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School Libraries in Ghana: A State-of-the-Art Report

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This article provides a review of school library development in Ghana against the background of a new educational system that was put in place a decade ago. Although the government and the Ministry of Education have for a long time recognized the role of school libraries in education, little has been done to ensure that facilities are properly put in place for libraries to play this role.

General Education

Ghana achieved political independence with an educational system patterned on the British system. This type of education was elitist, largely theoretical, and literary. Vocational education was not encouraged and was, in fact, scorned. The dropout rates at both primary and secondary schools were high, and these dropout students had no marketable skills to make them employable. Many, therefore, relapsed into illiteracy, and many others constituted a social menace.

A new National Policy on Education was introduced in 1987 that tries to avoid these pitfalls by providing vocational oriented programs for the children. The children spend six years at the primary level with a broad-based education aimed at inculcating permanent and functional literacy and numeracy as well as effective communication in the mother tongue and other Ghanaian languages.

The junior secondary school, the most revolutionary aspect of the new educational system, takes three years. Subjects taught here are both academic and prevocational. Children are helped to acquire new knowledge and develop skills to make them respect the dignity of labor. It is hoped that any dropout students at the end of the junior secondary education will have acquired some marketable skills that would make them employable.

The senior secondary school, which also lasts for three years, is for those who are able and willing to complete the six-year secondary education. It has both academic and vocational courses, but its focus is largely on preparation for higher education. A successful completion of this stage then opens an avenue into any of the third cycle institutions.

History of School Library Development

In Ghana, provision of library books for children started almost as soon as that for adults (Alemna, 1983). With the establishment of the Ghana Library

Board in 1950, immediate steps were taken to provide materials for school-children.

The success of the children's section in the public library services prompted the Ministry of Education to empower the Ghana Library Board to make library books accessible to children in schools. The first type of library for schools was, therefore, the mobile library system whereby the books were sent in book vans from the capital of Ghana to the rural areas for use by schoolchildren. Books were issued on the basis of one per child but, where the enrollment was less than 100, the number would be increased.

This service was, however, beset with numerous problems. In a country with so wide a terrain and many inaccessible areas, transportation became a serious problem. The major problem, however, was the availability of the required number and types of books for the schools. The selection of books was normally done by the staff and children, and what often happened was that the popular books were in short supply. In a country with few publishing houses, this meant that the books had to be imported from other countries, and this involved a lot of time and money. It is little wonder, therefore, that this service collapsed after a few years.

The government of Ghana in 1967 set up a Working Committee on School Libraries, comprising representatives from the Ghana Library Board, the British Council, and the Ministry of Education. Its mandate was to examine the state of libraries in the various secondary schools and teacher training colleges in the country and to make appropriate recommendations for their improvement. (Oddoye, 1969).

The findings of this committee revealed that, with the exception of a few secondary schools, libraries in most of the secondary schools and training colleges were poorly organized. Most had low book stocks, poor accommodation, and untrained staff. In fact, in some of the schools, libraries were nonexistent. This committee made various recommendations that appear to have lacked committed official support. One recommendation that was carried out, however, was the establishment by the Ghana Library Board of a School and College Library Department in 1972 with the following duties.

1. Visiting schools and colleges to give individual advice and help in organizing their libraries;
2. Ordering and supplying library books to all schools that will pay their grants to the Ghana Library Board;
3. Cataloguing and classifying all new books for schools;
4. Producing book lists, manuals, and other publications useful for school libraries;
5. Conducting seminars and training courses for library clerks and teacher-librarians;
6. Offering advice to architects on library requirements in new schools or when a reorganization is required;

7. Building up standard book collection from which teachers examine books and make their selection;
8. Advising on the setting up of a central rebinding service for school libraries; and
9. Encouraging the formation of a School Library Association as a special section of the Ghana Library Association.

However, from its inception to the present time, this Department has been seriously understaffed and inadequately funded, and it is in a somewhat ambiguous position organizationally because its operational status vis-à-vis both the Ghana Library Board and the Ministry of Education has not been clearly defined for purposes of coordination.

So far, its activities have mainly concentrated on the partial fulfillment of three of its stated duties: visits to schools and colleges; ordering of library materials; and organizing training courses (Alemna, 1990). Until concrete steps are taken to make it functionally relevant to the problems currently facing secondary school and college libraries, this Department will exist only in name.

Because of the poor performance of the Schools and College Libraries Department of the Ghana Library Board, the Ministry of Education set up a Community Libraries Project in 1986 with the aim of improving the standard of education of pupils in the country. At present, there are nine community libraries in Accra (the capital city of Ghana). These libraries are to serve the various communities, not only the schoolchildren. However, because the reading public is made up mainly of children who are attending schools, the original intention of setting up these libraries was laudable. These libraries acted as supplements for the poor school libraries and inadequate home libraries. Unfortunately, less than 10 years after they were set up, facilities and services in these libraries are deteriorating fast. The same problems faced by the school libraries-inadequate funding, materials, and personnel-have caught up with the community libraries.

The Ghana Book Trust is a nongovernmental, nonprofit, voluntary organization that is operated exclusively for charity and educational purposes. It was established by the Canadian Organization for Development through Education (CODE) based in Ottawa, Canada. The Trust has helped to enhance access of Ghanaians to books through supplies of books to schools and libraries throughout the country. It has also helped in the training of library assistants for these libraries. It is hoped that enough support will be given to the Book Trust in order for it to provide adequate services for schools and libraries in Ghana.

School Library Administration and Management

School libraries in Ghana are established and managed by the Ministry of Education. On paper, every secondary school and training college in the

country is expected to have a library. However, in most of these institutions, what goes by the name of a library may not really be a functional library.

Where the institution has employed library assistants, the Ministry of Education pays their salaries and, in some cases, the Ministry of Education also sponsors a short training course organized by the Ghana Library Board for School Librarians. Previously, the Ministry of Education provided funding to the Public Library Board to acquire and process materials for schools and colleges. This centralized service has now stopped, and the institutions now get their monies to purchase materials directly from the Ministry of Education. The materials are then processed by the library assistants in the schools.

The schools have a close relationship with the public libraries. Regional public librarians are often consulted by school librarians for advice in times of difficulty. As stated above, public libraries serve as a major training ground for school librarians in Ghana. At the inception of public library service in the country, the Ghana Library Board operated a book box system whereby books were sent in boxes on loan to schools in rural areas for a time, and then returned to the Library Board for reallocation to other schools. Owing to various reasons (mainly economic), this important service ceased during the early 1980s. There is no sharing of resources or networking among school libraries in Ghana.

School Library Programs

One of the major problems of school library development in Ghana is the lack of recognition of the important role the library plays in the school. As a result of this, there is no law or policy on school libraries, which has resulted in the haphazard development of libraries. There are also no specific standards for school library development. There are no clear-cut library programs. In most cases, these libraries are used as reading rooms where students go to read their class texts. Technology and media use are virtually nonexistent.

School Librarians/Teacher-Librarians

At present there is no specific training or requirement for school librarians in Ghana. This has led to the poor staffing situation, which in turn has contributed immensely to poor services in these libraries. Although the Department of Library and Archival Studies at the University of Ghana provides an area of specialization in school librarianship, few students are interested in this area because of frustrations faced by teacher-librarians in the country. The Ministry of Education provides no inducement for teacher-librarians and, because they have no local or national association, they cannot fight for their rights. Unfortunately, the Ghana Library Association has not been of any assistance to them.

Professional Standards

In the evaluation of school libraries, standards cannot be ignored, as it is on the accepted standards that a library is described as being handicapped or otherwise. The 1967 Working Committee on School Libraries prepared *A Manual for School Libraries in Ghana* (1972). These standards are now out of date, and new standards have been proposed (Alemna, 1993). It is not clear whether the Ghana Library Board has adopted these standards completely or even with some modifications. It is important that new and uniform standards are adopted for the management of school libraries in Ghana.

The Future

It can be seen from this report that the idea of school libraries is not entirely new in educational institutions in Ghana. Nevertheless, the development of these libraries has not been systematic, and official interest appears to have been cool and casual rather than active and sustained. It is amazing how little importance the government has attached to the establishment of libraries in schools, even in a new educational system that demands a greater use of books and libraries. However, all is not lost.

There is presently an Act in the Parliament of Ghana to establish the Ghana National Library service. This Act will supersede the Ghana Library Board Act 1970, and "make provision for the improved operation of the Board and provide related matters" (Ghana National Library Service Act, 1997, p. 2).

Based on the new local government system, which places much more emphasis on decentralization, the new Act empowers metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies to establish their own libraries. With regard to school and college library services, the new Act is expected to "provide operational guidelines in respect of approved policies to District Assemblies and School libraries for the performance of their functions relating to the library services" ... [and] monitor and supervise services in school and district libraries" (Ghana National Library Service Act, 1997, p. 6).

The Ghana Education Service, with the collaboration of the Ghana Library Board is to:

1. Provide library service to educational institutions in the first and second cycles;
2. Select, order, and distribute materials;
- 3 Advise in the choice of building, staffing, and stocking of libraries;
- 4 Supervise and inspect libraries in Secondary Schools and Teacher Training Colleges;
5. Organize inservice training, workshops, seminars, and so forth to train library personnel;
6. Control the financial subvention for libraries from the Ministry of Education.

These tasks are not easy to undertake, but at least something good has begun. It is expected that the Directorate of the National Library Service will sensitize authorities of the Ministry of Education, most especially head-masters and principals of secondary schools and training colleges. There should be a better means of cooperation between these agencies than has previously existed.

It is a matter of interest to note that, for the first time in 28 years, a Bill is about to be passed in Parliament in Ghana that deals specifically with libraries. It is hoped that this Bill will not only accelerate the development of libraries in Ghana in general, but also help to raise the level of school libraries from their present abysmal level. All this will depend, however, on the recognition given to school libraries in the general educational system in the country.

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