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Effective library provision in Ghanaian Communities: case study of Dunkwa–On–Offin Branch library

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Abstract

Public library is an integral part of the community. It has the social obligation to serve the whole community. This study examined the effective library provision in Ghanaian communities, in order to ascertain the problem of low patronage of community libraries in Ghana. The population for the study comprises registered and non-registered patrons of the facility. From the total population of 300, a sample of 100 respondents were drawn and used for the study. Out of the 100 questionnaires administered, 96 were completed and returned. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data using frequency counts, tables and percentages. The findings shows that majority of the users were students who use the library for study purpose. The study also revealed that information resources were outdated and facilities provided in the library was inadequate and inappropriate, culminating in low patronage of the facility. This situation was due to poor funding from both national and local government to the Ghana Library Authority who are mandated to oversee the operations of the community libraries in the country. The researchers suggested that the government and all stakeholders in the education sector must ensure proper financial support to libraries to enable them acquire and procure all necessary logistics that can improve quality of services. Also Internet facilities should be available in all community libraries to ensure generation of incomes to support their operations.

Keywords

Library Provision, Public library, Community library, Information Provision, Ghana

Introduction

Access to relevant and up to date information is crucial for the economic and social well-being of nations. Libraries for ages are known for providing information and promoting knowledge. A library is an organization whose sole purpose is to collect information, process it, preserve it and eventually disseminate it in various formats most convenient to its users (Ogbah, 2014).

Libraries exist for people, and not the reverse. Libraries primarily exist for the purpose of preserving records of human knowledge and civilization. Without libraries, human ideas would not have been successfully transmitted across generations (Abbas, 2012).

Libraries are seen as repositories of human experiences and knowledge. Although libraries have changed significantly over time, their cultural roles have remained essentially the same. Libraries are still responsible for acquiring and providing access to books, periodicals, and other media that meet the educational, recreational and informational needs of their users. In order to

effectively sustain their cultural roles, libraries have been categorized into different types to render their services better and to satisfy more patrons (Obinyan; Obinyan and Aidenojie, 2011).

The UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994), defines the public library as "the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups". The public libraries happen to cover the widest population possible; their role in spreading literacy and education has long been acknowledged and is considered to be indispensable. According to Parvathamma and Reddy (2009), public libraries have been noted to improve literacy through various information and educational services they render over time. They are also well known to stimulate imaginative thoughts and expand personal horizons while making the empowerment of citizen, and provision of access to a common cultural heritage a reality.

Public libraries serves as a repository of human experience and are not subject to the barriers of space and time, the major purpose of the library is to provide information to its patrons. Lawal and Udofia (1994) posits that, the library meets the information needs of the users in the following four categories:-

- Education - to develop society, adults, children and to fill gaps in memory
- Information - to develop executive activities such as economics, social and commercial development
- Aesthetic - to cultivate appreciation for culture, art, truth and judgment and
- Recreation -- to provide amusement and hobbies.

The public libraries in our country are in an abject state without a constantly refreshing print collection and vibrant non print multimedia sources that lure illiterate and semi-literate folk due to various infrastructure, manpower and monetary constraints as well as lack of priority on the part of policy makers and implementing bodies. In Ghana, the public library system began in 1948 with the then Anglican Bishop of Accra Diocese, Bishop Anglionby as the architect. Since independence, Ghana has placed a high premium on educational programmes in order to catch up with the developed countries. This pursuit calls for the establishment of Information Centre's or Libraries which serve as stimulating environment for innovative learning.

Although most communities in Ghana have library facilities they are not being put into maximum use. The situation of public library services in Ghana is, at present, very poor, owing to the lack of financial and human resources, and the absence of library materials. This situation is unfortunate which warrant an investigation, since no library which aims at providing effective service cannot afford to neglect research into the needs of its users both actual and potential.

Background information of Dunkwa–On-Offin Branch Library

Dunkwa-On-Offin Branch Library was inaugurated on 18th August 1957. The occasion coincided with a One-Week Book Exhibition arranged by the British Council. The Opening Ceremony was performed on the first day of the Exhibition. The Chairman for the occasion was Odeefuo Boa Amponsem III, Omanhene of Denyira Traditional Area, in conjunction with Mr. T. K. Appiah, the then District Commissioner of the area as the Guest Speaker. The Book Exhibition according to

the Assistant-in-Charge at the time was a big success, since it attracted many people to the library. Also a lot of people in the Dunkwa community became aware of the existence of the public library. The ceremony received Media coverage from the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation in both English and the Local Twi Languages on Radio, as a result the Assistant-in-Charge received a lot of telephone calls inquiring about the services offered by the library.

The library since its establishment in 1957 has been accommodated in a Two (2) room's compartment at the Community Centre, one of the room is being used as the Adult Library and the other room has been partitioned for a Children's Library Section and a Store Room respectively. The Adult Library has 16 shelves measuring 6.5 ft. by 3ft; whilst the Children's Library has shorter shelves measuring 2 by 4ft. The library also has a total of 5 long tables and one round table being used by the Adult and Children's Library. There are two (2) writing desks and one Steel catalogue which takes not more than 500 catalogue cards, it also has fifty (50) plywood and steel chairs and one long bench.

The total book stock of the library as revealed by the accession register is over 4000 volumes. The Adult Section has over 3000 books and the Children Section has over 1000 books. Books and other materials acquisition are done for the library by the Ghana Library Authority in Accra. These books are processed, that is classified and catalogued before they are sent to the Branch library. The library also receives book donations from some organizations which include the Ghana Book Trust, World Vision International and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day.

The library has to contend with Two non-professional staff with only a three months In-Service-Training and one messenger / cleaner.

Services rendered to patrons, who are adults, students and children consist mainly of reference and lending. Membership of the lending library is by application. Applicants complete membership application form and is duly endorsed by a guarantor. The guarantor has the responsibility of assisting the library staff to retrieve all overdue books. In the case of student and children the forms are endorsed by their Headmasters and Head teachers. Patrons are made to pay an annual subscription fees which are determined by the Ghana Library Authority. On the other hand, references services are provided free of charge, that is one does not need to register as a member of the library in order to access reference services. The reference collection of the library includes encyclopaedias, dictionaries, yearbooks, periodicals and atlases.

Statement of the problem

This study examined the effective library provision in Ghanaian communities with specific reference to the Dunkwa –On –Offin branch library. There are many branch libraries in Ghana which provide library and information services to the Communities. However, due to inadequate funding and other constraints their services are below standard. This situation has led to a general dissatisfaction with the service provision for the communities resulting in low patronage of the library facility.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the research was to investigate the problem of low patronage of community libraries in Ghana.

Objectives of the Study

The specific study objectives are namely:-

- To identify standard services branch libraries provide
- To examine carefully and critically the service being offered by Dunkwa –On –Offin Branch library
- To find out why patrons are not satisfied with service being offered
- To make recommendations for the improvement of library provision to the community

Review of the literature

A public library is an organization established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organization. It provides access to knowledge, information and works of imagination through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment (Gill et. al, 2001).

Public library is an integral part of the community. It has the social obligation to serve the whole community. It is a positive agent for change in the community. Ekbote (1987) states the importance of the library in the community as “a library makes a substantial contribution to socioeconomic changes in a social milieu.” Murrison (1971) highlighted the great role of public library in a community as “it is a social institution which converts a savage community into a state of civilization.” The public libraries are a gateway to better life. They are capable of enriching the human personality and of helping the people to become responsible citizens.

The Public Library is regarded as the people’s institution. It is the local gateway to knowledge that provides basic condition for lifelong learning and facilitates cultural development of the individual and social groups. The public library is noted for providing services to all irrespective of age, sex, cast, religion, education, and social status, generally all users get the material relevant to their needs and requirements, and they happen to cover the widest population possible; their role in spreading literacy & education has long been acknowledged and is considered to be indispensable.

The UNESCO Manifesto published in August 1995 asserts that the public library must have a clear policy formulated, defining objectives, priorities and services in relation to the local community needs. The library has to be organised effectively and professional standards of operation must be maintained. The manifesto further states that services have to be physically accessible to all members of the community. This requires that the buildings should well situated, possess good reading and study facilities as well as relevant technologies and sufficient opening hours convenient to users.

In order to ensure effective use of information resources and services in public libraries, Parvathamma and Reddy (2009) advocated that public libraries need to take proactive approach in motivating users to use their resources and services. They also stressed that public libraries need to enrich their information resource collections, provide access to the Internet and offer community-based services including literacy programmes.

According to Alemna (1981), the usefulness of any public library depends on its ability to serve the community as a centre of reliable information and to provide opportunity and encouragement for people of all ages to educate themselves throughout life. Onohwakpor (2006) has opined that libraries, as a store of knowledge, is indispensable to the success of any functional education. He further said that education without the services of a library is half-baked education that can only produce narrow minded individual which will not be productive to their community. Efforts are therefore made to acquire, process, preserve and make available the resources to the users.

Krampa (2012) postulates that basic literacy, besides being a fundamental human right, is also a foundation not only for achieving education for all but, more broadly, for reaching the overarching goal of reducing human poverty. One of the institutions with a mandate to do this are libraries. According to Kargbo (2005) the public library acts as a bridge between the information rich and the information poor. Krolak (2005) in consonants with Kargbo (2005) confirm that, public libraries play the most important role worldwide in helping to bridge the information gap by providing free access to information and communication technologies, particularly the Internet. They are inclusive in that they build bridges between individuals at the local level and the global levels of knowledge. In industrialized countries, access to modern information technology is currently one of the most attractive library services. Kargbo (2005) further posits that the public library is sometimes referred to as the 'poor man's university' where members of the society irrespective of age, color or social status have access to information for lifelong learning. Hence, public library services are indeed essential public access points because people feel comfortable to rely on their free information services.

Murrison (1971) is of the opinion that the public library has to offer children, young people, men and women the opportunity and encouragement to educate themselves continually; to keep abreast with progress in all fields of knowledge and to maintain freedom of expression, and have a constructively critical attitudes towards all public issues; to be better social and political citizens of their country and of the world, to be more efficient in their day to day activities to develop capacities and powers of appreciation in arts and letters to aid generally in advancement of knowledge, to use their leisure time to promote personal happiness and social well-being.

Effective library provision also depends on user education. User education is an essential task of any library to make its resources visible and available to outreach. According to Kumar and Phil (2009), user education is "a process of activities involved in making the users of the library conscious about tremendous value of information in day to day life to develop interest among the users to seek information as and when they requires". On the other hand, Tian-hui (2009) posit that user education is an educational activity of the library and information organization, which is carried out intentionally and systematically to increase users' information awareness and retrieval skills. It can enable them to make full use of the library and information resources. For

the library, the main task of user education is to guide library users to maximize the use of library resources, including collection resources and human resources, as well as training their proficiency in the use of library resources.

The public library service is developed to meet the need of the community. If the community need is well defined the tasks become easier for the librarian. It is the responsibility of the public library to provide information counseling and guidance to derive information from various sources to its different users with varied demands. The Public Library Service: IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Development (1994) in the chapter “Meeting the needs of the users” has suggested to identify potential users including persons with special needs like indigenous people, people with disabilities, housebound people, people in hospitals, in prison, within various organizations and people in different professions. This document has also suggested to identify non users of libraries. It mentions that public library is to support literacy, promotion of reading, to support formal and informal education including distance education, to help in the development of basic life skills, to support leisure time interests, to provide information services with the help of information technology. It has also given emphasis on user education to develop their skills that will enable them to make the most effective use of library’s resources and services (Bandyopadhyay, 2008).

Methodology

The researchers adopted a survey design approach for this study, because it was considered appropriate. According to Aina and Ajiferuke (2002), it involves a systematic and comprehensive collection of information about the opinions, attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and behaviours of people. The population for the study comprises registered and non-registered patrons of the facility, and a sample of 100 respondents were drawn and used for the study.

Questionnaire was designed and used for data collection by the researchers. It was designed based on the objectives of this study. The questionnaire was in three parts, the first part was designed to gather personal and demographic information of the respondents, the second part of the questionnaire was administered to collect information on the usage patterns of the library whilst the third part was to gather information on the library facilities. Out of 100 copies of the questionnaire administered, 96 copies were completed and returned. Data were presented for analysis using descriptive statistics which include; frequency count, percentages and tables.

Results and Discussion

Use of the library

The Community library that was studied operates within the hours of 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM from Monday to Saturday. The respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the operating hours of the library, in order for the researchers to find out how the operating hours affects the usage of the facilities in the library. The results showed that 91.7% of respondents stated that they are satisfied with the operational hours. The rest of the respondents constituting 8.3% indicated that they are not satisfied. Table 1 below shows the details:-

Table 1: Library Opening hours

Status	No. of respondents	Satisfied		Not Satisfied	
		No.	Percentages	No.	Percentages
Adults	26	24	25	2	2
Students	40	36	37.5	4	4.3
Children	30	28	29.2	2	2
TOTAL	96	88	91.7	8	8.3

Source: Field Survey

Purpose for Use of the library

The researchers also investigated the purpose for the use of the library from the respondents. The data revealed that 39.6% of them indicated that they use the library mostly for reference purposes and majority of these category of users were students. Also 35.4% who use the library for study purposes were mostly students. Book borrowing was a major service provision by the library, the researchers found out that only 10.4% of respondents indicated that they borrow books for home reading. Those who use the library for recreation / pleasure constituted 14.6% and majority of them were students. Table 2 below shows details of the findings:-

Table 2: Purpose for use of the library

Status	No. of respondents	For study		For reference		For book borrowing		Recreation/Pleasure	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Adults	26	8	8.3	10	10.4	4	4.2	4	4.2
Students	40	14	14.6	18	18.75	2	2	6	6.25
Children	30	12	12.5	10	10.4	4	4.2	4	4.2
Total	96	34	35.4	34	39.6	10	10.4	14	14.6

Source: Field Survey

Assessment of the Book stock

The researchers also investigated the respondents opinion on their rating of the stock of the library since their impression about the library stock has a direct bearing on their use of the facility. The study revealed that 68.75% representing majority of respondents noted that the book stock was poor. It was noted that majority of the respondents who were students, (31.25%) further described the book stock as woefully inadequate and does not reflect the various disciplines of their study. This observation was not surprising since the library shelves was stock with outdated and worn out books because the facility has not been replenish with new book stock from the Ghana Library Authority for some time now. Over the years, government's allocation of funds to Ghana Library Authority has been dwindling leading to reduction of the book stock of libraries under its jurisdiction. Table 3 shows details of the findings:-

Table 3: Assessment of Book stock

Status	No. of respondents	Good		Fair		Poor	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Adults	26	8	8.3	2	2	16	16.7
Students	40	6	6.25	2	2	30	31.25
Children	30	10	10.4	2	2	20	20.8
Total	96	24	25	6	6.25	66	68.75

Source: Field Survey

Utilisation of Newspapers and periodicals

The study also investigated the patronage of periodicals and magazines from the respondents. The data indicated that majority of the respondents, 55.2% patronized periodicals and magazines acquired by the facility, whilst 44.8% do not make use of periodicals and magazines. Though the study shows that over 50% of the respondents patronized periodicals, the researchers observed that the library could only acquire few titles of these materials, which included only one newspaper for Children, which is Junior Graphic. Other respondents, adults and students also complained of insufficient number of periodicals acquired by the library. This situation can be attributed to inadequate budgetary constraints to the library. Table 4 below gives the details:-

Table 4: Use of Newspapers and periodicals

Status	No. of respondents	Yes		NO	
		No.	%	No.	%
Adults	26	19	19.8	7	7.3
Students	40	24	25	16	16.7
Children	30	10	10.4	20	20.8
Total	96	53	55.2	43	44.8

Source: Field Survey

Utilisation of reference collection

The researchers also ascertain the opinion of respondents whether they make use of reference collection of the library. The study revealed that 81.2% stated that they never make use of the reference books, whilst 14.5% also indicated that they make use of the reference books regularly. This appalling situation was due to the outdated stock at the reference section hence the low patronage of the reference collection. Table 5 below shows the details:-

Table 5: Use of reference books

Status	No. of respondents	Regularly		Occasionally		Never	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Adults	26	2	2	2	2	22	22.9
Students	40	8	8.3	-	-	32	33.3
Children	30	4	4.2	2	2	24	25

Total	96	14	14.5	4	4.3	78	81.2
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Source: Field Survey

Assessment of Library facilities

The researchers asked the respondents to rate the facilities of the library, especially the furniture and the seating capacity. The study revealed that 79.2% of the respondents indicated that the facilities provided are too old and inadequate, however about 13.54% stated that the furniture and seating capacity as not good enough. This situation is not peculiar to this facility under investigation alone, but most of the community libraries in the country. Table 6 gives the details of the findings:-

Table 6: Furniture and seating capacity

Status	No. of respondents	Very Good		Not Good		Adequate		Inadequate	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Adults	26	-	-	4	4.2	-	-	22	22.9
Students	40	-	-	5	5.2	1	1	34	35.4
Children	30	2	2	4	4.2	4	4.2	20	20.8
Total	96	2	2.06	13	13.54	5	5.2	76	79.2

Source: Field Survey

Assessment of the Library Accommodation

The researchers found out that the library since its inception in 1957 has been accommodated in Two (2) big rooms at the Community Centre premises. From the researchers investigation, this situation is not peculiar to the Dunkwa Branch library, since most community libraries in the country were accommodated in Community Centre buildings. The study revealed that 95% of the respondents were satisfied with the suitability of the location of the library because it was in a Central Business Centre and also surrounded by a cluster of both first and second cycle schools. Despite the suitable location of the library, the respondents were not happen with the disturbance of readers as a result of the noise generated by the Junior High School sited at the basement of the Community Centre building. The researchers also noted that strictly speaking the two rooms are not adequate to accommodate the two sections of the library, which is the Adults and Children sections and a storeroom.

Conclusion

The purpose of providing a library in a community is to contribute to the social, cultural and economic well-being of the people in the community through the provision of leisure and learning opportunities. Ensuring effective library provision in communities` means services have to be physically accessible to all members of the communities. This requires well situated library buildings, good reading and study facilities as well as the deployment of relevant technologies and sufficient opening hours convenient to the users. The study revealed that the library had not been able to meet this noble objectives due to inadequate budgetary constraints culminating in unsuitable accommodation, lack of effective development of library collection, no effective

development of information resources and lack of effective delivery of relevant services tailored to the diverse community.

The community's perception of the library was not pleasant, resulting in patronage of the services being offered by the library. The irony is that the government always touts improvement in education and manpower development without attaching priority on effective library provision in the country. The Ghana Library Authority should continue to dialogue with the government in the allocation of appropriate budgetary support to ensure that the community libraries are well equipped and maintained to promote effective library provision in the Ghanaian communities.

It has been rightly opined that “the Public library is acting as an agency for social and personal development and can be a positive agency for change in the community. It contributes to the creation and maintenance of a well- informed and democratic society and helps to empower people in the enrichment and development of their lives and that of the community in which they live” (IFLA, 2001).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are offered by the researchers:-

- Internet facilities should be available in all community libraries to ensure generation of incomes
- Provision of photocopying, binding and lamination services should be made available to patrons
- The Ghana Library Authority should liaise with the various District Assemblies to facility the construction of appropriate accommodation and furniture provision for the community libraries
- The government and all stakeholders in the education sector must ensure proper financial support to the libraries to enable them acquire and procure all necessary logistics that can improve quality of services
- Personnel's of the library play a pivotal role in helping the present and potential users. Therefore keen interest must be taken to employ well qualified and trained personnel for the library
- The Ghana Library Authority should ensure that attractive library subscription fees are charge in all the community libraries for services rendered.

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