

SKILL GAP ANALYSIS AND INTERVENTIONS FOR JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEAVERS IN THE EASTERN REGION OF GHANA – THE KOFORIDUA POLYTECHNIC EXPERIENCE.

Samuel Okae – Adjei and Buckman Akuffo

Institute of Open and Distance Learning, Koforidua Polytechnic - Ghana.

Abstract

One of the serious concerns with various governments in Africa is unemployment and underemployment. In Ghana, the problem of unemployment and underemployment is on the increase. The educational reforms embarked in 1986 seem not to have yielded the desired results. After basic education from primary school through to Junior High School (JHS), graduates were expected to have acquired basic skills to be able to get themselves decent employment. However, the various workshops and laboratories provided in 1986 are now nonexistent (Okai R. 2007). With only forty-seven percent (47%) of qualified graduates entering the Senior High School (SHS) in the country, school leavers are obliged to enter the informal sector with no skill to fend for themselves and even in some instances, for their families. Ironically, with insufficient funds for vocational training and non-availability of government supported training centers, these young souls have to struggle their way through traditional apprenticeships and informal training with individual trainers (masters).

This study examines skills training provision as on-the-job apprenticeship training and efficiency of the delivery in these contexts to evaluate their effectiveness on graduates' labour market outcomes as well as the preference. To achieve the objectives of the study; household survey on 287 JHS school leavers in the Eastern region of Ghana, as well as interview with the apprentices and their masters or supervisors. To appreciate the nature and form of training given to apprentices, the challenges faced as well as the needed interventions, self-employed trainers in the informal sector were also interviewed.

The study revealed that only 1% of respondents indicated that their current job training was given at school. Again, ninety two (92%) of the trainers or owners of small scale businesses desire to be given further training because they lack modern skill in today's business world. The study suggests that training programme such as module artisan school, radio lecture series and mentorship programme be deepen for these artisans to empower them sharpen their skills for higher productivity.

Keywords: Artisan, intervention, flexible and blended, skill gap and Koforidua Polytechnic.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ghana as any developing country, needs to develop its human capital in line with the scientific and technological needs. The educational reforms embarked in 1986 seem not to have yielded the desired results. After the mandatory basic education from primary school through to Junior High School (JHS), graduates were expected to have acquired basic skills to be able to get themselves decent employment. However, the various workshops and laboratories provided in 1986 are now nonexistent (Okai R. 2007).

Okai et al., (2007) intimated that emerging trends in employment have accentuated the need for skillful persons than ever. They posited that there is high level of unskilled graduates from Junior High Schools. This has culminated into high level of social vices among people in the country specially the youth over the years (Ghana National Development Planning Commission, 2010).

In most developing countries, it is an established fact that there is a skill requirement gap between what nations need for growth and what the educational institutions are producing. Indeed, Ghana is not an exception to this global struggle. There are unequal training opportunities fostered by inequities based on geographical location, gender and socio - economic factors in many parts of Ghana. It is therefore important to examine the skills of individuals and empower them to be more competent.

1.1 Importance of skills development

The social-economic development of Ghana is very much dependent on the development of Technical and Vocational Education (TVET), which have its core focus on skills development. Jones et al., (2002) maintained that the importance of skills development spans from economic, social cultural dimensions. Skilled manpower in informal sector will lead to expansion of the private sector as artisans set up more enterprises. For example a skilled carpenter can definitely use wood more judiciously than an unskilled counterpart. Again, a well-trained caterer can work to minimize food wastage or reduced incidence of food poisoning, not forgetting the safety practices that a skilled or well-trained caterer will adopt in her business.

1.2 The role of Polytechnics

Polytechnics by their establishment are to train middle level skilled manpower for national development. It is a fact that Polytechnics are well placed to train and help artisans in the informal sector than universities and other technical and vocational institutions. This can be attributed to the nature of skills Polytechnics impart, their curriculum orientation, competences of staff and the linkage between Polytechnics and industries.

Under the auspices of the Institute of Open and Distance Learning (IODL) of Koforidua Polytechnic, various programmes are developed for artisans on skills development. This is in fulfillment of the Polytechnic's contribution to the community and its corporate social responsibility.

Over the years, Koforidua Polytechnic (KP) has been collaborating with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in equipping its staff in training and capacity building to responsibly contribute to the community. Staff from KP has been attending seminars and workshops organized by COL in Africa. KP is one of INVEST key institutions in Africa and the only partner institution in Ghana. COL capacity building activities have helped KP to effectively reach out to the informal sector and to promote Flexible Skills Development in Ghana.

2. METHODOLOGY

The Polytechnic Act 1990 mandates all the ten (10) Polytechnics in Ghana to have closer link with their immediate communities. The Eastern region of Ghana falls directly into the immediate environment of Koforidua Polytechnic and for this reason; the study was restricted to the Eastern region of Ghana.

At the various monthly meetings of Artisans Associations, the researchers sought permission from the association executives to explain the rationale behind the study to the various memberships. At different monthly association meetings, the researchers explained the rationale for the study to members and also answered questions posed in relation to the study. The Associations included hairdressers, mechanics, drivers, tailors and dressmakers associations as well as their counterparts in electronics and TV repairs.

The research subjects were Junior School graduates who were undergoing some form of apprenticeship or have established their own small scale business. The rationale was to establish how the skills that they were to acquire is impacting on their trade. Again, the study was to provide some intervention to empower the identified group of artisans or tradesmen through skill development. Research instruments employed in the study included questionnaire, structured interview guide and observation. The simple random sampling technique was used to identify three hundred (300) school leavers who are under apprenticeship or are in business and two hundred and eighty-seven (287) responded to the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 95.67%. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents in respect to their profession.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents.

Trade	Gender		Total	Percentage Frequency (%)
	Male	Female		
Drivers	20	00	20	6.97
Tailors/Dress makers	12	67	79	27.53
Caterers	05	46	51	17.77
Hair dressers	03	14	17	5.92
Auto Mechanics	45	03	48	16.72
Electrical Technician	32	00	32	11.15
Carpentry and joinery	40	00	40	13.94
Total	171	116	287	100

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents included sex, age, level of education, number of years respondent has been in business or training, status at work, and form of training are as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of respondents.

Characteristics	Gender		Total	Percentage Frequency (%)
	Male	Female		
Age				
< 20	23	16	39	13.59
20 – 29	62	41	103	35.89
30 – 39	50	39	89	31.01
40 – 49	23	09	32	11.15
50 – 59	13	11	24	8.36
Total	171	116	287	100
Number of years spent in trade				
< 2	34	08	42	14.63
2 – 5	42	22	64	22.30
6 – 9	47	24	71	24.74
10 – 14	35	54	89	31.01
15 or more	13	08	21	7.32
Total	171	116	287	100
Status of respondents				
Apprentice	73	57	130	45.30
Master	98	59	157	54.70
Total	171	116	287	100

Source: Field Data, 2013

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents in the study are youth and under 40 years. About 36% of the respondents are between 20 - 29 years, with about 31% also aged between 30 – 39 years. It is worth noting that respondents below 20 years were about 14%. The age distribution implies that these artisans have more years to be in business and the earlier they were empowered with the requisite skills, the better for their contributions to the economy.

Again, Table 2 shows that 89 respondents representing 31% have been in business between 10 – 14 years, whereas about 25% of them have been in business for periods between 6 – 9 years. The lesson revealed here is that majority of respondents have been in business for some time now and are equipped with the rudiments of their job, hence, they are in a better position to determine the skill requirements for the current job.

It is interesting to note from Table 2 that both apprentices and their masters show even distribution implying the readiness of both sides to participate in the study.

3.1 Skills needs assessment

The study sought to find out how the skills of respondents help them to meet their job demand. Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents' skill and how they satisfy their needs.

Table 3: Skill and demand satisfaction

Are your skills able to meet all your job demand?	Response		Frequency	Percentage Frequency (%)
	Yes	No		
Driving	20	00	20	6.97
Tailors /Dress makers	66	13	79	27.53
Catering	51	00	51	17.77
Hairdressers	11	06	17	5.92
Auto Mechanics	30	18	48	16.72
Electrical Technician	21	11	32	11.15
Carpentry	37	03	40	13.94
Total	236	51	287	100
(% of total)	(82.23)	(17.77)		

Source: Field study, 2013

The study revealed that some trade were satisfied with their level of professional competences. From the results, it is evident that majority of respondents are of the opinion that their current skills are able to meet the job demands.

A question to validate or otherwise of the skill demand satisfaction was posed to the respondents. The results is as shown in Figure 1.

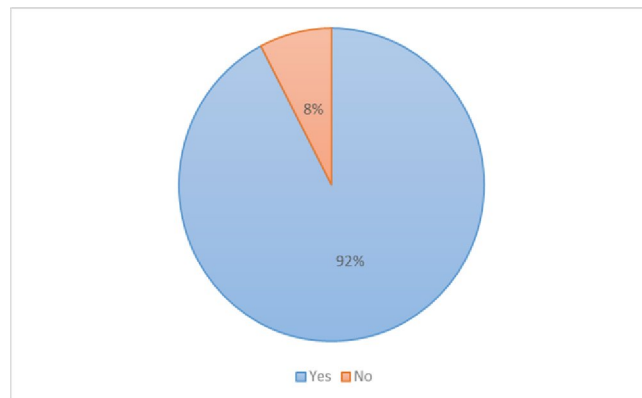


Figure 1: Respondents readiness to undergo further training.

Even though as many as about 82% of respondents have indicated that they have the requisite skill to meet the demand of their job, Figure 1 reveals that 92% of respondents are ready to undergo further training. Respondents explained they were ready to learn more from colleagues to be able to meet the new trend in businesses for now and the future demand.

The study sought to find out where artisans acquired their training, either at school or training center or with individual trade masters. Table 4 shows the distribution of source of training by respondents.

Table 4. Source of training of respondents

Source of training	Frequency	Percentage Frequency (%)
From JHS	03	1.05
On the job training	41	14.29
At apprenticeship center	219	76.31
Community/National training center (NVTI, GRATIS foundation etc.)	24	8.36
Total	287	100

Source: Field Data, 2013

Though about 80% of respondents claimed that they had had some Junior High school education which was intended to equip them with the necessary skills to be self-employed after school, only 1% indicated that their current job training was given at school while 76% of the respondents said they had their training from apprenticeship centers.

The researchers also wanted to find out the level of preparedness of the respondents to upgrade their skills. Respondents were asked to state areas they will be interested to receive training in. Table 5 shows the areas of empowerment respondents are prepared to undergo training in core modules.

Table 5: Core areas of skill development for respondents.

Trade	Gender		Total	Percentage Frequency (%)
	Male	Female		
Savings (Managing your money)	22	26	48	16.72
Insurance (Protecting your property)	33	21	54	18.82
Book keeping (Keeping records of your business)	42	13	55	19.16
Customer care (Attracting and retaining customers)	03	36	88	30.66
English Language	10	05	08	2.79
Health and Safety	03	11	21	7.32
Numeracy	03	01	04	1.39
Basic Computer Literacy	06	03	09	3.14
Total	171	116	287	100

Source: 2013 Field data.

In an attempt to find out the areas of study that artisans were willing to build their capacities, respondents typically indicated their preference for customer care (31%), book keeping and insurance (each at 19%), and saving, 17%. According to

respondents, the reasons for the inclusion of these subjects was due to the fact that the subjects will enable them manage their resources effectively. Others contended that they had had some unpleasant experiences with some money lending officers and had led to losing millions of Ghana cedis and that, it was time they acquired knowledge to be able to transact business properly.

Apart from the core modules indicated in Table 5, respondents also indicated specialty areas they would like to be empowered. Table 6 shows the distribution of the special areas of interest to the various trades.

Table 6: Special areas of interest to respondents.

Trade	Elective areas
Drivers	Defensive driving, vehicle touring, First Aid, Road signs reading, Road Traffic Art, Code of Ethics, Vehicle laws and routine maintenance/checks.
Tailors/Dressmakers	Bodies block, Measurement, adaptation of styles, manipulation, darts strategies for marketing products
Caterers	Kitchen Hygiene, Personal hygiene, food preservation, nutrition and food poisoning basics
Hairdressers	Equipment, uses of equipment, safety keeping of equipment, product chemistry, mixing of products, hair style, washing, retouching, setting, weaving, pedicure and manicure, and hair texture.
Auto Mechanics	Engine management diagnosis, sensor diagnosis, actuator diagnosis, ECU information retrieval and tyre maintenance and usage.
Electrical Technician	Basic electronics, measurement and servicing, fault diagnosis, soldering, power electronics, electronic maintenance, tools and equipment.
Carpentry	Basic wood technology, measurement, design and fixtures, chemicals, wood architecture and design, patterns, uses of by-products, weather and measurement.

Source: Field data, 2013

According to the respondents, the topics identified in Table 6 are those areas they have very little skills about but consider very important to their trade.

In collaboration with other industry players, a set of basic skills were also identified and respondents were asked to demonstrate their skills on. It is interesting to note that majority of respondents were not found to be competent in the demonstration exercise. Even those who were eventually able to execute the tasks, implored unorthodox methods. This observation gives credence to the need for

interventions for these artisans in order to empower them to contribute to the economic development of the nation.

3.2 Flexible Skills interventions and empowerment by Koforidua Polytechnic

Based on the findings of the study Koforidua Polytechnic has mounted a number of interventions to empower artisans to develop their skills and capacities. These include the Artisan Programme, Radio lecture series and the Mentorship programme.

3.2.1 Artisans training programmes

Based on the interaction with respondents and observations made, the artisans programme has been set up to address the needs identified. Consequently, an entrepreneurship programme was organized for more than three hundred (300) people. Three successful entrepreneurs were invited to share their experiences with the artisans. Two modules have been developed for the master and apprentices separately based on the discussions with the respondents/artisans groups. Each module has a core component and elective components. The core component are the selected areas respondents indicated they needed to build their capacities while the elective component is made up of the identified new trend or difficult areas artisans have identified and needed more exposure (visit <http://youtu.be/KTYzzvdCJYc>)

The core areas of study which included Savings, Insurance, Book Keeping, Health and Safety and Customer Care. Here all participants/artisans are brought together and given tutorials on these areas. The lectures were later prepared on CDs in audio for participants.

3.2.2 Radio lecture series

One of the major reasons the artisans attributed hinders their capacity building was lack of time to participate in the few capacity building programmes their associations sometimes organize for them. In an interview with some of the respondents, they indicated that due to financial constraints and the fear of losing customers, they feel reluctant to close their shops to attend capacity workshop when they even hear of one. To address this, topics such as communication skills, developing business and succession plans, growing your business, advertising among others, have been selected and lectures are given via the Polytechnic FM, POLY 87.7 FM. Facilitators of these lectures include lecturers from the Polytechnic and some seasoned artisans. While the lecturers give the theoretical bases, the selected artisans share their practical experiences via radio.

In the practical session, interested artisans are given some tasks, which many find difficult to do. There are normally given two weeks to prepare and then are assembled at either workshops in town or the community centers where others

artisans, lecturers and some students are invited to demonstrate their skills for others to learn from.

The radio series/lectures are repeated at specific times for others who could not tune in to benefit. Again, the assigned tasks given and the radio lectures are recorded on CDs and VCDs which are sold at a very minimal cost to interested artisans. The medium of instruction is the local language.

3.2.3 Mentorship programme

To create greater linkage between academia and the artisans, a mentorship programme has been instituted. Under the various heads of departments of Koforidua Polytechnic in collaboration with the Institute of Open and Distance Learning at the Polytechnic, the artisans have been grouped under facilitators. Ten (10) students are then assigned to each group as field workers under a supervisor. Depending on the special needs or at the request of the respondents, the student group and their supervisors develop business plans, succession plans among others together with the artisans for the artisans to implement in their workplace.

Every last Friday of each month, the students go round the shops to monitor the progress made. The supervisors then read these reports and have the necessary discussions with the respective artisan(s). So far, one hundred and thirty-four (134) respondents in the study are involved in this project.

3.3 The Future Plans for artisans empowerment

In the near future, it is the intention of the Polytechnic to have a closer linkage with the identified artisans groups. This is to help them share experiences among themselves and help them create international market for their products or services.

It is also hoped that the artisans' training programme will culminate into the main stream distance learning, where participants will be given the opportunity to earn professional qualifications on distance learning mode.

The mentorship programme will be extended to include all open and distance students who will share their experiences with these tradesmen, and monitor their progress till they are able to benefit from a larger scope of operation.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the responses and data gathered from the study it is clear that school leavers who are into their own business need more exposure in their area of operation. A host of flexible approaches such as lectures on VCDs, CDs, radio lecturing and the mentorship programmes discussed above could help empower artisans even as they remain in employment.

REFERENCES

Ghana, Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy II (2006 – 2009), Vol. 1, National Development Planning Commission, Accra. P. 44.

Jones, N., Morgan A., Turner D, (2002). Quality assurance in education, 10 (4) 229 – 236.

Meeting the challenges of Education in the 21st Century, Report of the President's Committee on review of education reforms in Ghana, 2003, Ministry of Education Accra.

Okai R., Musa A., & Obeng S. (2010). Assessment of the effectiveness of open and distance learning as a tool for training of small scale artisans and technical and vocational students in Ghana.



Mr Samuel Okai-Adjei, Director/Snr Lecturer Entrepreneurship giving a lecture on successive plan via Radio.



Mr Buckman Akuffo, Head-Flexible Skills Development giving a lecture on succession plan via radio

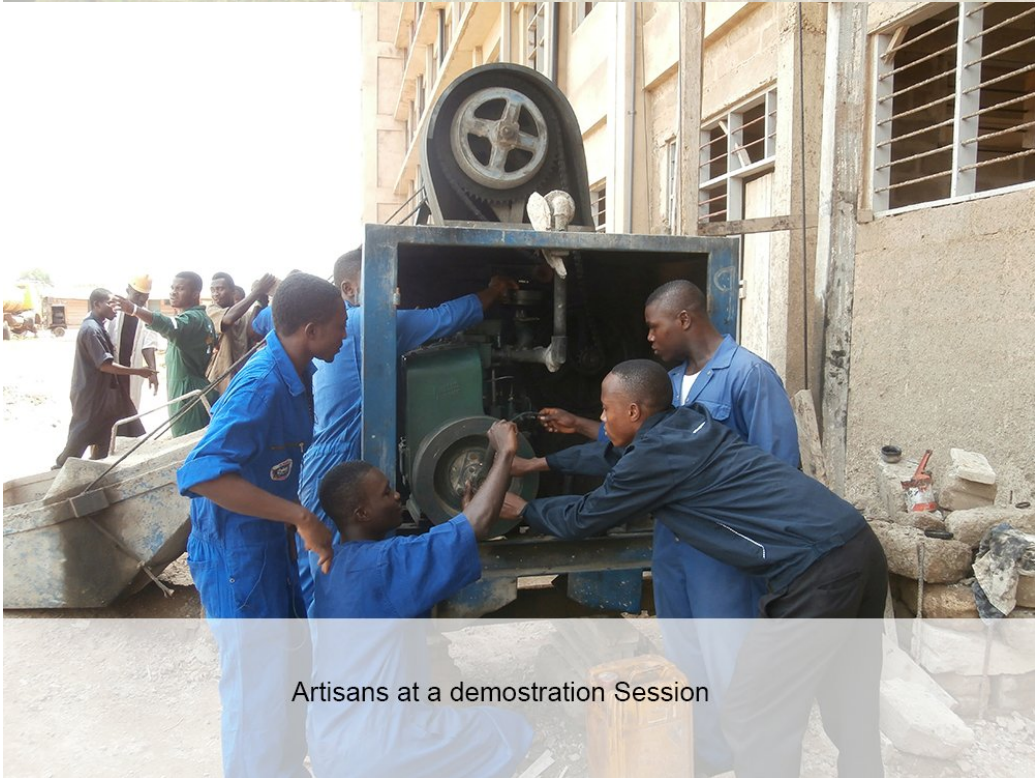




An artisan demonstrating a skill to colleagues



Artisans at a demonstration Session



Artisans at a demonstration Session



Artisans at a demonstration Session



