

FEE-BASED SERVICES IN THE KWAME NKUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (KNUST) LIBRARY, KUMASI

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ABSTRACT

The new trend of fee-based services in academic libraries as a result of inadequate central government funding is gradually catching on with Third World University Libraries. The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Library, Kumasi, started to commercialize some of its services since 1989. Some of these services are reprographic, photocopying, e-mailing, CD-ROM and a few others. In 1995, income generated from these activities came to ₵4,240,000.00. It rose to ₵13,612,000.00 in 1996; nose-dived to a low ₵6,421,080.00 in 1997 and climbed up again to ₵19,251,280.00 in 1998. A host of factors contributed to the minimal turnover. These are enumerated and suggestions put across to lift up the performance.

Keywords: *Income-generation, Library Services, University Libraries, Tertiary Education.*

INTRODUCITON

From time immemorial, libraries have been known to render free service to their communities. Any charges they levied were either punitive for default in the return of borrowed books or the payment for damaged or lost books. Some patrons' minds are so set about this free service that to them, it does not stand to reason to talk about commercial services in the library. Academic libraries, they argue, are supported by the tax-payers' money, and must, therefore, open their doors free to their community of users. This has been the trend of affairs for many years but with the present austere economic measures and dwindling government financial support for libraries, some libraries are of the view that where there is an extra cost, different from the normal,

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in satisfying a user's request, this must be borne by the said user.

"The protagonists of free library services may well argue that any service worth providing should be offered free to the user. However, the reality of the prevailing financial constraints in many libraries appears to be compelling libraries to reach out for other means of raising funds. Where individuals are not denied free access to the usual library services, there are increasing opportunities for fee-based information services" [1].

NEED FOR INCOME - GENERATION

The KNUST Library since its inception, had operated as a traditional library where all services such as registration of new users, reservation of books for clients, photocopying of documents, acquisition of materials for patrons through the ILL facility, the use of carrels and many other services, had been rendered free with minimal penal charges. Nevertheless, this state of affairs is gradually changing with government's insistence that she cannot single-handedly support tertiary education and, therefore, there must be some form of cost-sharing, that is, the beneficiaries of the service should also pay part of the cost.

KNUST Library benefited greatly from an EDSAC-IDA (Educational and Structural Adjustment Credit - International Development Association) aid package. It is the policy of these bodies that the beneficiary institution would operate with the aid to generate income so that even if the aid should dry up, the service would be self-sustaining. For example, the photocopiers donated to the Library must be able to pay for their regular maintenance and repairs and be able to raise enough money to replace them with new ones when they wear off.

Thus these two demands, that of government and that of the donor agencies, have left the library with no choice but to raise money from its services. Policies formulated for the achievement

of this are enshrined in an over-all visionary document drawn for the Library called "University Library Strategic Plan, 1995-2015." [2] This document forms part of a total University 20-year strategic plan; 1995 being the commencement year.

In the plan, the library identifies some possible areas of income-generation:

- * Charging registration fee as is done in other universities (e.g. Balme Library, University of Ghana, Legon).
- * Sale of library publications.
- * Reprographic services (i.e. photocopying, micro-reproduction of documents and slide production)
- * Hiring of carrels to users
- * Fax and e-mail services
- * Word processing/Desktop publishing services
- * CD-ROM search services
- * Hiring of available space for exhibitions, photographic displays.
- * Renting of part of the library for tea and snack services.
- * Potential alumni contribution/in cash and kind
- * Endowment Fund
- * Contracts through consultancies: The library will provide consultancy services to some educational institutions and other establishments.

Coffman [3] confirms that most libraries have been charging their patrons for a variety of things for years. He identifies the 'fine' for an overdue book as the most common, but adds that there are also charges for photocopying and other reprographic services, and many also charge for reserved books, ILL, meeting rooms and other incidental services not considered central to a library's main mission. [3]

Of the activities that bring in additional income to the university libraries, Ekoja (1996) mentions the sale of duplicating papers, sale of back issues of newspapers, publishing, photocopying, telephone and fax services, training programmes, consultancy, registration of new users and fees by external users. [4]

INCEPTION OF INCOME GENERATION

The effort to commercialise some services in the KNUST Library started on a low scale in 1989 when the first set of two photocopying machines were supplied by the Ministry of Education. These machines were to be self-sustaining and were occasionally inspected by a team of officers from the Ministry to ascertain their judicious use. The commercialisation, however, took off with much fervour in 1995.

SERVICES FOR INCOME-GENERATION IN THE KNUST LIBRARY

The KNUST Library generates its income from such services as electronic mail (e-mail), photocopying; reprographic services, such as photography; overdue fines; CD-Rom searches; registration of external users especially, from the research institutions like the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR); and charges for late registrations.

REVENUE

In 1995, the reprographic unit earned ₵259,700.00 while the others - photocopying, penalties, CD-Rom and the rest - totalled ₵3,980,780.00. The total income for the year came up to ₵4,240,480.00.

The total income for 1996 was ₵13,612,540.00, a leap over the previous year's. E-mail alone yielded ₵7,197,640.00; Reprography, ₵387,700.00 and photocopying and others ₵6,027,200.00. The amount of ₵6,421,080.00 earned in 1997 was due to the break down of the e-mail and photocopying services for some part of the year. The e-mail service made ₵3,478,900.00; reprography, ₵408,700.00; and photocopying and the others, ₵2,533,480.00. The year 1998 saw a more encouraging performance. A total revenue of ₵19,251,280.00 was generated from all the services. The break down was as follows: ₵6,731,850.00 was raised from the e-mail service; ₵12,270,230.00 from photocopying and other services; and reprographic services fetched only ₵249,200.00. The account given clearly

shows amateurism and poor book keeping. Until recently, the library had no accounts clerk and the Principal Administrative Assistant was keeping the book. In the first place, it is difficult to delimit the performance of photocopying, overdue fines, and payment for lost books. In the second place, these figures are not the net-income. How much was spent on inputs to make us determine the profit or loss of performance was not possible.

It is evident from the accounts that the e-mail service is the highest single income-earner. Though the amount accruing to photocopying does not stand out, the librarian believes it has the potential to outstrip the e-mail service - if only the machines could work consistently without the frequent breakdowns.

The CD-Rom Unit yields the least income in the library. The service holds quite a potential but its current lowest position has resulted from the fact that the service has not been widely advertised in the university and, therefore, not much patronised. Out of 454 users and potential users of the library interviewed, 272 claimed they had no knowledge of the service in the library and only 182 indicated awareness. The service is also plagued with the inability to up-date its databases as a result of lack of funds.

Fines from penalties did not perform any better. The staff responsible for collecting this money easily give in to users' plea for clemency and in addition, the charges are quite low. An overdue book attracts fifty cedis (¢50.00) per day.

Income generated from the reprographic unit has been disappointingly low. In fact, the two who work in the unit could not raise enough money to pay the salary of one for the year.

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF INCOME

In addition to the services that are generating income for the library currently, there are other potential which the library is making efforts to exploit. A micrographic equipment made up of a reader/printer, a camera filemaster, and a cordel processor supplied and installed in the library in 1989 by courtesy of the EDSAC Programme has been lying fallow since then, allegedly due to

lack of films and chemicals for processing the films. The equipment holds a great potential for income-generation for the library. Records storage and management is a big problem for the university and other institutions such as the banks, the courts, hospitals and many, others. Storage of paper documents take a lot of room space and the deterioration rate is high and rapid, even the retrieval of files from such databases becomes a task. This is where the usefulness of the micrographic equipment comes into play. The records could easily be filmed and stored in a cabinet to save space. And with much publicity and advertisement, this could fetch the library a fortune from within and without the university community.

The library is also seriously considering setting up a consultancy service. This outfit will be responsible for training personnel, stock development, and giving professional guidance to institutional, school and private libraries. The Library, hitherto, had been giving orientation to some freshly employed school and community library attendants in the district ex-gratia.

There used to be a bindery attached to the KNUST Library to take care of strengthening, treatment and general repairs of books for the library. This wing of the library was closed down when the University Printing Press was established. Nevertheless, the need to re-establish the bindery becomes more evident each day. If re-established, it should be able, in course of time, to accept commercial jobs such as binding of dissertations, theses, strengthening of paperbacks, and repair of worn out books. The patronage will be from students, lecturers and other members of the university community, generally.

The Reprographic Unit of the KNUST Library has for years concentrated and devoted its resources to only photographic services; covering mostly university functions and student activities. An area it further needs to exploit is slides and video tape production for teaching and demonstration at lectures and in laboratory researches. This will also serve as the bedrock for the distance education programme that is soon to take off in the University.

The library is also seriously considering generating

further revenue from registration fees from its fresh users. It had all along been free.

DIFFICULTIES

The greatest problem the KNUST Library encounters in its bid to generate supplementary income is the hostility of clients to the whole concept. Users continue to perceive the library as a service unit funded from government sources and, therefore, do not understand, for example, why they should pay commercial rates for a photocopying service in the library. According to them, the library's charge should be token. Defaulters, especially, senior members of the university do not take kindly to being charged for overdue books.

The library also contends with the problem of the lack of experience, and the right attitude on the part of the staff in this new role of income-generation.

The library, in addition, does not have the professional business personnel such as a business manager. This would have given the whole venture a professional touch making it look different and more serious from the traditional collection of fines and penalty exaction. The frequent break-down of the machines, especially, the photocopiers renders the service unreliable and not really profitable.

The greatest single problem, nevertheless, is how to re-orient library users to accept the fact that librarianship has advanced and gone beyond mere custodianship. Service to clients is becoming increasingly expensive in a world of sophistication and advanced technology. Users, particularly, academicians, must accept to pay for costs incurred by libraries on their behalf; costs entirely different from the purchase of books and journals.

CONCLUSION

The KNUST Library does not seem to be performing creditably with its income-generation activities. Turn-over from the activities is unacceptably low, calling for restructuring to plug all administrative loopholes, and to harness and tap all the potential that exists in the library in order to make a real impact in revenue-generation.

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