The Contribution of Internet Cafes in Promoting Tertiary Education in Ghana: A Case of Wa Township in the Wa Municipality of Ghana

Eshun Nuamah Samuel
Department of Community Development,Nadowli-Kaleo District, Box 36, Wa, Ghana

Yebowaa Franklina Adjoa
University for Development Studies,Wa Campus, Box 520,   Wa, Ghana

Manu Owusuwaa Abena Manu
Queen of Peace Senior High School,   Box 3, Wa, Ghana

Abstract
The study sought to examine the role internet cafes play in assisting tertiary education in Ghana with Wa Township as a case study. Questionnaires/interviews were randomly administered on 450 respondents in all the 15 internet cafes in Wa Municipality. 78.4% of the respondents were tertiary students. It was found that tertiary students use the internet for academic purposes. They spend more hours in studying at the internet cafés than the library as a result of inadequate internet facilities are their campuses. The study recommended effective collaboration between lecturers and the library staffs to aid effective knowledge sharing.
Keywords: Internet Cafe, Education, Ghana, Library, Tertiary education

Introduction
The Internet is information superhighway. Just as a road allows travel through different areas of a country, so the Internet allows information to flow through many different interconnected computer networks. It features exhaustive material on the arts as well as research material for students and coverage of recreation, entertainment, sports, shopping, and employment opportunities. As indicated by Lima, (2006), "the internet and other ICT tools in general constitute a valuable channel for knowledge dissemination and opportunities for development and growth among nations in the world" (p. 49). The internet has increasingly become part and parcel of the life of many people and institutions globally. Without internet, many of today's businesses and institutions will collapse and thereby retard global development. In developing countries the internet has serve as one of the fastest means of retrieving and disseminating information amongst students, lecturers, and researchers in higher institutions (Nwogu & Anunobi, 2007).

Internet cafés are multi-purpose commercial entities where people without residential internet come to access varied forms of electronic communication and are charged a fee in relation to the airtime used. They exist in many countries and are especially common in places where computers or Internet subscription rates are not affordable for large parts of the population (Cilesiz, 2009). According to Mutula (2003), internet cafés are spreading faster in Africa and guarantees the privacy that one would not find at libraries or places of work. In Ghana, Over two million people now have access to the Internet partly due to the increasing number of internet cafés and perhaps the increasing number of service providers (Abbey, 2011)

Some literature on internet cafés and internet use
The use of the internet has been described by Kling (1999) as a function of social and technological access. The social access refers to the combination of skills in information communication technology, financial resources and the professional knowledge of the individual. The technological access on the other hand refers to the availability of internet infrastructure, computers and its accessories. This explains the wide disparity between the adoption of internet in less developed countries and developed countries. Developed countries have solid ICT infrastructure that is incomparable with less developed countries, and for that matter citizens of developed countries are more familiar with the internet and its usage (Wong, 2002).

A research conducted by Adomi et al (2003) in Nigeria pinpoint students as the most frequent users of internet cafés. Businessmen were ranked second whiles lecturers and teachers were third and fourth respectively. This assertion that students are the number one users of internet cafés has been confirmed by Gitta et al (2003) in Uganda and Sairosse and Mutula (2004) in Bostwana. This situation prevails because most students are dependents on their parents or guardians and for that matter cannot afford connection at home.

Users of internet cafés use the internet for several purposes. In Nigeria, Ugah and Okafor (2008) conducted a study with the aim of investigating how the internet is put to use at the café. They revealed that 50% of respondents' use the internet café for research purposes whiles 30% responded they use the internet for

communication. Similarly, a research by Chachage (2001) in Tanzania made known that 62% of sampled population uses the internet to search for information on specific subjects, 67% revealed they go to the internet café to read newspapers online whiles 27% agreed they use the internet to search for information on behalf of others.

In a study of the role of the Internet on education, innovation and global living standards carried out by Princeton Survey Research Associates (PSRA) (2001), 74% of respondents alleged that educating students through a computer-generated classroom will offer more learners with greater prospects to learn, 87% indicated that the internet will have a positive effect on improving education, 69% revealed that the internet will have a larger impact in improving educational systems so that the students can get the best instruction regardless of their economic background and physical location, and 93% say that the internet will be valuable in providing students with greater access to libraries, information and teachers around the world. The study finally concluded that the internet would bring about enormous benefits and improvements to the educational systems because of the Internet's supreme capability to spread knowledge and disseminate information.

Some researchers have indicated that internet cafés can be threat to the socio-cultural traditions and values in society. Rathore and Alhabshi (2005) reported that the emergence of the internet cafés as entertainment centers poses a threat to the customs and traditions of the Malaysian society with the government working very hard to reduce the negative impacts associated with the use of the internet cafés. In China, a lot of internet cafés have been closed down by the Chinese government due an operation to curb what Hong and Huang (2005) referred to as 'unethical' use of the internet café. Many youths has been using the internet cafés as a center for gambling, violent games and the viewing of pornography. The nuisance of internet cafés has also been felt in Ghana. Some youth are reported to be engaged in internet fraud at the internet cafés known locally as *Sakawa,* which is described by Warner (2011) as "ever-evolving klepto-theological paradigm created to abet in the preparation of internet crime." Waner (2011) further reported that priest and other spiritual leaders of both western and local religion have taken to performing "*Sakawa blessing ceremonies*" for youth participation in cybercrime, which are intended to protect cybercriminals from being discovered and ensure their ultimate financial success.

However, many students and teachers in Ghanaian tertiary institutions use the internet cafés for academic purposes. In Ghana, university environ is deemed as a strategic location for small-scale entrepreneurs interested in establishing internet cafés. This scenario is similar in Nigeria were Alao and Folorunsho (2008) reported that there were as much as 32 internet cafés in IIorin where the federal university is sited. Despite the increasing importance of the internet cafés, there is little on the contribution of the internet cafés in education in Ghana. This paper therefore sought to explore how internet cafés in Ghana serves as a supportive arena in promoting tertiary education.

Profile of study area
Wa Municipal is one of the administrative districts in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The Wa Municipal shares administrative boundaries with; the Nadowli Distrit to the North, the Wa East District to the east and South, and Wa West district to the West and South (Wa Municipal, 2009). The municipality is a host to three tertiary institutions, a university, a polytechnic and a teacher training college. There are as much as 15 internet cafes in the town with Vodafone Ghana serving as the main service provider. All the internet cafes has wireless network that extend between 100m and 1km radius.

Methodology
This paper is based on a survey of users of internet cafes in Wa Township during the month of March and April. Questionnaires/interviews were administered on customers who were physically present at the internet cafes in three different times of the day in order to get a realistic picture of users of the internet cafe. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were employed to collect data from respondents. Data was collected from all the 15 internet cafes in the town. 30 respondents from each café were selected randomly to fill the questionnaire making a total of 450 respondents. 353 respondents were tertiary students representing 78.4%. Students of tertiary institutions were the main focus of the study. Some internet café owners were interviewed on their activities in the town. Simple percentages and tables were relied upon for data analysis and presentation.

Results and discussion
Table 1: Respondents characteristics

Number of respondents	450
Gender distribution, Male/Female (%)	69/31
Age-Average	24.4
Occupation	
Students	
• Tertiary	353
• Secondary	16
• Basics	19
Self employed	13
Govt/ private institution	27
Unemployed	22

According to table I, majority of the users of internet cafes in Wa Municipality are tertiary students constituting 78.4% of the study population. This confirm earlier studies by Adomi et al (2003) and Gitta et al (2003) that students are the number one users of internet cafes. A visit to the various campuses of the tertiary students revealed that all the campuses have inadequate ICT infrastructure that can meet the demand of students and therefore have no option than to use the services at the internet cafes. In answering why tertiary students are more present at the cafés than other category of students, this was how one internet café owner put it:

"..... the tertiary students are aggressive toward their younger colleagues. They do not want to browse at the same place with students less than 15 years of age. They always complain they are dirty, stubborn and sometimes shout on them. Gradually, most of them stop attending the café and are currently using the game centres in town. This situation is causing us lose a lot of money"

Gender inequality in terms of internet usage is also clear in the study. About 69% of the respondents were male whiles females constitute only 31%. This means that males are more frequent at internet cafes than females.

The average age for internet café users in Wa municipality is 24.4, implying that most of the users of internet cafes are youthful. This is also in agreement with Tiemo and Ubogu (2012) who revealed that most of the users of cyber cafes in Nigeria are between the ages of 20 and 25 years.

Table 2: Most preferred place to access information for academic purposes by tertiary students

Place of information	F	%
Lecture Hall	164	46.5
Library	54	15.3
Internet cafes	135	38.3
Total	353	100

With regard to the most preferred place to access academic information, majority of the tertiary students representing 46.5% indicated they prefer the Lecture Hall. 38.8% also indicated that they prefer the internet cafes whiles a smaller percentage of 15.3% revealed that they prefer the library.

Most of the tertiary students who choose the lecture hall indicated that lectures are compulsory and have no option than to attend. They also acknowledged that the lecture hall is the most reliable place to access academic information because there is a direct contact between students and examiners. Some of the students revealed some challenges associated with the use of the lecture hall. They cited overcrowding as one of the problems. They explained that their numbers are most often more than the capacity that the lecture hall can contain. This sometimes makes it difficult for students to hear their lecturers. Malfunctioning of the public address systems in the various institutions was also a challenge to the effective use of the lecture halls.

The library has always been an integral part of the educational system with the mandate of creating an environment where students and teachers can access academic information that is relevant for their studies. According to the study most students of the various tertiary institutions revealed that the libraries of their respective institution only provide some limited space for students who do not have better place to study at home. Most of the books and journals outlined in lecturers course outline cannot be found at the library. They explained that most of the textbooks and journals date as far back as 1960s which may not be relevant for today's socio-economic and technological situations. They recommended the immediate provision of internet services at the library and the availability of current journals to match the need of the 21st century students. Some students also recommended effective collaboration between the library and lecturers in other to identify and determine the books and journals that are needed for specific courses.

The internet café is gradually assuming the role of the library in the Wa township. 87.5% of tertiary student indicated that they use the internet cafes because the library is not accessible to them. They easily get the required information at the internet cafes without delay. One tertiary student of the Wa polytechnic has this to say:

"With just a click, I can download most of the books and journals that my tutor requires me to study for free. I can only borrow a book at the library. So why should I go there?"

Some students also revealed that studying at the internet café is flexible. One can engage in other activities at the café to entertain him or herself when he or she is bored. Others further explained that the library is too official, they need a place where they can relax and study. Proximity to the library was also one of the factors cited as the reason why students prefer to access academic information at the internet cafe. 78.6% of tertiary students indicated that they do not have residential accommodation in their respective campuses. This makes it very difficult for them to use the library especially at night.

Table 3: Average Time spent per week at places of academic information by tertiary students

Place of information	Hours
Lecture Hall	7.24
Library	0.17
Internet cafes	3.30

Table 3 shows the time spend at the respective centers for academic information at the week prior to the study. It was revealed that tertiary students spend an average of 7hours 24minutes at the lecture hall. Furthermore, each tertiary student on the average spends 17 minutes at the library. An average of 3hours 30minutes was recorded as time spent at the internet café. This means that most students spend more time at the internet café than the library.

Uses of internet by tertiary students at the internet cafes

Type of use	F	%
Academic purposes	347	98.3
Email/chatting	303	85.8
Reading News online	156	44.2
Visiting pornography sites	43	12.2
Gambling	17	4.8
Downloading software/music/videos	88	24.9
Online games	21	5.9

As shown in Table 3, majority (98.3%) of the tertiary student use the internet for academic purposes. This finding is in line with studies in other part of Africa where Odero (2003) reported that most postgraduate users of internet cafes in South Africa uses the internet as an educational resource whiles undergraduates are most often inclined to use the internet to chat, listen to music and download stuffs for entertainment. Most of the tertiary students who reported they read news online revealed that, the news papers at the library are always not enough. One has to wait for the other to finish reading before he or she can also read. One final year student from the University for Development studies has this to say:

"I have never seen a current paper at the university library since I came first year. The latest I will find is always a day late. I remember the campus librarian once said at an orientation ceremony that information should be delivered on time and it should meet the information needs of the people. Is like they preach virtue and practice vice"

Regrettably, some tertiary students use the internet in an unproductive way. 12.2% of tertiary students visit pornographic sites at the internet cafes. 4.8% of the tertiary students also use the café as a center for gambling. However, in study conducted by Gu¨rol & Sevindik (2006) on the profile of internet café users in Turkey, an overwhelming majority (85.6%) of respondents claimed that they had never visited pornographic sites.

Conclusion and recommendation

The study sought to investigate the contribution of internet cafes in promoting tertiary education in Ghana with wa Municipality as a case study. The study has confirmed earlier studies that students are the number one users of internet cafes. The assumption that internet café users are youthful was also confirmed by this study. The study further revealed that students prefer and spends more hours at the internet café than the library. The study therefore recommends the immediate provision of internet services at the various campuses in municipality.

Teaching and library staffs should also be seen as partners working together for a particular goal.

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