

# Assessing Impact of Resource Capacity of Geography Departments on Student Employability Skills Development in Public Universities in Ghana

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## **Abstract**

*Educators assume that training institutions that are under-resourced are not likely to attain their goal of equipping their graduates with the requisite skills for the world of work. They further assume that resource capacities exist in the human, physical and other resources of academic departments. In order for geography departments to make judicious use of their resource capacities, this study explored and described the types of resource capacities that geography departments possess to train students in employable skills. The study in the main, adopted a qualitative research design, using focus group discussions and open-ended interview schedules for data collection. Different categories of respondents were included in the study: 36 students, 4 instructors, 4 employers, 19 support staff and 19 geography employees. The study institutions were the geography departments at the University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast, and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, all in Ghana. Results of the study showed that the geography departments deployed their resources to varying degrees to train students to acquire employable skills. Most of the employable skills that students acquired were developed to a moderate level. Based on the findings of the study, the study recommended that the geography departments formulate policies to improve the quality of all five capacity resources in the geography departments.*

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**Key words:** *Ghana, Capacity resources, geography departments, employability skills, human resource, physical resource, leadership resource, and intra- and inter-organisational resources.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The apparent indispensability of resources in education and training programmes is because they are finite and limited in nature. In this light, for an effective evaluation of geography programmes, there is the need to consider the availability and quality of resources. Resource capacities in the context of learning and development are all types of resources, including manpower, materials, tools and personal contacts, possessed by an organisation, which give it the ability to fulfil its mandate (Techpedia, undated). For geography departments to have the capability to develop students' employability skills, they need adequate amounts of resource capacities such as leadership, human, material, intra-and inter-organisational resources (Ababio, undated).

Effective leadership capacity is the ability of the leadership of an organisation to influence both the staff and students and other stakeholders towards the attainment of its goals (Lusthaus, Adrien, Anderson, Carden & Montalvan, 2002). This type of resource is used by a department to continuously change, adapt and follow a path that has been approved by its members and external stakeholders towards the actualisation of its mandate and

objectives. Effective leaders in educational institutions are those transformational leaders who through their initiatives lead the schools to transform students' lives, motivating and inspiring them to do things which on their own, they could not do (Ecker, Dufour & Dufour, 2002). However, one should not lose sight of the fact that, leadership alone is not a sufficient condition for effecting changes in the performance of an academic department.

The human resource capacity is about an organisation ensuring that it has enough people with the right kinds of competencies (i.e. knowledge, skills, abilities, motivation, experiences and behaviours) that it needs to perform well (McNernay, 1995; Hall, Andrukow, Broek, Embuldeniya, et al. 2003). It is purported to be the key element that influences directly all other types of resources. Nonetheless, before the human resource of an academic department could influence positively the other types of resources, it ought to be of high quality as affirmed by Newmann, King and Youngs (2000). In a study of some elementary schools in the USA, Newmann et al. contended that the teaching staff must be professionally competent in instructional and assessment strategies and must have high expectations for student learning.

Fowler and Ubels (2010) emphasise the importance of material resources such as finances, equipment, office space, etc. to ensure that no organisation is incapacitated. High quality technologies such as information, communication and telecommunication (ICT) equipment and library and information systems, including internet facilities broaden and facilitate a department's ability to collaborate with people in the external environment as these communication media help generate new ideas and increase public participation and networking opportunities for the department (De Vita & Fleming, 2001). Beaver and Weinbaum (2012: 4) when highlighting the role that material resources play in improving school capacity, noted that "material resources can only improve school capacity only if they are used in connection with other resources; material resource being inanimate objects can only be of benefit to an organisation if it is deployed in support of other forms of resources that allow the school to improve". Newmann et al. (2000) also contend that any school desirous of improvement should endeavour to procure such resources as high quality curriculum and other teaching learning materials, such as books, assessment instruments, laboratory equipment, computers and adequate workspace

Newmann et al. contend that a strong inter-staff collaboration is characterised by

- (a) Collaboration and collective responsibility among the teachers to achieve common goals;
- (b) The staff sharing clear goals for student learning;
- (c) Joint professional inquiry by the staff to address challenges faced by them (e.g. curriculum alignment);and
- (d) Opportunities for staff to influence school policies (p. 263).

The Beaver and Weinbaum also view another resource, inter-staff collaboration as "the intangible network of relationships that fosters unity and trust within a school's staff" (p. 3). Beaver and Weinbaum add that though a high quality human capital is a necessary condition for strong school capacity, it must sufficiently be encouraged and developed in concert with other components of resource capacity, particularly the social capital. When the skills and expertise of staff are not shared, and for that matter, remain with individual staff members, such kind of human capital cannot be engendered for improved performance. When inter-staff collaboration is weak, it has a corresponding spill over effect on the other types of institutional resources; when there is little communication and animosity among factions of the staff, it becomes extremely difficult for the staff to build coordinated and integrated curricula, thus reducing the department's capacity for attaining its goals.

It should be noted that, a high quality staff cannot alone bring about effective training of students, unless the efforts of all the teachers are mobilised and coordinated into group efforts for the total success of that educational institution. When staff members are

accountable to one another and their students, it brings about not only the holistic development of that institution, but also their students, thus affirming Schmoker and Marzano's (2000) contention that the very nature of institutions makes it imperative for them to succeed when all parties in it are rowing in the same direction.

Misener and Doherty (2009) refer to inter-organisational linkage resource as the ability of the institution to draw on relationships with clients, members, alliances, funding agencies, government and the media. In highlighting the nature of inter-organisational linkages, De Vita and Fleming (2001) have noted the various forms that such linkages can take – collaborations, alliances and partnerships, networking, etc. The main significance of inter-organisational linkages is to leverage the social capital of institutions. By identifying themselves with like-minded institutions, they expose their products and services to the public. Such linkages also have multiplier effects – they can increase the resources available to the institution as postulated by the resource dependency theory. Conversely, empirical research has shown that isolated institutions are the ones most likely to struggle and eventually go into oblivion (Galaskiewicz & Bielefeld, 1998 as cited in De Vita & Fleming, 2001). Similarly, Coyne and Dye (1998) noted that inter-organisational linkages help institutions to keep up with advances in pertinent fields, and give access to wide-ranging sources of up-to-date information within each area of the institution's work.

In relating the inter-organisational linkage resource capacity to this study and its impact on the employability skills development of students, we looked at the quality and types of collaborations, alliances, partnerships and networks that the geography departments had or hoped to involve in with academic and non-academic institutions. This study looked at for instance, the number and types of national and international staff and student exchange programmes that the geography departments had and how these engagements were contributing to the employability skills development of students. The next subsection outlined the objectives of the study.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The general objective of the study was to assess the impact of resource capacities on geography departments' ability to equip students with employable skills. Specifically, the study sought to

1. Explore the role of resource capacities in the implementation of projects, which result in employable learning outcomes;
2. Investigate how resource capacities affect employability-related courses or modules; and
3. Examine impact of instructional strategies on student employability skills development.

### **THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE STUDY**

The theory underpinning this study is the resource dependency theory (RDT). The main postulate of this theory is that all organizations rely on resources from their environment. Since these resources are controlled by other organizations in the external environment, these organizations are able to exert power and control over the recipient organizations that require their resources (Fadare, 2013). Similarly, Pfeffer and Salanchi (1978) argue that for organizations to survive, it is imperative that they acquire and maintain resources, a key postulate of the RDT. Adding to this argument, Hatch (2013) explains that an organisation's reliance on its environment is a function of its need for input resources like equipment and materials, labour, capital and sale outlets for its products and services.

In applying the resource dependency theory to geography departments, it can be said that these academic departments indeed depend on resources provided by the external

environment. The geography departments being subsystems within a supra-system such as the university system depend on universities for their input resources. For instance, students who are the “raw materials” for geography departments are admitted into the university through the university registrar. Again, an input resource such as staff is recruited into the university system through the registrar. Other inputs such as equipment and teaching learning materials are acquired by the university on behalf of the geography departments. In addition, the heads of department are appointed by the Vice Chancellor in consultation with the dean or provost of the faculty/school or college in which the department is located.

Aside the influence of the university on the survival of the geography departments, other organizations and associations in the external environment also influence the survival of the departments. These organizations and associations include professional associations of which the staff of the geography departments are members, alumni associations whose members are at times, invited by the geography departments to deliver lectures to both staff and students and employers and business entities where graduates of the geography departments are likely to get employment. These employers and professionals often offer advisory and consultancy services to the geography departments and in some cases serve on the boards of some of these departments. Lastly, geography departments the world over have international collaborations with other academic and non-academic organizations. They influence one another through staff and student exchange programmes, joint research projects and funding of locally initiated programmes and projects.

## **METHODOLOGY**

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

### **Research Design**

The qualitative case study design was employed to carry out the study. This design is an inquiry-based research process aimed at understanding a social or human problem, using words to report the views or perspectives of the participants in their natural settings (Creswell, 1994). In this study, the researcher visited the participants at the geography departments and places of work of the graduate employees and employers to collect their views on the research problem.

### **Research Institutions**

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

### **Population, Sample and Sampling Procedures**

The target population was all level 400 undergraduate students and their instructors in the geography department. Thirty-six students and 19 support staff were purposively selected for the focus group discussion and open-ended interview guide, respectively. Convenience sampling was used to select four instructors, because majority of the instructors decided to complete the self-administered questionnaire, which was the main instrument for data collection. Through snowball sampling, 4 employers and 19 graduate employees were

included in the study. The triangulation of the views of the heads of department, students, graduate employees and employers, provided diverse information, particularly concerning the types of internal and external resources that impact on student employability skills development.

### **Research Instruments and Data Collection Procedures**

Instruments for qualitative data collection which were deployed include focus group discussion protocols, observation guides and interview guides. A 14-item interview guide, with particular focus on items 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12, was administered to four instructors. The focus group protocol contained 13 items, with particular emphasis on items 3, 4, and 6 to 10. A 12-item interview guide, with emphasis on items 5, 6, 9, 10 and 11 was administered to 19 graduate employees, A 13-item interview guide, with emphasis on item 4 to 13, was administered to four employers. A 11-item interview guide, with particular focus on items 2 to 8 and 10, was also administered to two heads of department. The focus group discussion protocol was administered to 36 students in four different sessions, with each session lasting between 60 and 80 minutes. A 25-item questionnaire with five open-ended items was administered to the support or auxiliary staff. Lastly, a 12 item observation guide, guided by the constructivist theory was administered in six sessions, with each session lasting between an hour and two hours. Each department had two observation sessions. The field survey was conducted in the last quarter of 2015.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the study's objectives, this section is in three subsections, namely, examining perspectives of stakeholders on (a) the impact of resource capacities on projects and activities implemented by the departments, (b) how resource capacities account for employability-related courses/modules, and (c) impact of instructional strategies on student employability skills development. In arriving at these three themes, the researcher, with the aid of qualitative analytical software, Nvivo 8, used thematic analysis to derive these themes.

### **Impact of Resource Capacities on Projects and Activities organised for Students**

In organising projects and activities for students, all capacity resources were deployed by the geography departments. Students' participation in these projects or activities helped them to acquire certain employable skills. According to the students, their participation in group work or projects enabled them to acquire employable skills such as self-confidence, time management skills, interpersonal skills, presentation skills, research or data gathering skills, how to use equipment/tools/devices, and report writing skills (USFT, p. 14). Other projects and activities such as field trips helped students to firm up conceptual understanding of classroom instruction and the ability to put theory into practice. Oral presentations aided the students to hone their communication skills and boosted their self-confidence (USFT, p. 14).

Apart from the role played by the instructors in organising projects or activities, the heads of department also, occasionally organised events such as seminars and public presentations, where professionals from the corporate world came to speak on themes such as students' employment prospects and skills requirements for the job market. On one occasion, at the initiative of one head of department, an official from a shipping company was invited to speak on graduate job prospects in the maritime industry (USFT, p.17). The heads of department according to the instructors occasionally provided financial support for educational tours or fieldtrips within and outside the home regions of the geography departments (ASQT, p.2).

From the analysis of the impact of human resource capacity on student employable skills development, views from the students and the instructors show that this type of



resource helped students to acquire employable skills in three out of the study's four domains of employable skills, except commercial awareness. According to the students, projects and activities such as fieldwork, oral presentations and report writing helped them acquire employable skills and personal attributes such as self-confidence, interpersonal skills, presentation skills, use of equipment and report writing skills. These perspectives agreed with the instructors' views, who noted that, the heads of department often provided financial support for fieldtrips and initiated the mentoring of young instructors. Similarly, the support staff also helped in preparing laboratories and classrooms for instruction, organising field trips and conducting tutorials for students. The role of projects and activities in the training of students is in agreement with the student involvement theory and the constructivist theory, which state that, students' participation in extra-curricular activities such as workshops, seminars, student presentations, fieldwork and report writing, improves their academic learning time.

Another resource, physical resources also aided students' acquisition of employable skills through projects and activities. For example, students' use of the GIS laboratory helped them acquire employable skills such as ability to use equipment and practical thinking. The GIS devices help students to understand classroom instruction better. The GIS laboratory also helped them to acquire technical skills such as map making. The students also intimated that they acquired reading skills and built up their knowledge base when they patronised the library. They nevertheless, bemoaned the situation where sometimes, the libraries were overcrowded due to increasing student population. Again, they saw the malfunctioning of some equipment such as projectors and public address systems as a hindrance to their quest to acquire employable skills (USFT, p. 14).

In affirming the positive contributions of the physical resources to the training of students, the instructors also noted that, some facilities such as the library enhance students' reading skills and serve as a multi-source of information for academic references and research (ASQT, p.3). They, however, bemoaned the limited role of the laboratories (e.g. GIS, cartography, etc.), in the sense that students derived limited educational value from them due to factors such as limited physical space to keep laboratory materials, malfunctioning and out-dated equipment. The instructors, in spite of these inhibiting factors, admitted that, students got hands-on training in GIS and therefore acquired spatial analytical skills (ASQT, p. 4).

The views of other members of staff were also analysed concerning the adequacy of physical resources in the training of students in employable skills. When the views of the 19 support staff on the adequacy of physical resources for the training of students were analysed, almost half of them stated that the resources were inadequate (SSQT, p. 2). The fact that those in this group were more than those who indicated various degrees of adequacy of the physical resources implies that there is the need for the geography departments to augment the available stock of physical resources. This position of the support staff was in alignment with that of the two heads of department who in a way admitted the inadequacy of the physical resources. However, one stated that despite the satisfactory state of the physical resources, there was the need to augment and improve upon the current stock (HDQT, p.1).

In order to get another perspective on the state of the physical resources in the geography departments, the researcher deployed six structured observation guides aimed at assessing the quality and state of the resources. In five of the observation guides, it was indicated that, the teaching learning equipment/tools were of moderate quality. As regards the quality of library reading materials on employable skills learning outcomes, about two thirds of the observation guides indicated low quality. Lastly, the lecture halls and student study rooms were inspected. All the observers who administered the observation guide unanimously concluded that the physical resources were of moderate quality with regard to

seating capacity and state of facilities in the rooms (OT, p. 1).

In summary, the analysis of the impact of physical resources on student employability skills development showed moderate impact. For instance, the observation guides showed that the physical resources such as equipment/tools were of moderate capacity for the development of student employability skills. The students also agreed that the physical resources, though inadequate, helped them acquire some skills, a view that was in line with the perceptions of the instructors and support staff. UNESCO (1998) states that quality training in educational institutions is dependent on the quantity and quality of teaching learning materials, of equipment, office space, lecture halls and laboratories. This assertion by UNESCO is an affirmation of one key postulate of the systems theory - that in any institutional assessment, the input variables should be included.

The role of another resource, intra-departmental collaboration, was analysed with regard to the projects or activities jointly undertaken in the geography departments. From the interaction with the students, the following issues emerged after the thematic analysis:

- (a) Staff (academic and support) and students jointly organised field trips;
- (b) The heads of department and the students' associations also organised programmes and seminars on critical themes such as the role of GIS in national development, job prospects in the shipping industry, etc.;
- (c) Students collaborated, individually and collectively with their instructors to undertake research projects on key issues relating to their training;
- (d) Staff-student collaboration during students' associations week celebration; and
- (e) Students acquired social skills when they engaged in sporting activities with the staff.

The students intimated that such collaborations enabled them to acquire several employable skills such as leadership skills, data gathering skills, ability to use equipment, boosting of self-confidence, presentation and report writing skills, etc. (USFT, 7). From the analyses of the perspectives of the respondents and field notes from the observation guides, we can therefore, say that intra-departmental collaboration contributed in various ways to student employable skills development, especially in the development of intellectual and personal/key skills and personal attributes. The respondents identified some areas that the departments engaged in intra-organisational collaborative activities. In support of this, one female student intimated "during geography students' association (GEOSA) celebrations, the leadership of the department together with the executives organise outreach programmes, seminars and orientations, which do help us a lot" (FUSFT). Another male student also opined "I remember some time ago, the CERGIS unit and the GIS unit did some joint project to train students in the use of modern technology"(MUSFT). In agreement with the assertions made by the students, one instructor noted that at times "lecturers collaborate with one another to undertake team teaching, supervise students' project work and see to students' presentations" (ASQT).

Another source of data on the role of intra-departmental collaboration in departmental projects or activities was the heads of department. Their role was more facilitative in nature, in that on most occasions, they had to source for funds for the departments to organise workshops and seminars and for staff and students to undertake field trips. They also spearheaded the mentoring of the young instructors in the department (HDQT, p. 3). Views of the heads of department show that the departments at various points in the past had some collaboration within and outside Ghana. They collaborated with corporate entities to receive some equipment for the training of students, especially in GIS and remote sensing; they also organised workshops and seminars, inviting professionals from both academia and industry to serve as resource persons. Other areas of external collaborations include undertaking joint research projects and consultancy services with their colleagues from other universities within and outside Ghana, though mostly on individual

basis (HDQT, p. 2).

The staff also contributed to collaborative activities in the departments, in several ways. The instructors intimated that, they collaborated with one another to undertake joint instructional activities; they jointly supervised students' long essays and project work, with some assisting students in the preparation of oral and poster presentations (ASQT, p.6). Similarly, the support staff also contributed their quota. Some assisted in the preparation of lecture halls and laboratories for lectures, took students on fieldtrips, served as sounding boards to students in the writing of long essays, and organised tutorials for students. Majority of the 19 support staff, however, indicated that since their appointment (ranging from 1 to 5 years), there had not been any occasion in the past where the various units/sections in their departments collaborated to undertake joint projects to train students in employable skills – that their roles were mostly at the individual level (SSQT, p.3).

Lastly, direct observations were carried out by the researcher and his field assistants in an attempt to validate the evidence garnered from the other instruments. The direct observation on departmental activities showed that intra-departmental collaboration was of low capacity as attested to by four of the direct observations on the activities of the departments. The duration for each observation ranged from 1 to 2 hours, depending on the object of observation at the time of the visits (OT, p.1).

From the perspectives of the students, the instructors, heads of department, support staff and the observers, we can conclude that intra-departmental collaboration contributed in various ways to student development employable skills especially, in the development of intellectual and personal/key skills and personal attributes. All the above assertions are in line with tenets of the competency model, which state that students acquire competencies when instructions revolve around highly interactive discussions between instructors and students, and among students. It elaborates further that for the development of competent learning outcomes, intra-unit collaborative discussions, especially between staff and students should be encouraged.

The last resource that was analysed is inter-departmental collaboration. In responding to the open-ended interview guide, the instructors indicated occasions where their departments had different types of collaboration with other academic departments and the corporate world. A breakdown of their views is as follows:

- (a) In 2014, one department collaborated with the Geomatics Department during the GIS Day celebration;
- (b) Another department organised team teaching involving instructors from the department and other sister departments;
- (c) One department extended invitations to professionals from the ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), NADMO, Town & Country Planning, EPA, GES, etc.) to speak on key thematic issues.
- (d) Another department entered into a collaborative agreement with an organisation called Sambus to train students in GIS skills.
- (e) All three departments engaged in staff and student exchange programmes with some universities abroad, for instance the Association of American Geographers (AAG), International Union of Geographers, etc. (ASQT, pp. 4 & 5).

Another source of data for the role of inter-departmental collaboration in departmental activities aimed at training students in employable skills was the students. Their views on this issue are as follows:

- (a) In 2014, there was a collaboration between one geography department and the Geomatics Departments during the GIS Day;
- (b) Instructors from other departments were occasionally invited to teach some courses in the geography departments;



- (c) In 2014, one department collaborated with the environmental science department to teach a certain course in the absence of the substantive instructor;
- (d) In the early part of 2015, final year students in one particular department undertook a fieldtrip to the Town & Country Planning department at Takoradi where they were given an orientation on urban planning issues;
- (e) Every year during the long vacation, the departments give students introductory letters for industrial attachments with some corporate entities (USFT, pp. 16 & 17).

Lastly, feedback from both the geography graduates and their employers or bosses, shows that their respective establishments had very little collaborations with the geography departments. All the four employers indicated that there had not been any form of collaboration between their establishments and the geography departments at the time of the field survey (EGQT, p.2). Majority of the 19 graduate employees intimated that there had not been any form of collaboration between their establishments and their alma mater. The few examples of collaboration included joint teaching and consultancy and technical services in map making provided by the geography departments (GGQT, pp. 5 & 6). From the perspectives of the various stakeholders, we can infer that inter-organisational collaborations were in different forms, and had a mixed impact on student employability skills development. These assertions are in line with some earlier studies where the researchers found that there was significant disconnect between academic programmes and the world of work, and that some graduates were not given the opportunity to engage in industrial attachment during their undergraduate training (Wiafe, 2003; Evans et al., 2009; Bawakyillenuo et al., 2013).

### **Role of courses/modules in student employability skills development**

In analysing this issue, the roles of all the five resource capacities were analysed. Firstly, interactions with students showed how some courses taught by the instructors had helped them acquire some employable skills. A summarised list of their views include,

- (a) Spatial organisation has honed students' ability to plan and organise;
- (b) Environmental studies and rural development had equipped students with problem-solving skills;
- (c) The GIS course and Poverty studies had made students to be abreast of current IT and environmental issues in the corporate world;
- (d) Industrial location has enabled students to develop interpersonal skills;
- (e) Geomorphology and other physical geography courses had provided opportunities for students to put theory into practice;
- (f) Transport geography has helped students to enact workplace practices, develop communication and interpersonal skills (USFT, pp. 1, 2 & 4).

The instructors on their part indicated their unique role in the design and implementation of the courses in the department. Of special mention, were design of courses like GIS, remote sensing, cartography, field studies, rural and urban studies, regional planning and, environmental resource management. Students' participation in these courses had equipped them with one kind of employable skill or another (ASQT, p. 3). The heads of department also indicated that, in the past, they initiated the design of some courses such as GIS, remote sensing, map reading and interpretation (HDQT, p.1).

The researcher in an attempt to seek external affirmation of the views of the staff and students of the geography departments sought the views of geography graduate employees on how the undergraduate courses that they studied were relevant to their current job profiles. Majority of them indicated how some general geography courses and specific courses such as GIS, remote sensing, research methods, transport geography, ICT, etc. had equipped them with employable skills such as research skills, problem-solving skills, knowledge on

workplace practices, communication skills, leadership and management skills and interpersonal skills (GGQT, p. 3). The few graduates who saw no connection between their current job responsibilities and the courses that they studied at the university were in commercial establishments such as restaurants, banks and loans and savings firm (GGQT, p. 1).

A careful scrutiny of the transcripts of the heads of department, the instructors, students, graduate employees and their employers or bosses showed that at no point in time did the geography departments collaborate with other academic and non-academic institutions in the design of the courses run by the geography departments. However, there were some forms of collaboration in the implementation of some of the courses, as shown in the following examples:

- (a) In one geography department, instructors from other departments were occasionally invited to teach courses in that department;
- (b) In 2014, one geography department collaborated with the environmental science department to teach some courses in the absence of the substantive instructor (USFT, pp. 16 & 17);
- (c) In the implementation of a GIS course, one geography department collaborated with a private geospatial firm to train students in geospatial skills (ASQT, p.4).

From the perspectives of the instructors and heads of department, most of the inter-institutional collaborations that the geography departments had with outsiders were not in curriculum design and implementation, hence the low contribution of inter-departmental collaboration to courses/modules run by the geography departments. As regards the role of intra-departmental collaboration in curriculum design and implementation, data from the transcripts of the students, heads of department, instructors and the support staff showed very little evidence. Though admittedly there were intra-departmental collaborations, most of them were in the area of research projects and instruction, but not in curriculum design or development.

The above findings are similar to Evans et al.'s (2009) study on some Indonesian higher education institutions where they found that stakeholders from the corporate world were not meaningfully involved in curriculum reviews and practical research. They added that the collaboration was normally one-way with the educational institutions providing services to the corporate entities, but not the other way round. The findings of this study and the literature clearly show that the geography departments did not use adequately, all their resources in the design and implementation of courses to train students in employable skills.

### **Impact of instructional strategies on student employability skills development**

In this section, the investigator first presents instructional strategies used by the instructors that aided the training of students in employable skills and those that did not. The next issue is about the use of physical resources in instruction – in-class and out-of-door instruction. The third issue presented in this section is the role played by the heads of department in the use of instructional strategies in their departments. Lastly, the investigator discusses ways by which the geography departments used intra- and inter-departmental collaborations to influence instructional strategies.

### ***Relevance of instructional strategies to employability skills training***

The following are views of the stakeholders on the relevance of instructional strategies to employable skills development:

- (a) Some of the questions that were posed to students were not only academic, but also related to the world of work;
- (b) Students were trained to acquire most of the skills in the world of work and were

- often motivated to apply these skills wherever possible;
- (c) Students were trained to be well equipped with knowledge about current happenings in the world and how best they could contribute to solving them (USFT, p. 5).
  - (d) Instructors trained students to acquire employable skills, through class assignments, fieldwork, examinations, group assignments and presentations, problem identification and provision of solutions, research activities, coaching, etc. (ASQT, p. 1).
  - (e) Training in geography enabled some geography students(now graduates) to identify problems, seek explanations and seek solutions for them;
  - (f) Instruction in research methods helped geography students (now graduates) to investigate problems that arise in the job environment, acquire research and report writing skills (GGQT, p.3);
  - (g) Most of the instruction touched on real world situations, with key analyses being drawn between theoretical issues and real world practicalities;
  - (h) There was a direct relationship between the topic of instruction and real issues on the ground or in the world (OT, p.3).

Some student-centred instructional strategies helped students to acquire various types of employable skills. According to the learning pyramid, when the main goal of instruction is to actively engage students in activities such as group discussion, practice by doing, and peer teaching, students tend to retain 50%, 75% and 90% of the learning material respectively (Haffar, 2016: Daily Graphic, March 19, 2016, p. 53).

#### ***Minimal or negative impact of instructional strategies on employability skills training***

The following are summarised views of stakeholders on the negative or minimal impact of the instructional strategies on employable skills development:

- (a) Most assignments given to students were too theoretical (USFT, p. 10);
- (b) There was too much emphasis on examinations, resulting in students having the tendency to not read for understanding, but rather cram the learning materials in order to pass the examination;
- (c) Instructors tended to indulge students in “cut and paste” and theoretical assignments resulting in students having only surface understanding of issues;
- (d) Most instructors resorted to administering pen-and-paper examination to the exclusion of oral ones(USFT, p. 11);
- (e) The marking schemes did not assess understanding, but rather expected students to “chew and pour”, i. e. rote learning;
- (f) The use of verbose and technical language did not help student understanding of issues in class (USFT, p. 16).
- (g) Instructors did not combine theory with practice in their instruction;
- (h) Students were not involved practically during instruction and did not receive enough guidance from the instructors(ASQT, p.2);
- (i) The classroom instruction given to the graduate employees did not give them the practical experience needed for the workplace;
- (j) Most of the instruction was theoretical and therefore, made the application of learning materials difficult;
- (k) In the view of one graduate employee, about 99% of the instruction was on the learning of textual material and theory with little practical work (GGQT, pp. 4 & 5); and
- (l) Some aspects of the instruction appeared not to be applicable to real world situation (OT, p. 3).

The analysis of the impact of instructional strategies on student learning outcomes shows that most of the instructional strategies were theoretical or abstract thus making student

participation in class passive. This sad situation might have happened probably because the geography departments failed to make maximum use of physical resources, intra- and inter-organisational collaboration in designing innovative instructional strategies to train students. Nevertheless, some of the views also supported the fact that the heads of department, instructors, support staff and students used their leadership, intra- and inter-organisational resources to undertake various forms of instructional activities that might have inured to the benefit of students.

The limited impact of instructional strategies on student employability skills development is contrary to the postulates of some human development theories and models. The competency-based model posits that in the training of students, the focus should be on problem-solving tasks, task-based training instead of knowledge-based training and applied knowledge instead of pure knowledge. In apparent support of this, the systems theory also states that for the effective assessment of educational institutions, the assessment should focus on throughput variables such as the nature, number and frequency of examinations, quizzes and assignments; hands-on instruction/activities, and the use of multi-media and IT devices. Lastly, the student involvement theory also argues that, for students to gain competency, they need to actively, spend more time at lectures, reading, discussing and engaging in hands-on activities.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study's findings showed that through the deployment of different types of resources like leadership, human, physical, intra-organisational collaborations and inter-organisational linkages, the geography departments were able to equip students with employable skills to a moderate level. However, one particular employable skill domain, which the departments failed to develop to an appreciable level in their undergraduate students, is commercial awareness. This finding is in tandem with the existing literature on the paucity of employable skills that some tertiary education graduates are equipped with (Wiafe, 2003; Solem, Cheung & Schlemper., 2008; Akinyemi, Ofem & Ikyenomore, 2012 & Haffar, Jan. 12, 2015). From the findings of this study and the literature, it can be concluded that the geography departments, like other tertiary academic departments have not been able to deploy fully, their resources to adequately equip their students with employable skills.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As regards the human resource capacity, there is the need for the departments to periodically, organise seminars and workshops on instructional practices and good human relations for both staff and students. Concerning role of students, the departments should occasionally, hold public forums on how students can improve upon their learning. Lastly, the investigator recommends the need for a policy that makes it imperative for all instructors to get a minimum professional qualification of a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE), with particular specialisation in geography education.

To make the role of physical resources more effective, the study calls for a policy that makes it professionally unacceptable for instructors to teach without the use of electronic devices such as GPS, computers and projectors. To guarantee the success of such a policy, the geography departments must endeavour to procure these IT and geospatial devices, so that every instructor will have access to them at any point in time. There is also the need for a policy which calls for intermittent review and re-structuring of courses that current happenings in the world of work have exposed to be defunct.

Concerning the role of leadership as a resource, the investigator recommends that the heads of departments are given training in resource mobilisation after which the departments must embark on a vigorous resource mobilisation drive aimed to source for funds and human

capital to augment the training of students. It is also imperative that a policy be enacted for the departments to give their heads of department an orientation on current best practices in geography education and training. This will make such heads of department to be abreast of employability issues in geography education and training.

Concerning the role of inter-organisational linkages, it is recommended that a policy is enacted by the departments on how best they could take advantage of opportunities in both corporate and academic institutions. Such a policy should include (a) signing a memorandum of understanding with targeted business entities for mandatory student internship programmes; (b) attaching instructors to appropriate industrial establishments for them to gain knowledge on workplace practices related to their courses; (c) There should be private sector representations on curriculum review, design and implementation committees; (d) periodic review of geography curricula by accredited national agencies and boards; (e) extending invitations to corporate executives and professionals to serve as guest lecturers, to shape and provide practical insights on current best practices in geography-orientated occupations; and (f) engagement with both private and public bodies for the supply of teaching learning materials and equipment to enhance the training of students.

To address the deficiency in inter-staff collaboration, this study recommends the concept of 'lesson study', a popular peer-review instructional methodology in Japanese training institutions. This teaching methodology operates on the principle of Plan-Do-See for improvement in classroom instruction through peer observation, with its main focus exclusively on the lesson. It is also recommended that staff-student relations, is strengthened; instructors should operate an open door policy for their students to have access to their stock of knowledge and expertise anytime and anywhere.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Codes for Participants**

For the qualitative data collection, the researcher collected data from 36 students in four focus group discussions, and open-ended interview protocol administered to 4 instructors, 4 employers and 19 geography graduate employees and 6 observation sessions.

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

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