Actions to Improve Current State of Student Employability Skills Development in Ghana's Public Universities: A Case Study of Geography Departments

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Abstract
The paper explored perspectives of stakeholders in geography education on measures geography departments should take to equip students with employable skills. The study was conducted against the backdrop of a common perception that in Ghana, there appears to be a disparity between what the world of work expects from university graduates and what universities produce. This perceived gap was the thrust of this study. Constructivist Theory, which in the 20th Century was popularised by Jean Piaget and John Dewey formed the theoretical framework for the study. Three objectives were used to guide the study. The case study research design was adopted for this study. Purposive sampling was used to select 36 undergraduate students and 19 support staff. Census sampling was used to select two heads of department; convenience sampling was used to select four instructors who were willing to participate in the study. Snowball sampling was also used to select four employers and 19 graduate employees. Thematic analysis was used in analysing the data. One of the findings was the suggestion by the stakeholders that the geography departments should adopt a more innovative approach to the training of students. Another finding was the need for the geography departments to periodically review their curricula. A major recommendation was that the geography departments should occasionally organise seminars and workshops on innovative instructional practices and social networking among staff and students.

Key words: *geography departments, employability skills, innovative training, curriculum review, and undergraduate students.*

INTRODUCTION

One major reason why students enrol in courses of study at Departments of Geography in the universities is their desire to make themselves more employable by gaining skills and experiences, which will be recognised by potential employers as likely to make them more effective workers (Clark & Wareham, 2000). The days when students entered the university with the aim of studying for intrinsic and 'liberal' reasons are long gone. In those days, the remit of the universities was not essentially, to prepare students for employment, but to provide them with general intellectual abilities, transmit liberal cultural values to a new generation, and create a brigade of critical, highly trained leaders for the future (Clark & Wareham, 2000). Though that is still true today, it is no longer the whole narrative, because of the fast changing economic trends in many an economy.

Ghana happens to be one of the Developing Countries, where there has been a massive establishment of tertiary education institutions offering bouquet of courses whose contribution to national development is nothing for one to be enthused about. One major effect of this unbridled establishment of tertiary education institutions is the churning out of half-baked graduates into an economy where there are no longer enough jobs for such

graduates. Against this recent development of the 'massification' of tertiary institutions and graduate unemployment, it can be contended that providing quality and employability skills development to strengthen the human resource base is the hallmark of all tertiary education institutions the world over, Ghana inclusive (Fletcher, 2000). Geography has been a school subject for more than a century, having evolved from its nascent state of place-based gazetteer of facts and figures into a mature academic discipline providing insightful understanding of the world around us (Clark & Wareham, 2000).

Geography departments, the world over are mandated by law to educate and train their students to acquire knowledge and skills (a) of the earth's physical environments and their relationship; (b) in understanding of the interrelationship of social, economic, political and cultural factors; (c) in the analysis and use of standard statistical methods; (d) in writing carefully reasoned reports and academic essays; (e) in good visualization; (f) in the spatial analysis of socio-economic patterns, problems and forces; (g) in operating computer equipment; (h) in ability to employ land use data communication (i.e. written, oral, visual and electronic); (i) information management; (j) teamwork; (k) personnel management, and (l) problem-solving, etc. (University of Manitoba, 2009; Association of American Geographers [AAG], 2009).

A time has therefore come for the searchlight to be thrown on Geography Departments in Ghana with a view to identifying the prospects that their programmes offer and how they could be made more effective in their attempts to meet the requisite manpower needs of the society. One way of doing this is to undertake a capacity assessment of these departments with a view to identifying their strengths for effective employability skills development. Many research studies (Boateng & Ofori-Sarpong, 2002; Wiafe, 2003; Asafu-Adjaye, 2012; Darkwa & Adu-Gyamfi, 2013; Bawakyillenuo, Akoto, Ahiadeke, Aryeetey & Agbe, 2013; Baah-Boateng & Baffour-Awuah, 2015; Oppong & Sachs, 2015) have been conducted on higher education and employability skills development in Ghana and elsewhere. These researchers did not link their studies on employability skills to the study of geography undergraduate students, but rather graduates of other academic disciplines such as engineering, social science disciplines in general, business, agriculture, information technology, the humanities, etc. This therefore, clearly demonstrates a gap in the depth of research on employability skills development in geography education in Ghana. This research therefore sought to fill the lacuna by assessing the employability skills training given to undergraduate geography students in three public universities in Ghana.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study was to look at the employability skills development efforts of geography departments and recommend actions that would help them create the employable geography graduate. Specifically, the study sought to:

(1) Explore perspectives of respondents on instruction-related measures that must be taken to equip students with employable skills;
(2) Determine social networking activities that facilitate student employability skills development; and
(3) Highlight curriculum review/improvement measures amenable to student employability skills development.

THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE STUDY

The study was guided by the constructivist theory. The concept of constructivism can be traced to the classical antiquity era (i. e. between the early antiquity period of 8th and 7th century BC and the late antiquity period of 4th to 7th AD) (Wikipedia Free Encyclopaedia). It

is a theory of learning that focuses on the construction of meaning; how people make sense of their experience (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgaartner, 2007). Constructivist theory explains and interprets how a learner constructs his/her own knowledge (Learning Theories, 2011). Atherton (2010) adds that in constructivism, the learner is much more actively involved in a joint enterprise with the teacher creating ("constructing") new meanings.

In view of the fact that the constructivist theory places the student at the centre of the learning experience, it behoves the instructor to facilitate and moderate learning, instead of dispensing information (Huang, 2002). Both the instructor and student have a joint responsibility for learning. Instead of passively receiving information from the instructor, students rather develop knowledge internally by digesting the information (Prouix, 2006). According to Henson (2003), constructivist learning can be facilitated through case studies or projects, which closely align with real-life experiences.

When applying constructivism to adult learning, certain principles as espoused by Huang (2002), must be observed. These include (i) Learning should be interactive in the sense that effective learning is not done in isolation, but rather students learn and work collaboratively in their lives, by engaging in group activities such as class discussion, and interaction between learners and instructors; (ii) Through effective collaboration, learners' social and interpersonal skills can be enhanced; additionally, to provide opportunities for reflective responses and collaboration construction of new knowledge, collaborative learning should be provided; (iii) Learning must be facilitated in safe environment where the sharing of ideas and asking questions should be encouraged; (iv) By the use of case studies and internships, authentic learning is provided to students to enact real life experiences; (v) Both the theory of andragogy and constructivism place premium on student-centred learning; and (vi) Constructivist learning creates the opportunity for learning of the highest quality that provides the real world of adult learners.

The constructivist theory has been utilised in a number of school settings. For example, in the School of Global Geography and Development Studies at the University of Sussex in the UK, as part of the instructional strategies, workshops and seminars are organised around small student groups and fieldwork activities to provide real world experience for students. Other activities include laboratory work, which allows students to conduct experiments and do independent, research/project, which allows students to think reflectively and to develop a longer piece of work, thus improving their analytical skills (University of Sussex, 2010). In the University of Sussex, student outcomes are assessed by the use of a variety of student-centred strategies such as essays/projects, fieldwork and laboratory reports, student presentations and designing of posters on thematic issues.

Similarly, in the geography department at the Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom (UK), their curricula or programmes include a range of courses, designed on constructivist principles such as residential fieldwork (compulsory for all geography students), debating modules, individual and group research projects, students assessing their own work and that of their peers. The overarching goal of all these activities is to help students develop disciplinary knowledge and develop rigorous analytical skills, alongside the ability to conduct intellectual critiques that are attractive to a broad range of employers. Other skills include becoming more enthusiastic participants in their learning and above all, to acquire and develop a range of transferable skills (e.g. communication, presentation, teamwork and negotiation, numeracy and data manipulation) demanded by graduate employers (Oxford Brookes University, undated).

METHODOLOGY

This section covered themes such as research design, population, sample, sampling procedures, research instruments and data collection procedures.

Research Design

The research design was a qualitative, descriptive case study. This design is an inquiry-based research process of collecting data to help describe accurately the research problem and to explain the prevailing circumstances and practices of the leadership, instructors and students concerning student employability skills development. The use of the qualitative case study helped to respond to the objectives of the study, which made it possible for readers to appreciate the problem and stakeholders to address the issues raised (Ababio & Dumba, 2014).

Research Institutions

The study was a multiple case study, conducted in three geography departments where geography education had been part of the university curricula since the establishment of those universities. In other words, they are the pioneering geography departments in the country. These departments are Department of Geography and Resource Development at the University of Ghana, the Department of Geography and Regional Planning at the University of Cape Coast, and the Department of Geography and Rural Development at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, located in Accra, Cape Coast and Kumasi, respectively.

Population, Sample and Sampling Procedures

The target population was all level 400 undergraduate students and their instructors. Purposive sampling was used by the investigator to select 36students, two heads of departments and 19 support stafffor the focus group discussion with students and open-ended interview with the other respondents. The selection was based on the investigator's judgement and the purpose of the study, seeking those who have had the experience relating to the phenomenon to be researched (Kruger, 1994). The investigator used convenience sampling to select four instructors, because majority of the instructors decided to complete the self-administered questionnaire, which was the main instrument for data collection. As Kane (1990) explained, convenience sampling is the simplest kind of non-probability sampling in which one simply asks anyone who happens to be around and available; the people in your office or class or everyone who happens to pass by a street corner. Through snowball sampling, four employers and 19 graduate employees were selected. The triangulation of the views of the heads of department, students, support staff, graduate employees and employers, provided diverse information, particularly concerning the types of internal and external resources that impact on student employability skills development.

Research Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Instruments for qualitative data collection which were deployed include focus group discussion protocols and open-ended interview guides. A 14-item interview guide, with particular focus on items 10 and 13, was administered to four instructors. The focus group protocol contained 13 items, with particular emphasis on item 12. A 12-item open-ended interview guide, with emphasis on items 10, 11 and 12 was administered to 19 graduate employees. A-13-item open-ended interview guide, with emphasis on items 7, 8 and 13 was administered to four employers.A11-item open-ended interview guide, with particular focus on item 9, was also administered to two heads of department. The focus group discussion

protocol was administered to 36 students in four different sessions, with each session lasting between 60 and 80 minutes. A 25-item questionnaire with five open-ended items was administered to the support or auxiliary staff. The field survey was conducted in the last quarter of 2015.

Data Analysis

Based on the objectives of the study, the investigator adopted the deductive approach to thematic analysis. The focus group discussion and open-ended interview guide transcripts were coded and used to analyse and generate themes as well as conclusions. The investigator, initially employed open coding, followed by axial and selective coding to arrive at his themes. Nvivo 8 was used to manage the qualitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objectives of the study were used as the focus for forming categories or general themes during the deductive thematic analysis. After the thematic analysis, five main themes emerged, including innovative training, engendering practice-oriented training, improving inter-organisational collaboration, improving intra-organisational collaboration, and curriculum review. These were the actions that the respondents wanted the geography departments to take in addressing the current challenges facing the training of students in employable skills. These themes with their subthemes are presented and discussed in the ensuing sections.

Innovative Training or Instruction

After analysing the data in the transcripts of the stakeholders, three subthemes emerged. These include (i) improving mode of instruction/assessment (ii) promoting entrepreneurial training/lifelong learning, and (iii) organising group work, workshops, seminars and student presentations.

Improving mode of instruction/assessment

To address the issue of improving mode of instruction/assessment, the researcher the analysed views of the students, instructors, graduate employees and heads of department. When the respondents were instructed to suggest what the departments should do to improve the mode of instruction and assessment, one reason the students gave was that the instructors tended to teach for the reproduction of the instructional material, instead of teaching for students' understanding of the material. To the students, this mode of instruction compelled them to learn by rote, otherwise called "chew and pour" manner of learning. To overcome this challenge, a female student suggested that

> *"the instruction should be done in such a way that would probe students' understanding, instead of students being taught in a way that would compel them to reproduce exactly what they have been taught"* (FUSFT).

Other suggestions made to improve the mode of instruction and learning included, instruction being made practice-oriented by the adoption of internet-based teaching/learning methodologies, better laboratories and well-stocked libraries should be procured to enhance student learning and instructors using eclectic instructional approaches, since the world of work does not provide specific jobs for some specific people.

On the issue of improving the mode of assessment, there were varied suggestions from the respondents. These suggestions were that students should be assessed on all the salient aspects of their courses, pen-and-paper assessment should take only 10% of the total

marks with the remaining 90% allocated to practical exercises and student oral presentations should be part of the assessment procedures.

Analysis of the views expressed by the students, the instructors, graduate employees and the heads of department, means that if the geography departments were to equip students with the right employable skills, their mode of instruction should be amended to include eclectic instructional strategies that meet the requirements of varied workplace practices, internet-based instruction, and above all, assessment of student understanding of learning material.

Promoting entrepreneurial training/lifelong learning

To address students' views on this theme, several suggestions on entrepreneurial training were collected. Students suggested that the departments must shift from training students to be employees, but rather employers. In addition, students suggested the department should organise training programmes/seminars on entrepreneurship regularly every year so that they could have the experience of what was in the work environment. Lastly, students opined that there must be entrepreneurial training to make they (students) 'workable' (i. e. employable) after school.

As a clarification to the statement "students should be trained for lifelong learning", one female student suggested that instructors should teach in a way to make students learn for life, and not for grades or examinations. Similarly, a male student claimed that use of real life case studies of various employees' relations would help students to master in advance how to manage various types of employees before they take up management positions in the job environment. In support of the suggestion that students should either be given entrepreneurial training or trained for life, this is what one male student suggested:

> *"In a course like transport geography, students can visit people engaged in traffic light management, interact with them, ask them what and how they were going about their official duties. This real life approach to learning is better than students always sitting under the feet of an instructor to be taught"* (MUSFT).

From the students' perspectives, in order for the geography departments to train students in entrepreneurship, they need to use real life case studies, align classroom instruction with workplace practices, train students to be employers, instead of employees by using hands-on strategies in the form of workshops and seminars. This conclusion is in line with Hafar's assertion that "student apathy, unemployment and poverty do not happen by themselves; they are caused – the more people are given the opportunity to demonstrate who they really are, and how their natural inclination can be identified and trapped with skills to support the larger purposes of life, the more the nation itself progresses" (Daily Graphic, April 25, 2016:38).

Organising group work, workshops, seminars, forumsand student presentation

With regard to the above theme, suggestions were given by the students and support staff. The students suggested that the departments should organise workshops on presentations of research work done on campus; group work should be encouraged since in the work environment, graduates were likely to work in groups or teams; focus group discussion should be enacted in the lecture theatre to equip students with confidence and the ethics and skills needed at the workplace; and employers and the department should organise workshops/seminars for students. The support staff on the other hand suggested the need for the departments to organise regular retreats for both staff and students.

According to the respondents, if they were to acquire workplace practices, then the geography departments together with others stakeholders would have to use various forums, workshops, seminars and group work as part of their instructional strategies. The analyses of the above three subthemes showed that, (i) students could be equipped with employable skills, if the departments adopted eclectic approach to instruction that meets varied workplace practices; (ii) for students to acquire entrepreneurial skills, the departments will have to use real life case studies, adopt hands-on instructional strategies and align classroom instruction with workplace practices; and (iii) for students to acquire key competencies, the departments will have to use constructivist modes of instruction such as workshops, seminars, forums, group work and student presentations (Henson, 2003).

One of the above inferences agrees with Wiafe's (2003) recommendation that students must engage in real or simulated situations from the workplace in their curricula activities. The inference on eclectic instructional strategies also ties in with the competency-based model and human capital theory's postulates that the training of students should involve the use of various modes of instruction to meet different learning styles of students, and the use of new ideas, products, processes and methods. The issue of students acquiring entrepreneurial skills is also in agreement with Palanichamy and Veeramani's (2013) suggestion that one way of increasing students' competitiveness in the labour market is to incorporate industrial attachment into the educational structure. They added that during the internship, students get their first experience on the real working environment, and an understanding on working patterns within an organisation. They suggested further that entrepreneurship modules should be included in the whole curriculum and be delivered by professionals from industry instead of academicians.

As regards the above theme, the study's conclusions and that of the literature tell us that, innovative instruction that results in student employability skills development is multi-dimensional and practice-oriented. To guarantee student acquisition of key competencies, the geography departments will have to deploy their human resources and inter-organisational linkages to engage students in different types of work-based instruction, at the departments and within the premises of employer organisations.

Engendering Practice-oriented Training

After analysing the transcripts of the stakeholders, two subthemes emerged. These are (i) more frequent use of practical approaches to instruction and (ii) using equipment/tools to make instruction more practical.

More frequent use of practical approaches to training students

After the analysis of the data, the students and heads of department gave several suggestions on the above theme. From the perspective of the students, a male student suggested that the training of students should be more field-based since employers are now looking for practice-oriented people. In support of this suggestion, another male student and one head of department suggested that well co-ordinated fieldwork exercises should be regular and should not be conducted only once in a year. To promote more practice-oriented training, a female student also suggested that instructors should avoid "cut and paste" and the theoretical assignments that were assigned to students – students need more practice-oriented assignments. In making instructions more practice-oriented, a male student suggested that about 70% of training should be practice-oriented, with the remaining 30% being classroom-based. In apparent support of this suggestion, another male asserted that

"skill-oriented courses should be introduced right from level 100, through to level 400 – students should not be introduced to the practical aspect of the programmes only when they are in level 400"(MUSFT).

Analysis of the students' suggestions on practical approaches to instruction reveals that the students would prefer that the geography departments embark more on practice-oriented training aligned with workplace practices, skill-oriented training, and introduce more practical courses which will focus more on mini projects.

Using tools/IT equipment/facilities to make instruction morepractical/relevant

After the analysis of the data on the above theme, the views of students, support staff, and instructors were synthesised. The suggestions of the students included instructors using videos and pictures to help students understand the instruction better, and students being given the opportunity to know and handle some of the IT software tools, which would make them grasp the practical aspect of their training. In support of these suggestions, a support staff also suggested the need for the departments to get a studio and a laboratory where students could be trained, especially on how to draw and interpret maps. Similarly, two instructors suggested the need for all classrooms to be fitted with desktop computers and overhead projectors and in addition, more classrooms being built to make class size manageable.

Analysis of the views given by the students and a support staff, shows that the respondents would prefer instruction that makes use of multi-media resources and IT-based strategies aimed to make students get a better understanding of the instruction. From the analysis of these two issues, the researcher inferred that the geography departments could train students in employable skills if they adopted practice-oriented instruction aligned with workplace practices and skill-oriented training. The second inference was that the use of multi-media instructional resources and IT-based strategies would engender students' understanding of instruction, and enhance their employability skills acquisition prospects.

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The above inferences have support from literature. The constructivist theory postulates that the training of students should emphasise hands-on assignments, experiments, simulations and use of equipment by the students. Evans et al.'s (2009) study recommended the adoption of practical curricula, and improvement in the use of information, communication and technology (ICT) facilities.

Improving Inter-organisational Linkages

After analysing this theme, four subthemes emerged. These are (i) inter-industry and academia collaboration or inter-geography department collaboration, (ii) industrial attachments/student internships, (iii) strengthening professional association collaboration, and (iv) making external collaboration more transparent.

After the analysis of the data on inter-industry and academia collaboration, the various perspectives of the students, instructors, support staff and graduate employees were synthesised. Suggestions offered by the students included (a) academic departments getting in

touch with what was happening in the corporate world in order to update students on the current practices in the corporate world; and (b) professionals from the corporate world informing academic departments of the changes that they foresaw were likely to happen in their operations and accordingly must inform academic departments to alter their instructional strategies to align with the expected changes. One support staff also suggested the need for the departments to engage regularly with all stakeholders within and outside the departments. In apparent support of this assertion, an instructor also suggested the need for the departments to involve industry and government agencies through the sharing of problems that could become basis for the design of students' projects and the solutions found to such problems would equip students with employable skills. To sum up the above views, the graduate employees also opined the need for employers and the departments organising regular seminars, workshops and internship programmes for students.

From the various suggestions given by the respondents on how to promote academia-industry collaboration, geography departments will have to explore more opportunities where such collaborations will

(a) .... help update students on current workplace practices;

(b) ...afford the departments the opportunity to alter their instructional strategies to be aligned to projected trends in workplace practices; and

(c) ...promote student internship programmes, aimed to give students practical field training.

To address the issue of promoting industrial attachments/student internships as part of training students in employable skills, the perspectives of students, instructors and graduate employees were synthesised. From the perspective of students, there should be more industrial attachment programmes. To be more specific, a female student suggested the need for student internship programmes being limited to year 2 and 3 since at those levels students would have had enough knowledge about the geography programmes. In apparent support of the submissions made by the students, a graduate employee also suggested the need for students to embark on more industrial attachment programmes on a regular basis. Lastly, an instructor also suggested the formalisation of internship programmes with public and private sector organisations.

From the analysis of the students' views, it appears that student internship is one key component of academia-industry collaboration, which can take different forms such as it becoming a compulsory course, its integration in the academic curricula and its orientation towards workplace practices.

To address the issue of strengthening professional associations' collaboration the perspectives of a student and two instructors were synthesised. The student suggested the need for the various geography departments in the country to focus on bringing together all geography teachers for a conference twice or thrice a year, instead of the current once a year meeting organised by the Ghana Geographers' Association and the Ghana Geography Teachers' Association. The other two instructors similarly, also suggested geography departments' collaboration with professional bodies to help streamline geography programmes and students being encouraged to join professional associations as student members.

The above view expressed by the student and two instructors emphasise the need for collaboration among all shades of geography teachers to form some sort of professional learning communities across the country. Such associations will create a forum for sharing ideas, expertise, networks and experiences. On the other hand, analysis of the students and instructors' perspectives in the survey questionnaire showed that most of the employability skills domains, with the exception of commercial awareness domain, had moderate level of development. The low rating of the commercial awareness domain by the students in

particular, is an antithesis to student employability skills development as shown in the literature.

The above three findings from the qualitative analysis are supported by literature. The competency-based model argues that to train students to acquire key competencies, experiential training ought to be prioritised over academic or grammar-type training. This statement is in concurrence with the human capital theory, which also argues that the training of students should include workplace production processes and practices. Lastly, the systems theory lends its support to experiential instruction in schools by postulating that, the throughput variables in an education system should include hands-on instructional activities (Inter- University Quality Assurance Committee, n. d.).

Some empirical studies have also shown the relevance of inter-organisational linkages to the training of students. Wiafe (2003) suggested that students should be introduced to real or simulated workplace practices, and instructors with industrial experience co-opted to spearhead such an initiative. In the same vein, Evans et al. (2000), also suggest the training of instructors in employment-related skills and the development of public-private partnerships in the training of students.

Furthermore, to promote university-industry linkages, Dr. Samuel Ankrah, the Chief Executive Officer of GamAnk Group, suggested that managers and corporate executives should be invited to schools to serve as guest instructors. Such an initiative is to shape learning and offer practical insights about workplace practices (Daily Graphic, May 11, 2016). Lastly, Palanichemy and Veeramani (2013) recommend the use of industrial work placement programmes by training institutions. They contend that, some employers prefer to recruit graduates with previous experience in industrial placements, since they have had the opportunity to evaluate them up in the workplace and know much more about their suitability for specific jobs, than any degree transcript could tell them. In other words, such employers place much premium on what the competency-based model refers to as task-based training.

From the discussions on the study's findings and the existing literature, it can be concluded that improving inter-organisational linkage capacity in the geography departments is a sine qua non for student employability skills development. This conclusion is premised on two reasons:

(i) Universities who engage in University-industry linkages accrue certain benefits, which include student work placements, collaboration in course design and assessment, setting academic/professional standards, corporate executives' involvement in or contribution to teaching or workshops, and release of staff for workforce development activities (Hogarth et al. 2007).

(ii) The corporate world, on the other hand, also benefits from such collaborations by recruiting graduates who could challenge the status quo in their organisations, assimilate issues quicker, use divergent perspectives (though mostly theoretical) in addressing issues, problem-solvers and innovative (they bring in new ideas and energy), and use their initiative by acting without waiting for instructions (Hogarth et al. , 2007).

Other benefits accruing to corporate entities include universities designing continuous professional development and lifelong learning courses for their employees, universities serving as suppliers of research and development, and offering expert scientific assistance to companies.

Improving Intra-organisational Collaboration

After analysing this theme, two subthemes emerged. These are (i) Staff-student collaboration and (ii) Staff-staff collaboration. These sub-themes are in the ensuing paragraphs.

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The discussion of staff-student collaboration is based on a synthesis of various perspectives by three students and a support staff. From the students' perspective, the students suggested (a) the need for instructors to desist from giving unannounced quizzes but must do well to give enough notice to students as to the time and the type of assignments they would be given; and (b) instructors must create a platform of equal opportunity so that every student does at least an oral presentation before leaving school and lastly, instructors must have more time for students. On the part of the instructors, they suggested the need for instructors being open and less intimidating so students could understand their courses better and staff members should have regular contacts with students.

To address the issue of the staff- staff collaboration, the perspective of one student was synthesised. This student suggested the need for student presentations being maintained and improved upon; in addition, he added that instructors should collaborate with one another to ensure effective teaching of the practical aspects of the course.

The above views expressed by the students on the need for more intra-departmental collaboration, show that the students were not much enthused by the current level of intra-departmental collaboration, and that something needed to be done to help boost joint activities in the training of students. From the qualitative analysis, the current investigator infers the weak state of intra-organisational collaboration in the geography departments and suggests the need for more collaborative activities in the departments to aid the training of students in key competencies.The students' worldview on this issue was probably the outcome of the employable skills that they had acquired through intra-organisational collaboration. On the other hand, there is the possibility that the instructors might have been engaged in intra-organisational activities, but were unable to transfer their knowledge and experience in commercial awareness to their students. This could stem from a communication gap between the staff and students. Other probable reasons for improving intra-organisational collaboration are in the existing literature.

The study's findings are, elucidated further by the existing literature. The competency model postulates that training institutions should engender intra-unit collaborative discussions, especially between staff and students, if the latter are to acquire key competencies. Similarly, the student involvement theory contends that increased student participation in extra-curricular activities and interaction with staff, increases their academic learning time, thereby providing them the opportunity to gain these key skills. Lastly, the constructivist theory recommends group work and the use of peers as resources (i.e. collaborative learning), if students are to acquire key competencies.

Evidences from empirical studies are also in concurrence with the above theoretical statements. Newmann et al.'s (2000) study showed that inter-staff collaboration, when encouraged in schools brings about sharing of clear goals by the staff, engaging in joint professional inquiry to address challenges faced by the staff, and it provides opportunities for staff to influence school policies. On the contrary, Beaver and Weibaum (2012), argue that where inter-staff collaboration is weak, for example, when there is little communication and animosity among factions of the staff, it becomes extremely difficult for the staff to build coordinated and integrated curriculum.

Furthermore, partnership between the staff and students brings enormous benefits to academic departments. For example, at the Birmingham City University in the UK, the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) in the 2010/2011academic year, facilitated large scale 'Development Days' based around faculties and course teams,

including students in those teams. The aim of these development days was to ensure partnership in the design, delivery and philosophy of courses. The plenary sessions revealed that, though the staff thought they had done enough to embed employability issues in their courses, the students felt the staff could have done more (Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac & Lawton, 2006).

A scrutiny of the study's findings and the existing literature tells us that intra-organisational collaboration is a key contributor to student employability skills development. This conclusion is on the assertion that in situations where educational institutions put much premium on collaborative activities, students tend to benefit by way of tapping into the insights, resources, experiences, expertise and ideas of the staff and their peers. On the contrary, where intra-organisational collaboration is weak, attaining institutional goals becomes a mirage, thus denying students a forum for addressing their concerns and learning needs.

Curriculum/Programme Review or Improvement

Under this theme, the researcher analysed the respondents' perspectives on why there was the need for the geography departments to review their curricula to make them more inclined towards the development of employability skills. After the analysis, six subthemes emerged. These were

(a) Need for final year students to specialise only in geography;
(ii) Need for final year students to have a combined major (majoring in geography and one other social science subject);
(iii) Aligning courses with one another;
(iv) Need for an increase in instructional time;
(v) Deletion of irrelevant courses; and
(vi) The taught curriculum should be more industry/career-oriented.

To address the issue of need for final year students specialising only in specific areas in geography, the views of students were synthesised. A female student suggested that the geography programme should be a single major instead of the combined major that they were reading. To the student, specialisation in only geography would enable he/she more likely to make him/her ready for the job market, instead of reading two disciplines. Another female student also suggested that in the 3rd year, the major subject areas should be just one and not two and in the final year, students should focus on just one major and not the lot that they do now. In support of the views of the female students, a male student suggested the need for final year students not being allowed to read minor courses in other disciplines, as such an arrangement would make the students have less time to learn and understand geography in affirmation of the student involvement theory.

The above perspective of the students imply that students, especially 3rd and final year students should specialise in only one major - that is, geography. This will make students spend more time learning geography or increase their academic learning time to acquire geographic literacy (student involvement theory); that such a specialisation is likely to equip students with work-based skills required at geography-related occupations.

Contrary to the above thesis on the need for final year students to specialise only in geography, a contrary school of thought emerged after the analysis of the qualitative data. To address this issue, various perspectives of the students were synthesised. One male student, contrary to the geography major thesis, rather supported the current situation where students major in geography and one other subject area, which in a way could brighten their prospects of getting jobs related to geography and other subjects. Another male student suggested that it was appropriate to have knowledge from varied fields so one can decide later where to

specialise. A female student disagreed with the male course mate who said that other courses had practical aspects and geography didn't have it, hence the need to specialize from the onset. She rather thought majoring in two subject areas would give students many job options.

Concerning the above student perspectives, their suggestion that students specialise in two major subject areas could be deemed to mean (a) the need to broaden the horizon of geography graduates' job prospects and (b) creating opportunities for students to have a brighter chance of mastering the learning outcomes in both geography and non-geography courses. It could also imply that the combined honours would enhance their prospects of getting employment in either geography-orientated occupations or other social science-related occupations after graduation. This claim is in line with an assertion made by Professor Jane Naana Opoku Agyeman, Ghana's Minister for Education, who at the 17th Congregation of the University for Development Studies, bemoaned the overspecialisation at the undergraduate level, and stressed that "the whole thing about undergraduate studies is to have options (Daily Graphic, November 14, 2016:61).

Addressing the issue of aligning courses with one another, the suggestion made by a female student was synthesised. To the student, most of their courses were too broad and theoretical. She suggested the need for the courses to be structured in such a way that there was some form of coherence among them – that is, from level 100, one course should serve as a pre-requisite for another course so that there would be some sort of alignment in content structure. She suggested further that the geography department should avoid the mounting of courses that were discrete in orientation, which may not help students to do any specialisation. She again, suggested that their instructors should help students in the selection of courses, instead of students being influenced by what their peers choose.

The views expressed by this female student could mean that the curricula of her department consisted of some discrete courses, whose duration was short, say one semester or year, which did not provide the students with a longer period to grasp key geographic concepts or principles.This type of curriculum structure does not train students to get a holistic perspective of their programmes of study, and it would therefore be more difficult for them to acquire the requisite skills.

To address the issue of the need for an increase in instructional time/duration of courses, the views of a female and a male student were synthesised. The female student suggested that some of their courses required a lot of time like GIS and Remote Sensing since their contents were very broad hence, more instructional time should be allotted to these courses. A male student on the other hand, asserted that the contents of some courses were short in nature; hence it would be difficult for geography graduates to compete with people who had studied the similar courses for over a year or more

The above concerns by these two students mean that by the nature of certain courses, the instructional time for training students to attain learning outcomes should be increased if students were to acquire these learning outcomes.

The last issue addressed in this section is the suggestion on the deletion of irrelevant courses. To address this issue, one male student suggested that some of the courses were not necessary, and they (students) thought the courses should be deleted from the curriculum.

The implication of this statement by this male student is that there are some courses mounted by the geography departments that do not contribute meaningfully to their training. In other words, they are calling for such courses to be replaced with more outward-looking courses, which are likely to make them more competitive in the job market.

On the suggestion that geography departments should make the taught curriculum more industry/career-oriented, the views of the students and revealed that the respondents

would want the departments to align their courses with workplace happenings, that students should be trained in specific issues and courses that should be related to one's future career and introduction of society-related courses that would enable students to engage with people in the society.

The major concerns of these respondents were making the geography programmes more specific, which may call for specialisation in certain aspects of geography. Another concern was that the training should have practical components, aligned with workplace practices. It also means that the curricula should be designed to address issues that geography-related occupations are currently dealing with or are likely to encounter in the future – students should be trained in anticipation of such development.

The foregoing inferences are in alignment with the existing literature. Newmann et al. (2000) observed that in schools where strong intra-organisation collaboration (i.e. professional learning communities) existed, programme alignment or coherence was strongly emphasised. This coherence was evident in instructional philosophy, curriculum materials, teaching and assessment in certain subjects. The issue of the taught curriculum being made more career-oriented was addressed by Wiafe (2003) who recommended that students should be trained to see the relevance of the courses that they were studying linked to workplace programmes and activities. Similarly, in addressing the issue of curriculum relevance, Evans et al. (2009) recommended that educational institutions should design programmes that meet stakeholders' needs.

On the deletion of certain irrelevant courses, Akinyemi et al. (2012) recommended that courses that are not marketable should be phased out, and emphasis rather placed on market-driven courses. On the issue of students specialising in only geography courses in the final year or courses in two social science subjects, including geography, a synthesis of the literature shows that geography students should not only be trained in subject-specific skills, but also be versatile in transferable skills (Kneale, 2014; Talbot, 2000; IGU, 1992; University of Manitoba, 2009; UK QAA, 2014; German Geographical Society, 2014).

This study's finding on the need for increased instructional time is also in tandem with the student involvement theory, which posits that the number of hours students spend on their books determines their level of academic achievement. In other words, the more time students spend listening to lectures, reading, discussing and engaging in hands-on activities, the more it impacts positively on their acquisition of geographic literacy. In the same vein, Haffar (2016) suggests that, one way of increasing student academic learning time is for their instructors to upload their course materials on a designated site on the internet, where students could have easy access, any time, any day and anywhere (Daily Graphic, Jan., 25, 2016:38). In other words, what is implied here is that in this current digital age, instruction need not always be a face-to-face interaction between the instructor and students, but that other modern modes of instructional approaches such as on-line interaction could also be used.

From this study's findings and evidence from the literature, it can be concluded that a curriculum review or improvement is necessary, if geography students are to be trained to acquire employable skills. This conclusion is based on a synthesis of the study's findings and the literature, which showed that (i) there is the need to review the curricula to align with workplace requirements; (ii) students should be trained to acquire both subject-specific skills and generic skills, (iii) bringing more coherence into course design and implementation, (iv) replacement of courses with market-driven ones to enhance the employability prospects of geography graduates.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to examine the actions that the geography departments must take to address the capacity challenges that they are facing. The finding was that, for the geography departments to overcome their capacity challenges in the training of students, they need to create an environment, which called for innovation, review of archaic policies and practices, and above all, enhanced collaborative activities. The study's finding is consistent with existing literature, which stress the need for educational institutions to mobilise all kinds of networking resources, if they have to give their students adequate training in employable skills (competency model, systems theory, Wiafe, 2003; Bawakyillenuo et al., 2013; Haffar, Jan., 2016). From the study's finding and literature, it can be concluded that the geography departments have a number of proactive measures that they will have to take in order to overcome the challenges besetting the training of students in employable skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations:

1. There is the need for the geography departments to periodically, organise seminars and workshops on instructional practices and good human relations for both staff and students.
2. The need to have more access to modern equipment calls for a policy that makes it professionally unacceptable for instructors to teach without the use of electronic devices such as GPS, computers and projectors. To guarantee the success of such a policy, the geography departments must endeavour to procure these IT and geospatial devices, so that every instructor will have access to them at any point in time.
3. Since the study's findings showed limitations in the geography curricula with regard to employability, there is therefore, the need for a policy which calls for intermittent review and re-structuring of courses that current happenings in the world of work have exposed to be defunct.
4. In view of limited inter-organisational collaborations, it is recommended that a policy is enacted by all the three geography departments on how best they could take advantage of opportunities in both corporate and academic institutions.
5. A key element of intra-organisational collaboration, which needs to be strengthened is staff-student relations; it is recommended that instructors should operate an open door policy for their students to have access to their stock of knowledge and expertise anytime and anywhere.

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APPENDIX A

Codes for Participants

For the qualitative data collection, the researcher collected data from four focus group discussions, open-ended questions protocol administered to four instructors, four employers, 19 support staff and 19 geography graduate employees.

In order to make access to the six different transcripts used to display the analysed data from the field survey more transparent, the researcher adopted the following codes:

(a) HDQT – Heads of Department Open-ended Questions Transcript
(b) ASQT - Academic Staff Open-ended Questions Transcript
(c) SSQT - Support Staff Open-ended Questions Transcript
(d) USFT - Undergraduate Students' Focus Group Discussion Transcript
(e) GGQT - Geography Graduates Open-ended Questions Transcript
(f) EGQT – Employers of Geography Graduates Open-ended Questions Transcript
(g) OT - Observation Guide Transcript
(h) M - Male (i) F – Female