

LINGNAN UNIVERSITY

DOCTOR OF POLICY STUDIES

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Topic:

Equipping Ghanaian University Students with Skills Required by Employers: Policy Transfer of the US two-years Community College Approach in Ghana.

Abstract

Despite the fact that majority of students who graduate from universities in Ghana needed knowledge, training and expertise to enable them to be functional for a worldwide job, there are obstacles that most institutions of higher learning in most cities in the country are battling with which affect their inability to offer practical skill-oriented instruction to students seeking post-secondary education. As results most employers in business firms are unable to offer employment for these graduates with the perception that they are not well equipped with employable skills. Even where some employers would like to offer jobs that require of a minimum of 5 years working experience. This canker had created serious problems for the youth of Ghana who always graduate from most higher education thereby contributing to high graduate youth seeking for employment in most communities. It is upon this backdrop that the policy brief seeks to examine how institutions of higher learning in Ghana can provide quality education with emphasis on equipping students with practical and entrepreneurial skills and training to be readily absorbed by employers and business firms by transferring the US 2-year college approach into the context of Ghana. Ultimately, the primary objective was to see how the insights of the US policy can fix concerns stakeholders and businesses employers had regarding graduates in Ghana's institutions of higher learning. The study outcome is expected to lead to policy reforms that encourage entrepreneurial desire that would help to generate income and reverse the cycles of poverty. In efforts to address Ghana's graduate youth unemployment, stakeholders in higher education may be urged to provide practical instruction.

Context/Background

As a result of globalisation, universities have entered a highly competitive market (CHE, 2013). Due to this, most Africans are conscious of the kind of training and education institutions of higher learning provides to students. According to Materu, (2007) it occurs at a time when there is an increasing complaints by business firms that graduates in Africa are unsuitable for the job market. As African economies rely on university training and instruction to contribute immensely to the growth and efficiency, enhancing and restructuring programmes to reflect practical skills acquisition and learning is necessary (Goode, 2017). This clearly illustrates the importance of higher education for Africa's capacity development and specialized training in order to realize all of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Otara, 2012). According to recent studies, extending postsecondary education can help a country's growth prospects by facilitating accelerated technological catch-up (Bloom, Canning, and Chan 2006). To satisfy these new trend, higher education institutions will be made to reconsider their program structures, contents, and instructional strategies to focus on equipping students with marketable and employable skills that would enable them to be relevant in today's rapidly growing economies of most African countries, notably Ghana.

Higher education systems in Ghana are divided into three categories (Goode, 2017). They involve institutions of professional studies, universities and polytechnics (Goode, 2017). Furthermore, as opined by Yusif, Yussof, & Osman (2013) Ghana's private higher learning sector is booming, highlighting how Ghana is in high demand for postsecondary education. Also according to the

United Nations, World Population Review (2013) the Ghana National Accreditation Board had accredited thirteen private institutions of higher learning for Ghana's projected 30 million population by 2021. Contrary, the bulk of these higher institutions of learning authorised in Ghana to offer both private and public education have become consolidated at the country's cities and towns over time, depriving many rural students and residents with no or little accessibility to practical and affordable higher education (Goode, 2017).

In the past an Act of parliament upgraded polytechnics to the level of institution of higher learning. The polytechnics were upgraded by Parliament Act (Act 745) in 1993 without sufficient cash support, resulting in polytechnics being unable to deliver substantial practical skill-oriented education (Ababio et al., 2012). This according to Osei-Owusu & Awunyo-Victor (2012) result, there is a high rate of graduate unemployment among the youth. This supports the study of Owusu-Ansah & Poku (2012) that unless dramatic changes are made, the objective of developing a professional skilled workforce to deal with the issues of unemployment among graduates is impossible. Furthermore, the majority of graduates are unemployed because they do not meet industry standards (Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare 2019).

Also studies by Ayarkwa, Adinyira and Osei-Assibey (2011) had shown that graduates with a bachelor's degree who lack the requisite practical experience and entrepreneurial skills in Ghana face serious competition when looking for jobs. To address the problem of producing an unskilled workforce, which is a great concern among employers and stakeholders in Ghana's higher level of learning, this policy brief aims at addressing the challenges characterised universities in Ghana in training and educating students for the job market. This policy brief tried to draw on some features of the community college policy in United States feasible in the Ghanaian context to

help resolve the problem of graduate with no employable skills. This is because according to Tagoe (2014) US community model characteristics include serving as alternative pathways for students in higher institutions of learning in Ghana to broaden their access to employment opportunities and training programs required by employers and business firms (Goode, 2017). It is believed that if this policy is by adapted in Ghana, it will make students from higher education functional in the 21st century global market (Bista & Saleh, 2014).

The Present Situation/Policy Problem

Countries must vary their economies and, as a response, develop human resources to help carry out and facilitate this transformation in order for Africa to achieve sustainable growth and development (Goode, 2017; Otara, 2012). In Sub-Saharan Africa, University education is pivotal in the process, particularly when investment capacity is limited, in training competent people who will be able to implement new innovations and employ creative techniques to establish more efficient enterprises and organizations and thus effectively direct resources (Otara, 2012).

Ghana's higher education system has evolved over time. From 496,148 enrolments in 2020 (Duffin), to 230 universities and colleges with a 40% increment target by 2040 (Sasu, 2020). (Osei-resrach by Owusu & Awunyo-Vitor, (2012) has as well found that despite an increase in enrolment, student admittance to Ghana's institutions of higher learning has restrictive applicability for a large number of students who are eligible. Due to this trend, universities in Ghana faced with multitude struggles in providing students with practical and entrepreneurship education that will enable them to find gainful employment in modern technological world to maintain a living.

In connection to this, in Ghana, due to autonomous nature of universities, there is an absence of a uniform curriculum for universities and other higher level of education making it difficult to train students in entrepreneurial-based programs to enable them develop work experiences the skills employers need. Specific measures are to be taken by the government and stakeholders to address these new insights into the problem, since it will not only limit future opportunities for students, but it will also be a major cost on Ghana's budget and the limited resources for crime prevention in Ghana. Because these students are likely to contribute to the country's unemployment rate, which is expected to be about 4.53 percent of the total labor force in 2021/2022, (GETfund, 2019). In addition, such students will join the bandwagon of social vices with their associated social, political, and economic consequences, such as armed robbery, prostitution, gambling, HIV/AIDS and other STIs, kidnapping, fraud, and corruption, all of which would necessitate huge expenditures to combat. In order for Ghana to avert this problem transfer of the community college policy will be helpful in preparing university students to be functional and responsible citizens (Coryell et al., 2013; Boahin & Hofman, 2012).

Policy-Based Agenda Setting

In the 21st century, globalization has influence on education at all levels especially university education. One major area globalization has influenced learning in higher institutions is the effects it has on the increased need for learning opportunities worldwide according to (Lau & Yuen, 2014). This effect has led to an increase expansion of innovations in institutions of higher learning to meet the requirements of modern industry and market demands (Alalshaikh, 2015). According to Treat & Hagedorn (2013), the impact of globalization has functioned as a stimulus for learners to acquire skills-focused learning to be proficient and efficient for employers. As a result, demand for knowledge has become a vital tool for socioeconomic progress in underdeveloped countries like Ghana, as well as one of the internationalization measures (Alemu, 2014). Taking this into account, as institutions of higher learning in Ghana aims to offer employers and business firms with the required employees, they must also offer learning opportunities for university students to share from their global counterparts in order to acquire knowledge and comprehension of different cultures and appreciative inquiry to form global connections to function as global citizens (Besnoy et al., 2015; Acquaye & Crewe, 2012; Shumaker, 2013). It's worth noting that previous efforts by government had not yield any positive results. For instance at the turn of the century, most universities in Ghana curriculum is mostly based on humanities (Goode, 2017) and social sciences and as a result most students were trained in disciplines in humanities. Furthermore, Owusu-Ansah & Poku, (2012) study reveals that Ghana's traditional 4-year universities tend to emphasize liberal education over vocational and entrepreneurial skills and training, needed to strengthen industry and economy and boost self-employment to improve living conditions.

According to the Ministry of Education (2008) officially, government has 60-40 ratio of sciences to humanities respectively as its policy. Furthermore, according to the same report, Ghana Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training was introduced to offer jobs to students who submit applications into the programme. This was aimed to offer training opportunities for student's applicants which will ultimately reduce youth unemployment among graduate students promote income equality (Ministry of Education 2008). On the other hand according to (Goode, 2017), no evidence exist to show how effective the apprenticeship programme is. Furthermore, in today's global market, success is dependent on the love and willingness to pursue knowledge (Gokee, 2015). This shows that knowledge influence students' professional goals and aspirations for long-term employment, resulting in the need for 21st century labor skills (Besnoy, Maddin, Steele, & Eisenhardt, 2015). Also, in today's economy, traditional four-year college graduates have a tough time finding work (Godee, 2017). For instance Bista & Saleh (2014) study have found that graduates from traditional 4-year universities in US still struggle when looking for jobs. This demonstrates that graduates in well developed economies still suffer when looking for jobs upon completion and as a results university students who lack practical skills are likely to suffer same as their counterparts in the US in this current competitive global market economy (Grigoryeva, 2012; Goode 2017). According to a study by Owusu-Ansah & Poku, (2012), up to 50% of students who graduate from the 4-years university system in Ghana and proceed with their mandated national service may not be employed for two years because Ghana's universities produce graduates with low skills and capabilities, resulting in youth unemployment. This is the reason why there is the need to train students to develop interpersonal relationship skills and creative skills. By preparing students to acquire these skills,

they will be internationally relevant, functional and competent and also understand their roles and responsibilities in modern business environment (Floyd, Falconetti, & Felsher, 2012; AACC, 2013 & Boahin & Hofman, 2012). It is by this reason that the adaptation of the US community model is a clarion call in Ghana context.

The current structure and history behind Ghana's 4-year University Education system

In 1943, the British colonial masters established Asquith and Elliot Commissions in the then Gold Coast presently known as Ghana to look into how university education could be introduced in Ghana. These two Commissions evaluated formal university education in the Gold Coast and patterned it along the British Education system which paved the way for formal university education in Ghana (Yusif, Yussof & Osman, 2013). This according to Effah and Senadza (2008) resulted to the establishment of the Institution College of the Gold Coast in 1948 which was accredited as the first Ghana university in Ghana to award degrees from the University of London. Thereafter, in 1961 in order for universities in Ghana to attain international recognition, Ghana's public university system through an Act of Parliament, achieved complete autonomy which enabled the universities and other institutions of higher learning present at that time to offer programmes and award their own academic certificates (Teferra & Knight, 2008).

It's worth emphasizing that the Government of Ghana has been in charge of administrative management of universities in Ghana through the Ministry in charge of Education (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013).

In Ghana, institutions have been established by Acts of parliament to regulate university education and other higher institutions of learning. These include; the National Council for Tertiary

Education, the Ministry in charge of Tertiary Education, the National Accreditation Board and the National Board for Professional and Technical Education according to Teferra and Knight (2008). In addition to these institutions, since 2006, accreditation has been giving to other several private organisations to offer higher learning degree and diploma programmes. Lately, private education has been pursued by churches, businessmen, and other religious groups. Participation in private higher education has increased dramatically, possibly as a result of the expanding demand-supply deficit in Ghana's higher education sector (Yusif, Yussof, & Osman, 2013).

Today, private higher learning institutions surpass public universities in Ghana, regardless of the fact that public universities contribute for over 80 percent of admission figures in the country's university education sector (Yusif, Yussof & Osman 2013). Despite significant student enrolment, both private and public institutions have been unable to accumulate the rapidly increasing amount of students who meet the requirements for university education and training, are a results of insufficient educational infrastructure, restricted lecture halls, and rising fees (Osei-Owusu & Awunyo-Vitor, 2012). Presently, Ghana's university system of education much emphasise on liberal arts education, with little emphasis on skills acquisition needed by industry in the twenty-first century economy (Arthur-Mensah & Alagaraja, 2013). Preparing students in higher institutions of learning in Ghana in practical learning and skills training will help the country build a competitive labor market (Boateng, 2012). Hence, the adaptation of US community college policy serve as a viable option policy for students in Ghana to contribute their quota towards development (Styrahorn & Johnson, 2014).

Literature Review of the Internationalization of the US Community College Policy

According to Goode, (2017) and Jephcote & Raby (2012) many countries throughout the world have adopted the US community college 2-year education models and its characteristics as an option to the usual universities 4-year practice. Like most developing economies, such as Ghana, it gives viable option to a university degree of practical learning and training according to Floyd, Falconetti & Felsher, (2012). The U.S. community college 2-year education model exists internationally to offer different viable alternatives options for students, including remediation and developmental students in order to prepare them for long-term employment according to Raby and Valeau (2014). By this many countries have adapted as viable policy option.

As cited in Goode, (2017) in Vietnam, for example, the most popular reason for the adoption of the US community model was for young adult students to enroll in community colleges at a lower cost (Epperson, 2012). China copied the US 2-year community college policy from the to improve components of its current vocational technical education system in order to promote the local labor markets in China (Rui, 2014). In Japan the 3-year traditional professional education system was updated by adapting the 2-year community college policy from the United States in order to revitalize its economy (Raby & Valeau, 2014). Furthermore, according to the same report, to adequately train and prepare students for post-secondary education, South Korea adopted the 2-year community college model from the United States as an alternative adult education system. Likewise, Taiwan has also adopted the United States' two-year community college policy to equip its students with skills acquisition and training in certain fields for the local labor market.

In Africa, evidence exist on the importance of the emulation and adaptation of the community college policy in US. For instance, according to Mwangi (2013) Kenya adapted the policy to equipped community health workers. The aim was to train a more community health staffs to add to the existing health workers to improve national and community healthcare delivery in the country according to Kaseje (2015). Taking this into consideration, due to the lack of practical training, transfer of the US community college 2-year policy will be beneficial to Ghana context looking at the country's economy strength and its goal to offer more jobs to the youth by reducing unemployment rate among the youth (Osei-Owusu & Awunyo-Vitor, 2012) and universities aim to increase admission for students who complete high schools and want further education. The characteristics of the community college policy include the provision of internship for students, working whilst studying, and contract instructional programmes. These when transferred in Ghana will help provide opportunities for students to develop quality learning and training skills needed to reduce unemployment among graduates and income inequality (Osei-Owusu & Awunyo-Vitor, 2012). Furthermore, because the policy takes less time to finish, it may appeal to business firms and many Ghanaian higher education consumers (Mwangi, 2013).

Features of the U.S. Community College Policy Applicable to Ghana context

The community college policy in US has several features that is applicable in the Ghanaian context taking into consideration, the economy of Ghana, culture, system of higher education and students' characteristics. The policy composed of several activities and programmes that assist students to be culturally assertive responsive and adaptive to new environments required in the modern global market according to Coryell et al., (2013). The policy necessitates a platform for effective communication and social inclusiveness which helps in students create constructive and meaning rapport with local and international business partners (Gallagher, 2013).

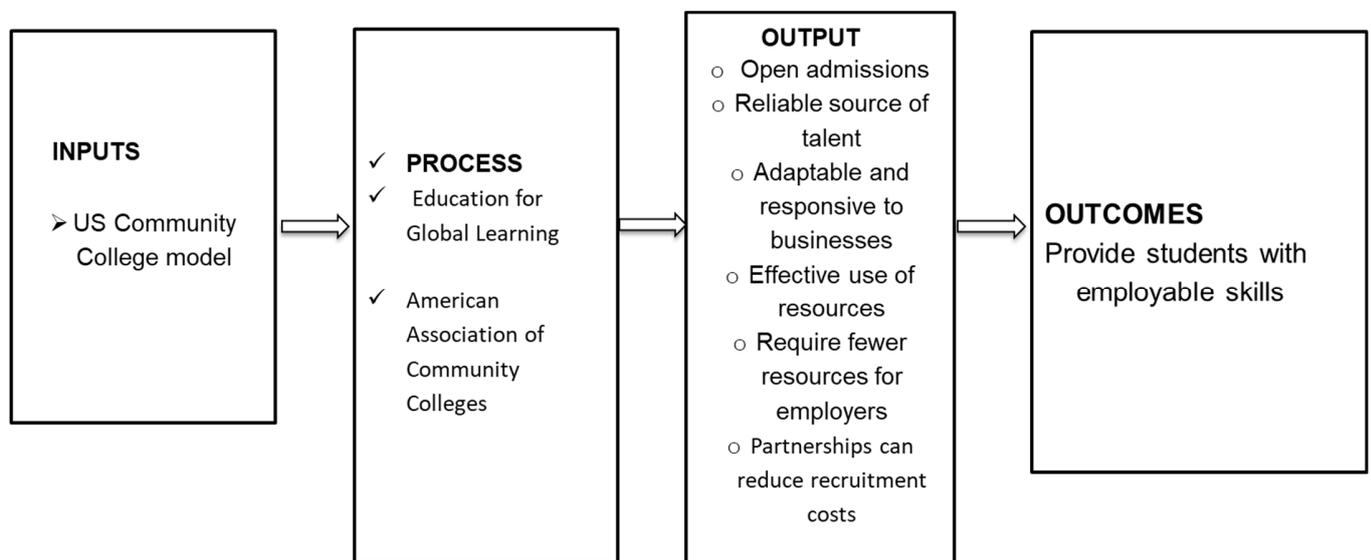
Furthermore, the United States embraced and invested in this policy because it highlights the importance of creating and active labour force for a productive and competitive capitalist market influenced by determinants of demand and supply to enhance living conditions. Therefore, adapting the US community college policy is an investment in career development and skills training which will inspire students to pursue education at the Ghana's institutions of higher learning to be equipped as functional labour required by employers in current technological global village as opined by Treat & Hagedorn (2013).

METHODOLOGY

This policy brief employed document analysis because (Bowen, (2017) defines it as comprehensive and systematic method of examining and analyzing documents including written and digital documents. Document analysis, like other qualitative research methodologies, required the inspection and interpreting data so as to gain understanding, make meanings develop insight, and generate knowledge based on empirical data and findings (Rapley, 2007;

Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This type of analysis can be used to add to a knowledge base by providing useful information and insights (Goldstein & Reiboldt, 2004, p. 246). To examine data from the US community model, I employed skimmed of documents and later examined the documents and articles and other studies on the US community model thoroughly for interpretation. Furthermore, the policy document was investigated using the theory of change model. The end result is presented in figure 1.

Figure 1: Employing the Theory of Change model



FINDINGS

- 1) Evidence from the literature suggest that the community college policy as exist in US operates in many nations throughout the world as a viable option to conventional four years university system.
- 2) The framework allows for practical learning and skills with a focus on industrial workforce (Floyd, Falconetti, & Felsher, 2012).

- 3) The model as exist in United States can provide students in Ghana with initiatives to learn technology and global literacy needed by employers and industry in today's competitive business environment, for long-term employment while
- 4) The model can help create jobs and wealth in the indigenous economy of Ghana. By this, a wide range of Ghanaian businesses and industries will be benefitted since according to (Osei-Owusu & Awunyo-Vitor, 2012) provide jobs as well as improving productivity of firms.

Viabale Policy Options/Policy recommendations

Individuals, government officials, and university officials who may be openly and closely involved in the adoption of the community college policy for training students in universities and other institutions of higher learning in Ghana are referred to as stakeholders in this policy brief (Jephocote & Raby, 2012). They are made up of current 4-year university students, faculty, administrators, employers, business firms, Vice chancellors, registrars, the Director of the Ghana Education Service, the Minister of Education, and officials responsible with providing oversight, such as the National Accreditation Board. As a result, I offer the following recommendations to Ghana's policymakers:

- 1) Create a policy that is designed similarly to the US 2-year community college policy with objective to organize workshops, seminars and career enhancement training programs to help university students acquire entrepreneurial training and skills to be functional, effective, productive and efficient as required by business and employers.

- 2) Develop career programmes, comparable to the internship program used by the US two-year community colleges model that is designed to meet industry and company needs in order to produce a knowledgeable labour force with the requisite skills necessary to build a competitive Ghanaian indigenous market economy.
- 3) Adapting the internship and work study model used in US colleges to encourage university officials to collaborate with community business enterprises so as to train and prepare university students for marketable skills. This will enable firms to recruit final year university students to be engaged in internship youth forums, which help students develop on the job experience and job requirement skills and boost their after-school employment opportunities. This in turn will benefit both stakeholders.
- 4) In addition, Ghana's Ministry of Tertiary Education should collaborate with the National Accreditation Board and university administrators to reframe curriculum to which will emphasise on creativity, ingenuity, analytical and logical reasoning so that university learners are challenge to think independently to be productive and functional in the modern competitive local and global market economies.

Policy Implications/Lessons

Two practical policy lessons evolve from the study findings. These are:

- 1) Academic programs and courses in Ghana's institutions of higher learning should be structured to support economic growth and prepare university students for meaningful jobs so as to enable them enjoy good standard of living. Also, there should be an update of the Ghana's institutions of higher learning curriculum to reflect career development

and professional development training programmes such as writing resumes or curriculum vitae, ICT skills such as word processing, job interviews, interpersonal relationship skills so as to be relevant to business employers and industries. Due to this reason, university instructors must be sponsored by government to attend conferences, workshops and seminars to enable them tailor their teaching skills and techniques to suit modern requirements of global and citizen. These are vital capital investments that will equip university learners with technical and practical experiences needed by employers and firms to increase productivity.

- 2) Universities in Ghana must acknowledge the importance of partnering with neighborhood firms in order to develop a skilled workforce for the dynamic local market. University-community business collaborations could improve the educational experience while also enhancing profit and efficiency (Ashton & Wagman, 2015). This partnership could allow community firms to provide mentorship university students in Ghanaian universities to create wealth and jobs, as well as encourage information exchange and sharing, to better prepare them to succeed as educated skilled workers required by employers in current economies. By doing this, Ghanaian universities may have the opportunity to learn from business firms and acquire the experiences needed by the employers. This will help reduce stress among both parties and satisfy both stakeholders. It will also give institutions the picture about the kind of skills employers need so as to direct their curriculum and pedagogical skills in training students to be readily absorbed by the job market.

Conclusion

This policy brief concludes that Universities in Ghana are unable to produce the kind of graduates needed for readily employment by employers because curriculum is flouted with disciplines tilted towards theory with less emphasis on practical. Due to this for firms and industries to employ graduates with skills acquisition to increase productivity and maximize profit insights from the US community college policy could yield positive results for Ghana. A transferring the policy in Ghanaian context will help address this challenge characterize institutions of higher learning in Ghana and offer more jobs opportunities for students.

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