
# Undergraduate Competences as Labour Market Mechanism for Curriculum Alignment in Ghana: Case of University of Cape Coast School of Business

**Anthony Akwesi Owusu[1], Edward Marfo-Yiadom[2], Georgina Asi Owusu (Mrs.)[3]**

**ABSTRACT**

The increasing graduate unemployment rate in Ghana is a matter of concern not only to government but also to stakeholders in education. In an era of globalisation, the issue has culminated in discourses about curriculum planning and alignment. Using a concurrent mixed method, the study purposely focused on exploring graduate competences as a labour market mechanism for curriculum alignment. In this regard, 63 participants comprising alumni, Human Resource Managers and lecturers were sampled using multiple procedures. In the end, the study showed that employers' highly ranked integrated curriculum and their responses favoured an amalgamation of education and practical training tailored to promote organisational growth. A significant difference was found between responses of lecturers and alumni regarding their preference for graduate competences as the basis for curriculum alignment. The study finally advocated, among other things, for competency-based curriculum philosophy as the underpinning variable to underlie Business Education curriculum in Ghana.

**Keywords:** Curriculum alignment, competence-based model, Higher Education, Labour Market demands
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## 1. Introduction

We are in an epoch where the focus is shifting to the continual production of knowledge as a commodity, positioning workers as human capital. In such an era, identifying and developing the important competences required of graduates is a challenging task for curriculum developers. It has been stated previously that the prime function of cooperative education programme s worldwide is to prepare students for the workplace by developing generic and specific competences that educators believe will be useful to employers (Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell &

[1] Principal Research Assistant, Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, University of cape coast, Mobile: +233(0)244832787/ +233(0)209665424,E-mail: anthony.owusu@ucc.edu.gh
[2] Associate Professor and Dean, School of Business, University of Cape Coast, E-mail: emarfo-yiadom@ucc.edu.gh
[3] Faculty Officer, School of Business, University of Cape Coast, E-mail: owusugeorgina30@yahoo.com

Lay, 2002). But what do we really know about employers' views on graduate competences? What competences do employers and implementers view as important, and how competent are our graduates when they first enter the workplace? The literature in cooperative education has focused largely on the views of academia, with few reports of research into employers' views (Apostolides & Looye, 1997). In recent years there have been extensive discourses on the required skills for the so-called knowledge society. These discourses have tended to focus on the increasing difficulties faced by employers in recruiting skilled and experienced staff - typically expressed in terms of a growing 'skills gap'. This skills deficiency is generally considered at a macro level in terms of the shortage of available staff in certain professions or industries, such as education, business finance, ICT, and the sciences. Often missing from this dialogue is the potential micro level skills-gap which relates to whether employees and new recruits have the right mix of competences for today's workplace.

There is a widespread recognition of changes in economies of nations and a strong need for business education to effectively respond to these changes. The demand for qualified and competent workers on the labour market informs higher education's plans to develop new curricular courses, programmes, and disciplines (Squires, 2009; Van der Velden, 2006). The labour market serves as a framework through which human labour is bought and sold as a commodity and the means by which labour demand is matched with labour supply. Any study on this subject would help establish on-going debates on the respective roles of education and industry in the development of human capital formation and would as well, help examine existing proposals in a bid to practically harmonise them for the desired result. Education and skills development constitute a major ingredient in the economic transformation of any country. Education often underpins strategies of human development and productivity.In Ghana, however, quality of education, training and productivity of graduate man-power skills has been a matter of national concern. The National Development Planning Commission (NDPC, 2010) identified weak linkage between tertiary education and industry as a major cause of emerging graduate unemployment in Ghana. Baah-Boateng (2013) estimate higher unemployment rates among the educated than uneducated and argue that besides the slow expansion of employment-oriented growth, the skills mismatch between what is churned out and what industry requires cannot escape blame.

Curriculum alignment was conceptually likened to the work of auto mechanics whose preoccupation is to line up the direction of the wheels so a vehicle is pointed in a straight line. Curriculum alignment logically follows this notion in that here, the "wheels" refer to the curriculum, instruction, standards and assessment. Several studies have postulated that this kind of alignment can enable a university to churn out ready and competent graduates to man industry (Baah-Boateng, 2012). Perhaps the complex nature of this assignment is one reason for existing gaps between what the written curriculum outlines and what actually gets taught and tested in the lecture theatres. In Ghana, one of the policy objectives of the Ministry of Education as enshrined in the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) between 2010 and 2020 is to strengthen links between education and industry and to promote employability via education and skill training at all levels of the educational system (MoE, 2010). It must be mentioned that the Ministry of Education has on several occasions, organised national conferences which were devoted to bridging the gap between industry, world of work, education and training.

### 1.1 Programmes Run by School of Business, University of Cape Coast

The structure of the curriculum has been designed in a fashion to introduce students to the business world through various units of study. Essentially, the subject curricular comprises two distinct programmes run by the Department of Accounting and Finance and the Department of Management Studies which lead to the award of Bachelor of Commerce (BCom) and Bachelor of Management Studies (BMS) degrees in the University of Cape Coast. For the purposes of this study, the course components of the two undergraduate business programmes have been provided in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Course Components of the Two Programmes offered by School of Business

| Programmes | Business Courses for the Four-Year | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 |
| BCom | Principles of Accounting, Principles of Economics, Principles of Business Law, | Law of Contract, Quantitative Methods, Business Ethics, Economy of Ghana, | Intermediate Accounting, Cost Accounting, Financial Management, Company Law, | Strategic Management, Advanced Accounting, Auditing, Management Accounting, |
| BMS | Principles of Management, Business Communication, Operations and Production Management, | Public Administration in Ghana, Management Information Systems, Human Resource Management, Marketing Research, Sales Management, | International Business, Sales Management, Law and Procedure of Meetings, Professional Selling Consumer Behaviour, Marketing of Services, | Managerial Economics, Investment Management, Entrepreneurship, Industrial Relations, Marketing Communications, Customer Care, International Marketing and Strategic Marketing Management. |

### 1.2 Guiding Philosophy

The university is guided by a student-centred philosophy of education with a focus on serving the needs, nurturing and challenging students to grow socially, physically, morally and intellectually. The major goal of the University of Cape Coast is and had always been to prepare productive citizens and future leaders who can serve the national and global community in diverse ways (UCC, 2011). To this end, education at University of Cape Coast among other things stresses: responsiveness to student needs without compromising academic standards; individual responsibilities among students, lecturers and staff; the relationship between education and employment. It also stresses inquiry and application of knowledge to real-life situations, critical thinking and the value of lifelong learning and the importance of co-curricular activities as vital elements of the total educational experience.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Undergraduate Programmes

The objectives of the first degree, as structured, are consistent with the basic aims of the University. The objectives are:

a) To help give the student a liberal educational foundation that should enable him/her to have a feeling and an understanding of different modes of intellectual thought and as they relate to various processes of living.

b) To enable the student to acquire a meaningful appreciation of major national development problems and their possible implications for international relations within Africa and the rest of the world.

c) To help the student develop self-confidence, ability to innovate habits of honest scholarship and constructive and development-oriented approach to problem solving.

d) To equip the student with specialised knowledge and skills needed for the pursuit of careers in different sectors of the economy.

It is recognised that a degree structure, though obviously crucial, cannot by itself assure full realisation of the stated objectives; social institutions and relations on campus, with the social and political environment in which the University is set, are some of the relevant supportive factors (UCC, 2011). A full realisation of these and related factors should, it is hoped, show in a graduate with a well integrated personality. Despite the promising nature of this new service economy, higher education has not lived up to developing an academy of scholars to focus on innovation and productivity (NDPC, 2010). For instance, Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan, and Dolle (2011) sadly noted that business schools are teaching the wrong things, in the wrong ways to the wrong people. And yet, little research has been found in the literature in Ghana to help confront this perceived mismatch between curriculum and labour market demands. The situation as it pertains currently creates a knowledge gap which needs to be filled. The lacuna in knowledge inspired the researchers to document research evidence and come out with valid conclusions and recommendations in ensuring that curricular of business schools are properly aligned to meet demands of the labour market.

The purpose of the study is to examine the desired competences of graduates as a mechanism for curriculum alignment. Specifically, the study has as its objectives to: examine the curriculum component that contributes substantially to labour market success of undergraduates professionals in the eyes of employers; examine some propositions of lecturers and graduates in curriculum alignment to sharpen the professional skills of graduates on the labour market; find out from employers the exhibited competences of graduates which contribute immensely to the growth of business organisations and find out if there is a significant difference in the proportion of graduate professionals who prefer adoption of competences as mechanism for curriculum alignment compared to the proportion of lecturers on the same matter.

### 1.4 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Which curriculum components contribute substantially to labour market success of undergraduate professionals in the eyes of employers?

2. To what extent do lecturers and graduates agree with curriculum alignment proposals to sharpen graduates' professional skills on the labour market?

3. Which exhibited competences of graduates contribute immensely to the growth of business organisation?

### 1.5 Hypothesis

H0: There is no significant difference in the proportion of graduate professionals who prefer adoption of competences as mechanism for curriculum alignment compared to the proportion of lecturers on the same matter.

## 2.0 Literature Overview

### 2.1 The Competence Concept

Competence, according to Van der Klink and Boon (2003), is an umbrella concept that serves the debate on educational goals and labour market demands. The concept of competence encourages business schools to formulate educational outcomes in terms of graduates'

performance, according to standards set by business, industry, and accreditation bodies. The process to determine such standards requires strong connections between the curriculum and the needs of stakeholders, such as the corporate world (Van der Klink & Boon, 2003). A study conducted by Feltovitch, Prietula, and Ericsson (2006) revealed among other things that competences are stronger predictors of job allocation and follow-up training than traditional human capital indicators such as field, grade-point average, and thesis results. Domain-specific competences are the baseline for developing expertise in a profession. Domain-specific competences facilitate access to jobs that closely match the level and content of the curriculum. To support the development of domain-specific competences curriculum planning and design should ideally be informed by expertise research and available knowledge concerning knowledge-development stages.

Generic competences are competences that can be transferred to many situations, vocations, professions, jobs and industries. Generic competences (problem solving, the ability to learn, higher-order thinking skills, communication and teamwork) are assumed to contribute to a broad range of career opportunities. Labour market research has shown that generic competences facilitate entry to jobs outside one's own discipline, and selection for follow-up training. This type of competences is also known as key competences, academic competences, or key qualifications (Rychen & Salganik, 2001). It is insightful to note that all these competences are driven into motion through the integrative combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes of the individual and it is that which denotes professional competence.

### 2.2 Competences Required of Graduates

While most employers recognise the importance of graduate personal characteristics, there is little agreement on the balance expected between these and their discipline-specific technical knowledge. However, a review of recent literature examining generic competences required of graduates, points to increasing emphasis on personal attributes, rather than technical skills. A number of propositionsongraduate required competences consideredsuch attributes as oral communication, problem-solving skills and self-motivation to be the three most important competences required for job success.Forinstance, Rychen, and Salganik (2001) see problem-solving, teamwork, communication skills, and personal qualities, as among the most important competences, but suggest that the workplace context determines their relative importance. A survey of 280 graduate employers by Joseph and Joseph (1997) found the top ranked competences in descending order as: willingness to learn; having a positive attitude; being motivated; having good communication skills; and, possessing the ability to work independently. Hence, the literature suggest that employers of graduates now place major emphasis on generic, behavioural competences, both in the recruitment of graduates for employment, as well as their performance on the job. So therefore, undergraduate courses must seek to develop these competences in order to meet the needs of business. Wessels (1995) found evidence of a link between degree programme s that included work-based cooperative education and graduate employment, and found that employers expect generic competences to be developed prior to employment. Interestingly, Wessels (1995) noted little correlation between academic achievement and levels of generic skills, suggesting that employability is not necessarily related to academic ability. A report suggested that employers believe that educational institutions provide relevant employment experience for business students, but remarkably, ascribe generic competences a low level of importance (Joseph & Joseph, 1997). However, the level of competency expected of graduates by these employers, fell well below their perceived level of importance, suggesting that employers expected these competences to be developed elsewhere in the curriculum and not necessarily through industry involvement. In view of the above, a lot of calls have been made to higher education institutions to produce graduates with the requisite competences that meet labour market demands in today's world of knowledge economy. A study undertaken by Hodges and Burchell (2004) identified competences employers viewed as most important for new undergraduates in business roles. This study showed that a significant gap

exists between what employers see as important and what they experience through the performance of new graduate employees. In addition, the findings indicated a strong preference for hiring new graduates who had some form of prior work experience such as that derived from cooperative education programmes.

Literature on graduate competences is replete with evidence which suggest that employers always hire graduates who have broad range of competences - both cognitive and behavioural. Notable among such studies is the one undertaken by Hodges and Burchell (2004) which shed light on views of employers about competences of graduates. There appears to be a broad general consensus in the literature that graduates need to have effective written and oral communication skills, have an ability and willingness to learn, have an empathy with / responsiveness to customers and clients, be flexible and adaptable, and be team players. Hodges and Burchell's study touched on what competences employers wanted in new business graduate employees and what level of performance they have experienced, it did not consider why employers hold these views, how these competences may manifest themselves in individual graduates and the perceived learning benefits of exposing students to the workplace before they graduate.

### 2.3 Empirical Evidence

In a pilot study, Hodges and Burchell (2004) found that ability and willingness to learn on the job was considered to be the most important competency by a number of employers, which was received the highest overall mean score of 6.4 on a seven point likert scale. By implication, this only buttressed the point by many employees that business graduates' knowledge acquisition in at the first degree is only a starting point for further learning. In the same study, low importance was placed on technical expertise with a view that competency was 'given' and, that, employers often employ people already with their technical abilities. In that study, employers expressed dissatisfaction about graduates' lack of flexibility which they intimated was a very important competency. The main reasons offered for this were that the variability in work demands required staff to be flexible in their approach and also this would enable staff to meet client or customer requirements.

Also, the initiative competency was mentioned by most employers as being important. A majority of employers in the study echoed that they liked graduates to show initiative rather than be led and that this competency allows them to think for independently in solving their own problems. Problem solving, analytical thinking and conceptual thinking were competences that were grouped together by many employers during the interviews. All three competences were in the top ten for overall importance and all three had large gaps in means between importance and performance. The reason given by several employers was that they considered graduates to have deficiencies in these competences. Another area which emerged from the interviews was the critical importance employers place on competences that relate to customer or client interface.

Energy and passion was also considered an important competency and for some, this related to showing a bit of energy and interest in what the client is doing. The employers in this study indicated that they do not view competences in isolation to each other and that they are inter-related, especially in meeting client and customer needs. The study also brought to the fore interesting discourses on staff inter-relationship with employers and graduates' attitudes in general. These included graduates' over-estimation of their competency, their desire to advance in their career ahead of their (competency) level, and their focus on immediate salary levels ahead of the potential for career advancement.

Many employers viewed competency as a relative term, with higher levels of competency intrinsically linked to relevant work experience. As with the previous business study, these employers rated prior work experience highly in the questionnaire. A variety of reasons were

given for this in the interviews. Most comments made by employers related to the benefits of situated learning, particularly in understanding practice realities. These included: an awareness of the informal communication operating in an organisation around staff and organisational politics; understanding organisation systems and processes; the importance of working in teams; the pressure of deadlines; the critical importance of the client; that for the organisation 'time is money', but for the individual making money takes time; the reality that mundane tasks are sometimes just as important as all the other tasks; that multi-tasking skills, initiative, flexibility and holistic thinking are critical competences for working in small firms; and that students learn that they know a lot less than they thought they did.

### 2.4 The Curriculum and Its Alignment

Curriculum has been variously defined by different authors in the field of curriculum studies. In this paper however, it could be defined as an overall learning plan, composed of strongly interrelated components and essential elements under the auspices of the school authority. The learning plan spells out the learning experiences that learners undergo under the jurisdiction of the school. The holistic conception of a curriculum is a contrast with narrow definitions of a curriculum, in purely content related terms. The holistic perspective of a curriculum takes the characteristics and expertise level of the student target group into account in the same way that it does with accreditation, evaluating and admission criteria for education programmes. According to Stenlund (2007), the notion of curriculum alignment has recently become one of the most important principles of education reform. Curriculum alignment is typically understood as a systems approach to the development and evaluation of a curriculum. A systems approach has three basic components: inputs, process and output. Lists of three steps in the development of a curriculum: define, develop and evaluate leading to content, instruction and assessment has been done. For Pellegrino (2006), alignment in this sense means that the three functions are directed toward the same ends and reinforce each other rather than working at cross-purposes and if any of the functions is not well synchronised with the others, it will disrupt the balance and skew the educational process. Alignment was being used to characterize the agreement or match among a set of documents or multiple components of an educational system.

Wilson and Bertenthal (2005) on the contrary, provide a definition that appears to capture the current view that alignment is not just a match of one set of content to another but also to other characteristics such as logical and hierarchical sequencing. They start off with the general view that is shared by many researchers, that a system, such as a curriculum, is considered coherent if the subject statement or objectives, instruction and assessment are all aligned with each other.

According to Schmoker and Marzano, (2000), the very nature of organisations argues that we succeed when all parties are rowing in the same direction. Viewed in this context of a system and its subsystems, and consistent with the three primary components of a written curriculum, tested curriculum and taught curriculum some scholars posit that a system naturally functions effectively if those components are all aligned with each other. Consistent with this view, performance-based standards are established in such a way that they are attached to powerful stakes such as progress through and graduation from school, admission to higher education and access to employment opportunities and training. The third and perhaps the most common view to curriculum coherence is that it should serve as an accountability tool (Finley, 2000). Because education is heavily funded by the state from tax-payers' money, policy makers have a responsibility to account for such funds and standardized test results have always been used as evidence that the tax-payers' money was used effectively and efficiently. Where coherence has been used in this sense, educational assessment has been driven largely by accountability concerns rather than for educational priorities. This view is usually popular with politicians since it gives them the political mileage that they badly need (Roach, Niebling, & Kurz, 2008; Finley, 2000).The last view to curriculum coherence is that it should guide effective teaching and learning. One strategy of the last decade was the push for coherence in educational policy with

the expectation that aligned policy would result in better teaching and learning (Herman & Webb, 2007). Rather than viewing coherence as a management or an accountability tool, the belief in this view was that curriculum alignment should be a normal part of the process of planning teaching/learning activities.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Design

The study employed the case study in the form of a concurrent mixed method design as strategy for data collection, analysis and interpretation. Both qualitative and quantitative data was analysed concurrently to arrive at the desired conclusions. An interview guide provided the qualitative data whereas the questionnaire provided the quantitative data. The design afforded researchers the opportunity to undertake the study the way it should.

### 3.2 Population

The population consisted of 32 lecturers in the School of Business and 204 alumni listed in the alumni data base of the School who have been engaged in 45 organisations in the Western and Central regions. In addition, the Human Resource Managers of the 45 business entities with a track record of employing undergraduate alumni of the School of Business in the two regions were included.

### 3.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study used multiple sampling procedures to select final subjects for inclusion. Twenty four (24) companies out of the 45 located in the regional capitals of Cape Coast and Sekondi Takoradi were purposively selected. Census sampling was used to select all 32 lecturers to whom questionnaires were administered. However,out of the number, 25 questionnaires were retrieved, giving a return rate of 78.1%. In the case of the alumni, 28of them who were found in the two cities and had been employed since 2011 in the insurance, banking, human resource, audit, accounting/finance etc. sectors were selected purposively.Then, ten of the Human Resource Managers wererandomly pickedand included via the method of lottery.

### 3.4 Instruments

Two instruments were used for data collection: a mail questionnaire and an interview guide. On the questionnaire, sections were devoted to ascertaining the extent to which respondents agree with statement of proposing integration of innovation to make graduates more competent on the labour market. These items were measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (agree) and 4 (strongly agree). Then, a semi-structured interview guide which consisted of 12 items was carefully developed and used to gather data from respondents. The questionnaire material was designed to obtain responses from lecturers and graduates on what they propose should be the mechanism for aligning the School of Business curriculum to make graduates succeed on the labour market. The two approaches helped in methodological triangulation to determine how far both approaches arrive at convergent findings on the matter under study (Denzin, 1970). In effect, among the two categories of participants Human Resource Managers or employers and graduate alumni), only the employers were interviewed.

To test the questionnaire items for content validity and reliability, a pilot study was carried out among twenty (20) alumni from the School of Business in Accra. The pilot-study showed that the interview was well tuned to the Human Resource Manager's subject knowledge and that the estimated time for each interview was feasible. To ascertain the validity of the interview guideline, a pilot testing was carried out on six (6) randomly selected Human Resource Managers in Accra two weeks before the actual data collection. A reliability coefficient of .72 was obtained on the questionnaire implying that the items were cohesive in describing the constructs of interest to the researchers.

### 3.5 Data Collection Procedure

The researchers carried out the study themselves with the immense help of the staff at the Dean's office of the School of Business. First, the alumni data base made it possible for contacts to be made with the organisations with the immense help of the alumni association. After being informed about the study and its goals, the association linked the researchers to the organisations where their members were employed. As research ethics demands, letters of consent were sent to members. Individual appointments were then made by telephone and confirmed. Questionnaires were sent to respondents with a week's deadline for completion.

The Human Resource Managers were interviewed in their own organisational set ups after appointments were booked with them and the rationale of the study explained to them. The session lasted approximately 15 minutes. The interviews were recorded on an audio device and researchers made notes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Kvale, & Brinkmann, 2009). All recorded interviews were transcribed, validated and coded. The survey instruments were also administered to the graduates and the lecturers respectively with the help of two research assistants. The materials were given to the participants and a one-week period was given for them to complete the material. Reminders were then sent to each one of them before the collection period.

### 3.6 Analysis

Data was analysed using the Predictive Analytic Software (PASW). The phenomenological approach postulated by Kvale and Brinkman (2009) was used to analyse the interview data. The approach was adopted because it allowed the researchers to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' lived world experiences with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena. With the quantitative data, simple descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and means) were used whereas the Chi-Square Test of Independence ($\chi 2$) was performed at 0.05 significant level to find whether significant differences existed in the proportions of responses between lecturers and graduates regarding preference of competences as mechanism for aligning the business curriculum.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Research Question 1

*Which competences and curriculum components contribute substantially to the labour market success of graduates in business education in the eyes of employers?*

Interviewees were asked to list business education outcomes in terms of competences and curriculum components that would engender graduate success on the job market in their respective business entities. Table 3 shows employers' opinions with regard to the competences and the curriculum components they consider as sine-qua-non for employee success. The researchers took time to re-group these into the various competences and curriculum models reviewed in the study.

Table 3: Distribution of Responses from Human Resource Managers RegardingCompetences Expected of Graduates

| Emerging Themes regarding desirable competences organisations require of employees | |
|---|---|
| % | **Frequently mentioned Themes** |
| 79 | Flexibly applied academic knowledge (Generic) |
| 75 | Thinking skills in which subject knowledge, such as business processes, business (re)structuring, implementations of innovations, cultural differences and markets is combined with problem identification, problem solving, conceptual and analytical skills, |

| | |
|---|---|
| | putting things in perspectives, thinking outside the box, learning to learn skills, and proper decision making. (Domain-specific and generic, PBL Curriculum & Conceptual Curriculum) |
| 67 | Capacity to apply knowledge in practice and capacity to adapt to new situations with a concern for quality. (Generic) |
| 33 | Interpersonal skills, Teamwork, Client orientation (Generic & PBL Curriculum) |
| 89 | Achievement orientation, personal initiative, independence, and flexibility (Generic & Competency-Based Curriculum) |
| 14 | Organisational knowledge, and knowledge of a second language (Generic) |
| 8 | Political savvy and the ability to tune with the target group and ability to work in international context. (Generic) |
| 23 | Assertiveness, resilience and personal effectiveness. (Generic) |
| 92 | Integrated curriculum design was ranked highest |

Source: Field Data, 2013

As can be seen, 79% of our interviewees expected the highest number and broadest range in flexibly applied academic knowledge (generic competence) whereas 75% viewed thinking skills in which subject knowledge, such as business processes, business (re) structuring, implementations of innovations, cultural differences and markets combined with problem identification, problem solving, conceptual and analytical skills as necessary competences. These, together with other ones such as analytical skills, problem identification and problem solving, achievement orientation, discipline, initiative fall under generic, domain-specific knowledge which are derived from the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) Curriculum and Conceptual Curriculum. The PBL curriculum was expected to particularly support problem solving skills, approach problems from multiple perspectives and 33% indicated social competences such as interpersonal skills and teamwork. The conventional curriculum was associated with conceptual and analytical skills, an expert-like attitude, extracurricular activities, initiative, and independence. To investigate the issue on curriculum component that ensures graduate success on the labour market, the employers were requested to rank their top-3 curriculum components or elements and the top-ranked (92%) curriculum component was an integrated curriculum design. Generic competency areas such as political savvy, the ability to tune with the target group and ability to work in international context was considered less important competences as only 8% of the employers ranked these areas.

### 4.2 Research Questions 2

*To what extent do graduates and lecturers agree with curriculum alignment proposals to sharpen graduates' professional skills on the labour market?*

The research question 2 solicited responses of lecturers and graduates from the school of Business on the extent to which they agreed with the curriculum alignment proposals aimed at sharpening graduates' professional skills on the field of work. Table 4 shows the responses of participants on this issue.

Table 4: Areas of the Curriculum that Graduates and Lecturers Propose for Inclusion in Response to Labour Market Demands

| Proposed areas for inclusion in the School of Business curriculum | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Graduates' proposals | Agree | Disagree | Total | Mean Rating |
| *Cooperative learning activities to improve team work of graduates in organisations.* | *21(75.0%)* | *7(27.0%)* | *28(100%)* | *3.2* |
| *Computer literacy programmes (ICT) geared towards improving graduate ICT literacy skills (Business Technology Education.) to improve graduate competences.* | *18(64.3%)* | *10(35.7%)* | *28(100%)* | *3.8* |
| *Communication and Career Development.* | *25(89.2%)* | *3(10.7%)* | *28(100%)* | *3.5* |
| *Internet business, e-banking and electronic marketing.* | *17(60.7%)* | *11(39.3%)* | *28(100%)* | *2.9* |
| *Grading of internship programmes by students at least for two semesters.* | *26(92.8%)* | *2(7.2%)* | *28(100%)* | *3.6* |
| *OVERALL MEAN FOR GRADUATES* | | | | *3.4* |
| *Lecturers' Proposals* | | | | |
| *Cooperative learning activities to improve team work of graduates in organisations.* | *5(20.0%)* | *20(80.0%)* | *25(100%)* | *1.9* |
| *Computer literacy programmes (ICT) geared towards improving graduate ICT literacy skills (Business Technology Education.) to improve graduate competences.* | *19(76.0%)* | *6(24.0%)* | *25(100%)* | *3.1* |
| *Communication and Career Development.* | *12(48.0%)* | *13(52.0%)* | *25(100%)* | *2.4* |
| *Internet business, e-banking and electronic marketing.* | *3(12.0%)* | *22(88.0%)* | *25(100%)* | *1.5* |
| *Grading of internship programmes by students at least for two semesters.* | *15(60.0%)* | *10(40.0%)* | *25(100%)* | *2.7* |
| *Overall mean for lecturers* | | | | *2.3* |

Note: SA + A =A; SD + D = D where SA is strongly agree, A is agree, SD is strongly disagree and D is disagree. Source: Field Data, 2013

From Table 4 whereas 21(75%) of the graduates proposed that cooperative learning activities be infused into the curriculum to improve team work of graduates, 7(27%) of them disagreed with the proposition. On the same issue, 5(20%) of the lecturers agreed even though the rest 20(80%) did not see why this should be included in the curriculum. A mean rating of 3.2 obtained from the graduates imply that the majority agree with this proposal. On the other hand, a mean rating of 1.9 was obtained for the lecturers' data implying that a majority of them disagree with the proposal to infuse more corporative learning activities as a way of inculcating team work spirit among graduates. The next item was on the integration of computer literacy programmes to improve graduate competences and ICT literacy skills. For this item, 18(64.3%) of the graduates and 19(76.0%) of the lecturers agreed on its integration into the curriculum though 10(35.7%) of the graduates and 6(24.0%) of the lecturers disagreed on its infusion into the curriculum. On the issue, 3.8 and 3.1 mean scores were obtained for both graduates and lecturers respectively

implying they all acknowledge that ICT skills are important for graduate success on the job market. On the issue of integration of communication and career development into the curriculum, 25(89.2%) of the graduates and 12(48.0%) lecturers agreed even though 3(10.7%) and 13(52.0%) of the graduates and lecturers respectively disagreed. The mean rating of 3.5 for the graduates show that they all agreed. However, 2.4 mean for the lecturers imply that the majority seem to disagree on its infusion into the curriculum.

There has arisen, an urgent need for student internship even though the School of Business has made it a non-graded optional activity for students. Therefore, participants opinions were sought on whether they proposed that internship should be made compulsory or optional for students for two semesters. On the issue, 26(92.8%) graduates and 15(60.0%) of the lecturers agreed on the proposal. However, 2(7.2%) of the graduates and 10(40.0%) of the lecturers disagreed with the proposition that it should be aligned in the curriculum. For the graduates, a mean score of 3.6 was obtained implying that the majority agreed on its infusion into the curriculum. For the lecturers, a mean rating of 2.7 was obtained showing that a majority agreed. The overall mean ratings for graduates and lecturers are 3.4 and 2.3 respectively meaning that whereas the graduates endorsed most of the proposals for curriculum alignment, lecturers, for some reasons, did not. Answering the specific questions, it can be concluded that to a very great extent, the graduates surveyed expressed satisfaction with any move to integrate the proposals into the curriculum in tune with labour market requirements. However, the lecturers, to a little extent, agreed with the proposals to align the business curriculum to tailor it to meet labour market demands.

### 4.3 Research Question 4

*Which exhibited competences of graduates contribute immensely to the growth of your organisation?*

A semi-structured interview was organized among ten Human Resource Managers to ascertain the skills and competences that graduates should possess before they are offered jobs. For the purpose of data simplification, the ten (10) participants were given an identification in the form of coding ranging from BE 1, BE 2,… BE 10 where BE 1 refers to business entity 1 etc. The views expressed by the top managers were dissenting. However, the salient aspects that they considered necessary for business success focused on the generic competences which are underpinned by the competency-based curriculum. For example BE 3, 5, 6, 7, 10 pointed out that specifically, graduates in business education who are able to close the communication and coordination lacuna between departments and divisions, internal and external clients, and operate the most flexible and communicative employees were likely to contribute positively to attaining business goals. From the literature these competences relate to graduates capacity to analyse, synthesise and relay vital information necessary for business growth.

Again, the majority laid emphasis on graduates who exhibit qualities in relation to capacity to learn on the job, initiate moves to solve problems, and have the capacity to applying knowledge in practice. Also, BE 1, 2, 6, 9, 10 emphasised competences such as capacity to adapt to new situations and concern for quality as necessary competences that ensure business growth in their businesses. A few of them (BE 1, 2 & 10) also mentioned competences such as information management competences, graduates ability to work autonomously and teamwork were viewed very vital competences that when exhibited contribute to the attainment business goals. This finding concurs with what has been noted to be that the best employers the world over look for the most competent, most creative, and most innovative people on the face of the earth and will be willing to pay them top dollar for their services. In our sincere opinion, the study has identified one key-curriculum type – the competency-based curriculum that is important in the eyes of employers on the labour market. This may have accounted for the seeming variations in the mean rating responses of lecturers compared to the mean rating responses of graduates regarding

curriculum alignment proposals aimed at guaranteeing graduate professional success on the job field.

### 4.4 Hypothesis

*Ho: There is no significant difference in the proportion of graduate professionals who prefer adoption of competences as mechanism for curriculum alignment and the proportion of lecturers on the same matter.*

The Chi-Square Test of Independence ($\chi 2$) was run using SPSS version 16 at 0.05 significant level to find whether significant differences exist in the proportions of views regarding responses on graduate competences as mechanism for alignment of the business curriculum between the two groups. Table 5 shows group statistics of the two groups in relation to their preferences.

Table 5:Participants' Percentage Preference on what should be the mechanism for Curriculum Alignment

| | | | Preference | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Competence | Other | | |
| Category | Graduates | Count | 21 | 7 | 28 |
| | | % | 75.0 | 25.0 | 100 |
| Category | Lecturers | Count | 23 | 2 | 25 |
| | | % | 92.0 | 8.0 | 100 |
| Total | | Count | 44 | 9 | 53 |
| | | % | 83.0 | 17.0 | 100 |

$p = .041$; $\alpha = 0.05$

As can be deduced from Table 5, 75% of the graduates surveyed indicated a preference for professional competence as the yardstick for curriculum alignment while 25% thought or preferred other mechanism instead of graduate competences. However, results of the Chi-Square Test of Independence ($\chi 2$) showed a statistical difference between the two category of respondents (graduates and lecturers) and preference for any mechanism as the basis for curriculum alignment ($\chi 2\ [1] = 0.9$, $p = 0.041$). Since $\alpha > p$, there is ample evidence to reject the null hypothesis and conclude on the alternative that a statistical difference exists between the two category of respondents and their preference for graduate competences to be the basis for curriculum alignment and not any other mechanism.

The percentage differences (G = 75% and L = 92%), may have accounted for the differences. The result reveals that the overwhelming endorsement of graduate competences as a mechanism for curriculum alignment by all respondents is influenced by whether the respondent is a graduate or a lecturer in the School of Business and not due to chance. This outcome contrasts the labour market research by Rychen and Salganik, (2001) which explained why generic competences facilitate entry to jobs outside one's own discipline, and selection for follow-up training. The result is congruent nonetheless with the study by Van der Velden, (2006) which put forward competences (generic and domain specific ones) as the basis for curriculum alignment in most educational domains.

## 5. Conclusions

Government has initiated efforts to address challenges faced in the Ghanaian education sector (MoE, 2010). It is obvious that Ghana has not sufficiently managed to create the needed link between education and training on one hand and industry on the other. And emerging issues in the global economy are making the situation even more complex. National policies to produce

competent graduates with the right mix of skills and attitudes to meet labour demands have been undisputedly inadequate and ineffective.

In fact, the human resource needs of a country are intricately linked to an efficient curriculum capable of providing quality human capital needs of a country. Higher educational institutions have a mandate to produce students who are willing and able to open businesses capable of supplementing efforts of government to curb high unemployment situations in the country. This study has identified key-curriculum issues that are important in the eyes of employers on the labour market. There should always be a balance between analytical skills and social predispositions in design of business curriculum. Prior learning and prior competence acquisition must be taken into account to avert a situation where business schools teach the wrong things to students so as to make them functional on the Ghanaian labour market.

Due to emerging trends on the labour market, business schools need to put in place mechanisms that emphasise professional competence of graduates in the redesign of undergraduate programmes. The programmes should be designed in a more flexible manner allowing students to alter their subject fields rather easily. In diversifying the study courses, universities should also take the interests of their students into account. Secondly, the programmes should equip students with the requisite knowledge and skills that allow them to find jobs. In order to enhance employability of students with their qualification, it becomes necessary for the programme to offer students the opportunity to do internship or do anything to acquire some work experience during their studies. This stage is so crucial because it is believed to facilitate graduate entry into the labour market. This paper recognizes the need for an approach to provide an academic space to engage with all relevant stakeholders on curriculum alignment to address the worrying unemployment situation of the country. Perhaps the integrated curriculum design and the competence-based curriculum is the way forward to allow for versatility of graduate professional competence.

## 6. Recommendations

1. University business curricula designers should align them to high level domain-specific and generic competences which engender acquisition of broad range of thinking skills, preferably combined with people skills necessary for higher level performance. In their training, they should be given a well-organised knowledge base and skills that lead to the development of authentic, domain-specific competences to make it possible for transfer and application of theory to professional practice.

2. To support business graduates succeed on the labour market, a systematic design of internship programme, which is graded, should be put in place to givethe students firsthand experience of the job market. The current situation where internship is not scored provides impetus for student apathy and lukewarmness.

3. As a way forward, there is a need for strong synergy between academia and industry where collaborative work could be done in the field of curriculum design tailored to meet and satisfy contemporary emerging labour market issues.

4. Universities and training institutions should provide general training and should be unwilling also to conduct short-term specific top up training programmes for business graduates in industry in congruence with their skill demands on the job market.

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