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EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: PERSPECTIVES FROM EMPLOYERS AND TOURISM GRADUATES IN GHANA

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Abstract

Employers of graduates of higher education have often complained of a gap between skills and work attributes required by industry and those acquired by graduates. The main aim of this paper was to provide a comparison of views of employers and tourism graduates on employability skills required for employment by industry in Ghana. The paper was based on a tracer study conducted in June and July 2011 at the Tourism Department of Cape Coast Polytechnic, in Ghana. The study, which was cross sectional, involved a sample of 174 employed tourism graduates, selected using snowball sampling and 25 of their employers selected through multi stage sampling. The results of the study indicated that while there were no vast differences in their views regarding importance of certain skills, there were variations in the level of importance placed on such skills. For instance, the graduates considered the work attribute of time management more important than the employers, while the employers gave higher priority to team working skills than the graduates. An implication of this study is that strong collaboration is needed between higher educational institutions and industry employers not only to ensure industrial attachment placement for students but also for the students to acquire the right employability skills and work attributes, needed by industry.

Key words

Polytechnic, education, employability, generic skills, gap analysis, competency model.

INTRODUCTION

As a result of fast technological changes being witnessed in the twenty first century, a highly skilled workforce is needed to fulfil industry requirements in a world that is in flux (Cobo, 2013). Achieving these requirements is rooted in the Theory of Human Capital, which emphasizes the importance of investing in education and training of the youth, as a

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way of improving the existing stock of skills needed by industry (Malchup, 1982; Teixeira, 2014). Polytechnic education is a type of human capital development aimed at giving the youth skills for industry. Globally, polytechnic education is practical and industry-oriented, instilling in its graduates skills which should equip them to solve the societal problem of unemployment.

The oldest technological university in the United States of America, the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, founded in 1824 was created for the purpose of instructing young persons in the application of science to the common purposes of life (Mercer & Ponticell, 2012). The primary focus of this institute was to apply science and civil engineering knowledge to solve problems of the society at that time. Mercer and Ponticell (2012) further noted that later in the 1960s, England, Wales and Northern Ireland enabled polytechnics there to award degrees by offering both academic and professional vocational subjects, that focused on applied education for work, concentrating initially on engineering and applied science.

According to Afeti, Baffour-Awuah and Budu-Smith (2003), polytechnic education, involves self-directed enquiry, or a do-it-yourself approach to preparing students for the job market. This means that polytechnic students are trained to develop their talents, interests and skills leading to occupations in various sectors of the economy (UNESCO/ILO, 2002). In Africa, polytechnic education has been embraced by almost all the countries including Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia, Uganda and South Africa, as a means of making tertiary graduates ready for employment (Ng'ethe,

Subotzky & Afeti, 2008). Ng'ethe et al. (2008) further noted that the overall public perception in most of these countries is that polytechnic education is of much lower status than university education. In South Africa, where the Technikons (known as "universities of technology") have been able to maintain and improve on their mandate of offering career-oriented programs, the complementary role of both tertiary institutions is recognized (Ng'ethe et al., 2008:119). Generally, in most African countries, polytechnic education is bedevilled with a myriad of challenges including poor funding and staffing, poor remuneration, academic and career progression, lack of autonomy and lack of recognition of the Higher National Diploma (HND) by some universities (Ng'ethe et al., 2008; Nyarko, 2011), thereby limiting their ability to fulfill their mandate of producing job-ready graduates.

Since their transformation into tertiary institutions in 1992, polytechnics in Ghana have been able to provide education and training to the youth in the country resulting in their acquisition of skills to make them employable. Afeti (2002) referred to the transformation in Ghanaian polytechnics as a solution to the crisis of identity closely related to their identity, orientation and philosophy. Polytechnic education could therefore be seen as a means for the provision of skills required by industry to their students, not only to make them employable, but also to become job-creators (Agodzo, 2007). Nevertheless, governments of developing countries in Africa, including Ghana, continue to face the challenge of their inability to create sufficient job avenues for their teeming youths, who graduate from their tertiary

institutions, annually.

The Daily Graphic of Ghana (2015) reported that the Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at the University of Ghana, Legon, had stated that there were over 200,000 unemployed graduates in the country and that about 71,000 young men and women graduates from the country's tertiary institutions enter the job market annually. It is also known that the government of Ghana is the largest employer of labour in the formal sector of the country (Amankrah, 2001). Such a scenario is due to the fact that the private sector of the country has not expanded large enough to employ most of the young men and women who graduate from the nation's tertiary institutions annually. The unemployment problem has been exacerbated by the government's freeze of employment in the public sector, since 2013, with the only exceptions being allowed in pre-tertiary educational institutions and in the health sector.

In the mid-1990s, the development of the tourism sector in Ghana led to the creation of a Ministry of Tourism, which was thought to be a panacea for reducing the unemployment rate in the country. This was premised on the fact that direct employment in the tourism industry at the time of the study, was estimated globally to be about 235 million, and that as the tourism industry kept growing at four percent per annum, by 2019 a total of 296 million jobs would be created in the industry (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2010). This expansion made the tourism industry one of the largest employers of labour, globally.

The linkage between tourism and job creation partly motivated the introduction of tourism education at the tertiary level in the country in 1996 by the University of Cape Coast (UCC) to offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses in tourism (Akyeampong, 2008). This was aimed at preparing students for managerial and administrative positions in the tourism and hospitality industry as well as faculty appointments in the country's tertiary institutions (Owusu-Mintah, 2012a). In 2000, Cape Coast Polytechnic (CCP) also started a Higher National Diploma (HND) programme in tourism studies so as to fulfil one of its mandates, of providing opportunities for skills development in the tourism and hospitality industry. This was followed by the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, where a Tourism and Culture programme was started in 2005. Of late, other public and private tertiary institutions in the country, such as Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), the Regency University College (RUC) and Zenith University College (ZUC) all in Accra, as well as Ho and Takoradi Polytechnics, are running Bachelor of Science degree programmes either in Tourism or Hospitality Management, or both. All these institutions are aiming at developing the human resource needed to meet the demands of the nation's tourism and hospitality industry and also help to reduce unemployment in the country (Owusu-Mintah & Kissi, 2012).

Nearly two decades after the introduction of tourism education at the tertiary level in the country, most of the graduates produced remain unemployed. A study of tourism graduates showed that some employers complained of the lack of appropriate skills by most higher education graduates (Owusu-Mintah, 2014). Another major

problem identified in that study pertained to the differences in perceptions between employers and tourism graduates. The employers on the one hand felt the graduates lacked the necessary skills demanded by industry, an assertion the tourism graduates disagreed. On the other hand, the graduates stated that they had the qualifications and industry experience gained during their periods of industrial internship, to make them employable. In their study on the importance of supervised work experience for employment, West and Jameson (1990) also noted the existence of differences between what industry required and what education produced. These are clear evidence that a gap exists between the views of employers and employees on employability skills needed by industry.

The present study was thus necessitated by the dearth in literature on the issue of skills required by industry that was found to be lacking by graduates of tertiary education, especially in Sub Saharan Africa, including Ghana. The purpose of the paper was therefore to ascertain whether differences exist between the views of employers and graduates regarding employability skills and work attributes needed by industry; and analyze these differences between the ranking of the skills by both employers and graduates so as to provide information for tourism educators on the improvement of their curriculum to prepare their graduates for industry. In helping to achieve these objectives, we set forth the following null hypothesis:

Ho: There is no significant difference between the views of the tourism graduates and their employers on employability skills needed for employment by industry.

The alternative hypothesis is as follows:

H1: There is a significant difference between the views of the tourism graduates and their employers on employability skills needed for employment by industry.

This paper is divided into five sections. After the introduction, we present the literature review, which is also followed by the methodology used for data collection and analysis. Thereafter, we present the results and discussions, with the paper ending with conclusions and a recommendation of the study.

Literature Review

Regarding the acquisition of skills for employment, the Human Capital Theory posits that the more people receive higher education, the higher their chances of getting a good job (Teixeira, 2014), as education and training are undertaken to provide people with skills required by industry. These skills could be specific (Lu & Adler, 2008; Rutter, 1993), required for employment within the relevant industry, or generic, which Raybould and Wilkins (2005) describe as "those transferable skills which are essential for employability at some level" (p. 204). Importance of generic skills has received much attention in the literature. According to Mayer (1992), generic skills have often been referred to as 'core skills', 'transferable skills', 'key competencies' or 'underpinning skills' (p. 404).

Wang, Ayres and Huyton (2009) also listed generic skills to include critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, teamwork, creativity, organizational ability, work ethics as well as information, communication and technology (ICT) skills. These are also referred to as employability skills, acquired through active learning (Rasul, Rauf,

Mansor & Puvanasvaran, 2012). These skills enable beneficiaries of higher education to be easily employable after graduation. According to Nelson and Dopson (2001), problem solving and leadership ability, could also be described as human relations and conceptual skills. in addition, there are also some skills like written and oral communication skills and attentions to details, as well as creativity, which Ladkin (2012) referred to as 'soft skills'.

Other skills that are important for successful performance in industry include organisational, leadership and motivational skills (Christou, 1999). These skills, which are important for management of businesses, are not incorporated in specific courses or subjects taught at the polytechnic. They are acquired through mentorship and by specifically following the footsteps of successful business people who empower employees to make decisions that influence organisational direction and performance (Luria, Gal & Yagil, 2009). In their study undertaken in Australia, Wang et al. (2009) argued that there are also operational skills, such as customer service skills and attention to detail, which are customer contact related and are pertinent for jobs in tourism and hospitality. According to Anakwe and Greenhaus (2000), Harris and Zhao (2004), Marhuenda, Martinez and Navas (2004) and Muskett (1996), these job-related skills are usually enhanced through industrial attachment undertaken by students at college.

The literature on employability skills is replete with those highlighting the perspectives of employers (Dickinson, 2000; Humburg, van der Velden & Verhagen 2013; Li & Leung, 2001; Major & Evans, 2008; Wang et

al., 2009). However, there are a few studies that discuss the subject from the perspectives of the graduates. In their study across the European Union (EU), Humburg et al., (2013) found that 50-60 percent of graduates surveyed across all the countries, indicated that their study programs clearly succeeded in providing them with employability skills. They continued to note that a meager 15-20 percent of the graduates said that their programs at the tertiary institutions failed to do so. A tracer study by Boateng, Eghan and Osafo-Adu (2014) revealed that only 2.5 percent of the 237 graduates of Wisconsin International University College (WIUC) in Accra, Ghana, who graduated between 2000 and 2012, were unemployed, with 10 percent of them self-employed. Boateng et al. (2014) concluded that the graduates indicated that they were generally satisfied with their professional situation and employability skills they acquired at the university.

On the differences between the views of employers and their employees on employability skills, Humburg et al. (2013) had reported that though employers did not rank academic skills high on their agenda for employment, they expected graduates of higher education to have sufficient general academic skills. They further noted that employability skills that the European Union (EU) employers rated very high included team working, sector specific, communication and computer skills, not leaving out work experience. They also thought that graduates, who had spent some time abroad either studying or working, were more open to some experience. Boateng et al. (2014) also reported that 97 percent of the graduates surveyed indicated computing and critical thinking skills as

the most important employability skills that secured them their jobs. These pieces of evidence show that there are differences or gaps in the perspectives of employers and graduates regarding employability skills required by industry.

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985), gap analysis is the identification of gaps of inconsistencies between management's perception and consumer expectations, and designing strategies to bridge these gaps or differences. Gaps are also known to exist between skills and work attributes acquired by graduates and those required by industry (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005). Gap analysis was used in the study by Raybould and Wilkins (2005) to identify reasons for these gaps and devise strategies to bridge them. On the other hand, content analysis is a method for summarizing any form of content by counting and grouping its various aspects, for examination of trends and patterns so as to make inferences from them (Stemler, 2001).

Several studies by Dickinson (2000), Raybould and Wilkins (2005) and Swanger and Gursoy (2007), have reported that a growing gap exists between the skills that educational institutions transmit to their students and what is demanded by management of industries. Haywood and Maki (1992) developed a conceptual model for studying the relationship between employers' demands and what is produced by educational institutions. They also identified a gap existing between expectations of employers and the educational sector, which could be studied by using a competencies model. According to Kozak (2002), in using the gap analysis, the mean values of identified variables of interest

are compared with those of another in a different destination. Therefore, the traditional approach assumes that there must be a gap between the host and the partner to allow the determination of strengths and weaknesses, and prioritizing and selecting what is regarded as the benchmark (McNair & Leibfried, 1992). Ordinarily, the gap analysis model considers differences in performance levels of businesses by using ranking of their performance as provided by independent assessors.

Another aspect of the literature focused on the preparedness of fresh graduates for the job market. A survey by Leon (2002) indicated that the graduates themselves reported difficulty with verbal communication, time management and task 'juggling'. This showed that some of the graduates were ill equipped and lacked confidence for the new jobs. In the case where people receive higher education and acquire most of these employability skills but do not get jobs after a long search, then it may mean that employers of industry do not accept such skills as relevant or the graduates did not know that such skills were irrelevant to industry or the curricula used in their education were not right. These views of employers and their employees on skills and attributes acquired and those required by industry can be compared and understood by using gap analysis.

In their study on employability skills and work attributes for industry, Wang et al. (2009) identified 27 generic skills and work attributes that hospitality managers in Australia expected their employees to have acquired. In that study, they compared the views of both managers of tourism and hospitality facilities and their employees about these skills. This was done effectively by the

use of gap analysis, supplemented with content analysis of courses studied. With respect to the views of employers and graduates on employability skills, Wang et al. (2009) had noted that managers of hospitality and tourism facilities gave prominence to communication and relationship management skills as well as work ethics. In their study, Wang et al. (2009) itemized and compared the views of some managers and their employees to ascertain the differences or similarities on some specific skills or work attributes demanded by industry. Among others, Wang et al. (2009) concluded that differences existed between managers' perceptions and the graduates attributes and skills. For example, while the employers considered team working skills as very important, the graduates saw time management as very important. They finally concluded that higher education did not necessarily produce job-ready graduates with important skills required by industry.

To help in understanding the context in which this study was undertaken, the competencies model developed by Chung-Herrera, Enz and Lankau (2003) was adopted. A competency model is a descriptive tool that identifies the knowledge, skills and behaviour needed to perform effectively in an organisation (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999). Competency models further provide a framework for redefining skills and knowledge required for a job. Such models, according to Chung-Herrera et al. (2003), have emerged as valuable tools employed by human resource and training departments to define skills and knowledge requirements of specific jobs so as to assess competencies and performance and help set business strategies.In applying the competency model

efficiently, Lombardo and Elchinger (2002) advocated the selection of 5 to 15 competencies to address the skills that make a real difference for different jobs. Though competency models usually focus on personality traits which are usually hard to measure accurately as noted by Lucia and Lepsinger (1999), skills and abilities of prospective employees are the target of development and measurement, as will be noted in this study.

Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional design, by using mixed methods research techniques for the data collection and analysis (Felizer, 2010; Owusu-Mintah & Amenumey, 2014). This approach was used to ascertain people's reasoning behind some decisions taken in relation to skills required by industry. Twenty of such skills or work attributes that are required by industry and acquired by students in higher education institutions, constituted the variables of interest for the study. As noted earlier, these skills and work attributes had been studied by Wang et al. (2009). The quantitative method was facilitated by using questionnaires prepared and used to collect data from both the graduates of the Tourism Department of Cape Coast Polytechnic (now Cape Coast Technical University) and some of their employers. The qualitative method consisted of interviews conducted with four of the graduates and their employers involved in the study and the results used in the analysis.

The target population consisted of 581 past students who had graduated from the department between 2003 and 2008 (Owusu-Mintah, 2012a). The research instrument was

adapted from the Cabeihm Graduate Tracer Survey Questionnaire (Cinches n.d.) and administered to a sample of 232 of the graduates, selected using a sample size determination table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The 40-item questionnaires each for the graduates and 25 employers, had more closed ended than open ended items and also had four parts: respondents' profile, organizational characteristics, job placement, and views on skills acquired and required by industry. Some of the items on the questionnaires requested the respondents to rate on a 5-point Likert Scale their opinions about their jobs, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, which skills did they rate highest, while others demanded multi rating, simple categorical answers (e.g. yes or no). The employers were selected using multistage sampling for the administration of the questionnaires. This sampling procedure involved the initial use of selecting a cluster of employers (from specific businesses), choosing a subset of the cluster and then using simple random sampling to select the sample to be administered with the questionnaires. These employers, by virtue of their positions in their jobs were asked to comment on issues relating to the skills used and work attributes exhibited by the graduates under their supervision (Major & Evans, 2008).

The questionnaires were administered either personally or by email. The survey for the graduates was conducted in business organizations and industries not only in some major towns of the country but also in some countries abroad (USA, Sweden and the UK), where some of the respondents were working. Only graduates abroad but not their employers were respondents. Snowball sampling technique was used to administer the questionnaires to the graduates. In using this technique, a handful of the graduates were initially identified, for them to provide email addresses of some of their classmates for questionnaires to be administered to them all. At the end of the fieldwork that took place in June and July 2011, 205 questionnaires were retrieved. Out of the 205 respondents 174 were employed and 31 unemployed. This recorded a response rate of 88 percent and internal consistency of 0.75, calculated via the use of SPSS Version 17, which was considered to be satisfactory. Data from these 174 employed graduates and 25 of their employers were used for the study, resulting in a total sample size of 199.

For the qualitative method, a prepared interview guide was used to interview four each of the graduates and their employers selected from the major job groupings that emerged from the retrieved questionnaires (tourism and hospitality, educational, financial and culture). Taking a cue from Christou (1999), the points in the interview guide used for the discussion revolved around the following issues:

- the knowledge and skills gained from their studies;
- the courses studied that provided them with the skills;
- the amount of practical experience obtained during their attachment;
- employability skills that enhanced their employment; and
- other important issues raised by the respondents.

In addition, the relevance of the courses they studied and the skills they obtained from studying those courses that prepared them for

industry, were discussed. With the permission of the interviewees, the conversations were recorded and later transcribed and used for the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Among the 174 employed graduates, 102 were males and 72 females. The 31 unemployed graduates constituted 15 percent of the 205 graduates surveyed. When compared

Figure 1:
Occupational distribution of the graduates

Some of the graduates worked at the airport and with some shipping companies and airlines while others worked at tourist attractionssuch as the waterfalls. Other graduates were employed by some educational institutions while some others worked in the castles under the auspices of the Ghana Museums andMonuments Board (GMMB).
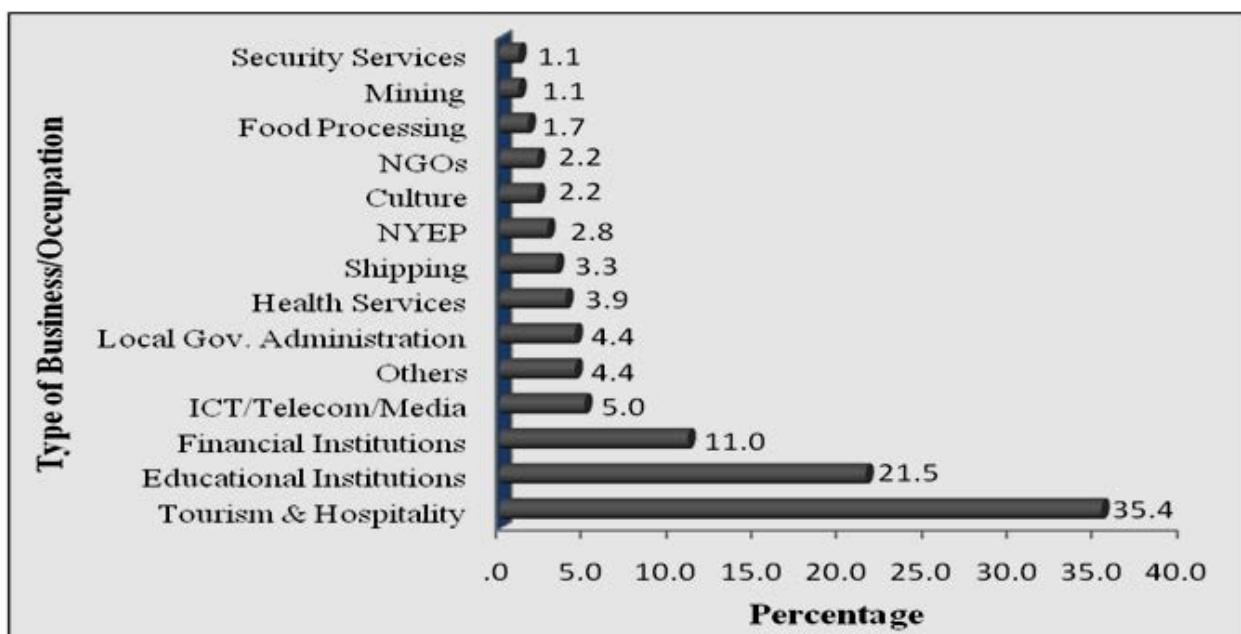

with the general national unemployment figures of around 30 percent (UNDP, 2010), the unemployed graduates rate was not considered to be too high. However, employment statistics for developing countries like Ghana are sometimes unavailable or unreliable (Owusu-Mintah, 2014; UNDP, 2007). The employed graduates were found in various types of businesses as shown in Figure 1.
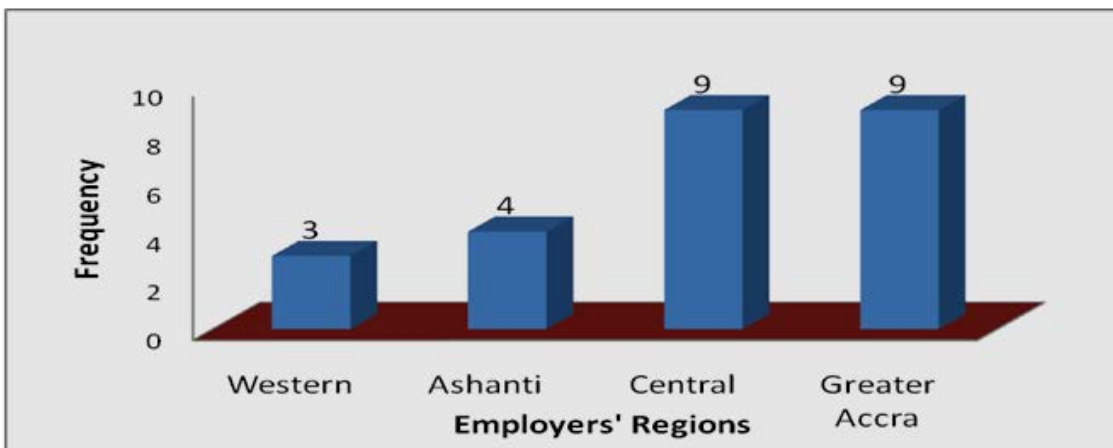
Profile of the Employers

Apart from the graduates, 25 of their employers made up of 22 males and 3 females were involved in the survey. These included head teachers of basic schools, managers of some financial institutions as well as managers or proprietors of tourism and hospitality facilities, where some of the graduates

were working. The employers were from industries and businesses varying from financial, educational, hospitality and tourism, culture, health services to non-governmental organizations, as shown on Figure 2.
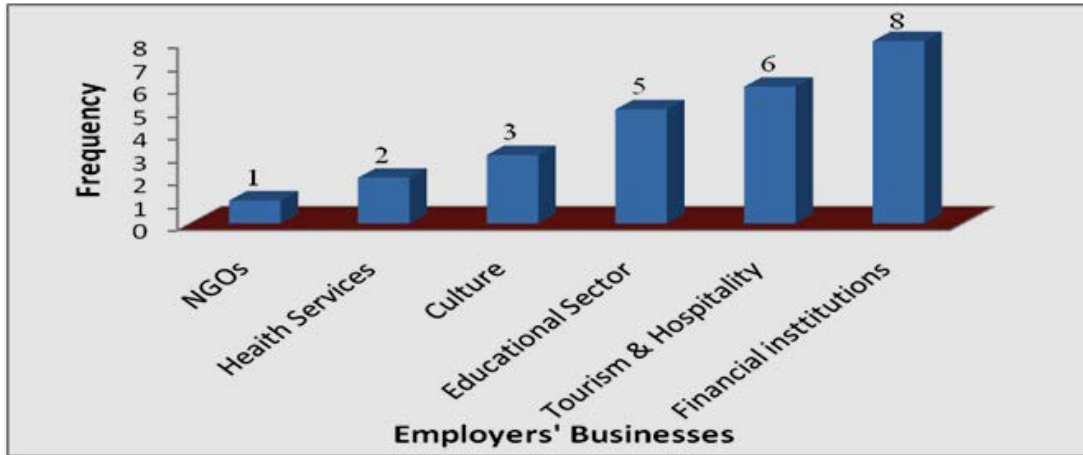
Figure 2: Occupational distribution of the employers

The data in Figure 2 show that eight of the employers were from financial institutions including banks, insurance companies and micro finance organizations. This was followed by six employers in the tourism and hospitality industry, the target of the study, with the educational sector having five employers. Those in the minority groups included persons in culture, health services and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as World Vision International (WVI). The employers were found to be working in four regions in the country (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Regional distribution of the employers

Though the research was conducted in eight of the ten regions in the country, questionnaires were retrieved from employers from only four of the regions, shown in Figure 3. They were from the Central and Greater Accra Regions, with the highest number of nine employers each, followed by the Ashanti Region with four employers and the Western Region with three employers.

Views of the respondents on employability skills

Taking a cue from Wang et al. (2009), in using the gap analysis model, both respondents (employers and graduates) were asked to rank the skills and work attributes, from the highest to the lowest ranks (i.e. 1, 2, 3, etc) and the differences between the ranks were computed. When the score (differences between A and B) was greater than zero, it was regarded as strength for ranked skills according to A (i.e. employers) and weakness for skills ranked by B (i.e. graduates). This was regarded as a positive gap (see Table 1). On the other hand, when the score was less than zero, or negative this meant that the ranking on the specific attribute favoured B, i.e. the graduates (strength) over A, i.e. employers (weakness). This negative gap, when very large, could be an indicator that a radical change was required.

Comparison of the ranking of skills and work attributes by the employers and the graduates was used to test for significant differences between skills acquired by the graduates and work attributes expected by the employers. In testing that hypothesis, reference was made to Table 1, which presents findings produced from comparing the views of skills and work attributes between employers and (their employees) the graduates. Figures for both respondents were merged to produce data for Table 1. It emerged from Table 1, that results of the t test performed on the data revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between the perceptions of the employers and those of the graduates on almost all the skills and work attributes listed (all p-values were between 0.174 and 0.990), except for academic grades, which produced a t value of 2.292 and was significant (p = .023). As the p value was less than the significant value of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. The evidence suggests that there are differences in the ranking and importance of academic grades by employers and the graduates.

As shown on Table 1, both employers and the graduates placed much emphasis on customer service skills, which are important for working in most service industries. It must also be noted that while the employers considered team working skills and creativity as very important, the graduates placed much premium on critical thinking skills, time management, confidence and decision making skills. These are all skills and work attributes that are important for success in today's business. It could also be noted from the table that not much emphasis were placed by both parties on written and oral communication skills and attentions to detail, which Ladkin (2012) referred to as soft skills'. There was however, differences in their views on one of Ladkin's soft skills, creativity; which was ranked 1st by the employers (mean=3.56), but was ranked 10th by the graduates (mean=3.44). It could also be noted that the graduates ranked academic grades lower than the employers, as students do everything during examinations to get good academic grades as an important criterion for getting a job after graduation. This supports the finding by Wang et al. (2009) that differences exist in the views of employers and employees on the importance of academic grades for employment.

Table 1: Employers and graduates' ranking of skills or work attributes acquired by graduates and required by industry

	Skills/Work Attributes	A Employers (N=25)		B Graduates' (N=174)		Diff. of Rank	t-test	
		Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank		t-value	Sig.(2-tailed)
1	Customer Service skills	3.56	1	3.75	1	0	-1.363	.174
2	Team working skills	3.56	1	3.53	6	-5	.188	.851
3	Creativity	3.56	1	3.44	10	-9	.786	.433
4	Time Management	3.52	4	3.59	2	2	-.444	.657
5	Problem solving skills	3.48	5	3.48	9	-4	.013	.990
6	Critical Thinking	3.44	6	3.57	4	2	-.810	.419
7	Confidence	3.44	6	3.59	2	4	-1.058	.291
8	Computer Skills	3.44	6	3.50	7	-1	-.397	.691
9	Leadership ability	3.40	9	3.27	13	-4	.762	.447
10	Decision making skills	3.40	9	3.57	4	5	-1.359	.176
11	Academic Grades	3.32	11	2.91	19	-8	2.292	.023*
12	Oral Communication	3.32	11	3.49	8	3	-1.063	.289
13	Written Communication	3.28	13	3.37	11	2	-.534	.594
14	Practical Skills	3.24	14	3.34	12	2	-.619	.537
15	Attention to detail	3.16	15	3.04	18	-3	.675	.500
16	Event Management skills	3.16	15	3.19	14	1	-.177	.860
17	Organizational skills	3.12	17	3.19	14	3	-.481	.631
18	Industry Knowledge	3.04	18	3.07	17	1	-.188	.851
19	Research Skills	2.92	19	3.12	16	2	-1.218	.225
20	Relevant work experience	2.76	20	2.89	20	0	-.738	.461

Note: Rank in order of importance: 1 = highest mean score, 20 = lowest mean score.
*Significance value <.0.05

Although the p-values of the two tailed t test for the skills and work attributes were mostly not significant, there were some notable differences between their rankings by the employers and the graduates. The differences between the views of the employers and the graduates were mainly on several of the skills and attributes except the first and last skills and attributes compared, i.e. customer service skills and relevant work experience. It could however, be noted that the employers ranked relevant work experience last among the list of skills or work attributes required by industry as it is known that most adverts by businesses for prospective employees mention two, three or even five years working experience required. The graduates were aware that work experience was a requirement for employment, so they considered industrial attachment as relevant work experience required for employment, as noted by Christou (1999) and West and Jameson (1990).

It could be noted from Table 1 that the employers placed a higher value on team work and creativity than the graduates. However, the graduates put more emphasis on time management and critical thinking than the employers. This was confirmed by one of the graduates interviewed who said that: "As a hotel manager, I am able to manage my time very well". This finding does not support that of Leon (2002) who found in his study that the graduates themselves reported difficulty with time management and verbal communication. In addition, while the employers considered problem solving skills as important, the graduates considered decision making and confidence as more important. However, problems are known to arise in everyday

management of businesses on which decisions must be taken. This was also affirmed by one graduate who remarked that: *"I need confidence at work to take important decisions to ensure my success at work"*.

Though the employers ranked critical thinking as sixth (mean=3.44), the graduates ranked it fourth in importance (mean =3.57). This was supported by a graduate interviewee who stated that: "Without critical thinking skills, I would have made unpardonable mistakes to jeopardize my work". These results show that in spite of minor differences between the perspectives of the employers and graduates on some of the employability skills compared, there were however, some similarities in their views on some of the skills that are needed by industry. Similar findings have been made by Swanger and Gursoy (2007) in their study on the development of educational curriculum that meets the needs of industry.

Regarding the graduates' knowledge of information communication and technology (ICT) skills, all the employers agreed that this has to be upgraded. This meant that the graduates were not well grounded in the practical application of ICT for industry (Wang, et al. 2009). The employers wished that they had employed graduates who were efficient in the use of simple computer applications such as Microsoft Word for typing, Excel for spreadsheet preparation and PowerPoint for presentations. The employers lamented that though during their interviewing before employment, most of the graduates professed to have learnt the use of computers at studies, the story was different when they faced the real situation at work.

Among the skills that the employers

considered as very important were problem solving and leadership ability. These are conceptual skills, which fall within the domain of human relations. This revelation confirms the findings of a study by Nelson and Dopson (2001). In that study, some 302 randomly selected American hotel executives were asked to rank important skills needed for their businesses. They ranked skills such as identifying and solving managerial problems, leadership abilities and development of a positive customer relationship, among the most important skills deemed necessary for tourism and hospitality graduates. Two areas that received complementary comments by the employers were problem solving skills and confidence, displayed by the graduates at work. One of the employers, who was a manager of a private financial institution in Takoradi, was full of praise for one of the graduates employed as a Marketing Officer with the credit and loans company. He had this to say about this graduate:

> *"If all the marketing officers in our other branches were hard working as him, our company would have progressed beyond what you see today. He always did the right thing and showed confidence in solving pertinent problems" (a 52 year-old employer).*

These are positive comments by the employers showing that some of the employers were satisfied with the skills being used by the graduates. The graduates also stated that they had obtained the skills needed by industry through their education at the polytechnic. One of the graduates mentioned Mar keting for Tourism and

Hospitality as one ofthe most important courses that he benefitted from, while studying at the Polytechnic. On the other hand, an employer of one of the graduates working in a guesthouse in Kumasi lamented on the performance of her employee:

> *"It took almost a year before my night supervisor could perform creditably at the Housekeeping department. I did not blame him too much because he told me that he didn't study Housekeeping as a course and had never worked in a hotel before going to the polytechnic" (A 39 year-old employer).*

These responses showed the importance of hospitality courses in the tourism curriculum.

All the four graduates interviewed agreed that they received more theoretical knowledge than practical skills in most of the business and hospitality courses they learnt at the polytechnic. These graduates mentioned business and catering related courses. The graduates however, indicated that they were prepared for employment in the tourism industry because they has some chances for industrial attachment, which had given them practical exposure to real-work situations in industry, where they were encouraged to think critically to solve problems and also manage their times judiciously. These are all important skills and work attributes needed for success in industry. These observations reflect the importance of industrial attachment in the education of tourism students, as it helps them to acquire employability skills needed by industry (Anakwe & Greenhaus, 2000; Harris & Zhao, 2004).

Conclusions and Recommendation

This paper provides a snapshot of the comparison of the views of some employers and their employees (who were graduates of a Ghanaian Polytechnic) on employability skills needed by industry. The findings suggest that there were generally no major differences in the views of the employers and graduates on most of the skills and work attributes studied. The absence of major differences notwithstanding, it is important to indicate that there were variations in the levels of importance that the groups placed on some skills required by industry. For example, while team working skills was ranked first by the employers, the graduates ranked it sixth.

Again, whilst the employers ranked problem solving skills fifth, it was ranked ninth by the graduates. This evidence points to a gap in placement of value on skills between the two groups. This problem therefore needs to be solved, so that polytechnic students being prepared for industry will know and strive for the best employability skills and work attributes that employers of industry require for employment. We therefore recommend that in the preparation and review of curricular used in preparing polytechnic students for industry, inputs from industry employers must be incorporated. This calls for a strong collaboration between educators in tertiary institutions such as polytechnics and employers in the various industries using the services of graduates from these tertiary institutions. If this is done, polytechnics as tertiary institutions will produce graduates with the right employability skills and work attributes, needed by industry.

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