

THE FINANCIAL DEARTH OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN GHANA: THE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY LIBRARY IN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The library is an essential component of the University system and needs to be adequately funded in order to perform satisfactorily.

University Libraries in Ghana, in general, and UST, Kumasi, in particular, have for a long time grappled with inadequate funding. A 1988 survey revealed that the university libraries in Ghana on the average were receiving 2.02% of the universities' vote in the 1980's, the least allocation to any unit in the universities. The trend persists to the present day.

The financial problem of the library is traced to the general insufficient government grant to the universities and the universities in turn allocating a negligible percentage of it to the library. The quarterly release of the subvention by the government contributes immensely to the problem.

The formula for allocating the grants to the faculties, institutes, centres and other units particularly at UST does not seem to favour the library much. The Finance Officers in turn, do not appear to be disposed to the course of the Library.

The paper makes recommendations for concrete financial policies to be drawn for the libraries; for an increase in the vote allocation to the libraries; and for the strengthening of the Library Committee.

INTRODUCTION

The Library is the centre of academic work in the in the university and must be generously funded to be able to provide the required services that will support teaching, learning and research. A University Library must be stocked with current relevant materials and equipped with modern tools and accessories in order to facilitate the library's work and make it effective as well as to assist the user in his quest for information. The turning out of high quality graduates from a university is in part a reflection of the high standard of the library.

Funding

University libraries in Ghana, like their parent institutions, depend largely, if not wholly, on government funding. According to Alemna (1994), a large majority of university libraries in Africa are government institutions depending on the government for about

90% of their revenue. This corroborates Ifidon's (1990) assertion that "the main source of funds to all Nigerian University libraries is government grants which account for about 95% of the total subvention to the libraries."

Allocation of Funds

The allocation of funds to the library, faculties, institutes, centres and all other service units of the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, is done by the "Programme Linked Budgeting Formula" which takes into consideration each unit's need and estimates, as well as the staff strength and number of students, where applicable. This formula does not seem to favour the library much since it has continuously received the least grant in the University's budget allocation.

The University Rationalization Committee (URC) was appointed by the Government of Ghana in 1986 to among other terms, "provide the basic information and recommendation to enable a medium term university sector development plan to be formulated for Ghana." The URC in its report in 1988 made interesting observations and recommendations. The report discovered that all the country's university libraries did receive the least of the subvention granted to the institutes by the government.

Reviewing the total cost of resources used between the period 1982 to 1986, the University of Ghana on the average spent 3.0% of her resources on the library. The worst year was 1985 when the library received only 2.59%. The

University of Cape Coast library had a low percentage of 1.16% with 0.48% received in 1984. UST allocated 1.62% to the Library within the same period with the lowest figure of 0.94% occurring in 1982. Going by the subvention system of funding the universities, the libraries on the average received 2.02% of the overall universities' grant. (URC Report, 1988, p 31).

A summary of the report's finding on university libraries in Ghana thus states: "the universities spend not more than 3.0% of their financial resources on the library. It is the considered view of the Committee that to support the academic activities on campus, the libraries of the universities (i.e. both main libraries and faculty libraries) must be adequately stocked with books and periodicals. It is inconceivable to think of universities without good libraries. Thus to make it possible for our universities to admit more students and to facilitate research in the universities, finances must be spent on the libraries (URC Report, 1988, p271).

The Committee recommended that 10% of all funds released to the universities be allocated to the libraries. This report was issued in 1988 and approved as a working document for the universities but to date, the 10% remains an illusion. In 1996, the UST library received 3% of the total university vote; Balme Library, 4%; and UCC Library, jumped to 4%.

In an interview with the finance officers of the three universities whether the observation of the URC that the libraries were receiving the least allocation

was correct, they all refuted it. The URC Report that the library receives the charts below, however, confirm the the least grant (at UST).

TABLE 1: VOTE ALLOCATION TO PROGRAMMES, UST, 1996

PROGRAMME	AMOUNT REQUIRED €000,000	PERCENTAGE GRANTED	ALLOCATION €000,000	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL VOTE
1. Director Academic Expenses	665.7	60%	3,994	43%
2. General Educational Expenses	2,159	60%	1,295	14%
3. Central Library	413	60%	284	3%
4. Central Administration	1,232	60%	739	8%
5. Staff/Student Expenses	1,973	60%	1,186	12%
6. Municipal Services	2,791	60%	1,675	18%
7. Miscellaneous	395	60%	237	2%
TOTAL	15,620		9,327	100%

Source : UST Recurrent Estimates, 1996

TABLE 2: ALLOCATION TO PROGRAMMES, UST, 1997

Functions	Estimated Requirement	Allocation	% of estimate allocated	% of total available	
	€ Million	€ Million		Norm	Budget
1. Direct Teaching Cost	11,256.90	6,737.20	59.85	45	44.20
2. General Educational Exp	2,962.00	1,704.00	57.53	15	11.18
3. Library	733.70	600.00	81.78	10	3.94
4. Central Administration	1,793.30	1,420.00	83.37	6	9.32
5. Staff/Student Facilities	2,675.00	1,992.00	74.47	5	13.07
6. Municipal Services	4,329.50	2,329.50	59.11	15	16.79
7. Miscellaneous	550.00	230.00	41.82	4	1.51
TOTAL	24,210.40	15,242.00		100.00	100.00

Source: UST, Recurrent Estimates, 1997

In his attempt to refute the URC's observation that the Library was being allocated the least vote, the Finance Officer of UST disclosed that the Library, in addition to its vote, was to receive 10% of every faculty's levy on students for the use of academic facilities each year. A cross-check from the University Librarian revealed that the Library had never received this amount since its inception in 1996

Vote Allocation to Libraries

The University Grants Committee's "Report of the Committee on Libraries" (Parry Report), in 1967 recommended that a university should spend a minimum of 6% of its total recurrent expenditure on its Library. Yet in the 1970s after the publication of the Parry Report, there was no marked improvement in the national average: 4.2% in 1971-2; 4.4 in 1976-7 and 1977-8; 4.1% 1979-80. A recession was even noted, 3.7% in 1982-3 (Thompson, 1987, p25-26). The Parry Report's minimum of 6% remains elusive and increasingly unlikely just as the URC's recommended 10%.

Ifidon (1990) gave the Nigerian average as 5.11% for the libraries of the first-generation universities; and 4.31% for the libraries of the third-generation universities.

It is, therefore, becoming increasingly clear that the percentage of university income devoted to library purposes generally tends to hover around the traditional 4%.

Problems

These percentages of the universities grants allocated to their libraries are paltry and non-supportive because the subvention itself is inadequate. However, the real situation on the ground is more disturbing, in that, the total amount of money approved as the library's budget for the year, in most cases, is not made available for spending on the library.

The UST Library was allocated 3.94% of the university's vote in the 1997 academic year. It is difficult to say precisely how much of the money was spent by the library, but it can be speculated that not more than 75% came to the library with as much as 25% confined to the "no money syndrome" confers.

A case in point was what happened to the UST Library in the 1996 financial year. The Finance Officer blamed the library for their inability to spend the total budget of ₦284,000,000.00 and therefore did not see the need for an increase in the vote. On the part of the University Librarian the library, in the last quarter of the year arranged for the purchase of some books and equipment but when the pro-forma invoices were submitted to the finance office for the release of funds, the rest of the library's allocation had been used up. The money was used to make extra chairs and tables for the semester's examinations, meanwhile the library also needed tables and chairs.

According to Munn (1968), the library is seen as a "bottomless pit", being infinitely expandable and therefore al-

ways in pursuit of "an undefined and presumably unattainable goal". To him, this is a barrier to a library receiving higher percentage of university's income and also for the fact that nobody has yet succeeded in making a cost-benefit analysis of the contribution of a library to its university.

Much as we blame the Finance Officers for the financial inadequacies of the university library, the real problem comes about as a result of the government's release of subvention to the universities on quarterly basis. Years gone by, Ghanaian universities were allocated votes on a five-yearly basis; later, this was reduced to one year; and now it is three months. It means that at the end of each quarter, the universities have to make returns to the Ministry of Finance in order to receive the next quarter's subvention.

This system of financial administration is characterised by a lot of disadvantages and does not augur well for long-term plans. Rather ad hoc and short-term plans become the order because funds are released in bits and trickles in at a time. This has an adverse effect on the growth and development of the university in general, and the library, in particular. The procurement of equipment becomes difficult, if not impossible. One of the most affected areas in the library is serials subscription; that vital collection for university work. The results are few journal titles with wide-gaps in the collection and the inability of the library to adopt modern and advanced technologies that are emerging in the profession.

Conclusion

Much as the university is seen as the cog in the machine for the development and advancement of developing countries, so also is the library which is seen as the linchpin in the university education. The library is a spending institution which cannot easily be subjected to a cost-benefit analysis. It must not therefore be the first to suffer budget cut in the university in time of financial austerity. The result of a poorly funded library may not be seen on the stroke of the moment but its effect is devastating and long lasting; it affects the university's objectives of turning out quality manpower for development, and also affects the country in general.

The Deputy Ministry of Education, Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas on Tuesday, January 28th 1999, reiterated the need for tertiary institutions to allocate 10% of their budgets to libraries. This suggestion was made when an IFLA delegation called on him in his office. The Minister observed that in the next century, countries would not progress with the amount of natural resources they have but by the skill of their people. It was therefore important that every nation made an effort at equipping its people with knowledge and information (Ghanaian Times No. 12844; pp3).

It is, therefore, my recommendation that Ghanaian universities should spell out concrete financial policies for the libraries and ensure that whatever is approved for the library is translated into goods, services and cash and not just money on paper.

If the recommended 10% is on the high side in the universities' estimation, so also is the 3.0% too low to develop a world standard library. Efforts must be made to raise the percentage to about 6% at least.

In the university, the importance of a committee is judged by the rank of the members serving on it. In the University of Ghana, the Vice Chancellor by the statutes of the University is the chairman of the Library Committee; this role cannot be delegated. It is no wonder that Balme Library, in spite of all the problems libraries encounter in Ghana, is the leading library in the country. I wish to recommend this for all the other universities in Ghana. It is worth emulating.

Information is needed for development and we can only achieve this when we invest in information development.

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