainly staff and students of the Polytechnic. There is no collection development policy and the special subject emphasis is on Engineering and Building. Materials are acquired mainly by orders through the Ministry of Education's World Bank Project, and some donations. There is no interlibrary loan agreement with any other library.

Library budget
There is no separate budget for the library and the Library Assistant does not know how much money is allocated to the library. The amount is, all the same, inadequate.

Accommodation
The building housing the library is inadequate and there are plans for a new building to be funded by the Ministry of Education.

Equipment
The library has two air-conditioners and one personal computer. Unfortunately, none of the members of staff has any training in information technology. They, however, agree that the introduction of the new technology will improve service and functions in the library.

Vision about the library
Staff and students are impressed with the library. However the limited collection and services have to be improved in order to maintain this good opinion.

Views of the Principal
The role of the library includes the development of the reading habit and independent research among

the students. However, according to the Principal, this can only be achieved with the employment of qualified personnel; expansion of library facilities; and the encouragement of library staff to attend conferences and workshops to keep abreast of new trends and techniques.

Cape Coast Polytechnic
This Polytechnic was established in 1986 and elevated to tertiary status in 1993. It provides training for middle-level manpower in Business and Engineering, among others. There are 6 Departments with 24 teaching staff. The teaching staff are mainly holders of bachelors degrees with a few Diplomates. There are 811 students.

Library staff
The library has one Library Assistant with a Diploma in Librarianship from the University of Ghana, Legon. There is no professional librarian.

Library committee
The library has a committee which sees to the general administration of the library.

Library materials
There are 4,171 books and no academic journals. Users are mainly staff and students of the polytechnic. There is no collection development policy and the special areas of emphasis are Engineering and Business. Materials are acquired mainly through orders and donations. According to the Library Assistant, the resources are inadequate. Users are often directed to the University of Cape Coast Library for materials which are unavailable in the Polytechnic library. The Library has no interlibrary loan agreement with any other library.

Library budget
According to the Library Assistant, there is no separate budget for the library and he does not know how much money is allocated to the library. Whatever the amount, it is inadequate for the library's present needs.

Accommodation
The building presently housing the library is inadequate and there are plans to put up a new building with funding from the government.

Equipment
There is no equipment in the library and the Library Assistant has no training in information technology.

Vision about the library
According to the Library Assistant, although the staff of the Polytechnic have a good impression of the library, there could be further improvement with the expansion of the library; recruitment of more staff; and the provision of more materials and equipment.

Views of the Principal
The Principal expressed similar views to those of the Library Assistant. He feels that the impact of the library on the Polytechnic could be enhanced even more, with the provision of qualified staff and better facilities for the library.

Recommendations
Based on the findings of this study, the following proposals are made to enhance the development of polytechnic libraries in Ghana.

Library budget
As indicated in the summary of the report, none of the six polytechnic libraries has a separate, specific budget allocated to them from the general polytechnic budget. This does not help in the proper running of a library in a tertiary institution. It is recommended that a fixed percentage of the polytechnic budget for the year is allocated to the library. The ideal percentage recommended is 10% of the institutional budget. If this is not attainable, a reasonable figure should be decided upon. The amount of money must be made known to the Librarian who will then draw up his or her estimates of expenditure for the year on the basis of that amount.

Acquisition policy
The collection of a library must be relevant to the needs of the user community. Collection development is thus a planned and purposeful activity which should be carried out within the context of an acquisition policy.

All the Polytechnic libraries presently lack written acquisition policies. It is recommended that each of the libraries formulate such a policy based on the purpose of the polytechnic and the areas of special subject emphasis. This will ensure that scarce resources are not dissipated on irrelevant or marginal areas.

Academic journals
For a library in a tertiary level institution, academic journals are *sine qua non*. Journals have a number of advantages over books including their provision of up-to-date information and their frequency in publication.

With the exception of Tamale Polytechnic, none of the other Polytechnics had any academic journals. Attempts should be made to subscribe to relevant journals. It is, however, suggested that the Librarians in the Polytechnics should consult the various subject teachers and the Principals in order to determine which journals are more relevant to their programmes, so that these are subscribed most to. It is recommended that not more than 5 titles of journals should be subscribed to by each Department of the Polytechnic at this stage.

It is more convenient to use agents for journal subscriptions. Some of the notable overseas agents

are Blackwells and Everett, both of the UK, and Swets of Holland.

Library cooperation

No library, however well equipped with materials and other resources, is self-sufficient. Libraries therefore rely on one another to optimize their resources.

It is recommended that the Polytechnic libraries investigate the possibilities of establishing one or more of the following links:

(a) Polytechnic – Polytechnic (Ghana)
(b) Polytechnic – University (Ghana)
(c) Polytechnic – Polytechnic (Overseas)

There could be an easier acquisition of materials not available in the libraries through interlending and document supply. To promote the latter, the libraries should initiate, as a matter of urgency, schemes for compiling union catalogues of documents and a union list of their collective journal holdings.

Library committee

It is recommended that those Polytechnics that do not have Library Committees set these up immediately. Those that have non-functional Committees should get them functioning immediately.

The composition of the Library Committee should be broad based and made up of the following:

i.   Principal – Chairman
ii. One representative from each Department
iii. Librarian and an Assistant (if there is one)
iv. Two students
v.   In attendance: Registrar or his or her representative, Finance Officer or Bursar.

Boards and committees

The Polytechnic Librarian should be a member of the Academic Board. In addition to this he or his representative (who must be a senior member) should serve on the following committees:

i.   Board of Studies
ii. Bookshop Board
iii. Publications Board

Workshops, seminars and conferences

These are organized periodically at the local or international levels in order to assist information professionals in acquiring knowledge and skills on new and modern trends in information provision. It is recommended that librarians in Ghana's polytechnics be encouraged to attend some of these workshops and conferences. Apart from the benefits of acquiring better skills, attendance at these workshops and conferences also enables the librarians to interact with colleagues, share ideas, and find solutions to common problems. All these ensure poise and confidence professionally.

In-service training

As a short-term measure, it is recommended that the Polytechnic librarians be sent on attachments for in-service training in the various university libraries in the country. Librarians from Accra and Ho Polytechnics could be sent to Balme Library, University of Ghana. Those from Takoradi and Cape Coast Polytechnics could be attached to the University of Cape Coast library. Librarians from Kumasi Polytechnic could be sent to the University of Science and Technology library and those from Tamale Polytechnic could be attached to the University for Development Studies library.

Ghana Library Association

It is also recommended that all the Polytechnic libraries register as institutional members of the Ghana Library Association. As an institutional member of the Association, the libraries should be able to sponsor their staff to attend activities of the Association such as conferences, seminars and workshops and benefit from interaction with other professionals.

It is also hoped that in the near future, the Polytechnics will be able to establish a 'Polytechnics Libraries Section' of the Ghana Library Association or the 'Committee of Polytechnic Librarians' similar to the 'Committee of University Librarians'.

Equipment and furniture

All the Polytechnic libraries need additional equipment and furniture. These will include shelves, display racks (for journals), catalogue cabinets, reading tables and chairs, accession machines and filing cabinets. The librarians could liaise with the university libraries to ascertain the particular library furniture they would require.

In view of the current drive towards automating library housekeeping processes, it is envisaged that the polytechnic libraries would also embrace the IT revolution in the short to medium term.

It is therefore strongly recommended that basic IT equipment of a PC, telephone and email and CD-ROM facilities be made available for each library. These facilities would enable the librarians to communicate with one another and with other institutions.

Photocopying machines

Going by the results of the survey, none of the Polytechnic libraries has a photocopying machine. The advantages that would otherwise have been gained from having this equipment are thus lost to these libraries.

The availability of a photocopier promotes the effective use of library resources. It also eliminates or minimises the incidence of book losses through theft and mutilation.

Arrangements should be made to acquire at least one photocopier for each of the polytechnic libraries. Customers who make photocopying requests should pay for them. Library materials copied on the premises, however, should attract a discount.

Accommodation

With the exception of Ho Polytechnic, all the other polytechnics are either contemplating extensions to their present buildings or construction of new buildings. It is suggested that whatever the situation, the architects and building contractors should work together in close consultation with professional librarians before starting any new buildings for a library. Modular architecture is recommended as this has proven to be most effective and efficient for modern library functions and requirements.

Working tools

Most of the libraries do not have any properly organized arrangement of their materials. An organized arrangement is facilitated by using standard classification and cataloguing systems such as Library of Congress Classification System (LC) or the Dewey Decimal Classification System (DDC) and the Anglo American Cataloguing Rules (AACRII 2nd ed.). These basic tools are not found in most of the Polytechnic libraries.

The University libraries in Ghana use LC while the Ghana Library Board uses the DDC. It is recommended that all the polytechnic libraries in the country use one type of classification system – either the LC or the DDC.

Meanwhile, immediate steps should be taken to acquire the following relevant bibliographic tools:

i. LC or DDC depending on the preference of the library
ii. LC subject headings list, and
iii. AACRII 2nd ed.

User education

Optimal use of the Polytechnic libraries can be achieved through an effective user education programme. It is interesting to note that two of the Polytechnics (Accra and Ho) mentioned the need for user education in their libraries. It will be necessary for more users to patronise the new resources and gain the confidence that the libraries are now able to provide services.

The trend in tertiary education these days is to introduce a compulsory course in 'Information retrieval' or 'Use of libraries'. This is a credit earning course which must be taken, preferably at the 100 Level, by all students.

It is recommended that the Polytechnics introduce this course in their curricula. Similar courses have been instituted at the University of Cape Coast and the University for Development Studies, Tamale. The Polytechnics can obtain their syllabi with the view of modifying them to suit their purposes. The Polytechnic Librarians should be able to teach this course.

Staffing

The Polytechnic libraries are woefully understaffed. This basically accounts for the backlog of books requiring processing and the generally poor services provided. It is proposed that each of the libraries should have a full time staff strength ranging between 10 and 12. The composition of staff should be as follows:

Professional Librarian	2
Library Assistants *(with the Undergraduate Diploma in Librarianship)*	4
Junior Library Assistants *(GCE 'O' Level/SSS)*	4
Secretary/Typist	1
Messenger/Cleaner	1
Total	**12**

The above is in line with a recommendation that all the libraries should operate on two shifts – morning and evening.

Staff development

Staff development enhances job performance leading to increased productivity while it also ensures retention of staff. The following recommendations are made for improved development in the Polytechnic libraries:

i. all staff with the Graduate Diploma in Library Studies should immediately be sent abroad for one-year Masters Degree Programmes in Information Science. (This course is presently not available in Ghana);
ii. where staff with the Graduate Diploma are not available, these should be recruited immediately and sent for further training;
iii. library Assistants with GCE 'O' Level should be given preferential admission into the Undergraduate Diploma Course at the University of Ghana, Legon; and
iv. junior Library Assistants with MSLC should be enrolled in the six-week attachment course at the Ghana Library Board for basic practical training.

Library automation

We are in the information age. Libraries all over the world have either automated or are automating their procedures to facilitate the exploitation and use of their resources. Library automation also makes networking easier for the purposes of accessing other information centres that are now available in national, regional networks and on the global system, the Internet.

It is recommended that the Polytechnic libraries in Ghana seriously consider automating their processes and procedures. There is a software for library automation which was developed by UNESCO. It is known as CDS/ISIS. The software can be obtained free of charge from the UNESCO Headquarters in France.

Bibliographic databases on CD-ROMs are also useful tools for a tertiary-level library. They enable

users to know what has been published and in which journals. The British Council, Accra, or the University libraries, particularly the Balme Library and the University of Science and Technology (UST) Library can assist in the ordering of the CD-ROMs as well as photocopying coupons for a fee. The Balme Library, University of Ghana, can also be contacted for advice.

Conclusion

The Ghana Education Service has taken a very bold and sensible decision to elevate the polytechnics from second cycle institutions to tertiary-level institutions. Tertiary level institutions normally offer specialized courses that lead to high level qualifications in certain specified fields. Therefore, as a matter of urgency, facilities and services in the polytechnic libraries must be improved in order to sustain their new status so that they can contribute effectively towards the educational development of the country.

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