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FEE-BASED SERVICES AS SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR PUBLIC UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN GHANA - A SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

Academic libraries have a crucial role to play in the achievement of the goals of their parent institutions. However, public universities in Ghana have generally not been financing their libraries to the quantum that has been recommended by the Universities Rationalization Committee in Ghana. Public university libraries have experienced dwindling budgetary allocations which hover around 3% of the total universities' annual budget. Responses received from a survey on sale of some aspect of their services as a possible source of additional income indicated that it exists only in one of the university libraries. Respondents posited that it is a potential source of additional funding to all three public university libraries - Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, University of Ghana and University of Cape Coast - involved in the survey. They however, indicated that the libraries' mandate is not to dabble in sale of information. A policy direction on this subject is recommended for the libraries to take advantage of selling some aspects of services as good potential source of funding to help them solve their financial crisis.

KEYWORDS: *Library services, Income generation, Academic Libraries, Ghana*

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Introduction

University libraries over the world play prominent roles in universities by providing suitable environment for teaching and learning, research and knowledge dissemination. In Ghanaian universities, the mandate of the university library is to build a comprehensive collection of recorded information to support the parent institution to achieve its mission.

For this reason, the Ghana Universities Rationalization Committee in its report of 1988 recommended that, public universities should allocate ten per cent (10%) of their budget to the university library for its operations. Public universities continue to struggle with the implementation of this recommendation. What is more, even the percentages given in the various university libraries have been dwindling.

Zakari (1997) intimated that "of all the different types of libraries in Nigeria, only university libraries have a clearly-defined policy on funding. They are allocated 10 per cent of the annual recurrent budget of their parent universities, a result of the Federal Government and Academic Staff Union of Universities agreement of 1992. It is [however,] regrettable that this agreement has not been fully implemented. Some university executives occasionally use library funds as "soft loans," or internal borrowing to finance university activities without seeking the consent of university librarians.

It has become imperative for public university libraries to look elsewhere for additional sources of funding for their numerous engagements. It is in the light of this that this paper seeks to identify services that can be marketed to generate income to enhance effective and efficient information provision to the users of public universities in Ghana.

Objectives of the study

The study investigated the potential of fee-based library services to contribute to income generation of public university libraries in Ghana. It specifically sought to do the following:

i) To find out if fee-based information products are available in the libraries of the three oldest public universities in Ghana;

ii) Where they are available, to find out if they contribute substantially to income generation;

iii) Where they are non-existent, to find out if there are plans to introduce them; and

iv) To identify the challenges to either improve on fee-based services where they are available or to introduce them where they are non-existent.

WHY SELL INFORMATION PRODUCTS AND SERVICES?

In this era of shrinking budgets due to cuts in subventions from central governments, as well as from their immediate heads of institutions, it has become necessary for academic libraries to find additional sources of funding. This is more so because libraries confront increased cost and expansion in the variety of materials. They face increased competition and the impact of technologies in the era of ever increasing number of courses and patrons in the various public funded universities in Ghana. At the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) for instance, student population has increased from twenty-four thousand, six hundred and ninety-five (24,695) in the 2008/2009 academic year to thirty four thousand, four hundred and thirty eight (34,438) in the 2011/2012 academic year. This translates to an increase of about 39.5% over a period of three years. The other two institutions under the study are no different in terms of escalating enrolments.

University libraries in Ghana actually receive far less than the 10% of the university budget as recommended by the Universities Rationalization Committee's report of 1998. Antwi (1998) states that although the Universities Rationalization Committee stipulated 10% of total recurrent expenditure, it was found out that university libraries in Ghana were on the average being allocated meagre 2.02% of the universities' resources. For instance, for the period 2008 to 20012, the KNUST Library on the average received 3.25% of the university's annual budget of which personnel emoluments component constituted about 64% (KNUST Annual Budget, 2008/2009 to 2011/2012 academic years). This leaves very little money for the purchase of books, equipment, payment of subscription and licensing, and the day-to-day administration of the University Library System.

Academic libraries have more often than not been concerned with publicizing the resources of the library and not the sale of information products as it is being advocated for in this paper. Boakye (2003), writing on the techniques of marketing library services and facilities, said in his introductory remarks: "techniques of marketing are strategies adopted to attract users or customers to use a product or service". He was in effect looking at ways for publicizing the product or service and not the sale of packaged information products. Information marketing as in sale of products and services has attracted attention in recent times as a result of reduced funding for library services especially in Africa. The competition for limited funding from the parent institutions means academic libraries must look out for ways of selling some of their products and services to generate revenue to finance their activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A few studies are in the literature on marketing of products and services in Ghanaian university libraries. Martey (2000) advocates that in marketing products and services of

academic libraries in Ghana, there must be a conscious effort to do what he terms ‘personal selling'. He further says that pricing is extremely important for marketing but this has not been the major preoccupation of the Ghanaian academic librarian for a very long time. He intimated that this is so because the government pays for library services and so libraries do not see the need to charge users for information that has already been paid for. What happens to these libraries in a situation where Central government is not paying enough for these services?

A survey conducted by Kwadzo and Amekuedee (2007) indicated that types of fee-based services provided by libraries in agriculture related special libraries in Ghana included online bibliographic search, photocopying, Email, CD-ROM searches and training. They gave varied reasons for the fee-based services offered. The reasons are mainly to make up for the shortfall in government subvention, to improve quality of service and to recover cost of service.

Ibegwam and Ogunyade (2008) revealed that majority of the library services and products were free in Ibadan and Lagos medical libraries. They indicated that the most common fee-based services are photocopying and reprographic services which are not traditional library services. They however indicated that new products and services that medical librarians would want to introduce to their libraries in order to generate funds include indexing and abstracting services. They intimated that, for libraries to develop products which will sell in libraries, five key problems need to be addressed. These are idea generation; identifying the business opportunity, doing venture analysis, product design and development and market strategy.

In a survey conducted by Thompson (2008) on “Marketing Library services: the case of state-owned multi-campus university libraries in Ghana, 74.4% of user-respondents of over 300 indicated that they were prepared to pay for some services and products offered by their

respective campus libraries. He therefore suggested that service providers should take advantage to introduce services which are very well packaged to meet user-needs at realistic charges.

In the opinion of Neal (1997), the successful library is the one that provides a range of expensive resources that most individuals cannot afford and provide a well-established mechanism of information acquisition and dissemination that is accessible to most people.

There are indeed different schools of thought with regard to libraries charging fees for some library services. In this regard, Ekoja (1996) points out that, those who are arguing in favour of fee-based services are gaining the upper hand in the debate because many compounding variables have made it expedient for libraries around the world to look outside their traditional sources of funding in order to raise additional funds to be able to sustain the level of services which hitherto, normal funding was able to take care of.

Sight should not be lost on the fact that, libraries have become clients of commercial databases on the Internet. So to be able to deliver services efficiently, some categories of services must be paid for. This point is further buttressed by Leisner (1995) who holds the view that increased customer satisfaction will result in increased willingness to pay for the services offered.

METHODOLOGY

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from libraries of three major public universities in Ghana in the month of October, 2012. An analysis was done to ascertain if packaging and sale of information products constituted a viable source of additional funding for their activities. The questionnaire was administered by selected Assistant Librarians in the three study areas. Available literature was also reviewed to augment the study.

In all there are six public-funded universities in Ghana, the study however focused on only the libraries of three of the public universities. These are the libraries of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, University of Ghana, Legon, and the University of Cape Coast. These three major public university libraries were chosen because they are the oldest in the country and were considered the most experienced for the study.

The respondents were selected from the para-professional and professional classes of library staff in these university libraries using purposive sampling method. These classes were chosen since their members were expected to be in a better position to know the intricacies of information provision, and what information marketing implies.

Questions bothered on gender of the respondents and other features which could influence packaging and selling of products and services. The gender of the respondents was included in order to offer both genders equal opportunity of sharing ideas on the subject being studied. In addition, the qualifications of the respondents were also sought to underscore the professional capacity of those taking part in the project.

The data collected were analyzed using simple percentages and tables to establish facts on sale of products and services as an additional source of funding for the university libraries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The total responses received from the forty-five (45) copies of questionnaire sent were twenty-four, representing 53.3% of the expected responses. Out of the twenty-four respondents, thirteen or 54.2% were male while the other eleven or 45.8% were female. The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) returned the highest number of responses, i.e. ten out of fifteen respondents representing 66.7%. The Universities of Ghana (UG) and Cape Coast (UCC) returned seven responses each representing a total of

46.7% of responses. These three university libraries are randomly designated Library A, Library B, and Library C to ensure confidentiality of responses.

The qualifications of respondents listed, ranged from Diploma in Library Studies through Bachelor of Arts to Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Library and Information Science as well as other postgraduate degrees in information-related disciplines. It must be noted that about 80% of the respondents had really gone through the mill having started from the undergraduate diploma level through Master of Philosophy.

As regards how long respondents had worked at their current duty post, it was observed that the time spanned between four months and thirteen years. Respondents had also worked in various departments of the participating universities. The departments included: Cataloguing, Acquisitions, Reference and Research, Lending, Electronic Information and Serials.

Table1: Categories of respondents

Category	Library A(No.)	Library B(No)	Library C(No)	Total	%
Snr. Asst Librarian	1	1		2	8.3
Asst Librarian	6	4	3	13	54.2
Chief Lib. Asst	1		1	2	8.3
Principal Lib Asst	1			1	4.2
Snr. Lib Asst	1	2	3	6	25.0
Total	10	7	7	24	100

Source: Field survey, 2012

It is observed from Table 1 that, majority of respondents were of the Assistant Librarian rank, and they formed about 54% of the respondents. These were followed by those who fell within the ranks of Senior, Principal and Chief Library Assistant grades; they constituted 38% of the respondents. The rest were Senior Assistant Librarians, who constituted 8% of respondents.

To the question "Does your library package information for a fee for interested users, such as News Agencies do for other media houses?", the responses were nineteen negative, representing (79.2%) with five positive representing (20.8%). This is shown in Table 2 below. This is a true reflection of absence of meaningful sale of information products in two of the three libraries under the study. Surprisingly two out of seven respondents from Library C were not aware of fee-based information services while five out of seven from the same library were aware. This clearly depicts lack of publicity of that service.

Table 2: Does your library package information for a fee to interested users?

	Yes	No	Total
Library A	0	10	10
Library B	0	7	7
Library C	5	2	7
Total	5	19	24
Percentage %	20.8	79.2	100

Source: Field survey, 2012

In response to the question as to what form does the sale or packaging take, the responses that were offered from Library C were; processing of library materials as a "paid for service" for other libraries, and academic searches on the Internet.

The responses provided for a sequel to question 7: "If no, why does the library not package information for sale?" were many and varied. A summary of the responses provided is as follows:

1. The mandate of the library is to support teaching, learning and research in the university, so if information provision is in exchange for money then the library will not be performing its required mandate to the university;
2. Information to the library user must not be for sale;

3. Most clients think information is for free, so they will not be prepared to pay for the service. It is for the library to educate users as to the need to put intrinsic value on information;
4. The library has no policy in respect of information sale. Moreover it is not part of the overall goals of the library;
5. The library is not business-oriented;
6. Public attitude towards information providers does not encourage sale of information products. The public seem not to appreciate the value of information; and
7. The library has not positioned itself to harness fully this vital source of income.

While expressing the various reasons why an academic library cannot sell information products, over 80% of the respondents consider the sale of information products as a potential vital source for the library to generate additional income internally. At Library A for example, 90% of respondents said it could be a viable source of income. Libraries B and C corroborated with 71.4% and 85.7% responses respectively. On the whole, a total of 83.3% respondents said it is a potentially viable source of income generation. This is depicted in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Would you consider sale of information products as a viable means for the library to generate income internally?

Libraries	Yes	%	No	%	Total %
A	9	90	1	10	100
B	5	71.4	2	28.6	100
C	6	85.7	1	14.3	100
Total	20	83.3	4	16.7	100

Source: Field survey, 2012

When respondents were asked as to which kind(s) of information products the library can sell without infringing on the local and international copyright laws, the responses were also many and varied. A summary of these responses are the following:

1. Information on new business trends;
2. Abstracts of postgraduate students' dissertation as well as staff publications with the collaboration of their creators;
3. Publications that can teach users better ways of searching and citing sources of information;
4. All kinds of information save classified ones;
5. Packaged information such as compiled bibliographies to users who are interested; and
6. Research on topical issues both local and international.

Some respondents indicated that, it is not the information that must be paid for, but the skill and additional time spent by the library staff to do the search for the client. As regards the question on which group of users could be the primary target of this enterprise in the library, it can be observed from the responses provided that, the prime target would be researchers. The number of responses provided in each option was taken as a percentage of the total number of respondents.

From all the participating universities, 83.3% would target researchers while 66.7% of respondents would target lecturers and postgraduate students, and 45.8% of responses were targeted at other potential users. Some respondents went further to specify that their choice of 'others' meant; industries, researchers outside the university community, consultants as well as students outside the university undertaking professional courses such as Institute of

Chartered Accountants (I.C.A.), Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (C.I.M.A.) etc. This is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Which group of your users would you target for Information Marketing?

Libraries	Lecturers	Postgraduate students	Researchers	Others
A	5	5	8	5
B	5	5	5	3
C	6	6	7	3
Total responses	16	16	20	11
Percentage %	66.7	66.7	83.3	45.8

Source: Field survey, 2012

The respondents who indicated that their libraries offered information for a fee were asked to ascertain the duration for which the libraries had been doing this. The responses indicated only one of the libraries, that is, Library C had been involved in the packaging and sale of information products since 2002.

Seventeen out of twenty-four respondents answered the question on whether there is a department responsible for packaging and sale of information products. This represents 70.8% of the respondents. Out of these seventeen respondents, six (6) respondents or 35.3% said there was a section charged with the responsibility of packaging and sale of information products in their library, while eleven (11) representing 64.7% of the respondents indicated there was no such department.

The subsequent question sought to find out if staff members who work in such departments had undergone any training for this 'specialised' service. Five respondents from Library C indicated there exists such training. This is not surprising since only Library C is involved in packaging information for a fee. As to the kind of information usually in demand, the responses received showed information on education and industry were in high demand. Journal article searches from electronic databases were the preferred choices.

There were many proposals by respondents to be considered in the event of a library embarking on packaging of information for a fee. Some of them were charging users for requests received from local and libraries abroad through the inter-library loans and document delivery (ILL/DD), orientation and registration of users seem to push the libraries to full commercialization thus moving them away from the mission of the parent university. However, it was found that all respondents generally agreed that libraries should be involved in information consultancy and this should bring money to the individual libraries just as any consultancy service will bring funds to the organization undertaking it.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the responses received that respondents in this study were professionals who know the purposes for which the university libraries were set up and that these library professionals are not business-for-profit-oriented. Only Library C has a unit formally set up to see to the pricing of information products to clients. Majority of the respondents, (83%) agreed that packaging of information products for a fee is a viable option for the libraries to generate income internally.

It can also be concluded that respondents know the kind(s) of information packages they can offer for a fee without infringing on the intellectual property rights of any creator or author. Majority of the respondents were of the view that clients are prepared to pay for the things they value. So it is important is for the libraries to deliver quality services to the academic community they serve and in return the services will be sustained.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that, public university libraries in Ghana should take advantage of this potentially viable means of income generation, they should through their Library Committees, push for a paradigm shift in their mandate.

It is also recommended that, implementing a policy on the packaging and sale of information products to actual and potential clients must involve adequate planning. This will include needs assessment and analysis, publicity and intensive user education. Nothing should be taken for granted or assumed. Library units responsible for this should look for the research interests or profiles of researchers and entrepreneurs so they could provide quality services to them for a fee.

Staff training will be crucial to the effective and efficient functioning of such units. Some level of expertise in information searching on a wide range of subjects is required. For this reason, it will be very good to get subject-specialists to monitor the activities of these units. These subject specialists may not be people who are authorities in their disciplines but those who have studied particular subjects up to at least Bachelor's degree level.

University libraries have a mandate to fulfill in their parent institutions. In order that they do not renege on this mandate, they can also make industry the target for sale of information products. This way, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) can be done for good returns. Libraries can search and package the information needs of industry in the area of research and innovation. Research departments of industry or their information centres can rely on university libraries for information on research and new developments in their areas of interest. Industry in turn could give back in support of the library's activities. This support or returns can either be in cash or in kind.

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