

The Use of Academic Libraries among Students in Tertiary Institutions in the Sunyani Municipality, Ghana.

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Abstract

The paper surveys library use among students in tertiary education institutions in the Sunyani Municipality of Ghana. A response rate of 77.4% (697 responses) out of the 900 randomly distributed questionnaires from the three tertiary institutions in the Municipality was recorded for the study. The study was motivated by the advent of information technology's role in information provision. It intended to unravel how best the academic libraries are meeting the information resource needs of users in the digital world. . The study showed, *inter alia*, that many students principally used the libraries as a place to prepare for examinations and to do their assignments. Recommended course textbooks, reference books and past examination questions were the most sought after materials among the respondents. Few of them had eyes for fiction and periodical resources. Even though majority of the tertiary students find the stock in the libraries to be fairly old, it did not ward them off from using the libraries. It is instructive that if the libraries continue to hold on to old books, it could lead to low patronage of the libraries in the advent of new platforms that have the potential to make large amount of electronic information available to users.

Key words: Academic libraries, Library use

Introduction

Education is unequivocally a great contributor to nations' socio-economic development. According to Gupta and Gupta (1997), it is the most powerful tool for change and must therefore train the minds of the educated to cope with the change. Schiller (2008) also sees education as an investment in human capital that produces a return to the individual in the form of higher earnings and social returns or spillovers that are an important factor in

generating more rapid growth. It should also be noted that much of the training of the cream of the human capital of a country takes place in academic institutions such as universities, polytechnics, colleges and their affiliates. This is because higher education institutions have been known to play a central role in developing the knowledge base of individuals, societies and organizations. According to Okwakol (2009), higher education institutions are charged with the formation of human capital through teaching, building knowledge base through research and knowledge development, and dissemination and use of knowledge by interacting with the knowledge users.

Academic libraries play a significant role towards the achievement of the goals of tertiary institutions and hardly would academic institutions be able to provide for the academic, intellectual and other interests and information needs of students without the services of good libraries. This is because a good library and information services have been noted as essential ingredient for research, successful teaching and learning (Banting et al, 2008). According to Agyen-Gyasi, Lamptey and Frempong (2010), academic libraries are essential contributors to knowledge generation and serve a wide spectrum of knowledge seekers. Lesikar and Petit (1995) noted that in conducting a research, the natural place to begin an orderly search for secondary information is the library. This makes educational institutions without this all-important facility (the library) worrisome. Aina (2004) has observed that the services provided by a university's library reflect the quality of the university. It was therefore worrying when Bozimo (1983) as cited by Adetona (2010) revealed in a study that overwhelming majority of Nigerian university academics had urgent need for library resources that were unavailable.

The existence of libraries actually dates back to the ancient civilizations. Krasner-Khait (2001) observes that the collection of written knowledge in some sort of repository is as old as civilization itself. Indeed, the Library at Alexandria, in ancient Egypt, was one that was said to have attracted the attention of many scholars in those days as a citadel of knowledge. Feldman (2000) is of the view that libraries began when people realized that information was a valuable resource and must outlive the people who created it. Library collections have since moved beyond written and printed materials to include electronic and audio-visual materials. In fact, a modern library with a few exceptions could be regarded as a service institution (Kumar, 1987). Whittaker (1983) points out that the scope of services to organized stores of knowledge (of libraries) has gradually developed over many years. Evans, Amodeo and Carter (1999) have also concluded that it is this "service" that serves as the foundation upon which the whole structure of the modern library rests. The rapid advances in information communication technologies have broadened the scope of storage facilities and access points to information beyond the limits of a physical library.

Functions of academic libraries

Libraries serve as highways to the forest of intellectual ideas by acquiring, organizing, processing and storing information in retrievable form and providing tools that can be used to access the information. Materials, including those that are useful for education and other interests have continuously been written and published by many scholars since the ancient civilizations. These intellectual products are kept in libraries, museums and other repositories for users' consumption. The academic library serves as the pivot around which academic activities revolves in tertiary institutions. Ubogu and Okiy (2011) have pointed out that academic libraries are those attached to universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and other similar higher institutions of learning. Adeniran (2011) while agreeing with Ubogu and Okiy's assertion also added that academic libraries serve research needs of students and staff. A list of what may be found in today's library, according to Brown (2007), includes: books, periodicals, films, recordings, computer databases, and competent human resources. In the view of Ugwuanyi, Okwor and Ezeji (2011), the abundance of information resources provided by libraries makes them a potential learning environment in a university. They therefore advocate that a good academic library should provide multifunctional environment within the library space as this would create a platform for individuals to achieve set goals.

Harrison and Beenham (1985) contend that compared to a public library, an academic library may be less universal in its subject coverage. The general objectives of academic libraries, according to Harrison and Beenham, may be listed as follows:

- a) to serve the needs of the academic community;

- b) to provide reference materials at the appropriate levels;
- c) to provide study areas for users;
- d) to provide a lending service appropriate to the different types of users; and
- e) to provide an active information service that may extend beyond the institution to local industry and commerce.

Adeniran (2011) also posits that academic libraries serve two complementary purposes. These institutions are established to support the universities' curricular and to support research of the faculty and students. Information and services provided by academic libraries should, at all times, reflect the constantly changing needs of their users. It is an avid fact that libraries significantly support teaching, learning and research in educational institutions. Well stocked libraries underpin tertiary institutions agenda to offer quality teaching and support learning and research activities. Abagai (1993) noted that the use of libraries by users and their satisfaction with the library services depend on the availability of appropriate learning materials, accommodation and competent staff. Implicitly, libraries should not only have good collection of materials but also comfortable places for users to learn and staff who can offer assistance to users when the need be. The effectiveness of libraries is often measured by the volume of library materials to clients, the amount of use of the resources and the apparent satisfaction of clients (Simmonds and Andaleeb, 2001).

Students' success in school partly depends on the quality of information they obtain from academic and institutional repositories. This poses a responsibility on students to have good information seeking attitudes and skills to enhance their chances of obtaining the requisite information to meet their academic needs. This is because information seeking is central to learning, and students who lack information seeking skills may be deprived of the information they look for.

Problem of the study

Academic libraries provide numerous services to their clientele to facilitate teaching, learning, research and other interests of the parent academic community. Undoubtedly, libraries are the centre of academic activities and therefore attract instructors, learners and the general public. They are the backbone of tertiary educational institutions. Educational institutions oblivious of the fact that academic libraries are the driving force behind them and fail to adequately resource their libraries are doomed to extinct.

The rapid advances in information communication technologies have widened the borders of accessing information as it enables users to retrieve and store information in varied formats. This has the tendency to influence information seeking behavior of users through the options it offers in accessing and storing information. Adeniran (2011) cites Cullen (2001) as stating that the global digital revolution is affecting both the traditional forms of the creation, organization and dissemination of knowledge and the world of tertiary education itself. The e-learning resources on the web have spurred learners to look for information stored in various formats and from places previously unimagined for learning and research purposes. The use of computers and modems by students to access information on the internet may lead to low patronage of the services of academic libraries.

Academic libraries are faced with competition as a result of the seemingly easy-access platform offered by information communication technologies which could lead to low use of the traditional services it provides. It is apparent that the digital environment poses a threat to libraries which predominantly have printed materials. The study, therefore, intended to intrinsically verify the extent of use of materials and services offered by academic libraries among tertiary students and suggest appropriate actions to be taken to continue to make the libraries useful and relevant to their clients.

Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- find out how frequently students visit the library;
- determine the purpose for which they use the library;

- identify the materials that are often used by students; and
- find out the ease with which students are able to locate books in the libraries.

Method

Design

Survey research design was used for the study. Surveys have been identified as making it possible to collect large amounts of data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The design was considered appropriate for the study as it enabled the questionnaires to be administered to elicit responses from students in three tertiary institutions.

Population and sample

The target population of the study consisted of students of the Catholic University College of Ghana, the College of Renewable Natural Resources (KNUST, Sunyani) and the Sunyani Polytechnic. The tertiary institutions in the Sunyani Municipality have relatively large enrolments and library set-ups to facilitate the delivery of quality teaching while supporting learning and research activities. The study adopted a random sampling technique to select 900 students from the three tertiary institutions in the Sunyani Municipality of Ghana.

Instrument and data analysis

The study employed the use of questionnaire as a tool for data collection. The items on the instrument were both closed and opened-ended. A total of 900 questionnaires were distributed to the sampled students between April and June 2011. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data collected and the results are presented in tables and figures.

Findings and Discussions

Profile of Respondents

The study registered a response rate of 77.4% (697 responses) out of the 900 questionnaires that were distributed among the students in the tertiary institutions in the Municipality. In terms of the gender distribution, the males were 346 while the females were 351 (representing 49.6% and 50.4% respectively). The students who formed the respondents as earlier noted were selected from three tertiary institutions in the Sunyani Municipality. The respondents consisted of 311 (44.6%) of Catholic University College of Ghana students, 114 (16.4%) of College of Renewable Natural Resources students, and 272 (39%) of Sunyani Polytechnic students.

The students were at the various levels of studies (1st yr, 2nd yr, 3rd yr and 4th yr) with majority of them being in the second year of tertiary education (representing 26.5%, 31.7% 27.7 and 14.1% respectively).

Frequency of visits to the Libraries

Academic libraries are expected to support teaching, learning and research in schools and should ideally be the favorite points of access for information search among students, faculty and scholars with diverse interests. It is therefore expected that the visits to and use of facilities offered by libraries would to be encouraging. The study revealed that majority of the respondents (232 or 33.3%) visit their libraries several times in a week. The results also show that 129 or 18.5% of the respondents visit the library once a week. The number of respondents who indicated that they visit the library every working day of the library were 121 (17.4%) while 182 (26.1%) visit the library occasionally. A small number 33 representing 4.7% of the respondents indicated that they had never visited the library. The study shows that majority of the tertiary students' still use library resources for their academic and other information needs in the advent of the technology-driven platforms such as the Internet. Although computers and internet use provide valuable intellectual resource to learners, the study shows that there has not been drastic reduction in the use of academic libraries by students in the Sunyani Municipality as

shown in Table 1. The digital environment may pose threat to libraries but well stocked libraries would be relied on to meet educational and informational needs of institutions and learners.

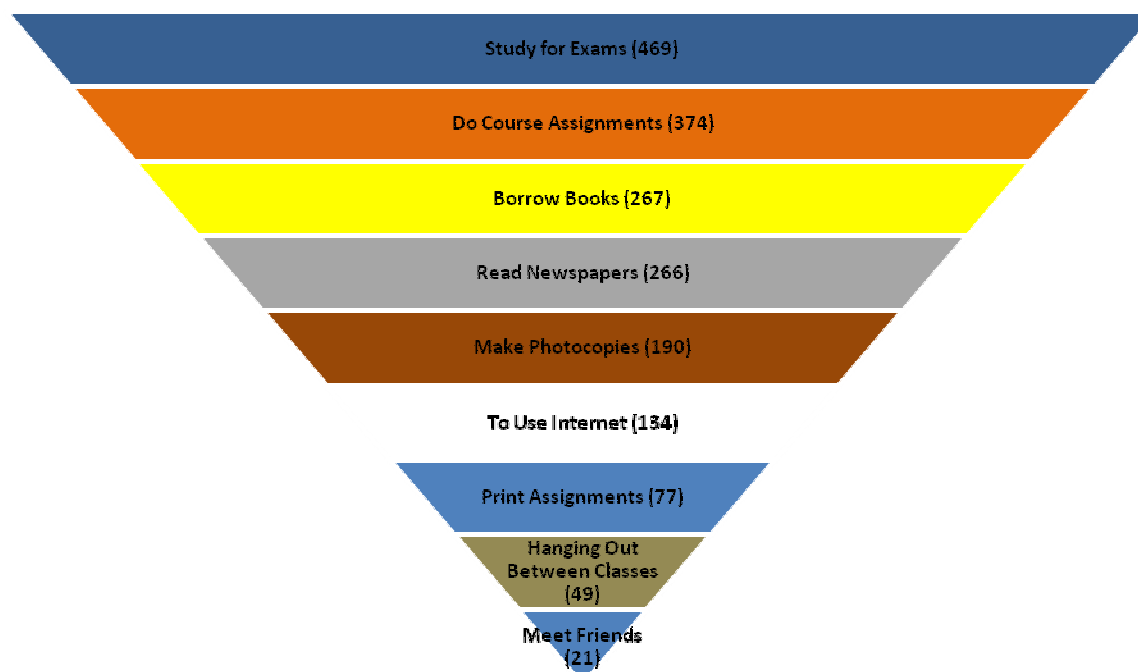
Table 1: Library visits

Options	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Every day	121	17.4%
Several times in a week	232	33.3%
Once a week	129	18.5%
Occasionally	182	26.1%
Never	33	4.7%
Total	697	100%

Purpose of visiting the Libraries

Modern academic libraries put several resources including photocopiers and computer-assisted platforms at the disposal of tertiary students and faculties to facilitate access to information and other data that may be of critical importance to effective teaching, learning and research. The studies showed that majority of the tertiary students use the libraries as places to study and prepare for examinations and also to do course assignments. Using the frequency of events approach, the respondents ranked ‘study for examination’ as the number one reason for visiting the library while the 2nd ranked reason was to ‘do course assignment’ (469 and 374 respectively out of a total frequency of 1847). This corroborates a similar study by Bature (2009) that showed that majority of students from four tertiary institutions in Nigeria use the library to prepare for examination (50.5%) and to do assignments (20%) as the purpose of visiting the library. A minority of the respondents indicated that they use the library as a location for meeting friends. This represents the least reason for visiting academic libraries as indicated in Figure 1.

Figure1: Purpose of visiting the Library (multiple answers allowed)



Book borrowings among the Students

Book acquisitions and lending are among the traditional activities of most libraries. Like most academic libraries, the libraries of the institutions used in the study offer their users the opportunity to take books out under defined arrangements. Evidence from the research showed that a significant number of the participants (217 or 32.7%) had never borrowed books from the libraries. A total of 243 (36.6%) participants indicated that

they occasionally borrow books from the libraries. It emerged that a relatively smaller number of the students either ‘often’ (20.3%) or ‘very often’ (10.3%) borrow books from the library. The results clearly depict that 32.7% of the respondents visit the libraries for some purposes other than borrowing of books (see Table 2).

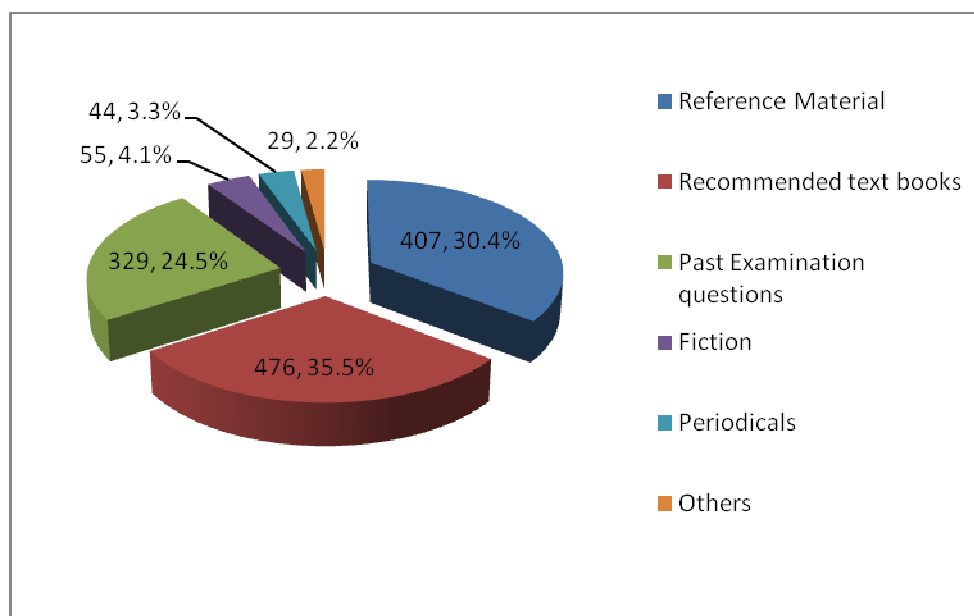
Table 2: Frequency of borrowing books from the library

Options	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Very often	69	10.4%
Often	135	20.3%
Occasionally	243	36.6%
Never	217	32.7%
Total	664	100%

Materials often used by the students

The academic libraries in the Municipality have a variety of materials that reflect the various disciplines being offered in their parent institutions. The study revealed that the most favorite library materials that the tertiary students use are recommended textbooks and reference materials such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, maps, atlases, etc.,. Majority of the respondents (467 or 35.5 %) indicated recommended textbooks as the most sought for materials when using the libraries. This also corroborates the findings of Bature (2009) that the materials with direct bearing on course of study was the resources mostly used by students of tertiary institutions in the Kebbi State of Nigeria. The study shows that reference materials were the next materials most students use at the libraries. This constitutes 30.4% (407) of the responses. Another favorite library material that tertiary students use is past examination questions with 329 or 24.5% of the responses. There seems to be a comparatively lower use of fiction (55 or 4.1%), and periodicals (44 or 3.3 %). The other materials ‘others’ made up of CD-ROMs, audio and video cassettes constituted a paltry 2.2% as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Materials often used by the students (multiple answers allowed)



Adequacy of the materials in the libraries

It is good for academic libraries to be adequately stocked with current and relevant materials to position them well to play their primary role of providing resources for teaching, learning and research. Kisiedu (2010) recommends a maximum of five copies per ‘borrowable title’ depending on the size of the user community.

The views of the respondents were sought as regard the adequacy of the materials at the various libraries. Majority of the respondents (50.9% or 338) considered the materials in their libraries as ‘few’ while 33.3% or 221 thought that the materials in their libraries were ‘enough’. The results further show that only a paltry 3.8% or 25 of the respondents saw the materials in their libraries as ‘too many’ contrary to 12.0% or 80 of the respondents who thought that the materials were ‘too few’ (see Table 3). This implies that libraries in the tertiary institutions in the Municipality should increase their stock to offer students more materials to help them to attain their academic and career goals.

Table 3: Adequacy of library materials

Options	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Too many	25	3.8%
Many	221	33.3%
Few	338	50.9%
Too few	80	12.0%
Total	664	100%

Students’ ability to locate materials at the libraries

Classification and library catalogs are meant, among other things, to bring orderliness in how materials are organized and also provide tools for accessing the holdings of a library. The study also sought to find out the ease with which students are able to locate materials in the various libraries. Majority of the respondents (51.2% or 340) indicated that they were able to locate materials most of the time. The study also revealed that 32.5% or 216 of the students found their preferred materials only once in a while and 3.0 % or 20 of the respondents specified that they had never been able to locate books they sought for in the libraries. It was found that 13.3% or 88 respondents indicated that they were able to locate their preferred books all the time.

The results of the study imply that majority of the participants do not have problems with locating materials at the respective libraries (see Table 4). This development has the tendency to make students enjoy visiting the libraries since there is a high probability of users to get the materials they needed without much difficulty. The waiting time in searching and looking for desired books has the potency to ward off users of the facilities. This calls for librarians to develop user-friendly catalogues and shelve guides to help facilitate location of materials in their libraries.

Table 4: Ability to locate library materials

Options	Frequency	Percentages(%)
All the time	88	13.3%
Most of the time	340	51.2%
Once a while	216	32.5%
Never	20	3.0%
Total	664	100%

Assistance in locating materials at the libraries

The study was also interested in finding out how students located materials when their information retrieval skills failed them. It came to light that majority of the respondents (53.3% or 307) who were unable to locate library materials on their own sought the assistance of library staff (see Table 5). The study also depict that 24.0% of them usually used the shelf guides in their respective institutions’ libraries to locate books while 13.5% of the respondents asked their colleagues to assist them to locate books. Only 7.1% of the respondents gave up once they were unable to locate their preferred books.

The participants being mindful of the fact that they were not specialists of information retrieval sought the assistance of those who had required knowledge in the subject. They made proper use of the library staff who have been employed to execute their professional functions to promote teaching, learning and research in the institutions. The shelf guides were also a very useful means for locating materials and they seemed to work for

the students in these facilities. This buttresses the need to constantly offer orientation and information retrieval skills to students and other users.

Table 5: Assistance in locating library materials

Options	Frequency	Percentages(%)
Ask a library staff	307	53.3%
Ask a colleague	78	13.5%
Use shelf guides	138	24.0%
Give up	41	7.1%
Others	12	2.1%
Total	576	100%

Condition of library materials

A significant portion of the tertiary students in the Municipality who were sampled for the study (47.4% or 315) described the materials in their institutions' libraries as fairly old while 59 (8.9%) regarded them as old. Nonetheless, 39.6% or 263 of the respondents regarded the materials as fairly new and 27 or 4.1% described them as new. The overall impression of the conditions of the books was not good. Majority of the users of the libraries regarded the materials as old (refer to Table 6). It is therefore important for the authorities of the respective facilities to constantly monitor, identify and appropriately stock the libraries with new materials as it is a sure means for eliciting patronage from the students. Again, with the rapid technological advances, if students develop apprehension for the libraries, getting them back to use the facilities may not be easy.

Table 6: Condition of library materials

Options	Frequency	Percentages(%)
New	27	4.1
Fairly new	263	39.6
Fairly Old	315	47.4
Old	59	8.9
Total	664	100

Physical environments of the libraries

The celestial and physical appearance of every facility has the potency to either attract or ward off potential users. It is against this backdrop that Kisiedu (2010) recommends that libraries should be attractive in its physical beauty and general ambience as this could attract more users. In an apparent support of this assertion, Edwards and Fisher (2002) state, among other things, that there should be a balance between naturally ventilated libraries with fresh air and sunshine. The study sought the opinions of the students on the physical environments of their school libraries. Majority of the respondents 40.5% or 269 saw their school libraries as 'welcoming' while 37.5% or 249 of the respondents indicated that their schools' libraries were 'quiet'. Only few of them 1.6% or 77 saw the environment to be 'boring' (see Table 7).

The overwhelming acceptance of the environments of the libraries could be a possible explanation of why majority of the students use the facilities to look for information and also as a place to read or study for examination as shown in Figure 1. Large library seating capacity offers opportunities for students to study for examinations and do assignments. Such environments are congenial for learning and research the core obligations of tertiary students.

Table 7: Library environment

Options	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Welcoming	269	40.5
Noisy	50	7.5
Boring	77	11.6
Quiet	249	37.5
Others	19	2.9
Total	664	100

Conclusion

The study has brought to the fore the impeccable role of libraries in education in general and tertiary education in particular. Indeed, the quality and quantity of a library's collection would definitely have an effect on the quality of education the students receive and what the teachers deliver in the classrooms and lecture halls. The study has amply demonstrated the continuous use of libraries by students in institutions of higher learning. It is realized; *inter alia*, that majority of the students in the tertiary institutions in the Sunyani Municipality use the library even though greater number of the students thinks that their libraries' collections such as books were fairly old.

Academic libraries provide its users with relevant and reliable materials for their academic work. In spite of the seeming widespread use of the internet by students, the use of the 'traditional' library for academic purposes has not been discouraging. Where students are unable to locate materials, many of them would prefer to ask the library staff for assistance which would be forthcoming. The libraries' staff assistance to users including aiding students to locate books coupled with the congenial learning atmosphere of the libraries might have accounted for the high patronage of the institutions' libraries.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are worth considering in view of the findings of the study:

- Since academic libraries have the potential to offer easy and cheaper forms of accessing information, it may be extremely important for their stock to be up-to-date in order to continue to satisfy the diverse needs of their users.
- For the libraries to continue to receive high patronage, steps should be taken to stock them with new books and other educational resources since a greater number of the books in the libraries are considered old.
- The libraries should continuously carry out periodic appraisal of their collections to determine the relevance and usefulness of the items on their shelves.
- The libraries' subscription to electronic database resources will also, in a large measure, enhance their ability to acquire good amount of current materials to support teaching, learning and research work in their respective parent institutions.
- It is also suggested that introduction of information literacy course including library user skills in the respective institutions to make the students 'information literates' for life so that they could independently to look for information on their own.
- Bulletin and notice boards should also be used to announce new arrivals and additions to the libraries' collections for the attention of their users.

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