Exploring the destinations of higher national diploma graphic design graduates in the Ghanaian labour market

Josephine Sarpong-Nyantakyi[1] Patrick Osei-Poku[2] and Eric Francis Eshun[3]

[1]
Josephine Sarpong-Nyantakyi, Lecturer,
Takoradi Technical University Takoradi, Ghana

[2]
Patrick Osei-Poku, Senior Lecturer,
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Kumasi, Ghana.

[3]
Eric Francis Eshun, Senior Lecturer,
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Kumasi, Ghana.

Abstract

The study investigated the development status of graduates of Higher National Diploma (HND) Commercial Art Programme (Graphic Design option) of the Takoradi Technical University (TTU) in Ghana. It examined 1,013 academic transcripts of the past students to ascertain the career pathways of the graduates. The results revealed that most HND graduates enrol in various professional fields to further their studies. The study therefore concludes that most students see the HND Commercial Art Programme (Graphic Design option) as a stepping stone to other professions. Hence the study recommends a replacement of the old curriculum with a Competency-Based Training module which would ensure that practical approach to teaching and learning processes are adopted to make trainees work ready for the world of work.

Keywords:
Higher National Diploma, Commercial Art Programme, Graphic Design, graduate destination, career pathways, Competency-Based Training.

1. Introduction

Issues of employability are dear to every nation because it is the bedrock of economic development. Whiles pursuing good economic policies to ensure that factors of production are adequately combined for optimum output, it is even more important to employ pragmatic education policies which are viable and progressive. It is in this regard that the erstwhile polytechnic, now Technical Universities education, were instituted through expediential policy to provide the middle level manpower needs of the economy, in order to bridge the gap between higher and lower level manpower in industry, commerce, municipal and community services (Afeti 2003). Whiles seeing Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes as key to poverty reduction, Oseni (2011) believes that they have the knack to develop the competencies of Ghana's workforce and

make them relevant to the world of work. In buttressing this claim, Kalufya (2017) further asserts that graduate unemployment is on the ascendency because academic institutions are not able to match up outcomes with workplace expectations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Technical Vocational Education and Training in Ghana

In principle, TVET education is expected to equip youths with the requisite technical and professional proficiency as well as nurture them for world of work (WoW). These are paramount in promoting the socio-economic development of every country (Ansah and Kissi 2013). Similarly, TVET is seen as the aspect of training that involves the acquisition of techniques and the application of knowledge of science for the improvement of man's surroundings (Olabanji and Oyebolu 2013). This aspect of education which is essential in developing nations, also prepares students for the WoW besides providing skills and manpower for industry.

Despites the benefits associated with TVET programmes, literature suggests that the Technical Universities (TUs) in Ghana are still facing serious employability challenges. Moreover, the Ministry of Employment and Labour Statistics does not have an appropriate tool to measure the rate of unemployment due to her inability to define the key component of employability (Ansah 2012 and Akomaning et al. 2011). The ultimate aim of the TVET programme is to make learners acquire practical and specialized skills, which are essential to enhance the economic development of the country. Ansah and Kissi (2013) stress that apart from equipping students with the specialized skills required for socio-economic and industrial development of Ghana, technical and vocational education are expected to emphasizes training, which is capable of making graduates self-

employed. Nevertheless, self-employment has been an area that receives very little attention from most fresh graduates because some of their skills are irrelevant to industrial expectations (Audu et al. 2013).

The literature also indicates that very little has been done to appraise the relevance of the HND Commercial Art Programme to the world of work in Ghana. Neither has there been any study on graduates' chances of securing job on the market (Afeti et al. 2003) except for a few studies that evaluated the effectiveness of the Fashion Design Programme at Accra Polytechnic now Accra Technical University and one that examined the linkage between design education in the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and the Graphic Design industry (Adu, 2015; Antiaye et al. 2013 and Afeti et al. 2003).

In buttressing this point, Piróg (2014) also asserts that a vital approach in assessing the significance of an educational programme is through graduates tracer studies to ascertain the career paths of the graduates. So that the results that emerges from the survey could be used to assess the worth of the curriculum. This study seeks to fill the gap by determining the labour market destinations of the HND Graphic Design graduates of the Takoradi Technical University.

2.2 TVET- An Engine of Growth and Development

Equipping the Ghanaian youth with the requisite technical and professional skills vital for socio-economic development of the nation is the ultimate aim of establishing TVET in Ghana. Shortly after Ghana's independence in 1957, the government of Ghana turned its attention towards education and economic advancement. To enable government to formulate education and economic

advancement, technical education was adopted to train middle-level manpower for the economy. Hence, trade and technical centres were established which, offered craft programmes that aided colonial masters at the time (Boakye-Agyeman 2006, Acheampong 2013). As time went by, interest in education shifted to clerical jobs and many students opted for the liberal arts programmes (Acheampong 2013).

The Polytechnic law-PNDC 321 was later promulgated in 1992, which upgraded the six existing polytechnics in Accra, Takoradi, Kumasi, Ho, Tamale and Cape coast to tertiary education level (GoG 2002). A white paper issued in 1993, gave prominence to polytechnic education in Ghana and was followed by the national policy to decentralize education (GoG 1993). Later, four fresh polytechnics were established in Sunyani, Koforidua, Wa and Bolgatanga and started running HND programmes right from their inception.

2.3 The setting up of Polytechnics in Ghana

A report on review of Education Reforms in Ghana (GoG 2002) outlines the objectives of the Polytechnics as follows:
   a. To develop people with intellectual and analytical mind and enable them to be beneficial to their society.
   b. To train and to equip people with the needed knowledge and skills to empower them to conduct basic and applied research and disseminate research findings.
   c. To produce a pool of graduates capable of adapting and applying research findings to meet the challenges of national developments.
   d. To produce both high and middle level human capital for various sectors of the economy in the face of dynamic industrialization requirement.

By the white paper, the polytechnics were restricted to syllabi dedicated to practical training which mandated the polytechnics to turn out dynamic citizens who will be relevant to society (GoG 2002).

Subsequently, the new Polytechnic Act 745 that replaced the PNDC Law 321 (GoG 1992) also spells out the following objectives:
   1. To maintain teaching and learning environment conducive to training highly skilled and competent manpower invested with entrepreneurial skills in partnership with other institutions and industry;
   2. To provide opportunities for and conduct applied research to advance economic growth; and
   3. To provide expert service with the view to satisfying needs. The rationale for this vision is to provide middle-level technical position in business and industry.

These objectives outlined above are commendable, attainable and have positively impacted and enhanced the socio-cultural, economic and intellectual capacity for the industries and the nation as a whole.

Baffour-Awuah and Thompson (2011) confirmed that this move became necessary after 1957 when the country's workforce expanded and overwhelmed it formal employments and resulted in high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Another study conducted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (2007) indicates that the traditional education system could not produce employable graduates with the requisite skills so the government introduced TVET at the centre of its

policies to address both the unemployment and poverty issues.

2.4 The Mandate of HND Commercial Art Programme

Similarly, the HND Commercial Art Programme at the erstwhile Takoradi Polytechnic now Takoradi Technical University (TTU), for instance, has not relented on its mandate to provide some youth with requisite skills for employment in spite of the challenges bedeviling the training programmes. The HND Commercial Art Programme (Graphic Design option) has since its inception nurtured proficient graduates for the middle-level manpower needs of this country (Benning, 2011). However, the study argues that the ability of these trainees depends on training programme, students' experiences, inherent skill and output to impact their society. Antiaye et al. (2013) agree that the changes in market structure, technological innovations and new ways of organizing work requires new knowledge and the introduction of employment competencies.

2.5 Creation of HND Commercial Art Programmes

The University Rationalisation Committee (URC) report mandated the polytechnics to complement the role of the universities to expand entry into tertiary institutions, thereby increasing the training of middle level human capital needs of the economy (GoG,1988). According to the report, the upgraded polytechnics were expected to mount Applied Arts programmes among other programmes. The URC report also recommended the introduction of Art Programmes such as Commercial Art Programme in Textile, Graphic Design, Photography, Printing et cetera in the erstwhile Polytechnics.

History has it that the Graphic Design, Sculpture and Painting Sections constituted the Fine Arts Department while as Ceramics and Textiles Sections came under Industrial Arts Department. In 2006/2007 academic year, the Polytechnic Council again approved School of Applied Art to be reconstituted to encompass both Industrial Arts and Fine Arts departments as well as Fashion Design & Technology and Liberal Studies Department (Mensah, 2016). In 2008, the five sections namely, Textiles, Ceramics, Graphic Design, Sculpture and Painting became full-fledged departments and combined with the Fashion Department and Liberal Studies Unit to form seven independent departments under the School of Applied Arts. The conversion of the Polytechnics to Technical Universities has altered the designation of Applied Arts to Faculty of Applied Arts and Technology; and the Centre for Liberal Studies headed by an independent Deans.

2.6 Visual Arts Programmes as an aspect of Tvet

Technical Vocational Education (TVE) is a broad term used to denote education of technologies and related sciences. In Ghana the term is adopted for technical and vocational Programmes and at the Higher National Diploma (HND). The Technical Universities offer technical programmes in industrial fields such as arts and culture, business, hospitality, commerce and management education, training and development; engineering, manufacturing and technology services as well as building construction. HND Commercial Art Programme (CAPGD), for instance, was initiated to equip the youth with technical and commercial skills suitable for employment and national development. Being an aspect of visual arts education, it requires closer link between the educational goals,

requirements and training structures vis-à-vis labour markets requirement and expectation. These requirements are expected to promote employability and put the role of TVET in focus. Hence, Nyerere (2009) describes TVET as a technical vocational oriented education and training that equips trainees with skills proficient for a particular occupation or trade. Therefore, TVET is described as a broad term to cover the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, knowledge and understanding related to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (Serumu, 2014; Atchoarena and Delluc, 2002). This definition renders visual arts programme an aspect of TVET as it affords the trainee practical innovative skills which promote job creation for national development.

2.7 The HND Commercial Art Programme-Graphics Design Option

As stated by Benning (2011) the Department of Graphics Design Technology had the sole privilege to nurture and train students in Higher National Diploma in Commercial Art Programmes for employment in artistic industries such as Publishing, Advertising and Printing as well as making students self-employed in line with the Ghana's current education policy. The objectives of the HND Commercial Art Programmes, Graphic Design Option are:

i. To foster and promote creativity by helping students to think, act and feel creatively through a variety of art activities using tools and materials.

ii. To provide students with theoretical knowledge, practical skills and visual thinking in art which are termed as cognitive, psychomotor and affective modes of development.

iii. To inculcate in students the need to appreciate the value of their own art so as to arouse their pride and patriotism.

iv. To encourage skills in the development of local materials and resources in promoting self and small-scale industries.

v. To let students acquire perceptual and analytical skills through art experiences as well as self-expression and communication skills through response to art.

vi. To develop in the student subjective qualities in harmonizing opposing ideas, contradictions and inconsistencies so as to cope with healthy human relationships.

vii. To help students use their creative abilities, knowledge, skills and attitudes in the production of artifacts such as communication design, printing and packaging (Benning, 2011).

The essence of the objectives above is to serve as guiding principles for the HND Commercial Art Programme (Graphics Design Option). However, It is realised that the HND Graphics Design Programme has not fully lived up to industry's expectation because the education institution cannot catch up with the vibrant world of work (Wilson, 2014). Currently, the HND Graphics Design Programme lacks the required facilities and logistics that would stimulate teaching and learning process as well as skills acquisition.

Puckett et al. (2012), while emphasizing that TVET has the capacity to tackle both challenges of closing skills gaps and reducing unemployment, reiterate that:

TVET suffers from the perception that it is inferior to the general academic

education (GAE) provided by traditional four-year universities. In most countries, students, parents, and career advisors still hold a strong bias in favour of degrees from traditional universities and see TVET programmes as a "second tier" option that is suited for students with lower aspirations or lesser academic abilities. The result is a negative-feedback loop: TVET schools are perceived as lower quality, which in turn limit investment in them. With insufficient investment, TVET schools increasingly suffer from inferior infrastructure relative to traditional education channels and have less money for teacher training, curriculum upgrades, and the equipment needed for students to learn the required skills (p.1).

These assertions concerning the HND Commercial Art Programme in Graphic Design (CAPGD) are true. As a TVET Programme, it is perceived as a second-class programme to the Communication Design Programme at the Department of Communication Design, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. The HND CAPGD has not gone through any formal curriculum evaluation since its establishment in 1995/1996 academic year and this has negatively affected it effectiveness. The negative perception held by the general public has further reduced the confidence level of the graduates, who upon graduation enroll in the traditional Universities in an effort to enhance their self-esteem.

2.8 Employability of TVET Graduates

Cleary et al. (2007) indicate that an employability framework in Australia portrays employability skills as 'skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise in order to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions'. The authors further gave an extensive description of employability to cover requisite skills for entry level and established employees.

Currently, the curriculum for HND CAPGD lacks what it takes to fully equip its graduates with employable skills (Fosu and Boateng, 2013). Hence, Bridgstock (2009) advocates for suitable strategic policies and programmes to ensure a smooth transition from school to the world of work. The study considers an examination of the HND Graphic Design Curriculum a necessity to identify the inadequacies inherent in the programme.

The study shares the same opinion with Ansah and Kissi (2013) that TVET by itself does not create jobs, but becomes beneficial when it is linked with the actual needs of the labour market. It is therefore necessary to ensure maximum collaboration between the TVET programmes and industry; and to agree on future labour market needs. Considering the goal of TVET to enhance socio-economic and industrial development in this country, adopting suitable approaches by human resource persons in the graphic design sector, would be appropriate to meet the requirements of the labour market.

Tsai (2013) indicated that employability exceeds just skills. He stresses that, for graduates to develop employability, far more and elaborate changes in the

curriculum would have to be done to correspond to the current requirement of employers. The probing question is: Does the current curriculum enhance graduate's employability status? If not the study desires to ascertain how these could impact on graduates' progression trends. Hence the study aims at the following objectives:

- to explore the destination patterns of the HND Graphic Design Graduates from 2000 to 2013 academic years; and

- to investigate the progression trend of the HND Graphic Design Graduates from 2000 to 2013 academic years.

The ensuing section outlines methods, results and discussion.

3. Methods

Given (2008) describes secondary data document (SDD) as available materials that are essential in outlining historical or current event in a community and this includes graduation rate in institution of learning. Documented evidence is essential in this study because it is a readily available and reliable source of information for the study, which sought to discover the development status of the HND Graphic Design graduates (TTU) from 2000 to 2013 academic years.

This study, which is homogenous in character was based on SDD of 1,013 students' academic transcripts gathered from the Department of Graphic Design Technology. Quantitative data analysis, specifically frequencies, was then used to analyse the data collected. This process involved initial and analytical coding and summary of careers, schools and other endeavours.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Destination Patterns

In assessing the destinations of the HND Graphic Design graduates, it emerged from the data that 132 (13%) of the graduates opted for further studies abroad (FSA), 305 (30%) of the graduates decided to enroll at the University of Education-Winneba (UEW) to pursue further studies in education. Besides 18 (1.8 %) preferred to divert into other professions at the Central University College (CUC) whiles 114 (11.2%) opted for Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). Meanwhile only 8 (0.8%) opted for institutions such as University of Ghana (UoG), University of Cape Coast (UCC) recorded 6 (0.6%), Methodist University (MU) recorded 9 (0.9%), Valley View University (VVU) also recorded 8 (0.8%) applicants and then National Film and Television Industry (NAFTI) totaled 7 (0.7%). Moreover, data indicates that 98 (9.7%) of the trainees selected other tertiary institutions (OTH) other than what has been spelt down. Furthermore 15 (1.5%) of the graduates opted for Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), University of Professional Studies (UPS) counted 17 (1.7%), Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) had 33 (3.2%) while as 222 (22%) opted for general employment (EMPL). However, 21 (2.1%) graduates chose Takoradi Technical University (TTU) for a top-up. Figure 1 shows the destination pattern of the HND Graphic Design Graduates from 2000 to 2013.

4.2 Career Pathways of Graduates

The survey also aimed at exploring the career path of the HND Graphic Design graduates. Figure 1 indicates that out of the 1013 (100%) entries, 222 (22%) graduates

opted for general employment across board. As much as 132 graduates representing (13%) decided to further their studies abroad. Again, 305 (30%) graduates pursued further studies at University of Education, Winneba. Besides, 114 (11%) of the graduates opted for Kwame Nkrumah University (KNUST) for the purposes of progression as well as development of skills, competency and experience among other things. Meanwhile, 98 which is 9.7 % of the total entries opted to further their education in some other local universities in Ghana.

About 33 (3%) also diverted profession to Ghana Institutes for Management and Public Administration. This group of graduates might have taken HND Graphic Design Programme as a stepping-stone to other destinations. Only 21 (2.1%) of the inputs opted for a Bachelor of Technology top-up programme at Takoradi Technical University. Moreover, 18 representing 1.8% and 17graduates (1.7%) applied to Central University College and University of Professional Studies respectively to start a new programme all together. Furthermore, 15 graduates (1.5%) opted for Ghana Institutes of Journalism while 9 (0.9%) graduates applied for Methodist University College. However, 8 (0.8%) graduates each chose to further their studies at Valley View University and University of Ghana while as 7 graduates (0.7%) opted for National Films and Television Institute. Lastly, 6 graduates (0.6%) secured transcripts to enter University of Cape Coast. Figure 1 gives a detail description of the destination patterns of the HND Graphic Design graduates from the year 2000 to 2004.
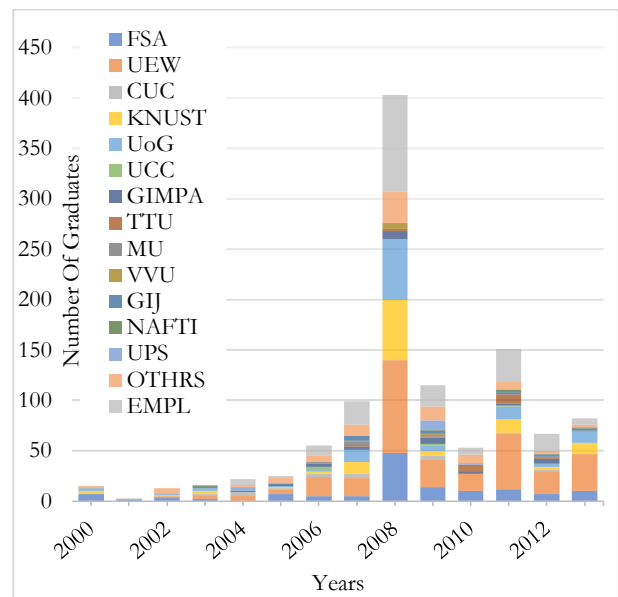

Figure 1. Graduate Destination Patterns between 2000 and 2013

The year 2000 recorded a total of 12 academic transcripts request for the various sectors. Among these are 7 graduates chose to further their studies abroad. Three graduates opted for a degree programme at KNUST while two others chose to progress at some other local universities such as Ghana Baptist University, Pentecost University College, All Nations University College etcetera. It emerged from the data that most of the graduates worked with their profession hence did not need transcript to secure further studies nor job opportunities.

Out of the total number of 36 students who graduated from TTU in 2001 just 3 graduates requested for academic transcripts. For instance, only 1 person opted for further studies abroad, another for employment and the other to pursue further studies at University of Education, Winneba. It could be inferred that pursuing a teaching certificate in addition to the HND Commercial Art certificate reassured graduates of permanent earnings and secured job. Again, majority of the graduates took to the profession and practiced as freelance graphic designers which does not require any transcripts. Others secured jobs at the graphic design

workplaces with their certificates and portfolio of works.

Again in 2002, only 12 graduates out of the total number of graduating students requested for transcript. For instance 4 opted for further study abroad, one decided to attend University of Education, Winneba (UEW) and another one offered to go to KNUST whiles six others chose other local universities. Meanwhile, in 2003, 13 graduates requested for transcripts for various establishment. Two opted to travel abroad whiles 4 indicated their desire to secure teacher certificates from UEW. The request for academic transcripts increased from 13 to 22 in 2004. Six graduates opted to further their education at UEW, 3 diverted their profession to Gimpa, 7 opted for other local universities whiles 6 requested for transcripts for the purpose of employment.

An examination of figure 1 suggests that no graduate requested for transcripts for further studies abroad in 2004. However, the highest request was for UEW. Whiles there is no definite conclusion it could be deduced from the interaction that the graduates who opted for University of Professional studies and Ghana Institutes for Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) might have done that because they did not have the competency to progress along the graphic design profession or to engage in graphic design industry. A follow up on some graduates confirmed that the graduates who diverted into other fields of studies for lack of interest and competence (Dasmani 2011). Figure 2 indicates that data gathered on transcripts from 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 increased from 24, 53, 90 to 343 respectively.

Data from 2005 to 2009 shows that request for academic transcripts for employment improved steadily from 2, 10, 23, to 96 in 2008 but reduced to 21 in 2009.

Meanwhile, increase in students' population automatically increased the request in academic transcripts as well. For instance, 343 graduates requested for transcript in 2008 out of which 96 were meant for employment, 92 graduates applied for UEW, 60 graduates opted for KNUST, whiles 31 applied for other local university for further studies. However, in 2009 the request for transcript dropped to 113. The highest request, which was 27, chose UEW; 21 graduates requested academic transcripts in order to secure employment, 14 demanded for the document to enable them further their education abroad. While 9 graduates opted for University of Professional Studies, 6 requested for the transcript to secure admission to GIMPA. Meanwhile only 5 graduates applied for KNUST and one graduate requested for transcript to do a top-up Programme at TTU that year. The rest of the requests were meant for Ghana Institute of Journalism (3), Methodist University (2), University of Cape Coast (2), Central University College (4), Valley View University (1) and NAFTI (1). Then in 2009 the number reduced from 113 to 53 then to 138, 65 and then to 72 in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 respectively (see Table 3).

In 2009, 14 graduates opted to further their studies abroad, the number reduced to 10 in 2010, then it increased to 12 in 2011and decreased again to 7 and 10 in 2012 and 2013 respectively. Applicant for UEW reduced to 17 in 2010, then increased again to 55 in 2011 then 23 and 37 in 2012 and 2013 respectively. In 2010 no one applied for Central University College, KNUST, UG, UCC, Methodist University or Valley View. However, the employment, other local universities, UPS, TTU and GIMPA recorded 7, 8, 3, 6 and 3 the respectively. From 2010 to 2013 UEW recorded 17, 55, 23 and 37 correspondingly. In the case of

KNUST, applicants reduced from 13 to 3 in 2012 then to 11 in 2013.

4.3 Time Plot of Four Significant Destination Patterns

Analysis of the data outlines four significant destination patterns for the HND Graphic Design graduates as UEW, Employments, Further Studies Abroad and KNUST. Table 4 outlines the time plot of number of students /graduates from 2000 to 2013 in the various establishments.
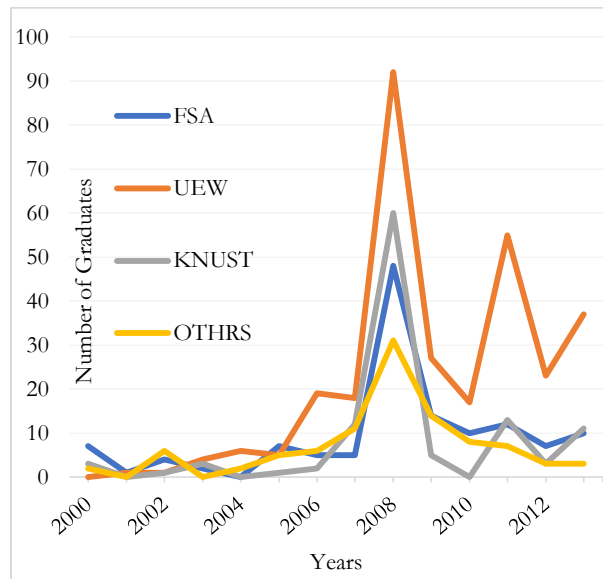

Figure 1. Trend of Graduates from 2000 to 2913 by Key Institutions

The destination of HND CAPGD graduates presupposes that most graduates feel inadequate hence the progression at traditional universities. Most graduates who enter UEW were motivated by the bachelor degree and teaching certification. It was also discovered that some graduates also diverted into unrelated fields of endeavor, according to them, they saw the HND CAPGD as a stepping-stone to other professions. Additionally, some graduates opted to enroll at the University of Education Winneba (UEW) to enable them practice as freelancers and teachers at the same time and thus secure two streams of income. However,

graduates who opted for KNUST did that on the basis of status. Obviously, the world of work is not familiar with the top-up (Bachelor of Technology, B-Tech) programme at TTU and that explains why very few graduates opted for it.

Whiles graduates destinations survey is seen as a yardstick for exploring the applicability and success of an academic programme, Harbour (2005) however, believes that graduate destinations surveys are not the ultimate means for accessing data on entering points for the Creative or Fine Arts disciplines since the final destinations of art graduates are very often unknown and complex. This is because most HND graduates often utilize hand-on work experience and operate as unregistered freelancers until that time that they are well equip to compete in the graphic industry.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that although the HND CAPGD is a TVET Programme, it is perceived as a second-class programme to the Communication Design Programme offered at the Department of Communication Design, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology because of the negative perception society has for emerging technical universities. These sentiments have further reduced the confidence level of the HND graduates, who upon graduation enrol at the traditional Universities in an effort to enhance their self-esteem.

The study has therefore revealed that most HND Graphics Design Graduates are not satisfied with the Higher National Diploma certificates offered at the Department of Graphic Design Technology. It stands to reason that if a pragmatic approach is not adopted to introduce modern graphic design modules

and a four-year bachelor programme then enrolment of quality candidates could be affected. It can also be inferred from the results that the performance of a graduate is directly in linked with the old adage "garbage in garbage out" and presupposes that if new entrants should be given thorough scrutiny via interview session prior to admission, prospective applicants would shapen-up before they enrol in level 100. In that regard, the candidates would come prepared with positive attitude toward the HND Graphic Design Programme.

It should be noted that the focus of teaching and learning is aimed at life-long, life-wide learning skills such as soft skills and emotional intelligence; upon which other layers of knowledge are built to enhance practical skills in effective learning (Obanya 2012). In that respect the study appeals to lecturers of the HND Graphic Design Programme to endeavor to acquire all the essential rudiments of teaching and to teach creatively so as to impact positively on learners and their world.

Hence, the Department of Graphic Design Technology ought to fully embrace Problem-Based Learning to enhance learners competencies and position graphic design education in its intricate problem-solving context (Hmelo-silver 2004). Whiles, the adoption of the Competency-Based Training would provide learners with the required experiences needed for the world of work. In that respect, skills gap would be bridged so that supply of skill would match demand to promote economic development (Afeti 2013.)

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