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Graduate unemployment in Ghana: possible case of poor response of university programs to the demands of the job market.

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CHAPTER ONE – Introduction to the study

1.1 Background to the study

Formal education in Ghana started with the arrival of the missionaries to the Gold Coast in the 18th century. In addition to the building of churches, they built schools, some of which were used to train children in teaching, evangelism, agriculture, vocational and technical skills to meet the social needs of the community. With time, the educational emphasis was shifted to producing manpower for clerical jobs to serve the colonial administration's personnel requirements.

In this context, grammar type secondary education was given prominence at the expense of technical and vocational education during the colonial era. By this prioritization, the best performers in pre-secondary institutions were attracted into the grammar-type secondary schools. Students who were found to be academically weak were directed to enter vocational and technical institutions or trade centres. This was the type of educational system Ghana, like many other countries which emerged from colonisation, inherited on the attainment of independence.

This one-sided prioritization of education remained unchanged even long after independence, though manpower requirements have drastically changed over the years. This inadvertently led to a university admission culture which gave prominence to students who offered the so-called ‘academic programmes’ and underrated applicants who offered technical, vocational and agricultural subjects at the secondary school level and who aspired to enter the university to pursue these courses at the degree level.

The universities even prefer to offer admission for their technical, vocational and agricultural courses to applicants who had done the pure sciences rather than those who offered these subjects at the senior high school. This trend was borne out of the persistent traditional belief that vocational and technical courses were for the academically (mentally) less endowed students.

Preference for pure science students for the technical, vocational and agricultural courses in the universities is indeed not surprising since the focus of these courses in the universities is more inclined to theory. No doubt there is a school of thought that believes that the universities of today have generally been too theoretical in the approach to their courses and have virtually
ignored to give any training to their students in innovation and entrepreneurship to the extent that students who graduates from the universities are not in any way equipped for self-employment. The graduates of the universities have all tended to become job seekers rather than job creators. Most of the time, the types of job which they consider appropriate for their status are not available, hence the large pool of unemployed graduates in the country.

The above illustrated national preference for academic education as opposed to Vocational and Technical Education was explained by the Philips Foster Vocational Education Fallacy which contend that Ghanaians “viewed academic education as the gateway for their children to gain access to prestigious professions” (Foster, 1965 and 1979) (World Bank, 1989).

2.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Stakeholders in educational provision generally see education as an investment. Parents ignore all the opportunity costs in educating their children and sacrifice their scarce resources to have their children educated in the hope that education will open the gates of employment into attractive jobs to them. Moreover, it is believed that the higher one climbs the education ladder, the easier it is to secure an attractive job. Yet there are thousands of young university graduates roaming the streets and various offices in the urban centers in search of seemingly unavailable jobs. To such people, education has failed its function of empowering them to be employable. This is the essence of this study to uncover the underlying factors for the high rate of university graduate unemployment and proffer solutions to the problem.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is designed to provide answers to the following research questions:

1) What are the critical human resource needs of the Ghanaian economy?
2) What are the human resource development policies and practices of the various universities?

3) What are the factors responsible for graduate unemployment in Ghana?

4) How do key employers perceive the relevance of the knowledge and skills base of the university graduates to their human resource requirements?

5) What level of collaboration exists between the universities and the job market?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Rampant unemployment of school leavers, especially university graduates, is not only a disincentive to schooling but could also be a recipe for social unrest if not immediately checked. Unemployment leads to frustrations which could find manifestation in different unfavourable forms. There is a saying that the devil finds work for the idle hands. This country enjoys some level of peace and stability which needs to be guarded very jealously.

The study provides insights into the phenomenon of graduate unemployment in Ghana and suggestions for resolving the challenges. It also generates new ideas for developing interventions to link education, industry and the employment sectors of the country’s development policy agenda.

CHAPTER TWO – THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

2.1 Introduction
Concepts and theories enable researchers organize, analyze and interpret data. They enhance the ability of a researcher to identify relationship(s) between one issue and another. Theories therefore constitute tools for reflection and also guide the collection, analysis and interpretation of research data. The previous chapter dealt with the background of the study together with the statement of the problem and the research questions. In this chapter, the concepts underlying the study are discussed.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The study is based on Education and Economic Development Theory. According to Wolman and Spitzley,(1996). “Economic development is defined as an improvement in the lives of people, manifested by positive changes in the level and distribution of employment

Education and Economic development theory suggests that education equips a person with knowledge, skills and attitudes (KAS) or competences. The person and the competences are referred to as human capital. Competences are used for work resulting in economic development of the individual and his or her area of residence. For competences to be used appropriately, they must match the tasks included in a job. If the competences do not match the tasks in a particular job, the learner cannot do that job.

The relationship between education, human capital and employment is shown in the model in figure 1.
The model suggests that, in order for competences achieved from education to match a job, first, the job and the skills required for performing tasks in the job must be identified (Job Titles and Job descriptions). Second, the curriculum content must embody the skills required for doing the job. Thirdly, the context of implementing the curriculum must expose the learners to the realities in the performance of tasks in the job. Any deviation from the above processes may result in mismatches between skills required for entry into the particular job or employment and the actual needs of the job markets. According to Smith (1986), “economic development will rise or fall on the success of the human capital strategy”.

The relationship between education and economic development is not linear. A. de Grauwe, (2008) states that “the path from school to work has become much complex and difficult to control.” Current research seem to suggests that “there seems to be a lack of systematic relationship between education and development”, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (A. de Grauwe, 2008). Recent research information on the role of human capital in economic development indicates that “it is not that education does not contribute to development, but rather that it only does so under certain circumstances” including the content and context of education.

While recognizing science education as an important content factor, other content factors such as life skills education - HIV/AIDS prevention, human rights and violence prevention were noted. In the context of education, the following factors as culled from de Grauwe, (2008) explain the unpredictable pathway from school to work among lower social classes:

Changes in the job market: the straightforward path which used to allow graduates to take up steady jobs immediately on graduation, no longer exists. Thus employment opportunities in
recent times are largely determined by the acquisition of the requisite skills demanded by the job market.

In stressing the importance of education as a human capital strategy for economic development, Human Rights-Based Approach to programming in Education (HRBAPE) is adopted to ensure equity and holistic development of the individual. Three levels of the right to education have been identified; namely ‘Rights to education (Access), Rights within education (Quality) and Rights through Education (Achievement, Outcomes and Employment) (UNICEF, 2008).

Clearly, Education is the major tool for human capital development (Wharton (1971). Human capital is one of the most important resources for a country because it is able to change and utilize other resources for development. Commenting on the need for gender equality in education, Klasen (2000) says: ‘after all, productivity suffers if half the population is under-educated, in poor health or excluded from the labour market as cited in Seymour and Pincus (2008).

The consequences of youth unemployment as outlined by Hobbs in the Caribbean includes loss of human capital, social inequality, deviant behaviour and economic costs, (Hobbs, 2008, p.8). In the context of this study, more explanation is sought through literature review to explain the relationships between the three factors in the graduate unemployment discourse as follows.

2.3 Skills for the 21st Century

From the international perspective, the skills to prepare students for the 21st Century have been classified into four components as culled from Swarts (2009): 

**i. Digital-Age Literacy:**
• Basic Scientific, Economic and Technological Literacies;
• Visual and Information Literacies and
• Multicultural Literacy and Global Awareness.

ii. Inventive Thinking

• Adaptability, Managing and Complexity;
• Self-Direction, Curiosity and Creativity and
• Risk Taking, High Order thinking and Sound Reasoning.

iii. Effective Communication

• Training, Collaboration and Interpersonal Skills;
• Personal, Social and Civic Responsibility and
• Interactive Communication.

iv. High Productivity

➢ Prioritising, Planning and Managing for Results,
➢ Effective Use of Real-World Tools,
➢ Ability to Produce Relevant and High Quality Products.

2.4 National Manpower Needs

The literature seems to suggest that appropriate national human capital specificity does not come by chance but through rigorous research and documentation of labour market information, (Marger and Beach Jnr.) 1967) and (Maxim Poletaev and Chris Robinson, 2008).

In some countries particularly in the US, critical workforce skills that are required for moving the economy forward have been identified and documented in the Dictionary Of Occupational Titles (DOT). The Dictionary Of Occupational Titles was the creation of the U.S. Employment Service, which used its thousands of occupational definitions to match job seekers to jobs from 1939 to the late 1990s. The Dictionary Of Occupational Titles contained job titles, job descriptions and skills of all the jobs done in the US economy. Job titles were coined in ways to avoid gender stereotyping, (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DOT).

The DOT served as a mirror for educational institutions in developing curricula to ensure that graduates from the education system meet the demands of the jobs they were likely to engage in (Curtis and Crunkilton 1993, Goodgame 1989, William 1982 and Davies 1973). The DOT provided generic skills for every job in America.
In curriculum development, information from the DOT was used as a frame and community labour market information was sought to update information from the DOT in making training programmes meet current job market expectations, William 1982).

In 1991, the DOT was revised and it appeared at a time that there was growing “recognition of the need for lifetime learning, when rapid technological change started to make the jobs of current workers more complex than they were a few years ago, and when timely and accurate labor market information became an increasingly important component of personal and corporate decision-making.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dictionary_of_Occupational_Titles).

The complexity of current job market system in the era of ICT made the use of DOT impracticable. However, the DOT was modified into Career Information Networks (O*NET). It provides high-quality, current labour market information covering nearly 100 percent of the workforce in the US. It is a document of consideration for anyone doing career and education research, writing resumes, preparing for interview, and for human resource developers, Research and Development persons, career counselors, school counselors, vocational rehabilitation specialists, students, people seeking first, new or better jobs and persons who want to choose or change jobs (http://www.onetcenter.org/).

It might be interesting to find out the preparations made in Ghana in terms of identifying critical jobs and skills for the development of the economy.

Examining the National Development Plan, specifically, the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II) 2006 – 2009. the following gaps were identified in the various levels of the education ladder.

On Basic Education, the document states; the policy gaps in this sector that need to be addressed include: inadequate progress in school enrolments, persistent geographical and gender disparities in access to education, less than satisfactory quality of education; inadequate technical and vocational skills and ICT training.

On the Second Cycle Education sector, the GPRSII states: the policy-related issues in this sector are: equitable distribution of well-equipped secondary schools; well-trained and motivated teachers; and inability to absorb the majority of pupils who complete the compulsory basic education programme.
On the Tertiary Education sector, the document states: the critical policy issues relate to: inadequate physical infrastructure to absorb the growing number of young adults who seek admission to tertiary institutions and insufficient numbers of qualified and well motivated academic staff.

Clearly, the human capital development policy in support of the GPRS II does not seem to identify types of skills required by in-school youth for implementing the programme which targets 2015 as the year in which Ghana will achieve a Middle Income Development status. Instead, the document identified training for skilled labour for out-of school youth but does not specify any skills. Being the national policy dealing with poverty reduction through education, training and employment generation, the GPRS II should have spelled out the categories of competences /skills required to reduce poverty among youth for educational institutions to explore in training programme development and implementation. However, the goal of the National Development Policy on human resource development is presented in chapter four of this report.

Critical skills required by the workforce in Ghana were identified by the Ghana Employers Association (GEA 2006). The skills are presented in Chapter four of the report.

Again, the GEA identified and allocated specific roles to Government, Industry and Training Institutions in critical skills development as follows:

Government to:

i. ensure that the ill-equipped first and second cycle schools in the country receive the requisite attention to be able to prepare students adequately for tertiary education;

ii. provide sufficient resources for public training institutions to acquire modern facilities to enhance quality training of students to meet the needs of industry;

iii. facilitate the development of labour market information system, national skills and manpower plan ;

iv. develop a long term strategy to provide incentives to encourage and promote the growth and productivity of enterprises to facilitate industrial attachment/internships;

v. develop and implement appropriate remuneration and other motivational strategies to assist training institutions, especially universities and polytechnics, to attract and retain young lecturers with a view to addressing the ageing faculty problem.

Industry and Training Institutions in Partnerships to:

i. develop a demand-driven curriculum that will produce graduates with skills suitable for industry;
ii. develop a competency based occupational scheme that will be used by training institutions to review their curricula from time to time;

iii. encourage lecturers in training institutions to work in industry from time to time to enable them blend theory and practice in the training of students;

iv. set up committee for the development and implementation of a comprehensive and integrated industrial attachment/internship program for students in training;

v. encourage industry to set up chairs in training institutions to serve as a platform for sharing ideas and the promotion of innovations and creativity;

vi. make it possible for competent and experience practitioners in industry to serve as adjunct lecturers in training institutions and also serve on subject panels and assessment bodies (GEA, 2006).

It needs be said however that although some of the specific human capital skills for moving Ghana’s economy forward have been identified by the Ghana Employers Association, it is not clear how these skills were identified and the extent to which Tertiary Educational Institutions are working along these lines to achieve the required human capital is yet to be seen.

Roles of Higher Education Institutions in Economic Development

According to Peggy et al (1996) “Higher education institutions have an important contribution to make to the economic vitality of their communities, regions, and states. In many regions of the country they have become the cornerstones of state and local economic development.” Peggy and others explained how higher educational institutions address the human capital needs of their communities and states in America as follows:

*Colleges and universities have traditionally had three major goals. They teach, conduct research, and provide service to the community. Institutions are able to draw upon these historical roles as they become more involved with economic development. Higher education institutions can contribute to economic development in a variety of ways (SRI International, 1986; American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 1988; MacGillivray & Richmond, 1996). They are able to (1) apply their teaching capabilities to human capital development, (2) use their research expertise for technological development, (3) provide service to the larger community via policy development, and (4) serve entrepreneurs by providing business development expertise (Peggy et al. 1996) p.2).*

The literature suggests that Skill Development Plans of Tertiary Education, implementation strategies and practices are critical in developing the appropriate calibre of human capital for a country. Gardner (2005) argued that for Tertiary Education to deal with the human capital needs of a country appropriately there is a flexibility challenge that must be overcome between the production of ‘Generalist, Versatilist and Specialist’ since these determine the depth of skill development. The key stakeholders in developing and implementing effective human capital development plans are students, Faculty members, Institution management and Industry. These stakeholders require a great deal of interaction to ensure programme success (R Prasad@infosys.com). Some of the medium of interactions indicated include: Institutional Counsel Meetings, Faculty Development Programmes, Technical Seminars, Student Projects, Question Bank Sabbaticals in Industry, Industry Visits, etc.
Peggy and others indicated that in the US for instance, the human capital strategy for economic development requires higher institutions to provide students with skills as well as with training on how to learn. The human capital development strategies recommended for postsecondary institutions as culled from Peggy et al (1996) among others are:

- revising curricula to meet 21st Century needs;
- offering remedial education for functionally illiterate adults and English language training to recent immigrants who cannot effectively join the workforce because of deficiencies in basic reading and writing skills;
- retraining and "reskilling" workers who are displaced by shifts from manufacturing and agriculture to service and knowledge-based sectors;
- renewing and updating professionals and managers in current and emerging technological advances; and
- developing entrepreneurial skills in individuals so they will be able to make jobs as well as take jobs (Peggy et al (1996) (p. 2).

Other modes in which Higher Education institutions contribute to employment generation as discussed by Peggy et al (1996) include:

**Technology Development and Transfer** using basic and applied research - producing new knowledge that can result in new products, processes, and services; advanced technology development - providing a continuum of technological activities that range from long-term basic research to immediate applications; and technology transfer to business and industry - purposefully helping firms to make use of technology developed within the institution.

**Economic Analysis and Policy Development**: through the conduct of economic research and analysis for government, economic development agencies, and corporations; helping organizations develop the capacity to engage in strategic planning; providing technical assistance to business and government; and assisting government officials and community leaders in developing the analytical skills to participate more effectively in economic development.

**Business Development**: by providing technical assistance on business management, financial management, and human resources development; operation of Small Business Development Centers (government-funded entities) designed to stimulate business formation and contribute to success; programs that target certain segments of the population, such as the minority, family, and women-owned businesses; and incubation services that provide new businesses with rental space, clerical support, and other business support.
Barriers to Higher Education Involvement in Economic Development

Peggy et al (1996) also identified barriers which can prevent the involvement of Higher Education institutions in economic development. The barriers pertain to resource allocation, faculty perceptions, organizational factors, and incompatibility between institution and community needs and limited curricular offerings. Exclusion from informal networks (social contacts and information) and Biases (inexperience etc).

To sum up, the literature suggests that the routes universities use to affect economic development of their communities include: human capital development, technological development and transfer, economic analysis & policy development and business development. In all, the following key elements need to be present to provide the environment for universities to fulfill the role of contributing to economic development:

- alignment with the institution’s mission with community needs;
- a match with the academic strengths of the institution;
- accessibility of economic activity locations;
- availability of special resources;
- internal organizational arrangements that facilitate coordination;
- institutional climate supportive of economic development;
- faculty rewards for involvement;
- understanding of community and industry needs;
- understanding of institutional capacity;
- collaborative arrangements with public and private sectors;
- strong, visionary leadership to overcome barriers; and
- aggressive promotion of offerings to the community.

Educational Programmes for Breaking Poverty Barriers

A de Grauwe, (2008) discussing the characteristics of educational programmes that have broken poverty barriers by linking education to world of work says the Curriculum Content goes beyond ‘theoretical knowledge’ or ‘specific technical skills’. It includes ‘transversal’ skills such as ‘reasoning’ and ‘relating’. He stressed that these “skills are more useful to youngsters in
today’s volatile labour market.” The Curriculum Implementation process involves teachers who were called ‘educators or Coaches’ who give individual attention to each student. Flexible time tabling is used which deviates from the formal or traditional school timetables.

In summary, the literature suggests that for an effective human resource development to occur, first there should be a national development plan. Secondly, there should be a National Manpower plan. Thirdly, human capital development institutions should design their programmes based on the National Manpower Plan. In the current circumstances in Ghana, there exists the National Development Plan, but no National Manpower Plan exists from which universities can derive their educational programmes for the training and development of skills. There thus appears to be a serious gap that needs to be filled.

CHAPTER THREE – DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this study research method is used to refer to the range of approaches that have been employed to gather data and information which are used as the basis for inference, interpretation, explanation and prediction. The study was conducted from October 2008 to January 2009.
3.2 Design

The cross sectional research design was employed in the study using survey data collection approach. This design was considered appropriate because it entailed the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data on more than one cases with two or more variables. The study is essentially qualitative in nature but it also has some quantitative elements - combining survey data with data from document analysis of national human capital policies.

Population

The population of the study was the academic staff of all the five public and about twelve private universities in the country, Officials of the Ministry of Manpower Youth and Employment and the management staff, particularly the Human Resources Management staff, of the various corporations and companies which employ university graduates.

3.2.1 Sampling Technique and the Sample

Sampling Technique and the Sample
A multi-stage sampling technique was used in the selection of respondents. The technique was used to randomly select thirty-seven academic staff comprising four deans and three heads of departments each from three public universities and two randomly selected private universities. In addition, three additional lecturers from the six of the selected universities were included in the sample. Three Human Resource Management (HRM) staff of four public and three private companies were randomly selected to fall into the sample. Additionally, six senior staff of the Employment Division of the Ministry of Manpower Youth and Employment were also sampled. Finally, forty-seven National Service Personnel were selected through the convenient sampling technique to provide information on their employment aspirations and prospects.

3.2.2 Type of Data Gathered

Information used for the analysis included those relating to:

ii. Vision or job aspirations at point of entering university;
iii. Relevant job knowledge and skills acquired in the university
iv. Job aspirations while doing National Service ;
v. Level of flexibility in type of job respondent was willing to take up;
vi. Employers perception of skills acquisition by the graduates;
vii. Relevance/Appropriateness of the university courses/programmes for the Ghanaian economy;
viii. Level of consultation that goes on between the university faculties and the job market.

3.3 Instrumentation

The survey instruments used for the study were subjected to expert critique and review before use. The instruments used for collecting data from the various categories of respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Data gathering instruments and respondent categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument Type</th>
<th>Category of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>HRM Officials, Academic Staff of Universities, Officials of MMYE, Fresh University Graduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Schedule</td>
<td>Academic Staff of Universities,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis format</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3.3.1 Data Collection

Data was collected through a face-to-face administration of questionnaires and one-on-one interviews with the target respondents. This was done with the assistance of well trained field assistants. The minimum qualification of these field assistants was a Diploma certificate.

Data Analysis

Analytical techniques as specified in table 2 below were used to answer the various research questions.

Table 2: Analytical Approach
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Type of Analyses</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the critical human resources needs of the Ghanaian economy?</td>
<td>Document analyses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the human resource development policies and practices of the various universities?</td>
<td>Document review and analyses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the contributory factors for graduate unemployment in Ghana?</td>
<td>Frequencies and Percentages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do key employers perceive the relevance of the knowledge and skills - base of the university graduates to their human resource requirements?</td>
<td>Document Analyses of transcribed interviews. Frequency distribution counts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What level of collaboration exists between the universities and the job market?</td>
<td>Simple frequencies and percentages.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Limitations of the study**

The study was limited in scope by its budget and time frame. It was not possible to cover more institutions, especially those in the northern part of the country due to limited resources. Also, most of the organizations covered in the study usually employ graduates with specialized skills. Thus though the selection was widespread enough to cover varied organizations, those who responded predominantly use specialized skilled labour.

**CHAPTER 4 – PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

**4.1 Introduction**

In this study, result refers to the outcome of various statistical procedures used in analyzing the data collated and coded. The result serves as the basis for interpretation, discussion and drawing inferences for the purpose of predicting and controlling phenomena.
4.2 Documentary Analysis

4.2.1 Human Resource Needs of Ghana - National Development Policy

In Ghana, the preceding governments have taken a number of policy decisions to reform the educational system to bring it in line with the current trend of development. In order to make education more responsive to the needs of the citizenry, the National Development Policy was launched to provide a guide on the strategies and areas of growth in education. A documentary analysis of the key areas of the policy on development entitled: Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II) 2006-2009 states:

“The human resource of the country is one of the key pillars of the GPRS II. The main goal is to ensure the development of a knowledgeable, well-trained, disciplined and healthy population with capacity to drive and sustain the private sector-led growth and strategy. An essential component of the strategy is to ensure the right to basic social services such as healthcare, safe drinking water ……protection of human rights of …….the elderly and rural communities”.

The statement on the human resource vision for Ghana appears more general than addressing specific skills required in a private sector led economic development.

Ghana Employers Association

In order to ascertain the level of collaboration between the National Development Policy and the critical skill requirements of the job market, the 2006 Annual Report of the Ghana Employers Association was carefully analyzed and the critical skills identified are enumerated as follow:

- High analytical skills;
- Creativity;
- Resourcefulness;
- Quick learning skills;
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills and
- Interest in new and emerging technology and the ability to work under pressure and maintain calmness in emergency, (GEA, 2006).

Human Resource Managers

The views of the Human Resource officials were also sought to find out to what extent the National Development Plan satisfies the requisite skills identified by the HRM. The responses from the Human Resource Managers revealed the following skills as critical to ensuring efficient and employable workforce:

- Practical oriented skills;
- Dynamic and problem solving skills;
- Strong entrepreneurial ability;
- Familiarity with the state of the Art Technology;
- Emotionally stable with strong interpersonal skills;
- Commitment and a strong Team player;
- Communication skill and
- Creativity.

A careful study of the National Development Plan, 2006 report of the (GEA) and the critical skill requirements identified by the Human Resource Officials, revealed that there was a strong emphasis on skills training but the direction and focus were not clearly defined.

4.2.2 Measures Adopted by the Universities to meet the Human Resource Needs.

The study also assessed the measures taken by the universities to satisfy the skill training needs of the country, and industry. The results from the qualitative responses are presented as follow:

The universities adopted a number of strategies in fulfilling key Human Resource Requirement in Ghana including: imparting of knowledge, skill training, personality and moral training as well as entrepreneurial ability and religious principles.

The first main focus in human resource development is imparting of knowledge-cognitive training. This was evident in the responses provided by some of the academic staff of the universities. In the words of a 46 year old Head of department in one of the traditional universities:

"The main objective of my university, Eh........what ........ em....we first of all train the mind to enhance critical thinking of graduates, Ahaa! Take a subject like Math, it develops the mind to have an enquiring and analytical reasoning or what do you say?"

Another lecturer stated that:

"What we seek to impart into the young men and women, Yes I mean the Graduates is to develop their thought processes so that they can fit into any new situations they find themselves in. You see the courses are not direct vocational training but in the end the graduates can excel on most jobs".

In addition, a young 34 year old lecturer indicated that:

"Ahaa!...did you say what we give the graduates to equip them? I know we give knowledge to help them find their levels wherever they go. But my brother frankly I don’t know whether that training is still adequate with the current trend of development"

These views are supported by the content of the various courses which are all very academically loaded. The document analysis of the course contents of some of the academic programmes indicated that over (75%) of the courses were theoretical or purely academic. This discovery was however, contradicted by the responses of some of the lecturers in some of the universities, especially the vocational oriented universities.

The result also indicated that another key measure initiated by the universities to enhance quality human resources development for the country was skill training of graduates. This was
confirmed by the sort of responses provided by the respondents. A Dean of students of one of the universities aptly put it in the following words:

“My opinion on the development of human resources is that my university em... you know I can speak for my university, trains graduates for the job market. Yea...... you see we expose the students to practical training with internship for the needed experience so they are well equipped for the market”

Also a senior lecturer in one of the universities alluded to the assertion when he stated that:

“My personal view is that graduates from my university do not have problem with unemployment because we equip them with skills needed such as entrepreneurial and leadership before they go into the job market. I can assure you that e...m... we devote almost one year for practical work no wonder majority of them excel on the field”

Yet another lecturer, 44 years old, had this to say:

“To me one of the key objectives of the university is to provide senior level management personnel for industry. Let me see.....ehh.......we impart knowledge but how the theories are applied to practical situations is our concern. The graduates are also given the opportunity to engage in practical attachment with industrial establishments to get a good feel of the real job experience”

Data from the study further showed that respondents identified personality and moral training as another crucial measure which could help churn out relevant human resources for the country. A senior lecturer in one of the private universities indicated this point in the following words:

“I must say that e...mm as a religious institution one of our core principles is to turn out graduates with sound moral virtues and strong personality which can make them stand out whenever they find themselves. Yes, you know they need such qualities to be able to expand the work of God and excel in other endeavors in life”

Another lecturer also stated that:

“To me one of the critical functions of university education is to develop a total personality who will not only be knowledgeable in his or her field but be careful about what conducts he or she engages in. You will agree with me that if you have brilliant professionals with bad moral values the result could be disastrous for society so we are constantly reviewing the course content to take care of this aspect of the training”

In addition, a 40 year old lecturer summed up the essence of adequate personality and moral training in the following submission:

“Let me start by saying that the sort of strong personality Americans for instance nurture, greatly helps in the development of their country. Errh......... we need graduates who can take firm decisions and be bold to strive to succeed hence we try to impart such virtues in the young graduates”

4.3.1. Considerations made in Structuring Course of study for Students.
There was a question to find out what considerations lecturers made in designing their courses. Respondents were free to mention more than one consideration. The analyses of their responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Factors considered to Ensure balanced Human Resource Training of Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Considerations</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prospects for jobs</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>83.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Level of Students</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imparting Knowledge</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>75.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current trends in Development</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospect for Further Studies</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 37

It can be observed from Table 3 that majority of the academic staff (83.8%) indicated that prospects for jobs was the most important factor considered in training graduates while (75.7%) of them felt imparting of knowledge was the key determinant in graduate training. Also, (56.8%) of lecturers identified the level of students as the basis for choice of content of study. In addition, 45.9% of them mentioned current trends in development as the key consideration, while another 45.9% of them also considered prospect for further studies as the most important guide in the direction of training of students.

The study also assessed the level of awareness of the National Development Plan (GPRS II, 2006-2009) among the staff of the various universities. The responses are presented in Fig.2.

Fig. 2: Awareness of the Content of the National Development Plan.
Reading from Fig. 2, forty-two percent (42%) of the staff were aware of the GPRS II while (58%) did not know about it. It appears from this result that most of the courses designed by the universities in the skills training of Graduates have not been informed by the visions and aims of the National Development Plan.

4.3.2. State of Graduate Unemployment in Ghana.

The issue of Graduates unemployment has become a debatable one with a section of the public arguing that there are enough jobs in the system to absorb all graduates but others believe the job market is choked and cannot absorb the large army of graduates. Views of staff of the universities, graduates, HRM Officials of various organizations and senior officials of the Ministry of Manpower Youth and Employment (MYE) were collated and presented in Fig. 3.
A large majority of each of the categories of respondents - Graduates (84.7%), university staff (75.7%), HRM Officials (64.8%), and officials of the MYE (54%) believed that there was indeed graduate unemployment in Ghana.

4.3.3. Perceived Causes of Graduate Unemployment in Ghana.

A further analysis was carried out into the factors that respondents had identified as causes of graduate unemployment in Ghana. Their result is presented in order of being cited.

- Misdirected training of graduates-most courses are not relevant to current demands for labour;
- Inadequate practical training during course of study;
- Public & private sectors not expanding fast enough to absorb the increasing number of graduates;
- Societal and graduates discrimination among jobs;
- Non transparent recruitment procedures;
- Insufficient support for graduates by both government and private sectors to set up their own businesses and
- Lack of counseling on job prospects.

4.4.1 Relevant skills Possessed by Graduates

There is the perception from the public that most graduates in Ghana lack certain traits that enhance performance on the job. The Human Resource Officials were asked to identify requisite skills expected to be exhibited by graduates. The skills listed in order of rating by the HRM officials are stated below:
• Commitment
• Problem solving and Leadership skill
• Team player
• Communication skill
• Creativity
• Competence
• Ready to accept responsibility
• Interest in job
• Supervisory ability
• Interpersonal skill
• Initiative

4.4.2. The Extent to which Ghanaian Graduates exhibit Expected Skills on the job.

As a result of the strong perception that the performance of graduates has declined in recent times, HRM Officials were requested to assess the extent to which the Graduates exhibited the necessary skills in the performance on the job. The results of the analyses are presented in Table 4. and Fig. 4.

Table 4: Extent to which Ghanaian Graduates exhibit Job related Skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent to which Graduates Exhibit Skills</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Extent</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Large Extent</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results indicated that majority of Human Resource Officials (71.4%), were of the opinion that graduates exhibited good measure of job related skills on the job. However, 28.6% of them felt that graduates lack such basic skills.

In order to assess the general performance of Ghanaian graduates, opinions were sought from the officials of the MYE and Human resource Managers. The result is presented in Fig. 4.
Fig. 4: General Assessment of Graduates’ Performance on the Job.

It can be observed from the bar chart that between 42% – 43% of the two categories of respondents (officials of the Ministry of Employment and HRM officials) were satisfied with the performance levels and output of the graduates. On both sides of this satisfactory level however were those from both categories who rated it as outstanding (32% and 25% respectively) and those who rated it as unsatisfactory (32% and 21% respectively).

4.4.3. Level of Collaboration between the Universities and Industry.

As a way of measuring the extent to which university programmes take account of the needs of the job market, the level of collaboration between various universities and the job market was explored. The result is presented in Fig. 5.
Fig. 5: Collaboration between Universities and Industries.

From the bar chart, respondents - university staff (51.3%) and HRM Officials (64.3%) generally indicated that there was low level of collaboration between the various universities and the captains of industry.

Respondents proffered a number of suggestions which could help address some of the bottlenecks identified in the skills training of the university graduates in Ghana. They suggested that:

1. more emphasis is placed on practical training especially with industrial attachment to expose graduates to enough practical work;
2. skills needed by the country and industry are clearly identified and specific steps taken to address their acquisition;
3. course structure should be reviewed regularly in line with demands of industry and the country’s development goals;
4. facilities and working conditions are improved in the universities to enhance quality teaching and learning;
5. Government and private sectors take steps to create more job opportunities to absorb the large army of graduates.
6. subject combination for students should be based on their interests and job aspirations;
7. students should be re-oriented to see all jobs as important so as to strive to make the best out them;
8. university admissions for various courses should be dependent on the demand for the knowledge type and skills they produce as against labour projected demands by the time the cohort of students would have been out of university and
9. students should use their time of study judiciously and learn to apply what they were taught to real life situations.
4.5. SUMMARY OF FINDING

The following are the findings from the results of the data analysis:

1. All stakeholders concerned with the training and usage of graduates had identified effective development of relevant skills in students as the key to solving the unemployment problem.
2. The core focus of graduate training include: imparting knowledge, skill development, personality and moral training as well as development of entrepreneurial and religious principles;
3. Key considerations made in structuring the course contents of various programmes include: job prospect, inculcating relevant knowledge, current trends in development and prospect for further studies.
4. A large majority of each of the categories of respondents- Graduates (84.7%), university staff (75.7%), HRM officials (64.8%) and officials of the MYE (54%) believed that there truly was graduates unemployment in Ghana.
5. Respondents enumerated a number of factors responsible for graduate unemployment. They include: inadequate practical training during course of study and misdirected training of graduates-most courses are not relevant to current demands for labour.
6. Human Resources Officials identified certain personality traits expected in graduates to include commitment, leadership skills, team player skills, communication skills, and creativity, to mention but a few.
7. An overwhelming majority of HRM officials (71.4%) agreed that graduates employed in various organizations exhibited traits as listed in (6) above satisfactorily.
8. Around 74% and 68% of the officials of the Ministry of Employment and HRM officials respectively were satisfied with the performance levels/output of the graduates while 32% and 21% of the two categories respectively were dissatisfied.
9. Collaboration between university faculties and industry/job market was low.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION
According to the result of the study, all the stakeholders had agreed on one way forward—skill training as the main solution to bridging the gap between the skills training in the universities and the demands of the job market. The need for under-graduates to be trained in particular fields related to job market needs was stressed by both the HRM Officials and the Ghana Employers Association. It is interesting to note that the Government has also clearly identified the need to give skills training to the graduates from the various institutions. What then is the missing link between the Development Policy and the implementation? Though there is a National Development Plan, there is no National Manpower Plan as suggested by the Ghana Employers Association. GEA stated that such a document could spell out the key skill needs of the country and the training required to guide the universities in drawing out their academic course contents (GEA, 2006).

From the analysis, there seems to be a gap between the Government Policy and the demands of industry. The main concern is how to tackle the specific training issues identified for the benefit of all stakeholders. Some of the specific skills identified by industry include: practical oriented and problem solving skills, creative, resourcefulness, entrepreneurial, communicative skills and sound computer knowledge. The developments of such skills require a lot of collaboration among all stakeholders in order to put the right structures in place. As pointed out in studies by Mager and Beach Jnr. (1967) and Poletaev and Robison,(2008) no appropriate national human capital specificity could be structured out by chance but through rigorous research and documentation of labour market information.

According to the Academic Staff, the core focus of graduate training include: imparting knowledge, skill development, personality and moral training. Others are the development of entrepreneurial and religious principles. A careful study of the areas of focus for the training of the graduates showed that the universities also identified the need to train graduates for industry. To what extent had the universities been able to address these challenges of shifting from theory-based teaching to the skill oriented training is the issue of concern. In addition, what was the level of emphasis placed on skill training as compared to the traditional cognitive training?. Most of the lecturers believed that giving a sound cognitive training to students could make them versatile and fit into almost any employment situations. This argument should however be weighed against the fact that current trends in development demands that in
addition to the strong cognitive training, the individual needs specialized skills that could enhance his or her performance on the job. There need to be a systematic shift in the course structure and direction of emphasis tailored to suit the current trend of development as noted by de Grauwe (2008). He observed that the straightforward path which allowed graduates to enter the job market no longer exists and cautioned that there was a need for systematic effort at training graduates for specific jobs.

It is very encouraging to note the consideration made by the universities in setting out their course structures particularly those relating to the prospects for jobs and current trends in development. Indeed, if education especially at such high levels cannot lead to employment, then it has become a failure. The way forward therefore should be to fashion out measures to effectively shape the type of graduates produced from the various universities. In the light of this paradigm shift, it is also important that the universities should not lose sight of the need for training in sound personality and moral judgment as strong virtues required for a rapid growth.

In Ghana, graduate unemployment has become a topical issue. A section of the public think there are enough job opportunities but just that graduates are not suited for such jobs or that they discriminate against certain jobs. But from the results of the study, all the stakeholders overwhelmingly agreed that there was truly graduate unemployment in Ghana. The finding is very interesting since it involved some of the most important stakeholders in the training and recruitment of graduates.

Most of the graduates expressed inadequate exposure to practical training as one of the main reasons why they thought it was not easy to get employed. On the other hand, most of the lecturers and officials of the Ministry of Manpower Youth and Employment reasoned that majority of the graduates considered certain jobs to be below their standards. This job inferiority assertion is held by most of the general public and this makes it very difficult for some parents to accept their young graduates entering jobs such as agriculture and teaching. Most of them decide to teach as a last resort and immediately leave for other lucrative jobs when the opportunity comes.

The issue of mismatch in training and job requirement was another factor identified by respondents as a major cause of graduate unemployment in Ghana. The subject combination of some of the universities failed to target particular skills which the various industries needed. A lot of graduates were thus well trained in their areas of specialties but could not be employed. This issue could be tackled effectively if Ghana should adopt a similar system such as that of the US where a Dictionary of Occupational Titles now called Occupational Information Network (O*NET) is kept. This document serves as a guide for outlining all the available jobs and their required skills for adequate institutional training to meet the demands of the job market (Curtis and Crunkilton 1993, Goodgame 1989, William 1982).
The fact that there are more graduates competing for the limited number of job opportunities cannot be overemphasized. Both the public and the private sectors are not expanding quickly enough to create employment for the large army of graduates. There are a number of graduates with the requisite skills but cannot get employed because the opportunities are not available. It is incumbent upon the Government and all other concerned bodies such the banks and Non Governmental Organizations to help the graduates to set up their own enterprises.

The Human Resource Officials had indicated that most graduates possessed skills that can enhance their performance on the job. Skills mentioned include: commitment, leadership skills, team player skills, communication skills, and creativity to mention but a few. This finding is very interesting due to the fact that they were postulated by the HRM officers themselves. One is tempted to say that if the graduates exhibited such skills satisfactorily then why are they not getting employment? The high rating of the graduates by the HRM officials could have resulted from the fact that the graduates employed by those organizations were trained in particular skills they required for the various tasks performed. In addition, most of the graduates also were given on the job training hence the excellent exhibition of the relevant traits.

The MYE and HRM officials further noted that graduates from the country’s universities performed satisfactorily at their various workplaces. It was not surprising that graduates engaged in various organizations were competent in discharging their assigned tasks. This may be due to the fact that even the process of recruitment is so rigorous that by the end of the process, it is most likely that only the best graduates are employed. Also since the job opportunities are very few as compared to the large number of graduates, it may happen that the best materials are recruited leaving a lot of the half-baked ones. A wider coverage of organizations could have revealed more characteristics of the graduates and this should be noted in any future studies.

The study unfortunately revealed that the level of collaboration between the universities and the job market was low. Most of the lecturers indicated that they hardly had any official interaction with captains of industry to formally discuss the areas of concern by the industries and feedback on the progress of products from the universities. The lack of effective collaboration between the various stakeholders could partly be responsible for the seemingly wide gab between content of course studied and demands of the job market. In addition, such collaboration might even enhance an effective internship programme between industry and the university so that the products could acquire relevant experience for the job market.

The result of the study brought to the fore some of the shortcomings of university education in Ghana identified by the respondents. It also provides avenues for the development of interventions to address the issue of graduate unemployment in Ghana.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:
1. The Government should develop a National Manpower Plan to outline the skill needs of the country and how to facilitate the training of such skills.

2. There should be a stronger collaboration between the universities and end-users of graduates on the skills requirements so that they can structure their courses accordingly;

3. The universities should make pragmatic effort to shift emphasis from theory type education to practical oriented type;

4. The Government should take steps to improve on facilities and conditions of service of lecturers to enhance quality delivery of education;

5. The Government and the financial institutions should help settle the young graduates with soft loans and other facilities for self employment;

6. The public should be educated to put value on all types of jobs and not to discriminate among jobs.

7. Graduates need a new mental orientation to see their courses beyond theory to practical experiences.

CONCLUSION

The study has made important revelations which demand a collaborative effort from all stakeholders involved in the training and use of university graduates. The recommendations hold a great prospect for ameliorating the mismatch between training, skills acquisition and opportunities for employment in industry/job market.

REFERENCES


http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/PLLI/HBCU/title.html 2/02/09 at 7.00pm.


