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# **Information acquisition mechanism of universities libraries: An empirical study of public university libraries in Ghana**

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**This paper takes a critical look at how academic libraries in Ghana acquire their information/materials. The investigation was mainly based on interviews. The interviews were conducted in four Ghanaian public university libraries from January 2014 to March 2015. In all, 38 senior members were interviewed. The findings indicated among other that the libraries under study purchase their library materials through donations, purchase and legal deposits. Also, other ways of acquiring knowledge/information in the library were: the socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation of artefacts. The study recommended that the Procurement Law of Ghana must be reviewed to allow other key officers like the provost and deans to give approval for the library to purchase books on their behalf; clearing process from the port should be streamlined to reduce the number of days spent clearing containers of books from the port.**

**Key words:** Gifts, donations, purchase, legal deposit, procurement law, socialisation, combination, externalisation.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Libraries are the cornerstone of civil society of the liberal democracy we have come to cherish. They must not be allowed to crumble into disuse. Therefore, an academic library book collection should have both depth and breadth because it needs to address a wide range of subjects and it needs a sufficient number of books to give those subjects the coverage they deserve (Ishola, 2014). According to Ishola (2014), the primary purpose of university libraries is to support teaching, learning, and research in ways consistent with, and supportive of, the institution's mission and goals. In addition, library resources and services should be sufficient in quality, depth, diversity and currency to support the

institution's curriculum.

Academic libraries acquire their materials through gift, direct purchase and exchange. Selection and acquisition of library materials depend on the kind of library since each library is interested in serving primarily its clientele which could be homogenous or heterogenous (Adesanya, 2015).

Adesanya (2015) and Agyen-Gyasi et al. (2010) added that, academic libraries face many challenges which include the following: budgets, inadequate library space for library materials, cumbersome procurement processes, and the problem of knowing which format to select owing to the rising costs of library materials.

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This paper therefore takes a critical look at how universities libraries in Ghana acquire their information/materials and the challenges they face in acquiring these materials for the library.

### Statement of problem

Acquiring library materials is a core function of any library. University libraries acquire and maintain book and other collections. The researchers experience as a former acquisition librarian and review of the literature reveals that university libraries face serious problems in the acquisition of information materials. Libraries find it difficult to acquire books to meet their user's needs quickly and economically as a result of financial constraints, delay in procurement processes, non-compliances to the legal deposit law, and many others. Consequently, this study sought to find out the processes of acquiring library materials for the library and the challenges involved in the acquisition processes.

### Objectives

The main purpose of the study is to look at the information acquisition mechanism of academic libraries in Ghana. The main objectives of the study are to:

- (1) Examine the processes involved in acquiring library materials in the public universities in Ghana;
- (2) To assess any other ways of acquiring library materials in the public universities aside the traditional methods of acquiring library material; and
- (3) To identify the challenges in acquiring library materials in the public universities in Ghana.

### METHODOLOGY

This is mainly a qualitative study and the investigation was mainly based on interviews. The interviews were conducted in three Ghanaian public university libraries in Ghana which were randomly selected from January 2014 to March 2015. The universities are the University of Ghana, Legon (UG) in Accra; University of Cape Coast (UCC) in Cape Coast; and University for Development Studies (UDS) in Tamale. For the sake of anonymity, these universities were randomly named as Universities A, B and C. Senior members of these academic libraries were purposely selected. Senior members usually are part of the decision making body of academic institutions in respect of the operations in the libraries and were thus invited to respond to the issues under study. In all, 38 senior members were interviewed.

The questions asked were generally based on the objectives of this paper and included the following: What are the processes involved in acquiring library materials in your library? Are there any other way of acquiring library materials in your library aside the once already discussed? And what are the challenges in acquiring library materials in your library?

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Acquisition of library materials is the process of locating and obtaining library materials identified as appropriate for collection development. During interviews, respondents said that they got their library materials through purchases, donations or gifts from individuals or organizations and legal deposits. The results are discussed subsequently.

#### Purchase

Aina (2004) states that a major source of acquisition in libraries is through purchases. Acquiring library materials through purchases is a complex activity in which book vendors and suppliers and subscription agents are involved. Direct purchase comes in two modes. The first entails ordering books and other publications through jobbers, vendors, or agents. The investigations revealed that ordering from vendors was better than through the publishers because vendors provide services like electronic ordering, placing standing orders and sometimes do the selection. The second type of direct purchase is purchasing materials at retail bookshops. It is faster and more convenient to purchase from the bookshop even though the price may be higher.

The study revealed that all the libraries use either one of the modes or both modes to acquire their materials. For instance, respondents from University B library revealed that they have permanent vendors. Many of their purchases are made from recognized sources. Competitive bidding is generally not possible, but vendors providing best services with strong financial background are selected. The *Procurement Act 2003 (Act 633)* of Ghana stipulates that public procurement can be organized either through competition or selective tender. University B has opted for negotiation tender.

The Procurement Act 663 (2003) of Ghana indicates that a tender may be negotiated with only one supplier/contractor so that competition is eliminated. Such contracts are usually known as sole sourcing or proprietary. This is subject to specific approval being granted by the Public Procurement Board (PPB), and may be appropriate when: the purchase is for urgently needed products, provided this is restricted to the minimum quantity to meet the urgent need until a purchase by other methods can be fulfilled. This mode of acquisition is preferred when ordering directly from a publisher for its own publications.

According to the respondents from the University B library, the acquisition is patron driven therefore they rely on lecturers, students and other recognized patrons to make requests. The theory behind patron driven acquisition is that academic library users are specialists in their fields. Since users are specialists, this model proposes that they are able to decide for themselves

which books meet the information needs of practitioners in their respective disciplines (Hussong-Christian and Goergen-Doll, 2010; Smith, 2011). The library compiles these lists and when approved by the Vice-Chancellor, the suppliers are charged to supply the books. According to the respondents, because the acquisition is patron driven they have value for money. This implies that whatever they buy in the library is valuable to the library collection. A study by Anderson and Associates (2002), revealed that the books ordered under Patron Driven Acquisition seemed to be as valuable to the collection as books acquired through standard channels.

University C, on its part, purchases its materials directly from bookshops on campus and also through vendors. They also stated that they buy books whenever there are conferences and where vendors come to display their books. According to the respondents, the purchase is also based on Patron-Driven Acquisitions. This is also referred to as Demand-Driven-Acquisitions as already discussed, is a method of offering library users a wide range of resources in various formats e.g., monographs, e-books, journals articles, etc. This enables the library to acquire library materials that have been requested to avoid the problem of buying materials that will not be patronized. .

In all the universities, it was realized that the purchase of library materials largely depends on the recommendation from teaching staff, the library staff and other patrons taking into consideration the various programmes and courses being pursued in the university. The study revealed that the University "A" library uses the Traditional Collection Development Paradigm whereby librarians frequently remain open to patron input and actively seek out patron opinions about the library collection. According to Smith (2011), one-way library selectors collect this information is by asking faculty what materials they want in the library. Selectors then consider the user input as well as information about the library's existing materials, collection standards, and the selectors' own impressions of the collection when choosing new books for the library. By allowing librarians to refer to user interests as well as other collection development mechanisms when purchasing materials, this method ensures that the immediate needs of users will not endanger the long-term balance of the collection (Hodges et al., 2010). At the same time, by asking library selectors to obtain user opinions, this method allows librarians to tailor the collection to suit local interests (Evans and Saponaro, 2005).

This study further revealed that all the three university libraries under study subscribe to databases through the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Ghana (CARLIGH). CARLIGH is the only library consortium in Ghana. It seeks to bring libraries from academic and research institutions together to help harness resources to achieve a common goal of providing adequate information to their users (Dzandza

and Alemna, 2011). A consortium therefore can be equated to communal living in Africa where members of the community live and care for each member in the society. The mission of CARLIGH is to employ collective information resources, available technology, and staff capabilities to improve teaching, learning and research including lifelong learning, in member institutions and by extension in Ghana. CARLIGH has successfully negotiated licensing agreements for selected databases and e-journals for users of some academic and research institutes in Ghana including the universities, polytechnics, and research libraries (Agyen-Gyasi et al., 2010).

This has been confirmed by University C library as it has been stated in its acquisition policy that the library subscribes to electronic materials and makes them available to faculty, staff and students. Currently, as a member of CARLIGH, the library subscribes to electronic databases such as Emerald, Ebsco Complete, Wiley, Taylor and Francis, Sage, Sage Knowledge, Sage Research Methods, TEEAL, and Cambridge University Press. Subscribing to databases through a consortium helps the libraries to spend less and get more. According to Dzandza and Alemna (2011), one of the primary purposes of consortia is the leveraging of library budgets to purchase more resources (mainly digital resources) than could be purchased by any one-member institution.

### Gifts or donations

Gifts and donations represent an important component of the collection-building activities of libraries (Cassell et al., 2008). According to Johnson (2009), most supports for academic libraries' in America collections come from gifts of books or donations in the United States.

Donations are "two sharp edges", even though they have contributed in the development of libraries; they have also resulted in a 'cast off collections' in our libraries. Pitcher (1976) in a book titled *Knot of Wisdom*, which recounts the history of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology attests to the fact that the university received gifts to commemorate Ghana's independence from a number of bodies and some of the books portray the American way of life. Alemna (1996), added that, the result of external aid and acquisition of books through donations have led to a situation whereby collection of books, whatever their merit, have found their way into our libraries'. Some of these collections, he added are out of touch with our local reality.

This trend has changed in recent times. All the universities affirmed that for some time now, they purchase more than what they receive as donations. This is indeed good news, meaning the libraries are to some extent able to acquire what they need and not receive junks as gifts. This confirms Aina's (2004) assertion that 90% or more of information materials in Africa are acquired through purchases.

Follow up discussions revealed that the universities are now able to purchase more as a result of the introduction and the increase of the "library user fees", an amount of money per unit of goods or service produced or provided by the government which is collected from the recipient. Revenues from user fees are usually allocated to a specific fund that goes back into funding the good or service, as opposed to being allocated to general revenue (Farish, 2012). As a result of inadequate funding in most of the university libraries over the years (Alemna, 1994; Bani, 2003; Ishola, 2014; Manuh et al., 2007), university have been compelled to introduce library fees to be able to provide and sustain quality library services to library users (Ishola, 2014).

The investigations for this study revealed that all the three public universities charge "Library user fees" at the beginning of each academic year, which range between 50 and 100 Ghana cedis. This money is given to the libraries and as a result they have been able to increase their purchasing power. The libraries are able to buy more library material, particularly books instead of mainly depending on donations. Latimer (1996) stipulates that library user fees bring the library useful amount of extra income that is ploughed back into the library service wherever it is needed.

### Legal deposit

Legal deposit is a statutory and government provision which obliges publishers to deposit copies of their publications in certain libraries, usually in the country in which they are published (Tibane, 2010). The aim of legal deposit is to ensure the preservation of and access to a nation's intellectual and cultural heritage over time as well as the holistic assemblage of all published materials from a country in the national library for the use of all the people of that country (Muir, 2001; Lor, 2004).

As reported by Kedem (2012), Ghana's Book and Newspaper Registration Act (1961) requires the registration and deposit of every book, "pamphlet, sheet of letterpress, newspaper, sheet of music, map, chart, or plan." Producers are required to send deposit copies within one month of issue to the Ghana Library Board, now Ghana Library Authority, the University College of the Gold Coast (now University of Ghana), and the Registrar-General. A 1963 amendment increased the number of depositories to include the libraries of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, University of Science and Technology (now Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology) and University of Cape Coast, respectively. The deposit must be sent with a document containing details of the book, such as the title of the book, names of the author(s), translator, editor and the subject matter of the book as well as the name and residence of the proprietor of the copyright or a portion of the copyright (WIPO, 2011). Currently, it is the

George Padmore Research Library on Africa Affairs of Ghana Library Authority, which acts as the National Agency for the registration of published books in Ghana.

The respondents were of the view that all the public university libraries should have been legal deposit centres. However, those that the law designated as beneficiaries of the legal deposit law they hardly or virtually do not receive any publications as such. The three public university libraries understudied, complained that because there is no enforcement of the legal deposit law, they are not in the position to prosecute publishers who offend the law. This means that the nation will not be in a position to collect and preserve all its literary output as envisaged by the law. A robust and effective system of legal deposit law should exist in every country (IFLA, 2008). Furthermore, there must be a strong cooperation between libraries and other agencies concerned to enforce the law in Ghana. IFLA (2008) posits that libraries legal deposit is the most successful when there is a close cooperation between the designated national custodians (usually libraries) and those responsible for the deposits (usually publishers or creators). The legal deposit law should also be reviewed to enforce strict sanctions against those who offend the law.

### Other ways of knowledge acquisition in the library

Academic libraries, apart from buying or receiving library materials as gifts, also, in one way or the other, generate knowledge in the library. Academic libraries through the various activities in the library correspond to the modes in the knowledge management model by Nonaka (1991), namely, socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation (SECI) to generate knowledge.

#### *Socialisation*

Socialisation is where there is a passage among individuals of tacit knowledge to tacit knowledge, through a process of collective sharing of knowledge (Ngulube, 2003). During the interactions, it was revealed that all the academic libraries used socialisation as an agent to produce and acquire knowledge. Librarians create knowledge when they consult with reference librarians, subject librarians, collection development librarians, or other instructional librarians and even with the teaching staff, students, researchers and the local community. Through discussions, they share their ideas (that is, tacit-to-tacit conversion).

Furthermore, the study also revealed that all the libraries organise library seminars, workshops and conferences. These are fora where ideas are shared. For example, according to the respondents from University C library, any time somebody attends a workshop or seminar outside the institution, the person is obliged to

share whatever he/she has learned with colleagues who did not get the opportunity. The same applies to the University A and B libraries. Each library also organises meetings, durbars and end of year parties, among others. These are all forums of socialisation.

Sharing of ideas among members in an organisation is a social norm, which is helpful in making the organisational environment friendlier. Sharing of ideas among members of the community is a useful way for members to learn from one another. According to Daneshgar and Parirokh (2007) the adoption of such approaches will enable all these people to expand their personal knowledge bases.

### **Externalisation**

Externalisation refers to the transfer of knowledge from the minds of its holders into an external repository in the most efficient way possible. The function of externalisation is to provide the sharing of knowledge. Externalisation is based on the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge (Daneshgar and Parirokh 2007). In this process, tacit knowledge is codified, sorted, categorised and held in a database or document in order to be reused by others and according to Nonaka (1991), this is known as organisational memory. Organisational memory is a valuable asset for the continuation of an organisation's existence.

Members from each library acknowledge that they take minutes of meetings, and at times document oral information in a form of research output that becomes available to all librarians. Again each library has written down policies including Library Annual Report; Library Guide; and Collection Development Policy. These are referred to as externalisation. This knowledge is used by others for the development of society as a whole.

### **Combination**

Combination refers to the conversion of explicit to explicit knowledge. That is where explicit knowledge is systemised and refined into "combination" knowledge conversion mode that produces a new tangible and structured knowledge (Nonaka, 1991).

All the participating libraries generate reports and users' profiles. They also prepare "Library Guides and Manuals, among others. These are revised periodically to create new knowledge. Librarians, according to my respondents from the various institutions, attend conferences, workshops, seminars, discussion sessions, meetings and come out with professional publications. These enable them to get opportunities to analyse and assess their knowledge, increase their thinking abilities to create new knowledge. They are able to internalise whatever knowledge they acquire in their mind and put it

into practice.

All forms of knowledge are critical for business growth and decision making capabilities of the organisation. The knowledge can be in tacit (in minds of individuals) or explicit (example in electronic form in databases and repositories or print). It is important to consolidate and integrate the knowledge (in whatever form) in the organisation so that people can use it to take appropriate actions.

## **CHALLENGES OF ACQUIRING LIBRARY MATERIALS**

Acquisition of library materials operates within the constraints of certain conditions that vary from one place to the other and from time to time. According to Magrill and Corbin (1984), the key challenges of acquiring library materials include: community of institution, poor communication and inadequate funding. Agyen-Gyasi et al. (2010) further indicate that academic libraries in Ghana face several challenges including increasing costs of materials and limited budget (that reduces the amount of materials to be acquired). However, the respondents from all the four university libraries lamented on the delay in the procurement process due to the Ghana Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 633). For example, one respondent from University B library laments that: the Act does not favor the university at all. At the moment some departments are not buying. The reason being that, a big university like, the University B, with many colleges and departments; it is only the Vice-Chancellor who can give approval for the purchase of books. This delays the procurement process.

This sentiment corroborates Agyen-Gyasi et al. (2010) assertion that the procurement processes are cumbersome.

Similar sentiments are shared by the respondents from University A and C libraries. They called for a review in the Procurement Law to allow other key officers like the provost and deans to give approval for the library to purchase books on their behalf.

Another challenge to the acquisition of materials in the library identified by this study is inadequate funding. Academic libraries in Ghana over the years have received the lowest share of the university budget. Alemna (1994), Bani (2003) and Manuh et al. (2007) support this view, attributing it to the economic recession of most African countries and especially in Ghana in recent times. While establishing these financial inadequacies, the study discovered that the libraries are able to purchase more materials due to the introduction of the library user fees. The respondents from University B library also complained about the difficulty in the clearing of books from the port. According to the respondents, the clearing process is frustrating as it can take months to clear a container of books from the port.

## Conclusion

It is the responsibility of the academic libraries to select and acquire library materials to support the mission and the vision of their parent institutions. The study revealed that the libraries under study acquire their library materials through legal deposits, donations and purchase. However, the major source of acquisition is through purchase. This is as a result of the introduction of the “academic user fees” and library fees by universities in Ghana. The study also revealed that, publishers are not abiding by the legal deposit law. The study again indicated that donation can be expensive since most of the materials donated are junks. Other ways of acquiring knowledge/information in the library are: the socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation of artefacts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- (1) The legal deposit law should also be reviewed to enforce strict sanctions against those who offend the law;
- (2) There must be a strong cooperation between academic and other agencies concerned to enforce the legal deposit law in Ghana;
- (3) The Procurement Law of Ghana must be reviewed to allow other key officers in the university like the Provost and Deans to give approval for the library to purchase books on their behalf;
- (4) Clearing process from the port should be streamlined to reduce the number of days spent clearing containers of books from the port.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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