

Factors Affecting The Acceptability Of Online Degrees: Evidence From Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Online degree is another means one can use to obtain any form of a degree but it is not attractive to the Ghanaian employer, this is because they do not trust it. This research seeks to investigate the factors that militate against the acceptability of online degrees, compare it to the traditional regular degree and also find out why the Ghanaian employer does not seem to trust it. The purposive sampling technique was used to collect information from students, the media and the employers. The result revealed that the Media, Technological Advancement and Socialization are the major factors that militates against the acceptability of online degrees. It was also found out that most students would have preferred the online degrees but were not sure of the job prospects. The findings also shown that not all employers mistrust online degrees, some of them try to find out the performance of the individual by putting them on probation to ascertain how capable they are. Comparing the regular face-to-face with the online degree, it was revealed that there are lapses in both systems. While the online seems to be facing Technological challenges, the regular system is also facing infrastructural, congestion in the classroom and inadequate resources including human resource problems. It however does not support the claim that online degree is not taken seriously by students neither does it support the lack of flexibility perception. On the other hand, it discloses that the Media can either help or destroy the good image of online degrees and ought to be a partner of the Ghana education service to help carry all the qualified students through Higher Education.

Date of Submission: 02-01-2024

Date of Acceptance: 12-01-2024

I. INTRODUCTION

Background To The Study

Education has been defined differently according to the social, political and economic needs of a society (Peters, 1973) sees it as processes and activities that contribute something worthwhile to society. In his view, every society, no matter how primitive, has a form of education.

In Ghana, most qualified students are left on the streets most of whom are jobless because they are unable to access higher education. In a speech delivered by the Vice Chancellor (VC) of the University of Ghana on November 4, (2014), he reiterated that most of the Universities could not admit Ghanaian students who completed Senior high schools due to lack of infrastructure, inadequate facilities, lack of teaching and learning materials, equipment, social amenities like Water and uninterrupted supply of electricity, lack of accommodation and lack of qualified lecturers were also factors that he mentioned. The various universities had to use Cut-off Points to eliminate the excess students. At the University of Ghana, 2,939 students applied for the 2014/2015 academic year yet, only 1,939 students were admitted; which indicates that 1,000 students were left out.

According to (Adisena et al, 1985) education is a tool for the integration of the individual effectively into a society so that the individual can achieve self-realization and strive for social, economic, political and cultural progress. So the question is what happens to the students who are demoralized as a result of not getting admission? A good option would have been online degree to help them secure a job and contribute to the development of Ghana. An academic degree is a qualification awarded to students upon successful completion of a course of study. These include undergraduate degree, graduate programmes and professional degrees. From the view point of (Sperber & Wilson, 2009), online Education saves resources as the student can sit anywhere and acquire knowledge. In the view of (Bernard et al, 2004), many studies indicated that online distance education programs are equal to or better than conventional programs in terms of students' satisfaction, flexibility, and learning outcomes (Lovorn et al, 2011), also adduced that in an online degree programme the learner can obtain a degree while still on the job, unlike the traditional institutions. In the view of Ally, online learning can be considered as the use of the Internet to access learning materials, interact with content,

instructor, and other learners (Ally, 2008). Online degrees are awarded to students as a flexible programme (Castle & McGuire, 2010; Erdogan, 2011; Silva, Laurite, & Aires, 2013). However, some of the programmes are unaccredited; for this reason employers judge the degrees as not corresponding to regular degree programmes (Castle & McGuire, 2010; Erdogan, 2011). Scores of fundamental rationales characterize these attitudes as perceptions.

Grenzky & Maitland, contemplated that online degree increase access to a higher education and has enabled people living in rural areas, working professionals, military officers in far-flung areas and parents with hectic schedules to attain higher degrees (Grenzky & Maitland, 2001)

Online degree is mainly through the use of electronic gadgets which are sometimes referred to as electronic-learning, a pedagogy empowered by digital technology (Nicholas, 2008), concluded by saying that e-learning occurs when teaching and learning is mediated through ICT. (Allen & Seaman, 2005), believed that the use of virtual institutions has helped in the expansion of education. The limited infrastructure, books, library and inadequate remuneration of lecturers and lack of resources and limited number of lecturers available, make online education a better option.

Statement Of The Problem

In our day the concept of online education is popular and very significant towards the future of education, particularly in developing countries and is well- acknowledged (Carnevele, D. 2007). Unfortunately, the Ghanaian employer does not seem to be enthused about it, hence prefer having an individual with the traditional degree.

Despite the major roll that technology plays in the modern world, not much research had been done to investigate why the Ghanaian employer does not seem to trust online degrees and even the level of readiness to incorporate it into the Ghana educational system.

Notwithstanding the fact that there are limited facilities in the traditional universities, online education is not being encouraged to serve as an alternative that can augment what the traditional institutions are doing.

Added to this problem is the fact that some Ghanaians who are well educated and very much enlightened are discouraging the use of online degree certificates as valid documents that can adequately compete with the certificates attained from the traditional Universities. On the 9th of November, 2017 Citi F.M. published news about the Ghana education Service's refusal to post teachers who have done the distance education programme to teach at the Senior High Schools, unless they do a top up of full time at a traditional Education Universities, like University of Cape Coast or University of Education (*Citifm.com, 2017*).

Objectives Of The Study

The rationale of the study is to scrutinize why online Degree is not acceptable to most employers in Ghana and to see whether there are any disparity between online degree and the regular institutional degree. The specific objectives are to:

1. To examine the factors that militate against the acceptability of online degrees in Ghana
2. To find out whether online degree programs are as good as the traditional regular ones
3. To find out whether the Ghanaian employers are ready to incorporate online degree holders into the job market.

Research Questions

The study seeks to unveil the following dilemma in the quest to investigate the acceptability of online degrees in Ghana.

1. What are the factors that militate against the acceptability of online degrees in Ghana?
2. What is the evidence that online degrees are as good as the traditional regular degrees?
3. How ready are the Ghanaian employers to incorporate online degree holders into the job market?

Importance Of The Study

It is anticipated that the findings of this study will go a long way to unearth possible solutions, suggestions and recommendations. The suggestions and recommendations are envisaged to assist institutions, the Ghana education service, the general public and employers who have some kind of negative perceptions about online degrees. The desire is to augment their efforts to unravel the mystery surrounding the new system of education.

In Ghana, most workers seems to have the desire to upgrade themselves and acquire more Knowledge but it seems difficult to blend schooling hours with working hours. Again, the government does not have adequate resources to accommodate all the qualified students at the classroom set up. Online degree has for that matter becomes the best option that can augment the acquisition of knowledge if this country wants to minimize

if not eliminate illiteracy. This has necessitated the need for a research into the field in order to ease any misconceptions.

More so, the study will offer knowledge to the institutions that are into online programmes by giving out appropriate measures that can make it acceptable to everyone. It seeks to also aid organizations that do not think it is equally a good qualification to produce the quality Human Resource. A positive outcome may bring confidence to employers who may otherwise not have the trust for such credentials. Not only would it benefit the workers, but also the research shall provide self-assurance to the prospective individuals who have already taken up the challenge and also those who are yet to venture into it. At the end, it will make them confirm or deny their fears.

Statement Of Delimitation And Limitation

Delimitation implies the boundaries or scope of the study which builds a fence around the topic under study. Thus delimitation is concerned with those elements of the topic that are intentionally eliminated from consideration. It is important to note that Accra alone does not constitute the whole Ghana, furthermore, it forms the Urban area only leaving out the rural areas, however, a reasonable number of the Respondents come from different regions, with lots of experiences that shall assist the researcher to come out with a result that is worth of generalization.

To reduce the negative perception and hasty generalizations that some individuals have about online degrees, the researcher used lots of strategy, precaution and foresight to elicit responses from all the stakeholders. Diverse individual students who are offering both Traditional and Online courses, Workers at different stages and Organizations, and other Opinion leaders; who have multi-ideas about online Degrees shall helped to arrive at a suitable conclusion. Moreover, there is an indication that most Researchers have not done much research into the acceptability of online degrees partly because some African countries might have concentrated on the traditional degrees and not value the online degrees.

Columbaria & Monaghan posited that a negative stigma still exists in online degree attainment and that further research is needed to provide insight into this area (Columbaria & Monaghan 2009) In a research conducted by (Adams & DeFleur, 2006; Astani & Ready, 2010; Linardopoulos, 2012); a common theme was detected to confirm that, there is need for a comprehensive study focusing on identifying employer views by specific industries. This is what some Ghanaians are equally afraid of. It is anticipated that the result of this research will help to unearth the dilemma about the difficulty in accepting online degrees at the job market and suggest the best ways that Ghana as a Country can explore to bring confidence to online degrees.

Limitations on the other hand, refers to the factors that are likely to affect results of the study for which the researcher must identify and acknowledge. In this vain, I foresee a problem of data collection as most of the companies would be reluctant to give out information on such a sensitive issue. Others might conceal valuable information for fear of being discriminated against when they present their certificates for recruitment. There is the tendency of employers thinking it is a ploy to expose them to their competitors who might take advantage of them, even the enlightened Ghanaian employers who have travelled far and near are hesitant to accept online degrees and may not be ready to discuss the issue.

Definition Of Terms

In order to eliminate ambiguity, to solicit interest in reading and for further clarity terms are defined, else, readers will become disinterested and for that matter would not hear the message being carried out. They may either distort the information or read their own meanings into those words. It is significant therefore to explain all the terms that are perceived to alter the original meaning of the statements that are made by a researcher.

- ❖ Credentials: qualifications
- ❖ Conduciveness: how favourable something is
- ❖ Commiseration: an act of sympathy
- ❖ Conventional programmes: refers to the regular classroom learning
- ❖ Fake certificate: a certificate that is not genuine
- ❖ Dilemma: the actual idea behind something
- ❖ Demoralize: that which is discouraging or disgraceful
- ❖ Hasty generalization: conclusions that are drawn out of one single incident without cross-checking
- ❖ Reportage: means of reporting an issue especially by the media
- ❖ Sensationalism: a media report that creates panic or fear
- ❖ Sensitization: alerting a person or group of people about an impending risk
- ❖ Traditional regular degree: degrees that are awarded in a classroom set up

Organization Of The Study

The study is distributed into five chapters. Chapter one is made up of the introductory section, which comprises, the background to the study, Statement of the problem, Objectives of the study, research questions, significant of the study, delimitation and limitation of the study, operational definitions, and organization of the study.

Chapter two includes, the literature review, the quest for higher education, the essence of online education, Access to higher Education in Ghana, Transformational theory, The theory of Equality, The Concept of Resistance to Change, Levels of Assumption about Online degree, The Role of the Media in Promoting Online Education, Online Degree and Traditional Degree and The Lens of Employers.

Chapter three includes the methodology, which deals with the population, the research design, the target population, the sample and sampling technique, data collection, ethical issues, piloting, and problems encountered.

Chapter four involves data analysis which constitutes organizing the data, grouping together responses that are similar and analyze systematically responses that were given with interpretations and drawn conclusions based upon the theme.

Chapter five comprises, discussion of the findings, drawn conclusion, and made possible suggestions bearing in mind the objectives. It also made some recommendation for further research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

To carry out a research on the factors affecting the acceptability of online degrees, it is essential to offer readers the opportunity to appreciate the quest for higher Education in Ghana, the need for more alternative degree awarding institutions, the view of the employer and some information on the essence of education to a country like Ghana.

Consequently, it has captured the following topics: The quest for higher education, The essence of online education, Access to higher education, Transformational theory, The theory of equality, The concept of resistance to change, Levels of assumptions about online degrees, The role of the Media, The role of the Ghana education service, Similarities between online degrees and the traditional Face to face degrees and the Lens of the employers.

The Quest For Higher Education

As the days go by and Globalization sets in, Ghanaians began to have the urge for higher Education, employers want more qualified employees and also high skills to improve upon the quality of work that they do so as to meet the global demands. In a Paper presented by Professor Van Dirk Damme, he asserted that the use of credentials is on the ascendancy, sometimes resulting to what he termed 'paper chase', fuelled by the expectation that degrees and diplomas are the guarantee to economic prosperity and social security of a job in most parts of the world (Van Dirk Damme, 2001). Subsequently, most Ghanaians who are capable of learning are eager to advance on the Educational Ladder in order to attain higher status and better jobs. On the contrary, Higher education though gaining ascendancy, only 49% of the qualified students get the chance to enter the public Universities, creating about 51% gap in the system (Senadza, 2012; Oduro, 2004). This is an indication that, more than half of the qualified Ghanaian Students do not gain admission to the public sector Universities. This has necessitated a research to find out the acceptability of online Degrees which seems to be another alternative of access to Higher Education.

The Essence Of Online Education

A research conducted by (Rajiv et al, 2014) found out that many of the universities and educational institutions worldwide offer online services such as registration, admissions, virtual learning environment in order to facilitate lifelong learning and to make it compatible with other educational management activities. Rajiv and his friends; sited instances whereby a teacher may create a purely Web-based delivery system including online handouts in respect of student's activities, projects and lists of resources for reference. They added that it is an advantage for students and other learners who may access web-based material anytime from anywhere in the world, through Internet connection. This implies that online activities are already on-going in most countries and may be a broader means to access education.

Access To Higher Education In Ghana

The 1992 constitution of the republic of Ghana Amendment Act, 1996 states that all persons shall have the right to equal Educational opportunities and facilities with a view of achieving the full realization of that right. (Article 25, clause 1) In spite of this provision, not all Ghanaians are enjoying this right.

In 2017, the best science student failed to gain admission to Kwame Nkrumah university of Science and Technology Medical School, according to George Nyavor a Joy news reporter; Pius Kyere who graduated from the St. James Seminary SHS in the Brong Ahafo Region scored eight As' in all the WASSCE Subjects and was adjudged the best student in science. Unfortunately, he was denied admission, (3rd April, 2017). The reason being that the said Student could not go through the selection interview. Almost all the Public Universities in Ghana seems to be overburdened with inadequate space and for that matter ought to use elimination procedures called "Cut off Points." Students may be qualified for the University alright but would have to go through other means to reduce the number of qualified students from getting enrolled on some particular courses. Nyavor lamented that it is woefully disheartening that a citizen cannot access Education in his own Country. This incident seems to portray a kind of inequity when it comes to access to education in Ghana, granted that there is enough space at the universities, the said student would have gone elsewhere or even be enrolled directly. The next stage therefore takes a look at transformational theory.

Theoretical Framework

Transformational theory

Deming, considered Personal Transformation by adducing that once the individual understands the system of profound knowledge, he will apply its principles in every kind of relationship with other people, he will have a basis for judgment of his own decisions and for transformation of the organizations that he belongs to Deming borrowed the Greek word "metanoia" which captures the meaning of transformation literally as "beyond the mind." He considered it as an idea of stretching or pushing beyond the boundaries with which we normally think and feel (Deming, 2006). To him, it means a profound change in mind, a radical revision, a transformation of our whole mental process, a paradigm shift.

Deming gave another example with a dimensional approach which he termed discontinuity and continuity; he focused on the individual as the first step of transformation which emanates from perception of a new meaning to their lives, actions, numbers and their relation to others after transformation. He stressed that the individual will apply the new principle in all spheres of relationship and good judgment of their organization (Deming, 2017).

Deming highlighted how the pattern of culture in a society affects individual development. On his part transformation is not a spontaneous reaction; it is a continued process moving from events that require everyone doing something to build skills, he said it is a journey and with time, people change and gain experience to do new things that they were otherwise not doing successfully previously (Deming, 2017).

Spock followed in the same line and argued that, Transformation occurs when leaders create a vision for transformation and a system to continually question and challenge beliefs, assumptions, patterns, habits and paradigms with an aim of continually developing and applying management theory, through the lens of the system of profound knowledge. According to (Spock, 1958) Transformation happens when people managing a system focus on creating a new future that has never existed before, and based on continual learning and a new mindset, they take different actions that they would not have taken in the past. Using this theory may give a clearer view as to whether Ghana needs to add other modes to the traditional degree awarding systems or move away from the old system and adopt something new.

Conceptual Framework

The Theory of Equality

Baumard debated a situation whereby a class of human beings can be given the same treatment in a uniform and identical way unless there is enough grounds to do otherwise. To him, it seems practically unfeasible to treat everyone with the same conduct. In principle, rules ought to be functional in all cases unless in a situation where people think that they have not been treated fairly by other human beings. Richard went ahead to tabulate instances like: desires, interests or anything that hurts their feelings. In his view, hypothetically it looks as though it is 'natural' or rational to accord every individual in a given class equal rights until there is adequate excuse not to do so (Baumard, 2010).

The theory of equality is necessary to the study since it may help the various institutions in Ghana to make an informed decision to either embrace alternative degrees or stick to the traditional ones. It may also help in discussion of the result of the study.

The Concept Of Resistance To Change

Piderit contended that Man as a social being detests change and the Ability to implement new skills and behaviors which are demonstrated capability to implement the change at the required performance levels. He continued by saying that reinforcement is a shared culture (Piderit, 2000).

Haitt & Prosci in their contribution added that Organizational managers should incorporate diverse means to sustain change. They use a two way system to explain their points, the internal and external factors.

Internal factors have to do with the individual's level of achievement and satisfaction; coupled with the end result that the one gains.

The external factor involves respect, appreciation and merry making that go along with the realization that something new has taken place. Hiatt concluded that change is supposed to be corroborated consistently for sustenance (Hiatt, 2006) this concept helped in the study to explore the perception of faculty and their willingness to accept or decline the decision toward adopting the technological change.

Levels Of Assumption About Online Degree

In a survey conducted by Adams & DeFleur, it was noted that most employers trust the traditional degrees and may have the preference for employing those who went through the traditional system than those who have the online degree credentials. Also, they made a strong case in their Article: the acceptability of a Doctoral degree earned Online as a credential for gaining faculty position, that notwithstanding the numerous degree awarding institutions online, only a few are totally accredited or taught by the well-known institutions. They conceded that individuals invest so much money in acquiring online degrees yet, whenever a company declares vacancy for managerial position in Engineering, Accounting, and Information and communication technology, among others, online degree holders are rather not given the chance. Adams and DeFluer again observed that reputation; work experience, accreditation and mentoring were some of the factors that account for the preference hence, their conclusion that most employers prefer traditional face to face degrees to the online degrees. (Adams & DeFluer, 2006).

Nance shares her view that individuals who are already on the job, go in for the online degrees because it is a means of advancing or getting promotion. Some do it to change their Jobs. While they are already working, it may be difficult for them to enroll on the traditional classroom. As a result they would rather pay so much to attain the online degree instead of waiting for an opportunity which might elude them. She added that the burden of moving from one geographical location to another is equally curtailed. In her view, it is not only about the geographical location but also foreigners who feel marginalized in the classrooms might be more comfortable doing the online courses which seems more flexible and convenient than where they can easily be discriminated against (Nance, 2007).

Contrary to the findings of other researchers, Glover advised those who have online degrees to be confident and explain to the employers in detail what goes into their courses and the value that it carries. She was certain that if they make analytical comparison between online and the traditional degrees; the quality of what they have done will be known to others who have so much negative assumptions about online degrees (Glover, 2005).

The Role Of The Media In Promoting Online Education

The Media serves as the intermediary between the Ghanaian populace and individual actors; they can sensitize and disabuse the minds. News they carry are taken for a fact until they are retracted. This research foresees the Media as a key role-player in the quest to investigate the acceptability of online degrees.

Schwarz purported that the Media affects education in diverse ways, our way of thinking and perception. He made reference to the days that everyone thought the world was flat instead of spherical just because the media portrayed it as such on a map that was drawn in the newspaper. He suggested that the educators ought to be Media literates in order to understand their jargons or hidden agenda. Apparently, he made a strong point that teacher education needs media literacy as a weapon that can stand global demands (DGs) (Schwarz, 2001).

Cassidy followed a similar pattern of reasoning by stating that media literacy should be made part of the school curricular to enhance clear differentiation between legitimate websites and the illegitimate ones in order to avoid being misled (Cassidy, 2004).

Simpson also alleged that the Media is responsible for the panic that gripped parents in the columbine High School shooting. On his part, the horrific events shown on Television repeatedly with the intention of selling their newspaper, was the greatest contributory factor to the rush to put security everywhere, parents felt their children could be killed at school (Cote & Simpson, 2006).

William supported them and described the Media as a 'double- edged sword' that can either hurt or help whoever wields it. Media can help teachers teach in real life situations, using real objects in videos, graphics and animation which make understanding easier than a text presentation. The bane however is where they blow issues out of proportion and cause panic (William & Brody, 2007).

Rolls viewed the media as a major character in a country's education, he claims that the media and technology are playing a critical role which is rather more glaring; he figured out the Michigan University for instance which offered computers to aid the academic work of students. He perceived the Media as the internet, Television, Radio and Newspapers, all of which he believes affect globalization extensively (Rolls, 2007).

In another development, Emmanuel Quest reported that researchers from the Valdosta State University (VSU), in the United States of America USA, drew the attention of Ghana's Minister of Education to the number of prominent individuals in the country who have acquired fake doctorate certificates. The following media groups reported the issue causing fear and panic to the general public. On the 16th of June, 2016, Citi News alleged that sixteen prominent Ghanaians including the former Inspector General of Police (IGP) among others had received Fake Doctorate degrees from US-based Dayspring Christian University (Ghanaweb.com, 2016).

Following the above is a report by Frederick Awuni that 22 fake certificates were discovered in a Police recruitment exercise. The individuals who have all gone through three months of training were dismissed from the Police training school at Pwalugu in the Upper East Region. Some of them changed the names on the certificates while others altered the results. Police administration then take the statement, gave them self-cognizance bail refer the matter to the Attorney general to also take action on it since the issue is a misdemeanor (Awuni, 2017).

Radio-Canada 2017, CBC reported that Marketplace purchased three PHDs, including one from Axact-affiliated Gatesville University for \$1,550 US; Axact denies it owns or operates any Education websites, though the allegation was denied, it has had a bad effect on image the institution (Holleman, 2017).

The Role Of Ghana Education Service

A number of interventions were made to secure the right of Ghanaians in education; notable among them is the Ghanaian constitution and some conventions that were signed by the Ghana government, on behalf of the Ghana Education Service (GES).

The 1992 constitution of Ghana with Amendments through 1996, Article 38 has given the Ghanaian the right to Education. In chapter VI (c) of the Article, Higher Education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means and in particular, by progressive introduction of free education. The (e) also states that "the development of a system of schools with adequate facilities at all levels shall be actively pursued". The understanding of this clause is that with time other avenues shall be added to make sure that no person or persons are denied access to education.

Ghana has signed a lot of treaties to protect its citizens and offer them the right to education, to the extent that, the individual has the right to complain on infringement of their rights in this direction. For instance: Ghana has endorsed the world education forum in Dakar and the millennium Development Goals (MGDs) in 2000, the right to education project in 2012, UNESCO convention on discrimination in Education and convention on Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) which is yet to be rectified. The government also has a convention on discrimination in terms of employment and occupation.

Considering all the above steps in Ghana, it is expected that education in Ghana should have well advanced to leverage the full potential of the Ghanaian student.

Professor Osei Dankwa questioned why the government is focusing much more on infrastructure instead of using Technology to solve educational problems. He suggested that the virtual concept may have been a better option and cited countries like Canada, United States, and Australia among others who have succeeded in offering equal access to their citizens. He stressed that most countries are vested in online courses and the idea of Virtual High School (VHS) which may bring about a change that will assist all the qualified students to access further studies. The VHS concept may create a continuum and eradicate the situation whereby some students may be in school while others remain at home waiting for a whole semester. As a country, he felt that the Ministry of Education needs to use technology to make sure that all the citizens are educated (Darkwa, 2018).

Subsequently, Mintah expatiates, a proposal between the Ghana government through the Ministry of Education and Real Studios Limited to implement the Digital Education system (DES) aimed at transforming the Analogue Educational System (AES) to a Digital. The Ministry of Education via the GES wants to use devices and software that the DES will design to assist teachers, learners, publishers and all stakeholders in education to access teaching and learning materials, anywhere at any time. The device if successfully installed may go a long way to place all persons to be on one platform. The motive is to enhance a smooth access to an entire book and information on a single device for learners at every level of Education in Ghana (Mintah, 2018).

Online Degree And Traditional Degree

Some researchers believe that online degree is as good as the traditional face to face and even more advantageous.

Henderson hailed the idea of studying online by stating that electronic learning helps to uphold the reputation of the institutions that offer them, it improves teaching and learning at a higher level. On his part, electronic learning has brought about some relief to the learner thus set them at ease as they study at their own pace (Henderson, 2003).

Following is an excerpt from Salmon & Jones adduced that online learning allows delivery and the use of teaching and learning materials electronically and offer students with free environment and time to go about their learning effectively. They equally believed that it has bought a new dimension of teaching and learning at the higher educational level (Salmon & Jones, 2004).

In a survey made by Daugherty and Funke, some of the respondents acknowledged that the online learning helped them to ask questions and had answers without any physical contact but in a classroom set up, there is fear of making mistakes and shyness which makes it rather difficult to seek clarification. The e-mail was also seen as an advantage to avoid a situation where the instructor would be called at a time that he may be too busy to communicate (Daugherty & Funke, 2007).

Daugherty & Funke observed that online learning supports students to broaden their knowledge in a variety of ways without being confined to the classroom for presentation or glue themselves to textbooks. Subsequently, they can use the computer among other electronic gadgets to easily access information (Daugherty & Funke, 2007).

Conversely, some of her respondents admitted that they had technical problems as they could not manipulate the computers effectively. They had difficulty in submitting assignments and were unable to join some of the online classes; this frustrated them a lot as they lack technological skills (Daugherty & Funke, 2007).

Kaufman and Walter adduced that greater efficiency and productivity are enhanced in online learning due to access to the technology of electronic library and references. Also, the discussions which take place previously and those that are on-going can easily be accessed online. Consequently, much time is saved on research work because the researchers have easy access to literature and information across the nations (Kaufman & Walter, 2008).

Castle and McGuire added that online degrees are of the same quality as the regular traditional degrees because the students advance their career, study to develop their skills and add value to their credentials. They described online learning as flexible, convenient and affordable, she confirmed that it helps her to sit at home and do her classes (Castle; McGuire, 2010).

In a research conducted by United Nations Educational Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the Arab countries, it was realized that the policy makers thought that online learning and teaching in general, will pose a threat to traditional methods of teaching as such rejected the idea and rather concentrated on building more structures at the expense of developing technology. They later realize that it is one of the best ways of solving the problem of access; Arab now has a large number of people offering on line courses (UNESCO, 2011).

The Lens of Employers

Adams and DeFleur conducted a research on open faculty position from advertised job vacancies and the result shows that though online degree symbolizes a massive education opportunity for most people, employers and University administrators prefer traditional degrees much more than online degrees. The findings suggest that contact with instructors and mentoring constitutes a major factor in considering 'quality' education, likewise the reputation of an institution for academic strictness for acceptability (Adams & DeFleur, 2005).

In a survey conducted by Fogle, the result shows that the type of professional category one belongs to or seeks for employment can ascertain whether or not his degree is of essence. In his view an external certification by a professional body may be a proof of the quality of education, it may not matter whether the degree is taken online or in traditional set up, the success of one's' examination can be conclusive enough (Fogle, 2013).

Another suggestion that came up after the survey is the demonstration of collaborative projects that were completed at an online university together with a voluntary work to show effective teamwork ability and the use of technology to beef up project goals. He also stated that the effectiveness of online degree has not been given enough popularity. The US news for instance gives more publications in favour of the traditional on-campus degrees. In his view if more awareness is created for the employers to know the efficacy of online degrees, everyone will be willing to accept and employ online degree holders without any prejudice (Fogle, 2013).

One other point he made is that; employers' acceptability will be on the ascendancy if they have gone through online education by themselves Fogle, believes that it is the best way that can give a clearer understanding to the employers who will now empathize in place of commiseration and genuinely use their own experience to judge the online degree favorably (Fogle, 2013).

Flowers and Blazer in their research came out with the finding that most employers may rather prefer hiring a traditional doctoral degree over those who possess online degrees at the academic hiring for a full time tenure (Flowers & Blazer, 2006).

Contrary to the findings of Flowers and Blazer, Guendoo put forward that the colleges in the United States were more fascinated about online degrees than the traditional Universities. On their part, they do not seem to have any obstacle that an online degree holder might have pertaining to getting employed. Guendoo stressed that most of the employers have experience either as students themselves or as teachers in online courses and expressed hope that with time the negative perception may come down drastically (Guendoo, 2008).

III. METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter entails the research methodology recommended for study. It encompasses; the population, the research design, the target population, the sample and sampling technique, research for data collection, ethical issues, piloting, administration of and problems encountered.

Research Design

Boston & Pearson explained research design as the overall strategy that a researcher chooses to integrate the different facets of the study in a comprehensible and logical way which will guarantee effectiveness in solving a problem; it is the outline for the collection, measurement and analysis of data (Boston & Pearson (2013).

A research design helps to unfold the dilemma behind the validity of questions, the objectivity, accuracy as well as economical state of a research (Raj, 1992). Normally, a research design entails the logical sequence which connects the empirical data of the study's initial research questions and ultimately, to its conclusions as stated by (Yin, 1994). It is the design that links the research problem to the type of data to be collected.

The explorative purpose method seems more appropriate in this research in that a study that seeks to find out the acceptability of online degree with particular reference to Ghana; one research design that lends itself to un-earth the answer to acceptability is the explorative purpose sampling (Raj, 1992), described purposive sampling as a type of sampling which focuses on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest that will best enable the researcher to answer questions. Raj again explained that the explorative purpose sampling is significant for areas not much had been researched into, he referred to it as a Basic research. It is appropriate to note that the acceptability of online degrees is a field that has been under-research and for that matter this sampling method is more suitable. This sampling technique shall be used to make sure that students who are at the tertiary level and are doing Degree courses are selected. Employers who deal with intellectuals and not artisans shall be selected; Media men and not celebrities, and also parents whose children are offering degrees. In order to avoid lack of differences in opinion, it is important that the same identifiable population like friends should not be overlooked; as such students who are doing different courses at different levels shall be more fitting.

As Maxwell suggested, a qualitative study is a logical strategy and ongoing process that involves interaction between the different components of theories, goals, and research questions to the validity of one another. Quantitative research according to (DeFrenzo, 2011) is used to quantify a problem by way of producing numerical data or data that can be converted into purposeful statistics (Maxwell, 2005).

Target Population

The target population involves Degree students who are studying at the tertiary institutions in Kumasi and Accra, Employers and The Media. From these groups of individuals which are also known as the theoretical population, a sample size has been selected and the result shall help to generalize my findings.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The research sample had been drawn from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and Ghana Technology University (GTU)), using students from both Accra and Kumasi campus; these institutions are well vested in Higher Education: comprising the Traditional Face to Face, Distance Education and those who are either doing or have done online Degrees. Questionnaires was administered to 100 Students, 15 employers and 5 Media men shall be interviewed. Thus the entire sample population would be 120.

Purposive sampling technique was used to obtain valuable information from the respondents. Explorative Purposive method is a non-probability sampling method which is most suitable in this research, if properly used can be more advantageous as the purpose is to tap the experiences of Degree students only (Judd et al, 1991). The assumption is that using a good judgment the specific sample would be selected and thus develops samples that are satisfactory to the need (Smith & Kidder, 1991). Accordingly, the researcher can only interview available and willing respondent who can offer the needed and sincere information Twumasi termed those who answer reluctantly as "Captive audience" because they do not put in much effort just to let go off the

interviewer to stop them from further bothering them (Twumasi, 2001). It was for this reason that those who have experience and were willing to be engaged came out as respondents who actually took part in interview.

Research Instrument for Data Collection

The researcher used questionnaires to collect information from students, and employers, and interview guide for the Media.

Questionnaires: close and open ended

Since the study was explorative, the Researcher delved deeper into the knowledge, experiences, perceptions, attitudes and aptitudes of the respondents concerning online degrees. Another reason was to give them the opportunity to feel free and touch areas that may not occur to others including the researcher. Open ended questions allowed for probing and collection of facts on the issue and sought their opinions about policies, event, structures and proposals. Such respondents are very significant to the success of a study and rather become informants in place of respondents (Yin, 1994).

Phone calls and Recordings

In this case the researcher wrote as the respondent spoke so as to avoid distorting the information and also avoid misrepresenting the speakers (Judd et al, 1991) one problem about a reported speech is when you do not say exactly what the one sending the message says then; message has actually not been heard. Some voices were recorded to help the researcher write them later as they could not be written immediately.

E-mails

Subsequently, a study about technology, made it necessary that the researcher used a fast and modern method to elicit response from the respondents who lived far away. This method was to minimize the use of time so that data collection did not take too long. E-mails are very fast and was of sufficient help to the researcher in trying to reach those who might otherwise ignore the whole interview process. It was one way of reducing cost and people could also have time to respond quickly.

Focus group discussion (FDG)

The focus group discussion constitutes a type of qualitative research design whereby respondents in a group are made to explain their views about a fairly new product, service or concept. They were put into small groups to discuss an issue frantically with a moderator to help in generating a data. The goal of a focus group discussion is to obtain information about the participants' perspective, attitudes and also know their stance on a pressing issue.

In FDG, the researcher used a discussion guide which led the group members towards the desired areas that may be of essence to the study. This involved probing and the discussion must flow for all the participants to air their views in a very healthy manner. It was a kind of tactics that was useful for exploring knowledge, experiences and can be used to examine not only the way people think but also how they think and why they think in that manner.

In spite of the numerous advantages of FDG, it has the demerit of being susceptible to bias, because individual ideas could be influenced by overriding participants or the moderator who might want to finalize every conclusion. Sometimes it can lead to unnecessary delays on issues that may be unrelated to the topic. Again the constitution or assembling of groups can be somehow difficult. For this reason, the researcher used smaller groups of 2-4 members instead of about 6-12.

Participant Observation

The approach has become rather of essence in order to establish a good rapport between the researcher and the respondents. It was also a means of building confidence in respondents. According to (Twumasi, 2001), observation is an instrument used to combine effectively with interview to achieve results. Again it made it easier for the researcher who was also a student, to hear the frantic views of her colleagues who have diverse experiences on the matter. From an insider's point of view, the researcher was able to detect whether or not there has been any attempt to resolve the issue or things remain unchanged.

The Triangulation Process

According to (Yin, 1994), triangulation addresses the problem of construct validity. He purported that there are four types of triangulation: the triangulation of data sources referred to as *Data triangulation*, triangulation among various assessors as *Investigator triangulation*, the same data set perspective of triangulation as *Theory triangulation* and finally the *Methodological triangulation*. The process of triangulation in data collection involved the judgment of using diverse methods with a view to accomplish a

precise and valid approximation of qualitative or quantitative outcomes for a particular paradigm. From the judgment of (Wiersman, 2000), it is a process of cross-validation means whereby, each method would measure the same idea using a different method to achieve the same result.

In the standpoint of (William, 2005), triangulation is a strategy that can minimize bias and other short coming associated with research. The most frequently used was the methodological triangulation. This includes more than one set of data collection using the same sources or two different data collection methods as in qualitative or quantitative method. To find out the factors affecting the acceptability of online education, it was necessary to use more than a single approach to elicit reliability and validity to a large extent.

Reliability, Validity and Generalization

The reliability of a measure according to Judd et al, referred to the extent to which a study could be free from random error components. Judd et al acknowledged two main types of reliability being *Test-Retest Reliability* and *Internal Consistency Reliability*. The presumption in test-retest reliability is that by echoing the same test, there was high probability that most of the mistakes would not recur. It was expected that the correlation between the two scores – *test-retest correlation* – provides an estimate of the measure's reliability (Judd, Smith & Kidder, 1991).

In internal consistency reliability, implied that “random measurement errors vary not only over time but also from one question or test item to another within the same measure”. Such as mistakes, muddling of a word or phrase among others. Thus, in order to forestall the occurrence of random errors, a split- half method was employed to divide the test into two and administered the two within the same day. This method is more preferable to the test-retest reliability, which requires re-assembling the respondents on another day. The main reason for the above method was to ensure that scores on some individual questions are not higher than on others (Judd, Smith & Kidder, 1991).

Despite the advantages that go with both test-retest reliability and internal consistency reliability, it is not always possible for one to carry them out in all researches particularly qualitative ones. First of all, it was not always to have access to respondents on two different occasions for the same purpose. And even in that case, the time at the disposal of researcher was too short for such venture.

The above problems notwithstanding, the use of pilot study could be a good substitute to some extent. With the pilot study approach, the researcher was able to redefine some of the questions on the Interview Guide and Questionnaires to make them more understandable. These measures taken alongside careful data presentation and analysis to a large extent ensured reliability.

Reliability was increased by jotting down notes, which was the outcome of investigator's interviews, observations, and document analysis. The notes were hand-written, typed and recorded on microcomputer diskettes. Following the views expressed by (Yin, 1994) in increasing the reliability of a study, the researcher judiciously documented in detail all the processes required in obtaining data from respondents.

Jude et al therefore recommend that generalization is done on *theoretical basis* in which case certain *assumptions* were made about the possible differences between the detected cases and the undetected cases and how the alleged differences affected the results. In such cases further research was required to maximize trust in the results. Going by the above, there was always the need for researchers to come out with a generalization partly centered on theories and concepts. The researcher also stated that the limited sample of study and even the process for the selection of the sample affected the study and this was stated in the section on *Limitations*. Furthermore, the researcher proposed further research of the phenomenon from a different angle in order to intensify confidence in the conclusion.

Ethical Issues

Aside the conduct of qualitative research which cannot be value-free, “it must be ethically conducted and ethically concerned” (Soltis, 1990) to him, qualitative research deals with interpretation and narrations of individuals, groups or organizations through assessment of Educational processes, projects or products of the event under studies.

In every research ethical issues are paramount during the process of conducting interview, therefore it is of essence to assure your respondents of confidentiality and make sure that you do not betray their trust. As a researcher, it is in order to counsel some of the respondents who have had very painful experiences with their employers who might have in one way or the other ridiculed or better put undermined their online certificates. A situation which could be termed verbal harassment. The Coomaswamy, Radhica Report looks at verbal harassment as unwanted personal comment or belittling, suggestive lewd or abusive remarks. For this matter, victims of such comments that seem to belittle them as holders of fake certificates were duly counseled to enable them open up and tell their stories of painful experiences with confidence (Coomaraswamy, 1994).

The respondents were prepared psychologically by establishing a good rapport with all the respondents. They were equally encouraged that the outcome of this research may go a long way to educate the general

public including the employers who may also understand the issues. The researcher again gives assurance that all the responses shall be handled with strict confidentiality and promised that no one except the researcher shall be liable for any omission or commission that might arise.

Subsequently, the content of the responses given was structured in such a way that no names of persons or companies was mentioned. This was to conceal the identities of persons involved directly or indirectly. Where names were mentioned, they have already been put out in the public domain and the researcher no-longer deem it a hidden story. Others are undeniable facts that do not need any substantiation. Some of the institutions have nothing to fear as they themselves have accepted those truths.

Though the researcher was part of the institution and had to interview classmates and friends, it has not impacted the study negatively or positively; instead a critical judgment was used to make sure that the purpose for undertaking the study was achieved in order to benefit those who might need it in future.

All the literature reviews were duly acknowledged to avoid plagiarism which is a punishable offense.

IV. DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

Overview

According to (Twumasi, 2001), in presenting and analyzing data, the researcher consider the research objectives and the research questions so as to get meaningful answers. The advice he offered was that the principal concepts in the research objectives and the research questions should be used to examine the data. He believes that in analyzing the data needs to be critically examined in order to understand the relationship between and among the parts, checking whether the research questions are being answered or that they are rebutted. It is for this reason that the researcher separated the data into identifiable parts in order to make it understandable and less complicated. The chapter is mainly based on primary data obtained through questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussion.

Biographical Data

TABLE 4.1: AGE OF RESPONDENTS

Age	Frequency	Percent
21-30	21	21.0
31-40	26	26.0
41-50	38	38.0
above 50	15	15.0
Total	100	100.0

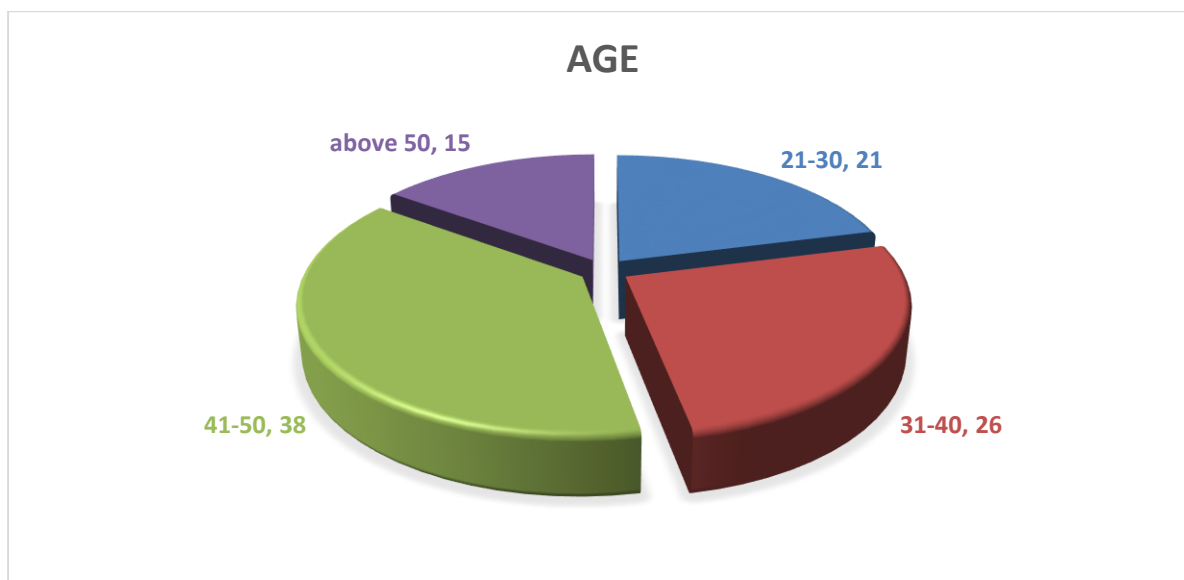


Figure 4.1: Age

Source: field survey 2018

The study collected data based on the age of respondents who attended to the study instruments. Out of a total of 100 respondents who were students, 21 were between the ages of 21 – 30 years, making 21% out of 100. Ages 31 – 40 years was 26 which implied 26% of the respondents and 38 students were between the ages of 41 – 50 years. The remaining 15 students were 51 years and above.

Table 4.2: Gender of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	55	55
Female	45	45
Total	100	100

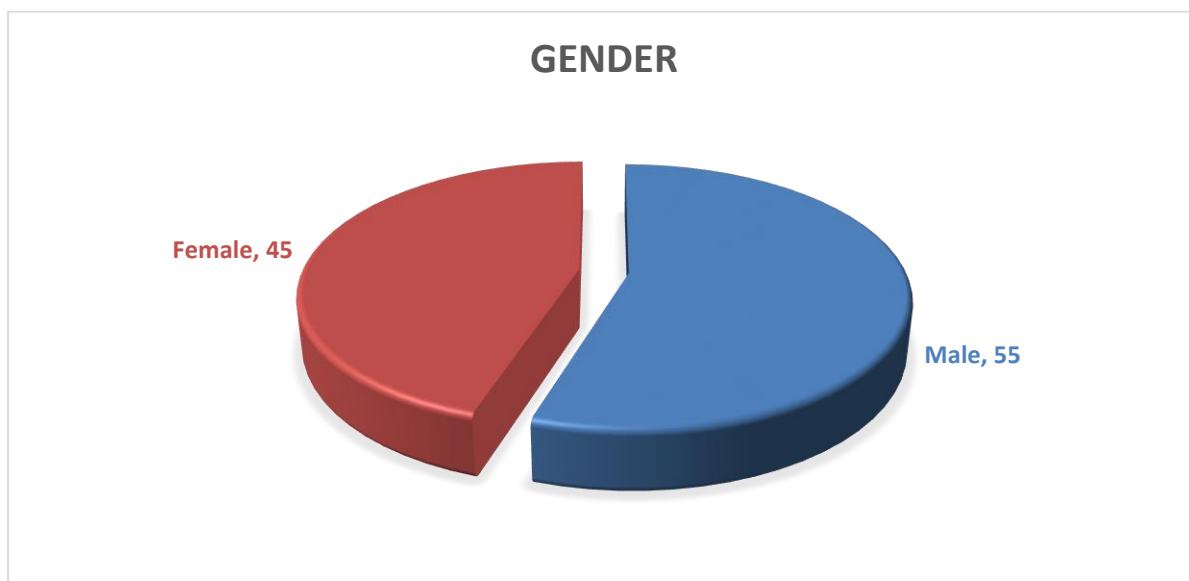


Figure 4.2: Gender

Source: field survey 2018

Data was collected based on the gender of students who to the answered the research Questions. Out of a total of 100 students, 45 were females while 55 were males representing 45% and 55% correspondingly.

Table 4.3: Nationality of respondents

Nationality	Frequency	Percent
Nigerian	3	3
Togolese	5	5
Russian	1	1
Ugandan	2	2
Ghanaian	89	89
Total	100	100.0

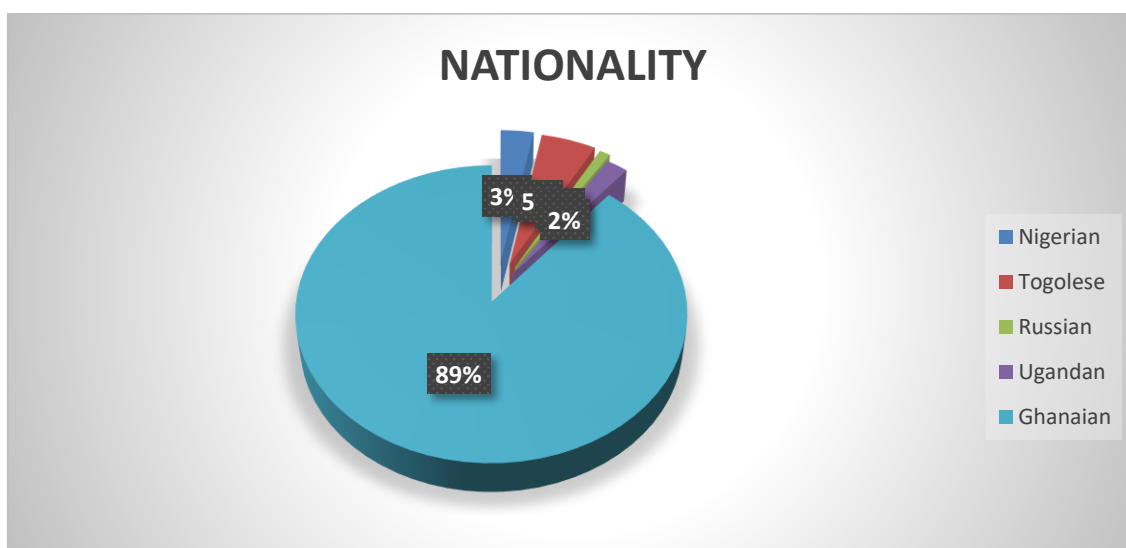


Figure 4.3: Nationality

Source: field survey 2018

In the process of data collection, respondents were categorized into their various nationalities. From the table and chat above, a majority of 89 respondents who answered the research instrument were Ghanaians as the researcher aims at finding evidence from Ghana. 5 of the respondents were Togolese, 3 other respondents were Nigerians, 2 Ugandans and 1 Russian who was on an exchange program at the University. Other Nationals were interviewed to give the researcher a faint idea of what pertains in their countries.

Table 4.4: Level of education

Parameters	Frequency	Percent
Graduate	52	52.0
Undergraduate	48	48.0
Total	100	100.0

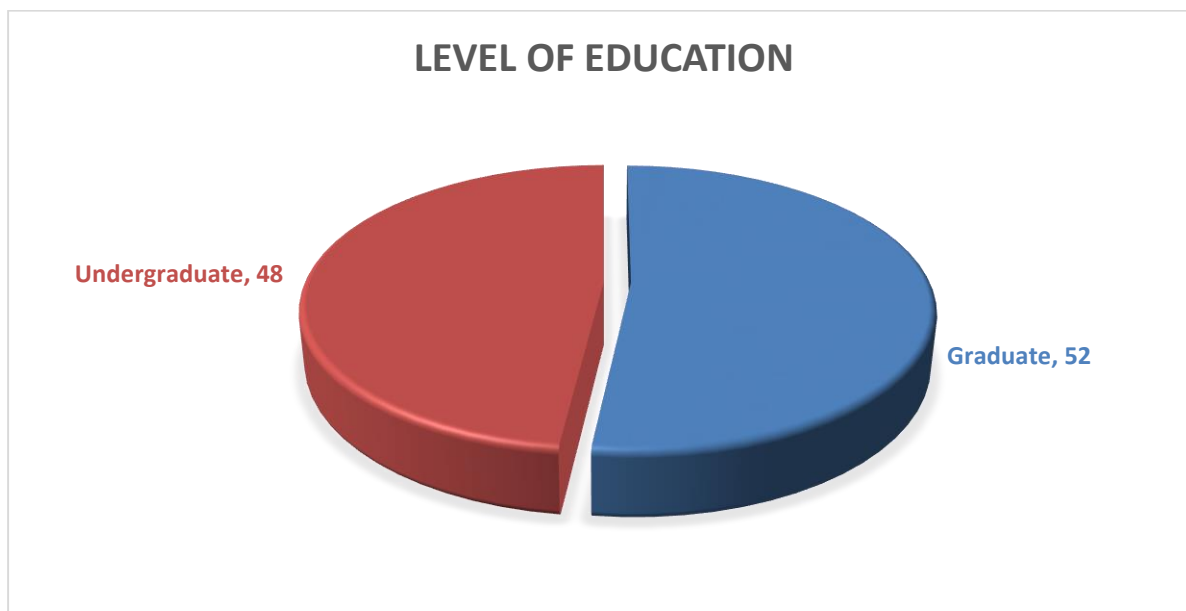


Figure 4.4: Level of education
Source: field survey 2018

The table and chart above is a representation of the classification into their levels of education. Out of a 100 students who responded to the research questionnaire, 48 were undergraduate students, while the majority of 52 were graduate students, the researcher used degree holders to secure answers that are desired and also to avoid deviating ideas from the purpose of the study.

To find out the factors that militate against the acceptability of online degrees

The first objective of the study was to investigate the factors that militate against the acceptability of online degrees. Owing to this, the researcher collected data to meet this objective by using a liker scale of 1 – 3, where 1 = Agree, 2= Disagree and 3= I cannot tell.

The findings were analysed using descriptive statistics with a scale of 0.00 – 0.99 = Agree, 1.00 – 1.99 = Disagree and 2.00 – 3.00 = Undecided. Analysis of these factors was interpretation by comparing the mean to the scale provided above, therefore, the closer the mean to 0.00, the more respondents agreed to the statement made and the closer the mean is to 3.00 more respondents were undecided about the statement in question. Responses were for that matter interpreted according to the scale provided beneath.

Table 4.5: Militating factors

QUESTIONS	No	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Online courses are more flexible as compared to regular courses.	100	1	3	1.73	.494
Online courses are for students who are not very brilliant.	100	1	3	2.23	.849
Online learning is internet and technology dependent.	100	1	3	1.65	.491
Most online degrees are not taken seriously	100	1	3	2.36	.859
Some of the institutions organizing Online courses lack credibility	100	1	3	1.59	.426

Online learning provides less social interactions.	100	1	3	1.96	.539
It is more cumbersome to manage an online degree programme than regular face-face programme.	100	1	3	2.19	.737

Source: field survey 2018

From the above table, one of the major factors that militate against online degree is the fact that, online courses are more flexible as compared to regular courses. An individual is able to blend academic work with their professions effectively without any hindrance, again the learner does not have to be present at any specific place to study. Consequently, this particular statement had the lowest mean of 1.73 which is close the mean 0.00; implying that they agreed to the statement made.

Based on the same scale, a mean of 1.65 indicates overall agreement to the statement that, It is more cumbersome to manage an online programme than distance courses which discloses another factor that militate against online courses as usually more cumbersome to manage than regular face-to-face degree courses.

Other dominating factors that militate against online learning is the fact that, online learning has technological challenges as compared to regular face-to-face learning. Students are likely to avoid online degrees due to technological challenges, most student who cannot manipulate the devices would either mess up their work or lag behind their colleagues, who are smarter and have access to smart devices. Power failure can equally bring studies to a halt and the worse situation is that, there many areas that lack constant supply of power and for that matter access to the internet.

Also, online learning provide less social interaction which can be seen as one of the factors that prevents students from engaging in online education. A person might be in need of clarification instantly to finish an assignment but may not get any help if there is no one online, another problem is that, the person receiving the certificate might not be the one who is actually doing the studies. Hence the perception that such courses are for students who are not very brilliant and for that reason not taken seriously.

Which of these is more affordable?

The researcher collected data from respondents in order to determine whether affordability is a factors affecting the acceptability of online degree, series of questions were asked and the responses recorded below.

Students were asked to select the more affordable form of degree, weather online degree or regular face-to-face education.

Table 4.6: Affordability

Parameters	Frequency	Percent
Regular face-to face education	51	51
Online Degree	49	49
Total	100	100.0

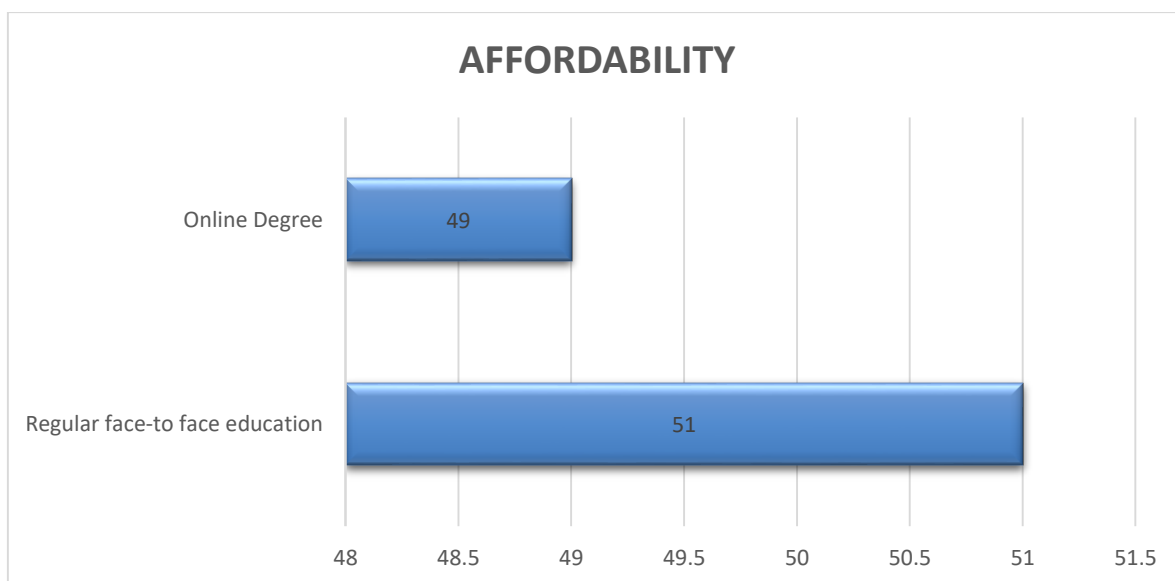


Figure 4.6: Chart on affordability
Source: field survey 2018

The table and chart above represents respondents view on the affordability of online degree and regular face-to-face education. From the findings, majority of the respondents representing 51 out of 100 respondents believed that regular face-to-face education was more affordable as compared to online degree with a frequency of 48 respondents.

Respondents of the study were asked to choose the more preferred from regular face-to-face and online degree.

Table 4.7: Choice of programmes one would prefer

Programme	Frequency	Percent
Regular face-to face education	57	57.0
Online Degree	43	43.0
Total	100	100.0

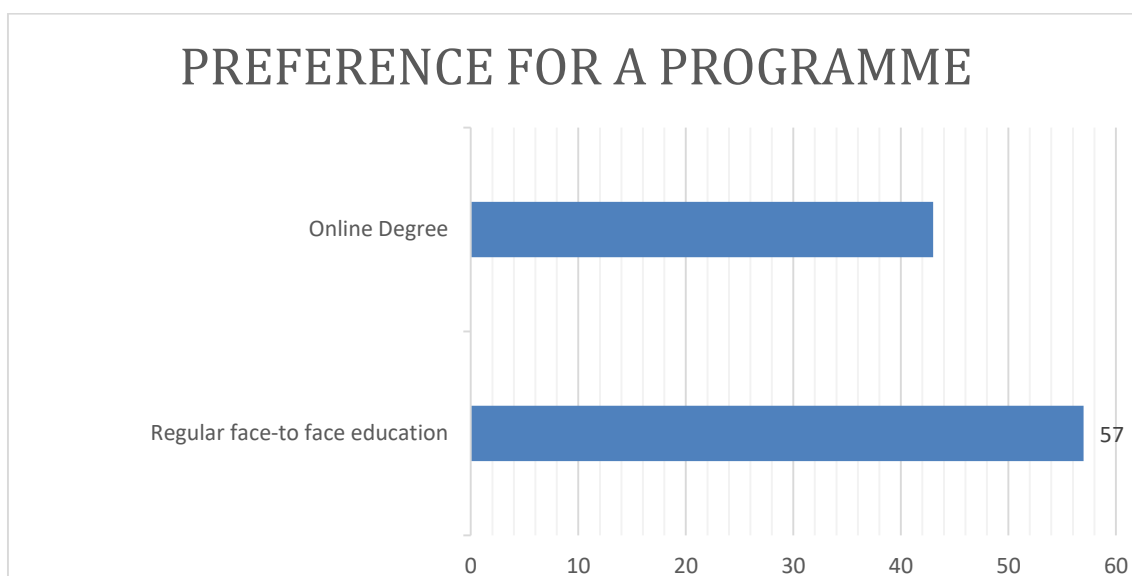


Figure 4.7: Preference for a programme

Source: field survey 2018

Based on the table and the chart which shows a graphical representation of the data collected with reference to the most preferred type of education, majority of 57 out of 100 respondents preferred regular face-to-face education while 43 of the respondents preferred online degree. This results indicates that, most students will prefer to take the regular face-to-face education as compared to online degree.

Who can educate the public?

The study also collected data on parties that students thought can educate the public on the acceptability of online degrees.

Table 4.8: Who can educate

Who can educate	Frequency	Percent
Teachers	23	23.0
The media	46	46.0
Policy Makers	16	16.0
Students	15	15.0
Total	100	100.0

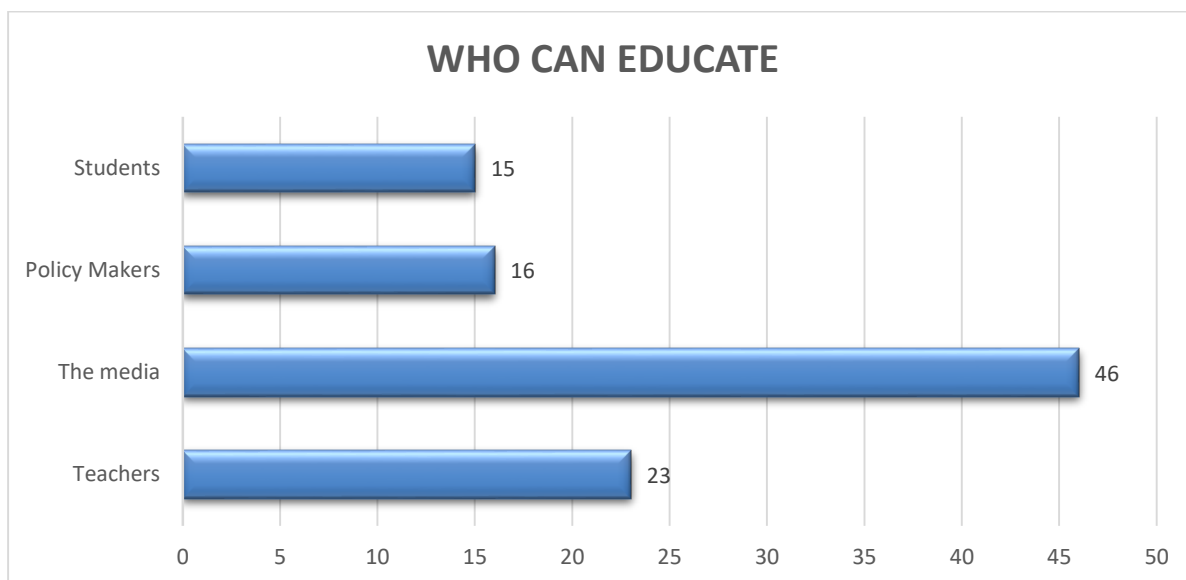


Figure 4.8: Chart on who can educate
Source: field survey

Based on the findings reported above, majority of 46 students out of a total of 100 students who responded to the questionnaire were of the view that, the media is the party that can effectively educate the general public about online degrees. This was followed by teachers with a frequency of 23 respondents, policy makers with a frequency of 16 respondents and students having the least frequency of 15 respondents.

Table 4.9: Who can discourage prospective students?

Parameters	Frequency	Percent
Media	52	52
Policy Makers	43	43
students	5	5
Total	100	100

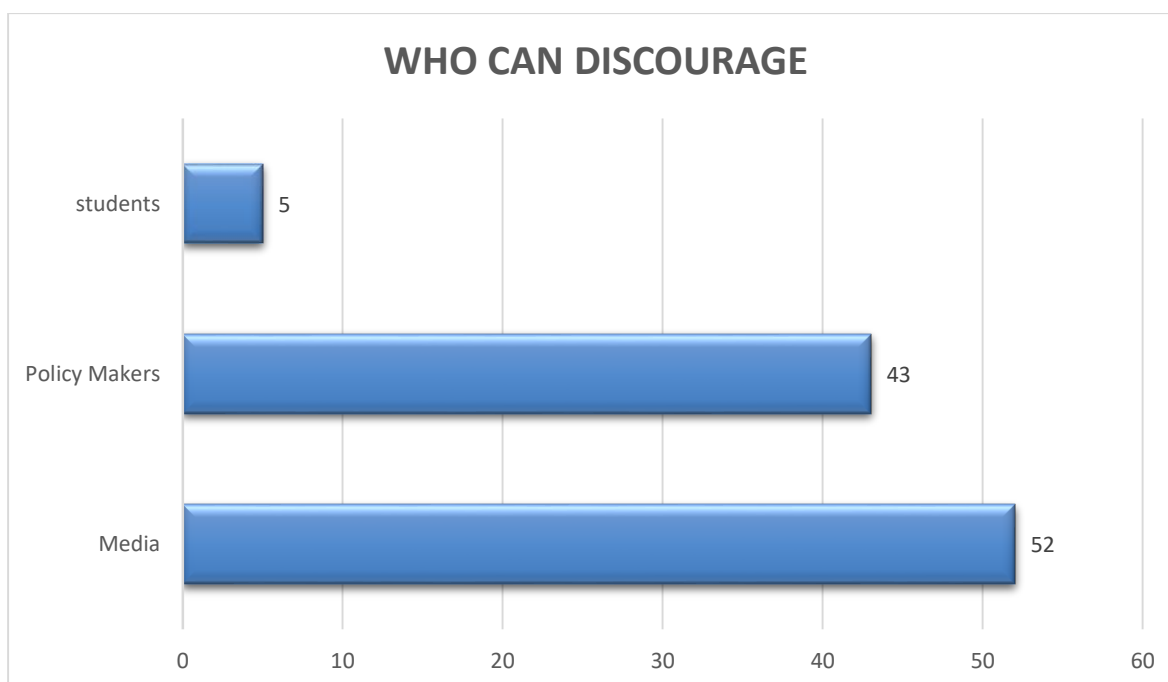


Figure 4.9: Chart on who can discourage
Source: field survey 2018

The data above represents respondent view on the party they think is in the position to discourage prospective students from taking either the online or regular degree. The findings indicated that majority of 52 of a total of 100 respondents were of the view that, the media is most likely to be in the right position to discourage students from taking online degrees.

The respondents were of the view that, the media speak to majority and can easily convince them on what they think is right.

A total of 43 respondents were in favour of policy makers as the most suitable party to discourage students from taking online degrees. These respondents who were students believed the type of educational policy can influence student's choices. Out of a total of 100 respondents, 5 of them believed that, student themselves are capable of influencing choices of other students when it comes to type of education. The respondents attributed their choice to peer influence where one student convinces the other to take a particular type of education.

Respondents of the study were also asked which programme they would like to choose if they had the chance to run a school.

Table 4.10: Programme you would choose if you want to run a school

Programme	Frequency	Percent
Regular	63	63.0
Online	37	37.0
Total	100	100

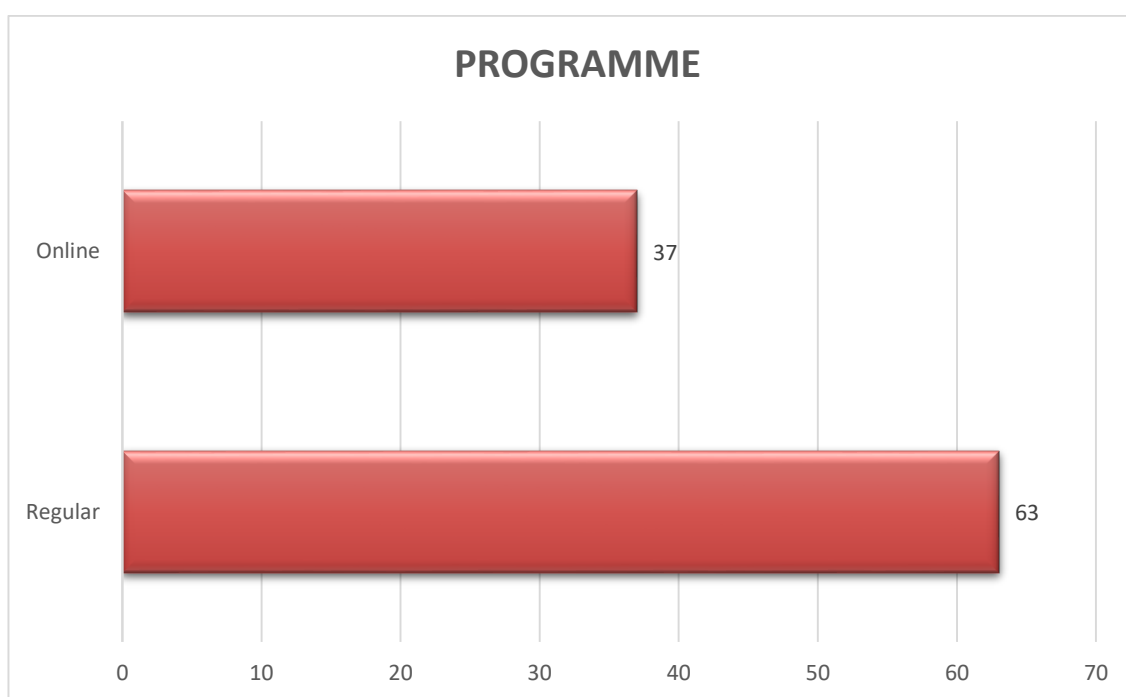


Figure 4.10: Choice of programme
Source: field survey 2018

Out of a total of 100 respondents, 63 of them, representing the majority indicated that, they would choose regular face-to-face education should they be in the position to run a school. The respondents were of the views that, regular face-to-face education is widely accepted, most of the institutions are popular, they are perceived as best universities and their degrees holders do not suffer to get jobs.

To find out whether online degree holders are as competent as the regular degree holders

The second objective of the study was to determine whether online degree holders were as competent as regular degree holders. To do this, respondents were asked series of questions and the findings reported below.

Respondents were asked their opinions about online degrees and their responses were reported in the table below.

Table 4.11: How do you see online degree holders?

Parameters	Frequency	Percent
Competent	61	61
Very competent	16	16
Not competent enough	23	23
Total	100	100

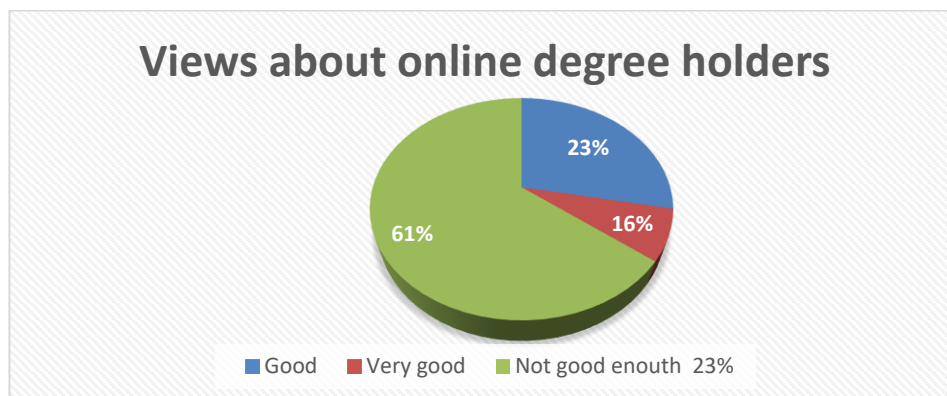


Figure 4.11: Views about online degree holders
Source: field survey 2018

Out of a total of 100 respondents, 61% of the respondents were of the view that, online degrees holders are competent, 16% of the respondents were of the view that they are very competent and 23% indicated that online degree holders are not competent enough. From this finding, it can be seen clearly that, majority of respondents have positive opinions about online degree holders and have the view that, online degree is good.

Table 4.12: Means of distinguish between online degree holders and regular?

Parameters	Frequency	Percent
The institution	34	34.0
The academic Brochure	23	23.0
Regular conversation	43	43.0
Total	100	100

MEANS OF IDENTIFICATION

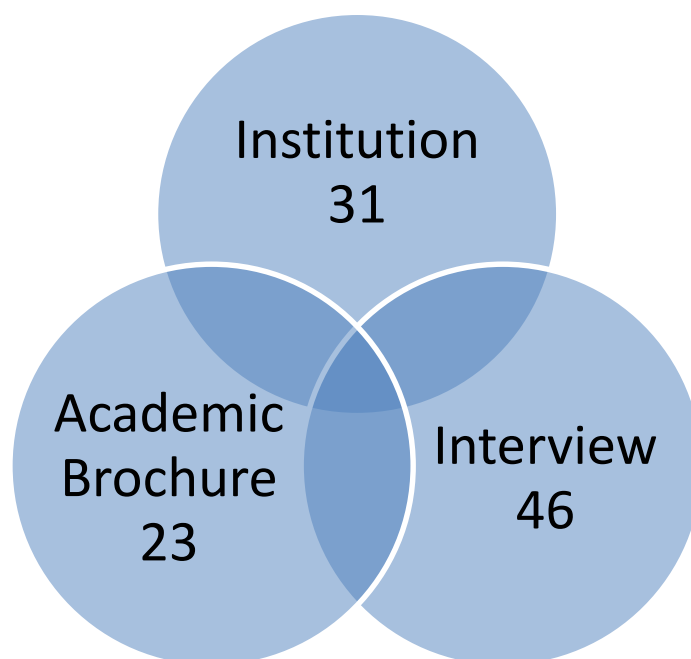


Figure 4.11: Means of Identification
Source: field survey 2018

The study collected data based on how respondents distinguish between online degree holders and regular degree holders. From the table above, it can be seen that, majority of 43 respondents out of a total of 100 indicated that, they are able to make out the differences through regular conversation with the degree holders. This is followed by 34 of the respondents who make such comparisons from the institutions and 23 making out the difference from academic brochures.

Will you say that the atmosphere of an online programme is more conducive than a regular?

Table 4.13: Conduciveness of online atmosphere

Parameters	Frequency	Percent
Yes	64	64.0
No	36	36.0
Total	100	100

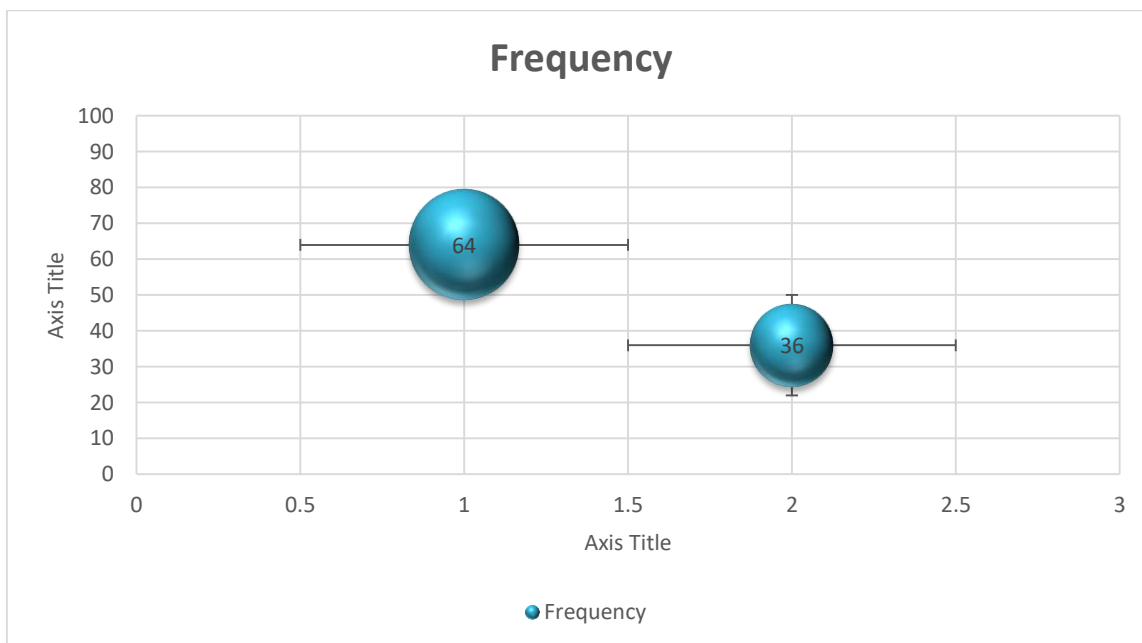


Figure 4.13: Conduciveness of atmosphere

Source: field survey 2018

Respondents answered question with regards to the atmospheres of online education. Respondents were required to determine if the atmosphere of online was more conducive to that of regular face-to-face education. The table above represents data collected from respondents with regards to the question. With a majority of 64 respondents saying yes, it was revealed that, most of the respondents were of the view that the regular face-to-face degree programme was more conducive as compared to online degree.

Some of the respondents who were of the view that, online programme was more conducive believes that the learner can still be on the job while learning with others thinking they can manage their time better. Respondents were of the view that, network connections needed for online education can disrupt and slow down their work progress.

Table 4.14: What do people say about online degrees?

Parameters	Frequency	Percent
Most of them are fake	1	1.0
They are equally genuine	33	33.0
Not from accredited institutions	66	66.0
Total	100	100

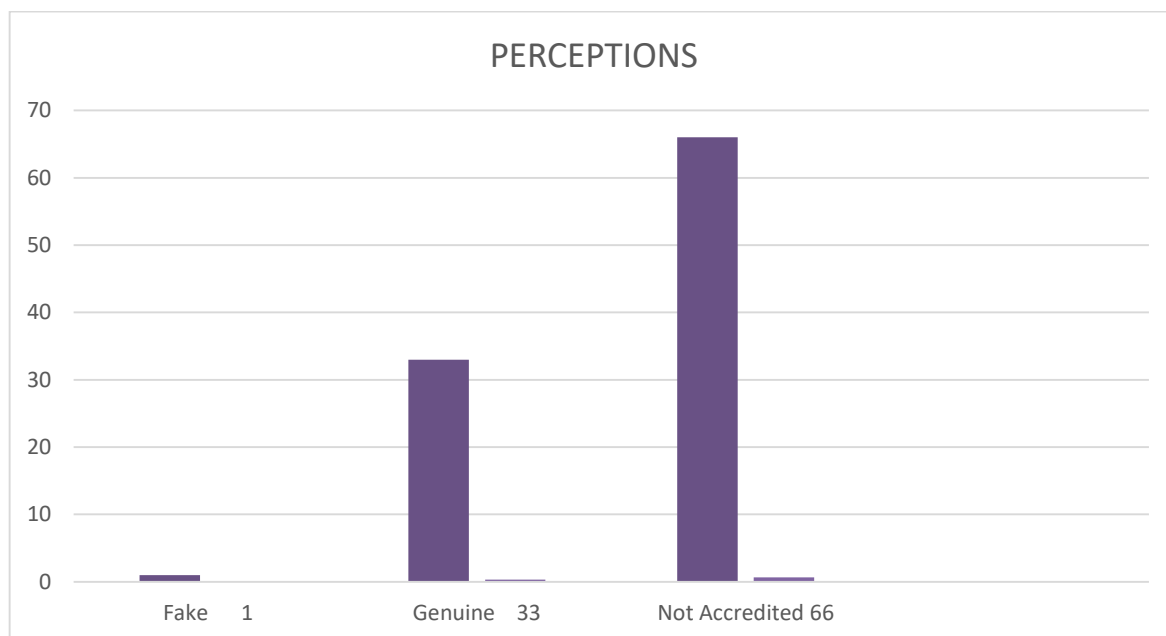


Figure 4.14: Conduciveness of atmosphere
 Source: field survey 2018

Respondents gave their opinion in what people say about online degrees. 1 respondents indicated that, people are of the view that, most online degrees are fake. 33 of the respondents revealed that, people were of the view that online degrees were equally genuine and 66 were of the point that some online degrees were not from accredited institutions.

What difference do you see between the performances of both categories?

Respondents were asked about the difference that existed between performance of online degrees and regular face-to-face education.

Table 4.15: Differences between online and regular

Parameters	Frequency	Percent
Regular degree is of a better quality	58	58.0
Online degree is of a better quality	42	42.0
Total	100	100

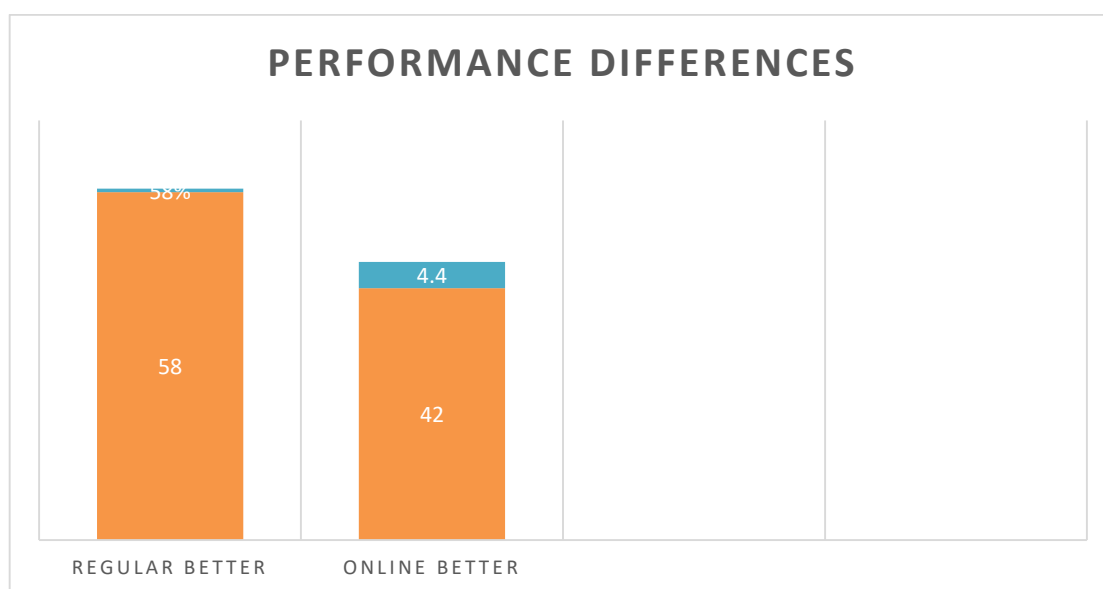


Figure 4.15: Differences in performance
 Source: field survey

From the table above, majority of 58 respondents were of the view that regular degree is of better quality as compared to 42 of the respondents who thought online degree is of better quality.

What is the difference between the Degree that is awarded to students who do online courses and those who do the regular courses?

Respondents were also asked about the difference between degrees awarded to studies online and those awarded to students through regular face-to-face education.

Table 4.16: Points of distinction

Parameters	Frequency	Percent
Doubts about the content of certificate	7	7.0
There is no distinction on the certificate	41	41.0
The output of work of the individual	52	52.0
Total	100	100

POINT OF DISTINCTION

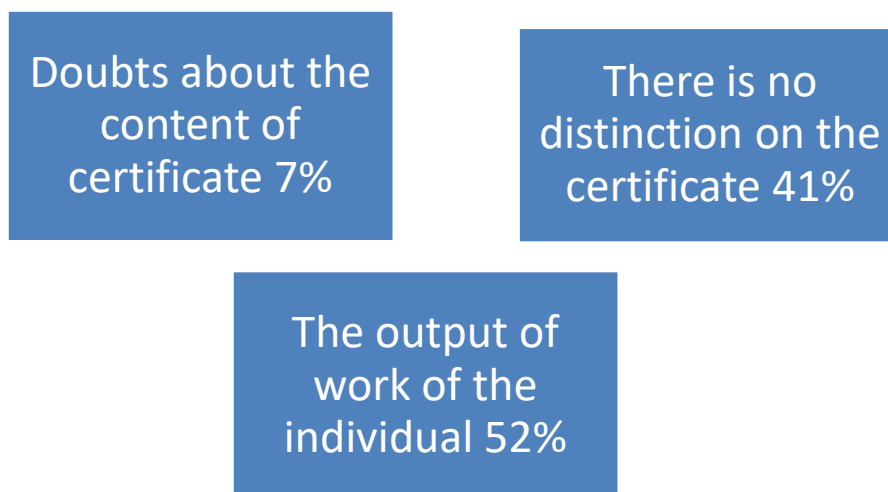


Figure 4.16: Points of distinction
Source: field survey

From the findings above, 7 of the respondents had doubts about the content of the certificate, 41 were of the view that, there was no distinction on the certificate and 52 indicated that, output work of the individual is a major factor for distinction.

Availability of Resources

The researcher collected data on the resource and facility availability at universities for the regular face-to-face education.

Are there enough classrooms to accommodate all the students who qualified for admission?

Respondents were asked if classrooms at the universities were able to accommodate all students who qualified for admissions.

Table 4.17: Availability of resources

Parameters	Frequency	Percent
Yes	15	15
No	38	38
Not really	47	47
Total	100	100

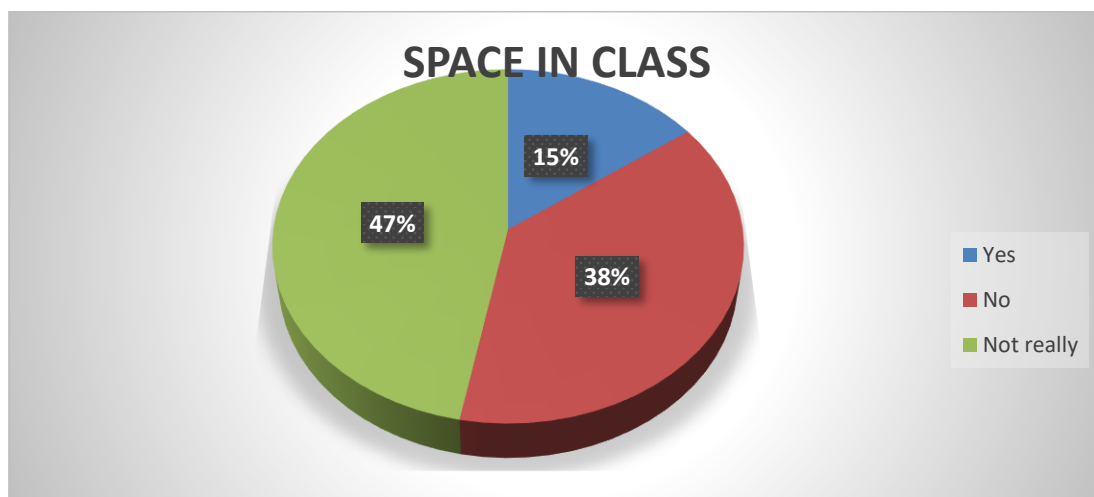


Figure 4.17: Availability of resources
Source: field survey 2018

Out of a total of 100 respondents, 15 said yes, that the classroom facilities are able to accommodate all students who qualified for admission. On the contrary, 38 respondent were o the view that, the classroom facilities are unable to accommodate all students. A majority of 47 respondents confirmed that, the classroom facilities does not really accommodate admitted students. This portrays a situation where universities who offer face-to-face courses have to go through some difficulties in admitting students.

Do you have enough lecturers to teach the number of students who gained admission to your school?

Table 4.18: Lecturer availability

Parameters	Frequency	Percent
Yes but some do on part time	59	59.0
No almost all of them are on contract	31	31.0
Yes	10	10.0
Total	100	100

Availability of Lecturers

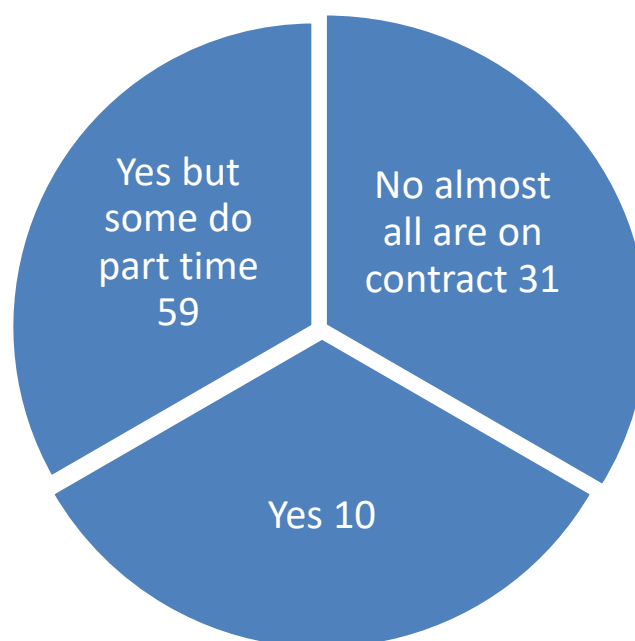


Figure 4.18: Availability of Lecturers
Source: field survey 2018

In terms of the availability of lecturers to teach the number of students who gained admission to the universities, 59 of the respondents believed lecturers were available but some were part-time lecturers. Also 31 of the respondents were of the view that, there were not adequate number of lecturers to teach students and that most of the lecturers were on contracts. And 10 of the respondents absolutely believed that, there are enough lecturers to teach students who are admitted into the various universities.

Is the government responsible for supply of stationery for teaching and learning?

Table 4.19: Supply of stationery

Parameters	Frequency	Percent
No Students buy their own books	54	54.0
They are made available online	46	46.0
Total	100	100

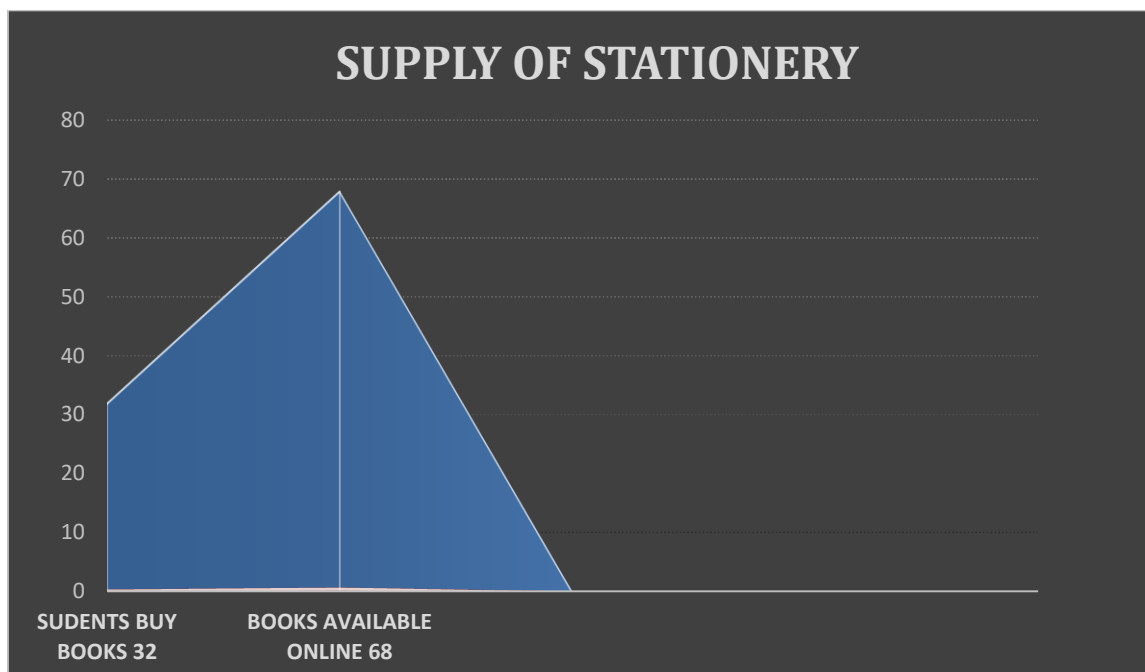


Figure 4.19: Supply of stationery
Source: field survey 2018

Respondents indicated that by a 32% frequency that, students buy their own books while 68% of them revealed that, stationary materials for teaching and learning is made available online.

The Media as a Factor

An interview was conducted by the researcher to confirm or deny the assertion that media reportage is a major factor that militate against the acceptability of online degrees.

The perception was not completely refuted, as some of them agreed that the media can alarm the masses, others were of the view that it is a way of alerting the general public to be more cautious. One of them agreed that sensationalism is also part of what some of the Media men do in place of accurate reportage.

Asked whether the media men have been exaggerating to sell their papers, one respondent said:

Respondent 1: *“not all journalists write their stories to make money, some are there to educate and alert the masses. Probably a few may want to use overstatement to sell their news”*

Respondent 2: *“Sensationalism has become part of some journalists, and others always want to be the first to report an issue instead of cross-checking the facts and I think they are the reason why people no more trust what we say”*

Respondent 3: *“I would not say that we have been exaggerating, rather the journalistic language is not like what you and I are speaking; it must be catchy enough to draw the readers’ attention sometimes just for fun and thus the beauty of journalism”*

Most respondents were of the view that, online degree was not a bad idea at all, however, there were major concerns about it being genuine and credible. This assertions were made in the following statements by respondents:

Respondent 1:

'It is not bad if accredited, I however believe that some are not genuine.'

Respondent 2:

'Records has it that some are not accredited institutions yet they award degrees.'

Respondent 3:

'Not all of them are genuine, even in our country here they are questionable online degree holders.'

Respondent 4

'My own brother took an online course, yet could not use it to secure any job.'

This statements reveal the concerns about the media with regards to online degree where they think and have evidence of some of these institutions not being genuine and accredited.

Also, respondents were asked if they had come across people with issues of having results that are awarded from institutions without accreditation and the following responses were recorded.

Respondent 1:

'Yes we have had them published to caution those who want to go into it'

Respondent 2:

'Issues of such nature are happening every day, go online and read the newspapers and you will see for yourself'

Respondent 3:

'You don't seem to be reading the papers thus why you are asking else you will know'

These responses portray the extent to which some Ghanaians are discouraged about online degrees and the negative perceptions surrounding people who have issues of having results that are awarded from institutions without accreditation.

The researcher proceeded to find out if respondents had people with online degrees at their work place. The general response was that, all respondents had people with online degrees at their work places and the respondents have some of these comments to make about them.

One Respondent revealed that they have but the employers are not enthused about them;

'We do have but the unfortunate thing is that most employers do not like them'

Another respondent also narrated that;

'Over here little importance is attached to online degree and those who do those courses use it to boost their expertise'

And the heart-breaking statement of all was made by another respondent by saying;

'It is unfair to waste money, time and resources to do a course only to be told it does not attract promotion'.

Respondents were asked the choices they will make if they were to choose between online degree and regular degree. Findings revealed most of them saying they would prefer the regular degree and only a few of them said they found the online more convenient and would prefer online degree.

Finally, the researcher asked respondents what they could do to help stop the negative impressions that employees have about online degrees. Respondents revealed that, proper education was being done by the stories they publish, and that, the stories are not to scare or discourage the general public, but to educate and help them make informed decisions.

Thus: *"it is just a matter of time, I am sure that as people travel and researchers continue to look into this matter, something good will come out of it soon."*

This last respondent seems to be hopeful that Ghanaians will overcome the problem through travels and research.

The Employer in Retrospect

To find out how ready the employers are to incorporate online degree holders into the job market

The third objective of the study was to determine how ready employees are to incorporate online degree holders into the job market. To do this, an interview was conducted with 15 employers of which were public organization and private organizations.

The first question on the interview guide was to determine whether employers accept applicants with foreign certificates for employment or the organizations only consider applications from Ghanaian universities.

Data collected indicated that, most organizations do not reject applicants with foreign certificates, however, their applications are considered based on different reasons. Some employers indicated that, it depends on the area of specialization while others explained that, they sometimes consider such applications because applicants are from professional schools. One respondent revealed this by saying:

'if they are accredited professional schools yes, because we already know them and it doesn't really matter but we are a bit skeptical about the unfamiliar ones''

This is an indication that, employers do not reject job applications from applicants with foreign certificates provided they are qualified for the job and they are graduating from an accredited and professional institutions.

Secondly, the interview aimed at determining if workers are employed directly from other schools or are put on probation periods for some time. Majority of the respondents indicated that, workers who are employed, especially new workers in their field of business are put on probation.

One of the respondents revealed that:

'The new ones are usually put on probation while those who already have experience are left to continue'

Another also said:

'It is necessary to start every worker on trial, it makes them sit up and put in their best'

'A respondent said: they do not put them on probation but rather they give them contract, once they prove themselves to be alright, they can take them permanently.'

Findings reveals that, most organizations put their workers on probation where they learn the required skills for the job and their performances assessed at the end of the period.

Also, respondents were asked if background checks were made before applicants were employed. Findings from the respondents indicated that, background checks were basic requirement to get the right people for the job. Some employee do background checks through referees of applicants and for some organizations, prospective applicants were required to bring a police report before they are hired.

Respondents who participated in the interview were asked if their respective organizations have any preference for employees who go through promotional ranks or employees are promoted based on further education. Some of the responses are quoted below;

Response 1:

'We do promote workers who upgrade themselves and also have criteria for internal and external promotions.'

Response 2:

'We have what is called on the job training after which our personnel are promoted, those who go for further Studies go for short term refresher causes.'

From the above data, it was revealed to the researcher that, organizations do promote employees who acquire further education. However, some organizations have their own scheme for promotion and training is used as a basis for promotions. The employers also indicated that, they looked out for certain positive characteristics such as output of work, punctuality and dedication to duty.

With regards to the promotion of workers who obtain online degrees, respondents revealed during the interview that, they promote such employees if they check and pass all the needed requirements. Employers also indicated that, they sometimes do not encourage the promotion of employees with online degrees because some of the courses are irrelevant to the organization.

Asked whether they pay the employees based upon the source of certificate?

Respondent 1.

Said: *"we do not pay anyone according to the source of their certificate, workers are paid by their ranks, and the certificates only place them on their ranks"*

Respondent 2.

"The issue is not about whether or not the certificate is obtained the traditional way or online, it has to do with its authenticity, once you have the right qualification as prescribed by the job requirement, automatically you fall on your rank hence your pay."

Based upon the responses, it was clear that, employers do not pay employees based on the source of their certificates, but employees are rather paid based on their experience and qualifications.

Respondents were asked how they were able to determine whether or not the certificate an applicant has is either online or regular degree.

Respondent 1.

"It is easy to know during interviews, once you observe and probe the applicant you will get it."

Respondent 2.

"You see many people think an interview is just to look at the personality but it helps to ascertain whether the applicant is the actual owner of the certificate or has obtained the knowledge for which his services are needed so you probe and find every answer."

Respondent 3.

"If someone says he has a certificate from London and yet has never travelled outside the country, do you need a soothsayer to tell you the source? No, it is as simple as that."

Majority of the respondents indicated that, they are able to determine such difference during interviews with prospective employees.

Others also revealed that, on some occasions, they make use of the design of the certificate to determine whether it is an online certificate or a regular degree certificate.

Respondents to the interview questions were also asked the question below.

If you have applicants of the same qualification but one with an online degree and the other with a regular Classroom degree, which one would you prefer?

Respondents gave the following answers respectively;

Respondent 1:

'I would prefer a well-known accredited institution to the one am not familiar with'

Respondents 2:

'Most of the online causes do not go with any practical work and thus why we don't take them'

Respondent 3:

'If the online institution is a professional institution that we know, why not'

From the data collected, most respondents will prefer employing applicant with a regular Classroom degree due to the fact that, it provided relevant courses which employees are aware of and for that matter have no doubt about it.

Finally, respondents were asked if they believed that an online graduate could perform effectively or even better on the job. There was general agreement to the statement and most respondents believed that there could be a possibility where an employee with an online certificate will perform effectively or even better on the job. One respondents made a revelation to confirm this by saying;

Respondent 1.

'We have had some personnel who came in like that and deed better than the regular students, it has to do with the kind of training not the channel'

Respondent 2.

"The problem has to do with the practical work that is always lacking, the online students do not do practical work like the regular course work, meanwhile they are supposed to come out and do the work that will yield results not just speaking big English."

Respondent 3.

"This simple question will answer you, how can a person be here in Ghana and physically be doing practical work, they can only see how it is done and not try to do it their own way without touching the exact things over there"

V. DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

In the view of Annesley & Thomas discussion helps the researcher to interpret and describe the importance of their findings in connection to the previous knowledge about the research problems, it simply unveil the unfinished aspects that are left for the readers to appreciate the problem. The statements are made in support or otherwise of the research questions raised. This is followed by inferences from the primary and secondary data collected. The discussion is done according to various sub-headings, where issue are supported or debunked with references from other sources that are cited. In the concluding part embraces questions that remained unanswered or new questions that have surfaced from the findings and suggestions for further research (Annesley & Thomas, 2010).

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Objective one: the major factors that militate against acceptability of online degrees

Indications from the data shows that the major factor that militate against the acceptability of online degree is the Media. (See Page 42). The Media is seen as one source the masses trust most and can be heard by almost of their listeners, therefore what they say tends to be the voice of the people whatever they bring to the public domain is what the masses take rather very seriously and if they campaign against a programme too it will not succeed. (See Page 44). In 2006, Citi News came out with a list of most prominent Ghanaians who were perceived as possessing fake Doctorate degrees and this created so much fear in the citizens. Generally people would do what they feel good about but of late, Media sensationalism has become a tool for measuring almost everybody's judgment.

The data collected implies that the media is a major impediment to the acceptability of online degrees if nothing is done to check them. In Simpson's opinion, the Media is responsible for panic that often grips the masses, he accused the Media for being responsible for frightening parents in the Columbian High School shooting incident, he believes that the media does too much of exaggeration which rather aggravates a problem instead of resolving it (Simpson, 2006) the Media can leave out 'Panic reportage' and be up to the task instead of causing fear and panic. (Refer to Page 18). The interview conducted for the Media deed confirm it as a means that they use to create humors.

William & Brody also describe them as a two-way sword that can either hurt or help, one way of making online degrees acceptable to the Ghanaian employer is through public education which can be championed by the Ghanaian Media who have a broader means to access information. The data collected also confirmed the Media a major factor, (Refer to table 8, Page 16). For online degree to be acceptable, it will take the Media as a major stakeholder to create that awareness (William & Brody 2007).

Another factor detected is Technological Advancement (TA), the citizens seem to lack access to the internet and stable supply of electricity has also become a hindrance to online education. This makes it rather cumbersome for students (See page 38 field survey). It was also confirmed that the online education lacks more interaction which is the reason why most employers are doubting the practicality of the degrees. Theoretical work alone cannot let workers put in their best, this is why the employers seems to prefer the traditional regular courses.

Comparison between Online and Regular Degrees.

Unless online is understood from a holistically broader perspective, the negative perceptions cannot be eradicated. In a comparison to see whether the online education is as good as the regular face to face, it was realized that there is no much difference between the two. As the online faces technological problems, the regular system also suffer from availability of resources and congestion in the classrooms. This happens to be one of the major reasons why most students are not gaining admission. (Refer to Page 11). Each system has their own advantage and disadvantages.

In reference to the data collected, it discloses that the online degree is a convenient means that is used to help workers upgrade themselves. Again it allows each student to work at their own pace and achieve results (Henderson, 2003) saw it as bringing relief to the students by saving their time and working under little or no pressure (See Page 21).

It must be noted however that the employers are not totally against online degrees, some of them believe that output of work outweighs the source of degree. If an individual is naturally hard-working, it does not matter where they study they will still make their marks. The data unveils how ready the employer is to take workers with degrees that are offered by well-known accredited institutions because it makes their search easier for them. Some are willing to employ the workers after they have proven competent during the probation period (Refer to Pages 64 and 67).

Policies of the Government

It is possible that government policies do not favour tertiary institutions, as a result most of them are under resourced, ill equipped with human resource and infrastructure. Some of the institutions do not even have access to Technological equipment to enable them run online causes. The non-availability of resources poses a major problem for the state and the public institutions. In a submission made by Professor Osei Dankwa, he lamented rather bitterly about the government's inability to incorporate technology into every facet of education (See Page19)

The Employers Readiness to Incorporate Online Degree Holders into the Job Market.

On the part of the employers, they are ready to employ those who have certificates from accredited and well known sources. Again they are ready to employ those who have proven that they are competent on the job after probation. So the output of work according to the employer is of much essence when it comes to acceptability.

Conclusion

Certainly, the essence of online education cannot be overlooked it is one very essential needs of a growing country like Ghana. To achieve the goal of the 1992 constitution of Ghana which gives every citizen the right to Education, it is important that other avenues are sort to augment what the traditional institutions are doing. The nation may not advance if most of the citizens remain half educated. Talents will be hidden and those who will develop into responsible adults would remain on the fence without achieving their goals. Who knows the number of people that would have invented and what kind of innovation they might have brought on? The truth is that, no matter the emotional fitness, intelligent quotient level of an individual, they still need sharpening

to completely bring out what is embedded in them. Undeniably, most qualified students are rather doing odd jobs. Those who should have been well vested in diverse forms of technology and employ others are themselves looking for non-existence jobs.

Thus, if other factors are not considered alongside traditional educational degrees like online degree, it might be difficult if not impossible to survive in the global competition. Most Ghanaians would be handicapped in their own country. In Ghana now working conditions are very bad, while most employers are also taking advantage of the workers, there is the need for highly qualified citizens; with technological ideas that will solve the problems of unemployment.

The use of Digital educational system and going paperless education is the answer. Proper education must be done. A realistic assessment of online education ought to be done, so that every employer will understand the need for a change in the educational system. Granted that the government ensures that constant electricity is provided with a good network which will make assessment of the internet easy, even the employers may have access to information and would not have to depend on what the media say. It will then be possible for everyone to distinguish between false information and authentic information no matter the source. Also the media will be compelled to do proper investigations before their reportage, they will then be doing education in place of humor which will rather be a great asset to the GES.

Suggestions and Recommendations for Further Research

It is strongly recommended that all the public universities in Ghana should engage in online education with a well-equipped technological resources. Information technology should be made compulsory at all the levels of education. It does not matter the location of a school in Ghana, whether in the urban or rural areas, computers should be available. One means of achieving this is to look for alternative sources of power to enhance access to the internet, there should be a monitoring system to ensure that school children do not abuse the use of the internet. It is very obvious that the 1992 constitution of Ghana, Article 38 (a) is been neglected or rather forgotten thus, "Equal and balanced secondary and appropriate pre-university education, equal access to university or equivalent education, with emphasis on science and technology" the question is whether this aspect of the constitution has been erased, if not then something should we done about it as a matter of urgency.

Looking at the way the Ghanaian population is growing, a time would come when the country would not only need online degrees but also Basic and Secondary school certificates online to reduce the congestion in those classrooms too. If the education starts from now, it will be a dream that is realized without difficulty. Once the country adopts the Digital Educational System, it would avert the problems that the Senior High Schools are facing presently.

Added to this, it is imperative to have some partnership with the Media for a realistic assessment of online education to be done, so that every employer will understand the need for a change in the educational system.

Finally, there is the need for the entire country to understand online education and the benefits that the country would derive from it and make it accessible and acceptable to everyone including the employers.

It is recommended that further research should be conducted into how best the policy makers can make online degrees attractive to all Ghanaians.

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