

The Role Of Libraries In Education: The Situation In Ghana

By Mrs.Valentina Bannerman (Chief Librarian UEW & Immediate Past Chairperson Ghana Librarian Association)

posted August 2012 OLE Ghana

The purpose of education has always been to train persons to fit into society. With the change in the needs of society comes the change in the way people are educated. In Ghana, numerous attempts have been made to bring dynamic and progressive improvements in the educational system in the country through review committees dating back to colonial times. The latest attempt was the President's Committee on the Review of Educational Reforms in Ghana set up in 2002 under the chairmanship of Professor Jophus Anamuah-Mensah. Key in this latest reform was to address the needs of the 21st century Ghanaian which include;

- Instant, unimpeded access (both online and offline) to a collection of information resources; local content, different types of resources including articles, conference papers technical reports, government documents, syllabi, and other unpublished research; and
- Ability to locate, evaluate and represent new information quickly at any time of their lives.

The institution created since time immemorial to facilitate such access to information is the Library. A Library is a collection of books and other informational materials made available to people for reading, study, or reference. In addition to providing materials, libraries also provide the services of librarians who are experts at finding and organizing information and training users to independently access information from within and outside the library.

Libraries advance the course of education and have developed to match with changes in education. The change from rote learning, to critical thinking has necessitated the move from traditional didactic methods of teaching where the teacher is regarded as the sole source of information to the resource based teaching where one has to use numerous resources to teach and learn. Libraries have also changed from print based to hybrid, where print and electronic resources are made available to learners so that they can have access to a wide range of resources.

It is generally acknowledged that Libraries and Education are synonymous. Good education cannot exist without access to quality information resources, to support teaching, learning and research activities. And a library has no meaning if it cannot impart knowledge. One can even compare Libraries and Education to Siamese twins

who share vital organs and need each other to function. One cannot be separated from the other without dire consequences, and the existence of one is impossible without the other. Neither is an end in itself. Both working together are a means to an ultimate end - an educated and skilled population - which is needed to create, share and use knowledge for personal, national economic growth and development.

There are five (5) categories of libraries in the country, named according to the patrons they serve. They are School, Public, Academic, Research and Special Libraries. Ghana does not have a National Library.



Academic and Research Libraries An academic library is a [library](#) in a higher educational institution, such as a polytechnic, [college](#) or a [university](#). These libraries are better off than the other categories of libraries and have formed the Consortium of Academic and Resource Libraries in Ghana (CARLIGH) with the aim of deploying the collective resources of their institutions to provide access to electronic resources. Though provided through the libraries, the resources are accessible anywhere on campus. Thus apart from the Internet which is free in most campus libraries, students, researchers, faculty has access to quality resources published by reputable publishers.

Public libraries are often considered an essential part of an educated and literate population. This is the type of library which should provide materials to anyone in the country from pre-schoolers up to the aged, including the disabled in the country. The public libraries in Ghana however are low on the scale of development

School Libraries Nursery, Kindergarten, Primary, Secondary, and Technical School Libraries fall into this category. In most cases, their libraries consist of outdated, tattered books manned by untrained staff. Yet these institutions are the very foundation of the educational structure.

Excellent reading habits begin in the early years. Introducing children to books in preschool supports kindergarten readiness, promotes early literacy and supports a love of language and reading. A library with variety of books, picture books, early readers and comfortable seating is what is needed for nursery, kindergarten and primary schools. At the secondary and technical schools, a library at this stage of students' lives provides materials to broaden the scope of what the textbooks have provided. Students learn to form their own judgment, which is a skill required for lifelong learning. Libraries also serve as a major resource for homework help. Yet only a few well endowed schools have good libraries.

Ghana Basic e-Learning Library (BeLL) It was predicted years ago that the digital age would eliminate books, and permanently end the centuries-old era of libraries. Discussions then centered on a paperless society where everything would be electronic and libraries would no longer be relevant. Contrary to expectations libraries continue to exist. Many people however associate them with print books and journals unaware that technology has rather enhanced the essential role of libraries to facilitate access to information and in knowledge creation and use.

It is this newly acquired image and enhanced role of a library that OLE Ghana in collaboration with the Curriculum and Research Development Division (CRDD) of the Ghana Education Service seeks to entrench with its clarion call for a repository of quality teaching and learning materials to enhance the delivery of pre-tertiary education. It seeks to do this through the establishment of the Ghana Basic eLearning Library (Ghana BeLL).

If Ghana BeLL is supported by the Government, the proposed Ghana BeLL will create “a comprehensive national repository of open education resources which will cater to the specific needs of the Ghanaian pre-tertiary curriculum” (Ghana Bell Concept Paper 2012). With the support of librarians, materials in such a library can be integrated in library catalogues and made accessible in all school and public libraries in the country.

Education is the key to the development of all countries. Access to data, information and knowledge is essential to facilitate the educational process and libraries are best positioned to play the role of providing access to these needed materials. If the country is to benefit from an improved system of education, libraries must be part of the process of education especially at the basic and secondary level. The Ministry of Education supported by the Government can provide this facility through OLE Ghana's Ghana BeLL to the pre tertiary level of education.