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The Challenges of School Libraries after the Implementation of the New Educational Reforms in Ghana

Abstract

The study is focused on challenges of school libraries in the new educational reforms in Ghana. The study was conducted at the Konongo-Odumase Senior High School in the Asante-Akim North District of the Ashanti Region. It is aimed at finding the extent to which the reforms has improved school library service provision. The study revealed that, school library service provision has not seen remarkable change since the inception of the new educational reforms in Ghana. Some of these challenges are poor funding, untrained library staff, poor facilities among others. To meet these challenges, some recommendations have been made. It is hoped that; if the recommendations made in this study are implemented, school libraries in Ghana will live up to expectation.

Introduction

Alemna (2000) defines libraries as collection of records of human culture in diverse formats and languages, preserved, organized and interpreted to meet broad and varying needs of individuals for information, knowledge, recreation and aesthetic enjoyment. Aina (2004) also states that school libraries are libraries attached to schools: pre-primary, primary and senior high school. They supplement teaching of school children. A school library caters for children who are eager to read and also for backward children who read with difficulty and who require visual aids and all kinds of incentive to study. These libraries contain more of audio-visual and graphic materials such as pictures, photographs, regalia, diagram, etc. than other types of libraries.

Fargo (2007) lists the following aims of a School Library as:

- 1, to acquire books and other materials in line with the demands of the curriculum and the needs of boys and girls and to organize these materials for effective use;
- 2, to guide pupils in their choice of books and other materials of learning desired both for personal and curricular purposes;
- 3, to develop in pupils' skill and to encourage the habit of personal investigation;
- 4, to help pupils establish a wide range of significant interests;
- 5, to provide aesthetic experience and develop appreciation of the arts;
- 6, to encourage life-long education through the use of library resource;

7, to encourage social attitudes and provide experience in social and democratic living; and

8, to work co-operatively and constructively with instructional and administrative staffs of the schools.

The school library service scheme in Ghana was initially proposed as part of the Second Development Plan beginning from 1959. Hitherto, some schools, particularly in remote areas were already subscribers to the book-box service from which some children's books were obtained. The school libraries are meant to support the teaching, learning and recreational programmes of schools. The size of their collections depend, to some extent on how well-endowed the school may be.

It was not until 1972 that the Schools and Colleges Department of the Ghana Library Board was established to take care of school libraries, and also to among other things:

- Order and supply books to schools and colleges;
- Catalogue and classify books for schools;
- Advice and help in organizing school libraries;
- Visit and provide services to schools and colleges;
- Conduct seminars and training courses for schools; and
- Conduct seminars and training courses for Library Clerks and Teacher Librarians. (Alemna 2000).

In spite of all the government efforts to improve on library services in second cycle schools, there are however some problems militating against its operations such as inadequate funding, understaffing, lack of logistics for school visits and many more. To help curb these problems the Committee on Review of Education Reforms in Ghana in October 2002 recognized the role of libraries and made recommendation as to ensuring quality school library service provision.

Statement of the Problem

As part of the efforts to improve library service provision in senior high schools as a way of improving education delivery in Ghana, the government of Ghana recognized the role of libraries and information services in the new educational reforms. The President's Committee on the Review of Educational Reforms in Ghana (2002) made a number of recommendations under "Library and Information services in Education" some of which are as follows:

- Government should provide funding for the establishment and expansion of institutional libraries at the secondary and tertiary levels;
- Adequate funds should be provided to purchase books and other library materials, equipment, logistics, vehicles, staff emoluments and buildings;
- First and second cycle schools should have library periods on their time tables;
- The Department of Information Studies of the University of Ghana, Legon should be supported by the government to expand its facilities to train librarians for public, community, college and school libraries;

- The functions of the School and College Libraries Department of the Ghana Library Authority should be well resourced to enable it to supervise and coordinate library services in schools and colleges;
- Staff in charge of school libraries should be trained and adequately motivated to enable them to stay on the job and work according to laid down regulations and procedures in conformity with professional practices;
- The Ghana Education Service (GES) should sponsor staff to pursue courses in information studies; and
- A directorate for School and College libraries should be created at the Ministry of Education to be responsible for school and college libraries.

Despite how resounding these recommendations are, one would have expected that much should have been done about school libraries. Instead school libraries are declining, a situation which is detrimental to the development of libraries in general and school libraries in particular.

Objectives of the Study

The study was undertaken with the following objectives.

1. To find out the conditions of school libraries in terms of adequate facilities.
2. To find out whether staff of the library are professionally trained.
3. To find out whether the stakeholders in education give the needed assistance to school libraries.
4. To find out strategies for meeting challenges of school libraries in the new educational reform.

5. To make some recommendations as to how the standards of libraries in schools could be improved.

Literature Review

School libraries and Academic Achievement.

A considerable number of research, projects and reports have found a positive correlation between an effective school library, managed by appropriately qualified and experienced librarians. A research conducted by Douglas & Wilkinson (2011) demonstrated the powerful role a high performing school library and schools library service play in raising pupils' literacy levels and improving access to knowledge. Their research revealed that, young people who read above the expected level of their ages are twice as likely as young people who read below their ages (77.7% as opposed to 35.9%)". Furthermore, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education (2011) opined that, evidence shows that libraries both in schools and in the community have a positive effect on reading, yet many are disappearing because of financial constraints.

Also in a research conducted by Streatfield, Shaper & Rae-Scott (2010), over 1,542 independent and 655 primary schools, on school library provision and use in the UK, the key findings were that, 87% of qualified librarians are contributing to information literacy work in their schools, while 59% of qualified librarians also contribute actively to the school Virtual Learning Environment. The study again indicated that School librarians support literacy and encourage reading for pleasure.

In the same vein, a study conducted by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED, 2011) pointed out that libraries in primary and secondary schools contribute remarkably to improving literacy skills. All the schools visited by OFSTED had well-resourced libraries, with computerized loan systems and facilities for accessing learning resources on an intranet. Libraries in the secondary schools too were often opened for much longer duration. This enabled students to complete their homework on the school's computers before and after school. According to the findings, the enthusiasm and responsiveness of the librarians generally had a direct impact on the attitudes of the students towards the library and reading.

Owoeye & Yara, (2011) also asserted that, the library is an essential factor in the teaching-learning process. It forms one of the most important educational services and that the chief purpose of a school library is to make available to the pupil, at his own convenience, all books, periodicals and other reproduced materials which are of interest and value to him, but which are not provided or assigned to him as basic or supplementary textbooks. They continued by stating that the importance of the library has been demonstrated by the government of Nigeria when it was expressed in the National Policy on Education (NPE) that every state Ministry needs to provide funds for the establishment of libraries in all educational institutions and to train librarians and library assistants. In addition, they considered the school library as a resource, because it occupies a central and primary place in any school system. It supports all functions of

school-teaching and provides service and guidance to its readers. Therefore they concluded their argument by saying that well equipped library is a major facility which enhances good learning and achievement of high educational standard.

Issues/Problems in School Library Development

A report by All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education (2011) in the United Kingdom shows that libraries both in schools and in the community have a positive effect on reading, yet many are disappearing because of financial constraints.

Alemna (2000) discussed the issues and problems militating against school library development. According to him, the absence of school library legislation in Ghana has enabled individuals and organizations to register schools without making the necessary provision for school libraries. He observed that, a number of schools principals and headmasters do not appreciate the essential role the school library plays in the teaching/learning process. Perhaps due to the educational background of some of these administrators who went through primary and senior high schools without libraries- the important role of the library in education may have escaped them”.

He again stated that the only few of the schools in Ghana have trained teacher-librarians because of this problem many of the school libraries are managed by untrained staffs who are in most cases uninterested in the library.

He went on to state that poor services stem from the poor staffing situation and the consequent lack of supervision in school libraries as some of the problems.

He observed that faced with the problem of lack of training, compounded by insufficient time, the tutor-librarian is unable to achieve much towards the organization and administration of the school library, and the end result is the poor services provided in Ghanaian school libraries.

On the issue of accommodation, he revealed that a number of school libraries are located in environments which are most unsuitable for the purpose for which the libraries have been set up. School libraries in Ghana do not seem to have any specific, unified standards. There is the need for some accepted standards to be formulated for school libraries in order to guide their operations. To be effective, authoritative and accepted, the standards must be formulated and promulgated by the Ghana Library Authority and the Ministry of Education Report of the President's Committee on Review of Education Reforms in Ghana (2002).

According to the Report of the President's Committee on Review of Educational Reforms (2002), all libraries in Ghana face common problems, which include the following:

- Poor and in some cases, lack of accommodation;
- Lack of libraries in some schools;
- Inadequate funding;
- Poor service conditions for staff, especially in the public libraries;
- Poor facilities for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) application;
- Outdated reading materials; and

- The Ghana Inter-Library Lending and Document Delivery Network (GILLDNET) for the universities is ineffective in providing the required services.

Alemna (2000) argues that, the state of the book industry in Ghana is also a major barrier to library development. The chronic balance of payments problems and the resulting scarcity of foreign exchange have not only substantially curtailed the flow of new books from local presses, but have also meant that the number of books imported into the country has dropped sharply. This has led to sharp increases in the prices of books in the country. The shortage of books means that neither the library nor the educational institutions are able to adequately provide for the needs of the reading public. A generation of students is now being taught by lecturers who are unable to gain access to current research and scholarship or to keep up with developments in their respective fields. Ikojo-Odongo (2008) sums up the challenges to school libraries as evidently arising from weak appreciation and/or inadequate knowledge amongst policy-makers and educators about the role of the school library. Underlying these challenges is the absence of Standard Operating Procedures of school libraries that will govern them in many African states. Studies conducted by World Bank (2008), Mosert (2001), Hart and Zinn (2007) and Rosenberg (2002) confirms Ikojo-Odongo's studies on challenges on school libraries.

Methodology

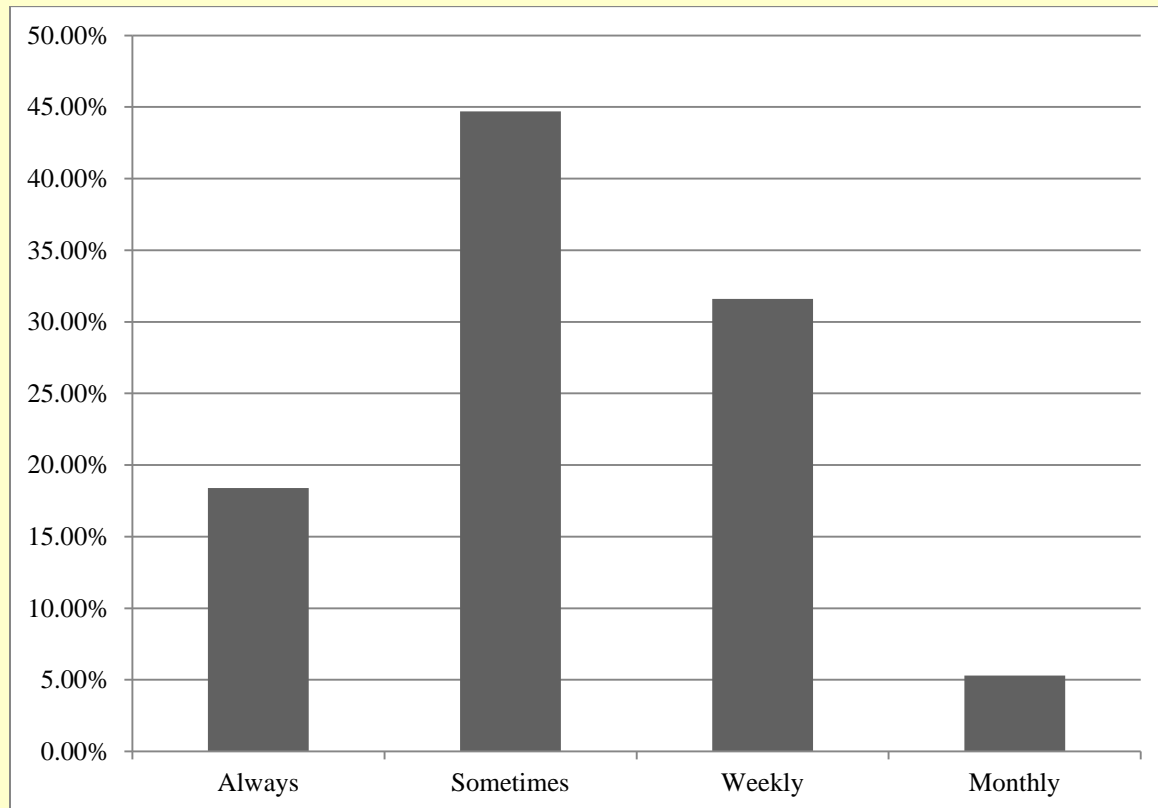
Based on the nature of the research (case study) coupled with the purposes of the study, the survey methodology was used. The sample size for the study was 228 respondents which comprised 150 students, 77 teachers and the library staff in the school as at the time of the study (June-August, 2012). The random sampling technique was used in selecting the sample. With this method, a list of all the respondents was obtained, numbered and arranged on a computer for easy identification. The numbers of the respondents were randomly picked. Identified persons were then given questionnaires to complete. Both close-ended and open-ended questions were used. The library staff and the library prefect were also interviewed.

Analysis and Discussion of Data

Nature and conditions of the school library

In response to the question on whether the school has a library and whether they use the library, all the respondents sampled answered in the affirmative. Again, the majority 91.7% as against 8.3% affirmed their usage of the library. Those who answered otherwise explained that there was no time to visit the library; the library was not conducive enough for research whilst others indicated that they preferred to use their own materials.

When the respondents who use the library were asked to indicate how often they did so, the results in Fig.1 were obtained.

Fig. 1: Frequency of library use

Source: Field Study July, 2012

It was observed that only 18.4% of the respondents used the library always, whilst 44.7% indicated that they only used the library sometimes. Thus, most of the respondents did not patronize the library frequently.

The respondents also answered a question on the location of the school library. Here, all the respondents indicated that the library was located in a designed room.

In response to the question on whether the furniture at the school library was adequate, only 84 (36.8%) of the respondents answered in the affirmative. The remaining respondents representing 63.2% stated that the furniture at the library

were not enough. Thus, the majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the seating capacity in the library was inadequate.

In response to the question whether the conditions in the library were conducive for effective reading and research work, 36 (31.6%) answered positively.

However, 192 (68.4%) of the respondents indicated that the library is not conducive and suggested the provision of adequate furniture, the use of air conditioning facilities, good lighting and ventilation facilities and the provision of adequate study carrels. This indicates that the majority of the respondents were dissatisfied with the conditions in the library.

State of Library Materials

On the issues of the type of books available in the library, the results in **Table 1** were obtained.

Table 1: Type of books available at the library

Type of books	Frequency	Percentages
Story books	36	15.8
Textbooks	42	18.4
Story books, text books, magazines, newspapers	42	18.4
Story books, text books, magazines	108	47.4
Total	228	100

It was observed that the reading materials available at the school's library were story books, text books, magazines and newspapers. However majority of

respondents (47.4%) mentioned story books, text books and magazines. This shows that these three reading materials were the readily available library materials.

The opinions of the respondents were also sought on the adequacy of the teaching and research materials, and in response only 66 (28.9%) affirmed that the teaching and research materials were adequate. Thus, the majority 162 (71.1%) indicated that the materials were woefully inadequate. They explained that the library users outnumbered the books, and there were not enough current and relevant books in the library.

On the mode of acquisition of the library materials, it was interesting to note that quite a number of the respondents (120 constituting, 52.6%) were ignorant about book acquisition processes. However a few 30 (13.2%) mentioned that the library materials were acquired through gifts, 36 (15.8%) said through purchase and 12 (5.3%) stated that they were supplied by government and 30 (13.2%), a combination of the three.

Funding and other assistance from stakeholders

On school library funding, 162 representing 71.1% of the sampled population indicated that they had no idea where the school got its funding. 18 (7.9%) mentioned Government of Ghana, six (2.6%) said Ghana Education Service, and

another six (2.6%) mentioned Government of Ghana and old students, interest groups six (2.6%), District Assembly and Ghana Education Service 30 (13.2%). It can be observed that Ghana Education Service contributes little to the funding of the school library.

Strategies for meeting the challenges of school libraries

When the respondents were asked if they were aware of the new educational reforms, 222 (97.4%) answered in the affirmative. Although, almost all the respondents were aware of the new educational reform, they were not aware of any the provisions for the improvement in library and information services in the reforms.

Asked whether the respondents had observed some remarkable improvement in the library services in their school since the inception of the reforms, only 36 (15.8%) answered in the affirmative. Thus, the majority of the respondents, 192 (84.2%) however indicated that there had not been any remarkable improvement. When the respondents were asked to rate the patronage of the library by teachers and students before the reforms, the results in Table 2 were obtained.

Table 2: Level of patronage of the library by respondents before/after the reforms

Level of Patronage	Frequency (Percentage %)	
	Before the reform	After the reform
Very well	6 (5.3%)	18(15.8%)

Well	78 (68.4%)	69 (60.5%)
Fairly poor	21 (18.4%)	18 (15.8%)
Poor	9 (7.9%)	9 (7.9%)
Total	114 (100.0%)	114(100.0%)

It was observed that the library was well patronized by both teachers and students before the reforms.

In response to the question on whether improvement in library services in their school can promote high academic standards, the entire 228 (100%) respondents answered in the affirmative. On ways of improving library services in schools to meet the challenges of the new reform, the respondents suggested stocking the library with relevant materials, the need for teachers and students

to be involved in the acquisition of books, need for suitable furniture, and air-conditioned rooms, acquisition of technologically oriented books, the need for a professional librarian and the inclusion of library period on the timetable in the school's curriculum.

The views of the respondents were also sought on the attitude of library staff towards them. It was observed that only 19.8% of the respondents indicated that the library staff was cooperative, 73 respondents representing 72.3% said the library staff was uncooperative and 7.9% stated that they were indifferent. It can be deduced from the results that the respondents probably had a negative perception about the attitude of library staff towards users.

Interviews with library Staff, Library Prefect and Researcher's Personal Observations.

The purpose of the interviews and the personal observations was to find out how the new educational reforms have improved school library services in the following areas:

- Awareness of the reforms and the content of the policy on library and information services.
- Funding
- Library conditions and facilities
- Collection development and adequacy of materials.
- Library staff and other related issues.

The results revealed that, even though all the respondents were aware of the takeoff, most did not know of the content of the policy. They also considered the provision of facilities such as furniture to be woefully inadequate.

On funding school libraries, it was found that, the school solely depended on the meager grants from the government of Ghana. Also, the Ghana Library Authority, Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service (major stakeholders) contributed little to the funding. The library therefore relies mainly on donations for its stock; the number of books added to the stock depends on donations made by philanthropists.

On acquisition it was interesting to note that even the staff and the tutor in charge of the library were not involved in the library acquisitions process. They believe most of the books in the library were acquired through donation.

The Library materials in the library consist mainly of textbooks, story books and magazines. There was no evidence of audio visual materials, recordings, and any form of electronic resources. Most of the materials found were not adequate and appropriate to user needs as most suffered from wear and tear due to over use.

Furthermore, the staff in charge of the library was untrained. She said that for the nine years that she has worked in the in the library, she has not gone through any refresher training to augment and sharpen the little skills she had at her former station. The results further revealed that, since she (librarian) is the only person in charge of the large library, out of fatigue she does sometimes open the library for long hours. Thus users are deprived of access to the library at evening and night hours since the library opens at 8a.m. and closes at 3:30 p.m. each day. In spite of all these revelations from the interviews and personal observations, library use was encouraging.

Summary

The major findings or observations from the analysis were that:

- a. The library is poorly funded as the library depended solely on grants from the government of Ghana.
- b. The furniture situation in the library vis-a-vis respondents' population was poor; hence seating arrangements were also poor.

- c. The library lacks staff and the only staff is untrained, thus staff service delivery is not up to expectation.
- d. Teachers and library staff were not involved in book acquisitions, thus books acquired does not meet required user needs. Most of the library materials were acquired through donations.
- e. Library materials are woefully inadequate and inappropriate. Most books are worn out due to over usage, coupled with obsolete materials not relevant to teaching and learning syllabi.
- f. The Ghana Library Authority and Ghana Education Service, who are major stakeholders in school library issues are not giving the needed assistance required of them.

Conclusion

From the analysis and findings of the study, it is concluded that, there are no remarkable improvement in the services of school libraries in the Asante Akim North District since the inception of the New Educational Reforms, as the challenges that existed before the reforms still persists. These include:

- Poor funding
- Untrained staff
- Inadequate and inappropriate materials
- Poor facilities

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Conference of Heads of Assisted Secondary Schools (CHASS) and other stakeholders should put pressure on the government to ensure the immediate implementation of the recommendation on the Library and Information Services Provisions under the New Educational Reforms.
2. Public Relations Unit should be created in school libraries to perform the following functions:-Sourcing funds to support the meager government grants for school libraries; and -To create awareness and educate users on the recognition of the importance of the school libraries.
3. The Ministry of Education should provide guidelines to regulate and prescribe modes of operation, procedures and principles of administrative and management practices etc. in all school libraries.
4. For the purposes of coordination, the operational status of the Ghana Library Authority vis-à-vis the Ministry of Education should be clearly defined.
5. Authorities of second cycle institutions should find an alternative funding for their school libraries instead of solely depending on the government. For instance the Conference of Heads of Assisted Secondary Schools (CHASS) should contribute dues to the development of school libraries.

6. The School Management Committees, Parent Teacher Associations in collaboration with school authorities can introduce library levy to be paid by the P. T. A. to establish a school library fund.
7. The library should be manned by trained library assistants rather than untrained staff who in most cases may not even know the rudiments of librarianship. Also, schools should prevail on G. E. S. to encourage and sponsor their library staff to pursue further studies by offering them study leave with pay so that they could be trained.
8. A School Library Association should be formed as special unit of the Ghana Library Association (GLA), in order to provide secondary school libraries in the country with a forum for discussion of their problems.
9. It is also recommended that CHASS in collaboration with GLA should organize periodic in-service training and capacity building workshops on school library management and other related issues for library staff to sharpen their routine skills.

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