

# *Placement of Graduates of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration in Sectors of the Ghanaian Economy: Insights from a Nation-wide Tracer Study*

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## **Abstract**

*This article examined the determining variables Ghanaian employers gave considerations to in the job placement of graduates of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA). This research endeavour was undertaken against the backdrop of a dearth of information concerning how IEPA graduates were placed in the labour market to enable them contribute their quota towards Ghana's developmental agenda. The concurrent mixed methods research design was employed, whereby semi-structured open ended interviews conducted with 16 employers were complemented by data derived from self-administered questionnaires distributed to 407 IEPA graduates. The data generated from the questionnaire responses were coded and analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies whilst the interview data were recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically. The findings revealed that the first three factors employers gave consideration to in the placement of IEPA graduates were degree specialisation, educational preparation and training, and experience of prospective employees. The findings suggested further that the professional training graduates received from IEPA were, to a large extent, aligned to/with their work schedules. In light of these findings, it was concluded that employers of IEPA graduates generally were consistent with the best practices admonished in the human resource development literature regarding placement of employees. It was recommended against this backdrop that IEPA intensifies its collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Education and its allied agencies to ensure she continually fulfils her mandate of preparing graduates for careers within the Ghanaian education sector as a whole.*

## **Introduction**

From the organisational point of view, employee placement and/or deployment is considered as an indispensable activity for every organisation's human resources department. This, according to the human resources development and utilisation literature (for example, Armstrong, 2009; Chester & Beaudin, 1996; DeBolt, 1991; Drummond,

Grimes & Terrell, 1990; Grossman & Thompson, 2004; Nudzor, 2016; Nudzor, Ampah-Mensah, Agbevanu, & Nyame, 2019; Rebore, 2007; Wood & Payne 1998), is because from time to time, new employees get recruited whilst old ones are transferred or reassigned to new schedules and positions in their respective places of work. It is in line with this same reason why the human resources management literature makes the point forcefully for employee placement not to be viewed as a one-time human resource development practice or process but as an ongoing concern for organisations that are serious about achieving ‘success’ in their endeavours in the labour market (Armstrong, 2009; Nudzor, 2016; Rebore, 2007).

This article reports on a Ghanaian nation-wide tracer study which examined how graduates of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA) were placed and utilised by their employers, and how efficient and effective the graduates were in the Ghanaian job market. The IEPA was established in August, 1975 on the basis of a joint agreement between the Government of Ghana and UNESCO/UNDP, and as a result of the felt need at the time to set up a ‘hub’ for the training of educational planners, administrators and other specialists in the field of education (Owusu & Dzinyela, 1994, cited in Nudzor, 2016). According to the historical records, the IEPA was established and mandated *inter alia* to: generate empirical knowledge and research to inform educational policy and practice; provide education and training aimed at improving planning, leadership and management capabilities of personnel in the education sector; and improve the operational efficiency of personnel within the GES and educational institutions in Ghana (Owusu & Dzinyela, 1994, cited in Nudzor, 2016).

Since her establishment, the IEPA has contributed (and still continues to contribute) her quota towards the development of Ghana. This is particularly evident in the leading role she assumes in the preparation of graduates for careers within the Ghanaian educational sector and other sectors of the general economy. In addition to being the ‘hub’ for the training of future educational planners and administrators of the nation (Nudzor & Danso, 2015), the IEPA plays a leading role in international-funded capacity strengthening projects in educational leadership and planning throughout the country. For example, IEPA has developed strong working relations with the International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP) of UNESCO and had recently

partnered the IIEP in delivering a distance education programme in Educational Sector Planning in Ghana. Most recently (i.e. between 2005 and 2010), the IEPA collaborated with Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam to undertake a Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation (NUFFIC) funded research project that enhanced leadership and management capacities of Lecturers of Ghanaian Polytechnics (now upgraded to Technical Universities). The IEPA was also involved deeply in the recent past in DFID-sponsored 'EDQual' research partnership with the University of Bristol and the University of Dar es Salaam which researched into educational leadership and quality issues in Ghana and Tanzania. Most recently, IEPA has collaborated with the Ghana National Commission for UNESCO in designing and conducting sensitisation workshops on the Education 2030 Agenda in the Brong Ahafo, Ashanti and Central Regions of Ghana.

In terms of the academic courses she offers, the IEPA currently runs leadership, management and administration oriented graduate programmes leading to the award of M.Ed in Educational Administration; M.Phil in Educational Planning, Educational Administration and Administration in Higher Education (University of Cape Coast, 2016). In addition to these graduate programmes, the institute offers a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programme in Qualitative Research. This programme was introduced deliberately, and with the view to strengthening and/or enhancing the research capacities of early career researchers of the University of Cape Coast and other professional research institutions in the country in the area of qualitative research. It is also heart-warming to note that IEPA has recently obtained clearance from the Academic Board of the University of Cape Coast for the introduction of new programmes, namely: MPhil/PhD in Educational Leadership, MPhil/PhD in Monitoring and Evaluation in Education, MPhil/PhD in Economics of Education, PhD in Educational Administration, PhD in Educational Planning, and Postgraduate Diploma in Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education. These programmes are being introduced to fill in human resource gaps in these critical areas of the Ghanaian educational system (Nudzor *et al.*, 2019).

Thus, through these training and capacity building programmes vis-à-vis the academic courses she renders, IEPA has assumed a leading role in the preparation of graduates for careers within the Ghanaian education sector and other sectors of the general economy. Whilst this

undoubtedly was a significant contribution to the development of the nation, it was unclear how her graduates were placed and utilised effectively in the labour market to enable them contribute their quota towards the developmental agenda of the country. A baseline tracer study commissioned by the IEPA herself in the Central Region in 2014 in this direction (Nudzor & Danso, 2015; Nudzor, 2016) produced interesting results worth citing. Among other things, the findings suggested that although employers were aware that educational preparation and training ought to take pre-eminence in determining the job placement of IEPA graduates, they prioritised factors such as seniority, rank, wishes, career prospects and trustworthiness of prospective employees. Also, the findings indicated that even though the graduate employees were utilised in ways that were generally seen to be consistent with their degree specialisations, they performed ‘other’ supplementary roles for which they received no professional training from IEPA. As interesting as these insights from the baseline study were, they represented the views of employers and IEPA graduates from only one out of the regions of Ghana. This thus called for a nation-wide tracer study which, apart from probing these issues further, was to inform a revision, if need be, of IEPA’s curricula and general modes of training and course delivery to ensure that she produces efficient and effective graduate employees to serve the human resource needs of the education sector in particular, and other sectors of the Ghanaian economy (Nudzor *et al.*, 2019).

This current article reports on an aspect of the nation-wide tracer study. Essentially, this article examined the job placement of IEPA graduates in the Ghanaian labour market. This was proposed against the backdrop of a dearth of information concerning how IEPA graduates were placed in the labour market to enable them contribute their quota towards Ghana’s developmental agenda (Nudzor *et al.*, 2019). In line with the general purpose of the article, the overarching question was: ‘What criteria did employers use to determine the job placement of IEPA graduates?’ Based on this overarching research question, the following three sub-research questions were posed:

1. In what sectors of the Ghanaian economy were IEPA graduates employed?

2. What factors did employers give consideration to in the job placement of IEPA graduates?
3. To what extent did the degree specialisation of IEPA graduates inform the placement criteria of their employers?

Thus, in this article, the views of both employers of IEPA graduates and the graduates themselves are presented to gain a better insight into what criteria informed the job placement of IEPA graduates. In order to accomplish this onerous task, some key words in the context of the article are operationalised as follows. First, 'employee placement' is conceptualised simply as the assignment of a new employee to a job-role or the re-assignment of an existing employee to a different job-role. Second, 'employers' are operationalised to mean chief executive officers or representatives of key organisations in which IEPA graduates are employed. Third, 'IEPA graduates' are referred to in context to mean employees of organisations in Ghana who had pursued and obtained academic/professional qualification in any of IEPA's programmes of study, specifically MA, MEd, MPhil and PhD.

So clearly, this section of the article has explored the research context, whereby issues concerning IEPA's history of establishment, mandates, exploits and the research problem necessitating the study on which this article is based are highlighted. Before the research methods employed for the study are elucidated, a brief review of literature, and a crisp description of the theoretical resources adopted as a conceptual framework for the study are presented in the following two sections to conceptualise and set in context issues surrounding employee placement.

### **Conceptualising Employee Placement**

In the words of Kumar and Sharma (2001) after the selection of personnel for job-roles, the personnel manager needs to do a judicious and scientific placement of the new recruits. In giving clarity to the term, Dessler (2008, cited in Kavoo-Linge & Kiruri, 2013) described placement as the process of assigning an employee to a position within his or her sphere of authority where the employee has a reasonable chance for success. Succinctly put, employee placement is concerned basically with the allocation of an employee to a job-role.

Several authors (for example Rebores, 2007; Dessler, 2008 cited

in Kavoo-Linge & Kiruri, 2013; Harms, 2009) contended that employee placement is important in an organisation because it affects the employee's performance as well as the overall success of the organisation in which the employee is engaged. Dessler (2008 cited in Kavoo-Linge & Kiruri, 2013, p.213), for example, argued that, defective placement can result in "poor employee performance which in turn may perhaps lead to reduced organisational efficiency, increased employee attrition, and frustration of personal and professional ambitions of the employee". Dessler proceeded to assert, on the contrary, that an apt job placement fosters employee's personal growth, provides a motivating climate for employees, maximizes performance, and increases the chance that organisational goals would be achieved (p.213). In the same line of reasoning, Rebore (2007) maintained that, proper placement of employee results in better motivation which in turn results in better performance, lower rate of absenteeism, lower rate of labour turnover, better utilisation of materials and machines, reduced cost of supervision, and keeps the employee well-satisfied and self-fulfilled.

Nübler (1997) added to these useful points by suggesting, albeit covertly, that effective deployment of prospective employees is a sufficient condition for maximum achievement of individual, collective, organisational and/or national goals and objective. In illuminating the indispensability of employee placement as a significant human resources development practice, Nudzor (2016), for example, outlined some important factors that ought to be given due consideration by employers or their agents when assigning prospective employees positions and/or designation in organisations. Instructively, Nudzor (2016) identified the most crucial factors for ruminating to include: educational preparation and training; certification; experience; and working relationships of employees. Other equally important factors Nudzor enumerated, but which he acknowledged that the human development literature (for example, Armstrong, 2009; Grossman & Thompson, 2004; Olufemi & Adebola, 2012; Oppong & Arthur, 2015; Rebore, 2007; Wood & Payne, 1998) admonished to be considered with discretion and level headedness are: wishes of prospective employees; seniority; rank; and career prospect of candidates. Regarding wishes of prospective employees as a determinant of job placement, for instance, Nudzor (2016) explained that it serves a useful purpose when placement

is undertaken in harmony with wishes of employees. However, he admitted that the literature throws out a word of caution, indicating that a significant cause of low morale among workers, especially teachers, is assigning grade levels and subject areas that they wished for but which they find undesirable. Against this backdrop, Nudzor drew on Rebores (2007), advice to caution that wishes of prospective employees can be considered as a determining variable in employee placement provided it did not compromise requirements of the positions employees request or clamour for, the organisation's policies and the general welfare of other employees (Nudzor, 2016).

Concerning seniority as another determining variable in employee placement, Nudzor (2016) made the point aptly that although it is a defensible criterion in making placement decisions, it should be given consideration only after 'other' variables indicated in this review have been considered. This, he argued, is in tandem with the suggestion of the human development literature (e.g. Rebores, 2007) to the effect that seniority is indeed a valuable criterion when it comes to reassigning employees, and that in situations such as this, it is prudent for 'senior' employees (i.e. those who have served the organisation for the longest period) to be given the first choices. In cases of involuntary reassignments, which sometimes become necessary because of unexpected vacancies, however, Nudzor observed that the literature advises that such positions should be given to employees with the least seniority to promote peace and harmony within the organisational structure.

So as has become immediately clear, the review of the human resource management literature for the purpose of this article raised three very salient points about employee placement. First, the review showed that wishes of employees coupled with the issues of seniority and/or rank are examples of variables used in determining employees' job placement, but that these are only useful after other most important variables such as certification, educational preparation and training, experience, and employees working relationships have been taken into consideration. Second, and following up on the first point, the review illustrated the point that although certification, educational preparation and training, experience, and employees working relationships are necessary prerequisites for organisational success, the actual panacea to optimal attainment of organisational goals and objectives rests largely

with how employees are placed and deployed. Third, the insights in this section of the article portrayed employee placement clearly as quintessential for every organisation because it affects the employee's performance as well as the overall success of the organisation in which the employee is engaged.

### **Theoretical Resource**

The human capital literature (for example, Almendarez, 2010; Becker, 1964; Saleem & Balakrishnan, 2015; Schultz, 1993 cited in Nudzor *et al.*, 2019) contend that an educated population is a productive population because formal education and training is highly instrumental and necessary to improve the productive capacity of a nation. This argument places strong emphasis on the stock of knowledge, skills and abilities embedded in an individual, which results from natural endowment and subsequent investment in education, training and experience which are critical for the development of every nation. In extending the human capital theorists' argument, the World Economic Forum (2017) adds that the knowledge and skills people possess enable them to create value in the global economic system. This implies that human capital (knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences) acquired through education, when utilised efficiently and effectively, enables employees to contribute to economic growth and development of any nation.

In line with the broad purpose of the research on which this article draws coupled with the need to generate evidence-informed findings to address the research questions posed, the human capital development framework developed by World Economic Forum (2017) was relied upon as a theoretical and/or conceptual resource for the article. This framework focuses on four key elements (namely: capacity, development, know-how and deployment) which involve employees' knowledge, skills and abilities that give an organisation its economic value. First, 'capacity' looks at the level of formal education of employees as a result of past education investment. This relates contextually to the knowledge, skills, competences, instincts, abilities, processes and resources required by employees to enable them perform creditably in their jobs. Second, 'development' focuses on the process of equipping individuals within organisations with the understanding, skills and access to information, knowledge and training that enables

them to perform effectively. This involves provision of formal education for the next-generation workforce and continued upskilling and reskilling of the current workforce (The World Economic Forum, 2017). Third, ‘Know-how’ relates to personal competency traits of employees that enable them to perform towards achieving organisational goals. Fourth, ‘deployment’ represents employees or staff scheduling, placement and/or utilisation (Harms, 2009), and how they are able to contribute their quota towards attainment of organisational goals and objectives. Figure 1 shows the distinctive aspects to human capital development theory as conceptualised for the purposes of this article.



**Figure 1: Theoretical resource for the study**

**Source:** World Economic Forum, *The Global Human Capital Report* (2017, p.3).

Thus, as the framework illustrates, placement of employees is underpinned by the interplay of the employees’ capacity, development, know-how and deployment. Our view is that by adopting the human capital development framework as a theoretical lens or resource, efficient and effective employee placement is guaranteed owing to the interplay between and among these four variables. Conversely, the belief here is that efficient and effective employee placement cannot be attained by giving negligible attention to any of the four elements. All four elements of the framework need attention and consideration in equal measure. Seen in this light, the human capital development framework adopted as a theoretical lens offers a better prospect for examining issues regarding employee placement. Essentially, the framework points to key consideration for policy-makers and employers

seeking to enhance employee and organisational performance through efficient and effective job placement.

## **Methods**

Considering the nature of the research problem and the context within which the study was undertaken, the concurrent mixed methods design was adopted for the research. Qualitative data in the form of insights from semi-structured open-ended interviews with employers of IEPA graduates was elicited for analysis. This was complemented by the analysis of quantitative data derived from self-administered questionnaires distributed to the IEPA graduate employees. Thus, apart from helping to ensure that the research findings were well triangulated, the concurrent mixed methods design was preferred because its use certainly guaranteed that the findings of the study have gone beyond speculations to be grounded in the evidence gathered (Creswell, 2009; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2010).

The population of the study consisted of two target groups of respondents. The first group comprised all the organisations in the various sectors of the Ghanaian economy (for example, Ghana Education Service, Technical and Traditional Universities, Colleges of Education, Ministry of Health, Banking/Financial institutions, Religious institutions, Political/Governance institutions etc.) that employed IEPA graduates. For the purposes of clarity, these organisations were designated simply as ‘employers’. The second group comprised all alumni of IEPA. That is, all graduates who had obtained MA, MEd, MPhil and PhD qualifications from IEPA. In all, a sample of 423 was obtained for the study. This number consisted of two groups of participants. The first group comprised 16 ‘employers’ of IEPA’s graduates who were selected purposively for semi-structured open-ended in-depth interviews to ascertain the factors that inform them regarding the placement of IEPA graduates in their organisations. The second group comprised 407 IEPA graduates themselves, selected from organisations within which employers were selected, and who were served with self-administered questionnaires regarding the purpose of the study.

Concerning the latter group (i.e. graduates of IEPA), an advertisement in respect of the nation-wide tracer study was placed in media outlets to bring this to their notice and solicit their involvement.

Following on from this, three modes of sampling were employed to select the 407 participants required to get a full complement of sample size for the self-administered questionnaires. The first of these approaches involved administering self-completed questionnaires to IEPA employees who responded to our invitation in the media and agreed to avail themselves to participate in the research study. This was followed by administering the same self-completed questionnaires to IEPA graduates who were known personally or whose organisations were known to the research team but who did not respond to our earlier invitation to participate in the tracer study. The third mode of sampling involved the use of the 'snow-ball' sampling technique to identify other alumni of IEPA through colleague participants and serve them with the self-administered questionnaires. Thus, the two groups of participants (i.e. the employers and the IEPA graduates) and the varying sampling strategies for their selection were employed as a means of attending to contexts and comparing knowledge claims among actors with different locations and orientations in what Vavrus and Bartlett (2006) refer to as 'vertically-bounded analysis'.

Regarding the procedure for data collection, ethical clearance for the research was first sought from the University of Cape Coast (UCC) Institutional Review Board since the original research this article reports on was supported financially by the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Consultancy of UCC. Subsequent to this, introductory letters were obtained from IEPA and copies were sent to institutions/organisations that were perceived to have employed IEPA graduates, informing them about the research study, its aims and benefits. This was followed by an advertisement about the research in a Ghanaian newspaper (i.e. the *Daily Graphic*) to invite graduates of IEPA to participate in the study. Thereafter, the research team was constituted and research data (i.e. both qualitative and quantitative) were collected concurrently. In adherence to research ethics, all respondents/participants consented to be part of the study by signing a consent form, and they were briefed and debriefed appropriately about the research processes and outcomes.

Owing to the composite data collection approach employed (typified by the use of mixed methods design), data generated were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Data gathered through the self-completed questionnaires were edited, coded and entered into SPSS for processing and analysis. The results were presented using

descriptive statistics in the form of frequency tables, bar charts and pie charts to allow for statistical inferences and generalisations regarding the placement of IEPA graduates to be made. The semi-structured interviews with employers, on the other hand, were first coded and transcribed manually thereafter. The transcribed data were then cleaned by correcting errors in grammar without distorting the meaning. The data were subsequently categorised according to the research questions posed and then extrapolated to avoid category overlap. Finally, the key issues, observations and lessons were drawn from the data regarding the placement of IEPA graduates in their respective places of work.

## Findings

For the purpose of clarity and succinctness, the findings emerging from the data are presented along the line of the research questions posed. But before this, the demographic characteristics of participants involved in the nation-wide tracer study on which this article is based are outlined in Table 1 to set the findings in context. The emphasis was on how the respondents pursue their programmes.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents/Participants**

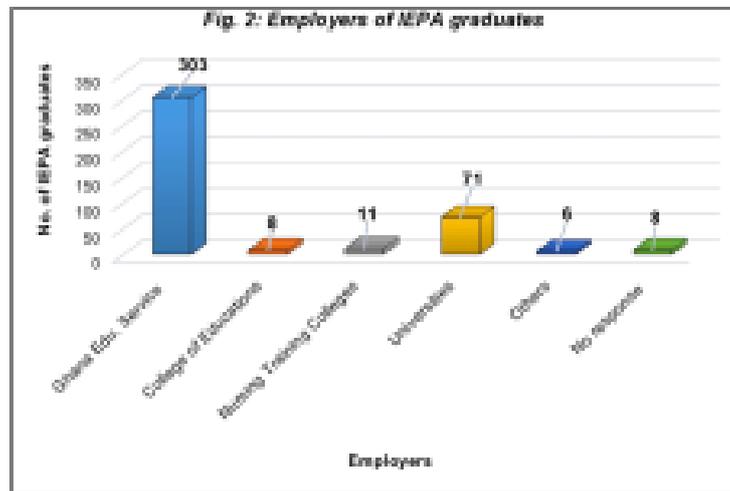
| <i>Demographic Information</i>               | <i>Questionnaire</i> | <i>Percentage (%)</i> | <i>Interview</i> |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Total number of respondents/<br>participants | 407                  |                       | 16               |
| Gender of respondents/<br>participants       | Male                 | 206(50.6%)            | 13(81.25%)       |
|  | Female               | 182(44.7%)            | 3(18.75%)        |
|  | No response          | 19(4.7%)              |                  |
| Programme                                    | M. A. (Ed Admin)     |                       |                  |
|  | Sandwich             | 9(2.2%)               |                  |
|  | M. Ed Regular        | 5(1.2%)               |                  |
|  | M. Ed Sandwich       | 273(67.1%)            |                  |
|  | M. Ed Distance       | 5(1.2%)               |                  |
|  | M. Phil. Regular     | 95(23.3%)             |                  |
|  | M. Phil. Top-up      | 6(1.5%)               |                  |
|  | No response          | 14(3.4%)              |                  |

It is clear from reading across Table 1 that out of the total number of 407 respondents who answered the questionnaire, 182 respondents (representing 44.7%) were females whilst 206 (representing 50.6%) were males. With regard to the 16 interviews conducted with employers on the other hand, only 3 of the participants were females whereas 13 of them were males. Also, whilst in the case of the questionnaire respondents, the participation of females could be said to be encouraging, the situation in the case of the interviews conducted unmasks clearly the cultural practice across developing countries (including Ghana) where employers feel reluctant, or for want of a better expression, refuse to appoint female workers to managerial positions. Also, reading down Table 1, 273 respondents, representing 67.1%, pursued and graduated with the Master of Education (MEd) degrees through Sandwich mode, clearly suggesting that IEPA has reached out to, and/or served most of her clientele largely through her MEd Sandwich programme.

### **In what Sectors of the Ghanaian Economy were IEPA Graduates Engaged?**

This research question was important in helping the research team to follow-up, investigate and possibly understand the specific criteria or factors that determined the placement of the graduates. Seen in this light, the question was more of a precursor to the main issues surrounding the placement of IEPA graduates which this article explores. Figure 2 illustrates the findings to this research question.

Reading from Figure 2, it is clear that out of a total number of 407 respondents contacted, 382(93.9%) were employed in education related establishments across all levels of education provision and delivery in Ghana. This figure includes respondents who were staff of Ghana Education Service (GES), Colleges of Education (CoE) and Universities (i.e. Technical and Traditional Universities). This finding was not surprising, granted that IEPA was established and mandated as a human capacity development institute for Ghana's Ministry of Education (MoE) and her allied agencies for training of educational planners, administrators and other specialists in the field of education (Owusu & Dzinyela, 1994). In this respect, therefore, IEPA could be seen as fulfilling her mandate through the preparation of graduates for careers within the Ghanaian education sector as a whole.



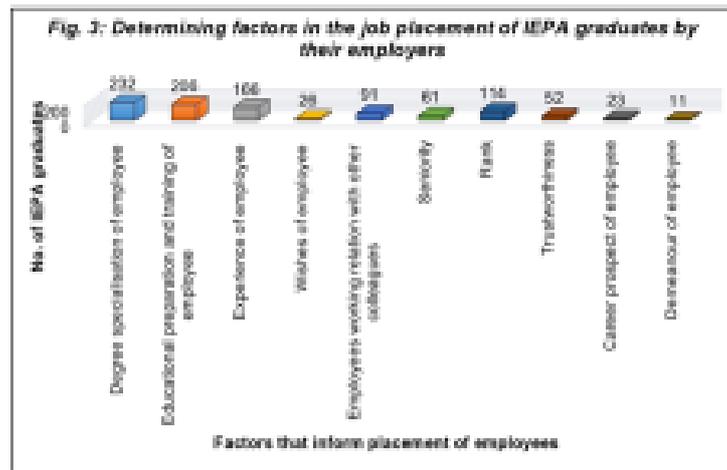
**Figure 2: Sectors of the Ghanaian economy IEPA graduates were engaged**

Also interesting from Figure 2 is the number of respondents employed in non-education related establishments. While 8 respondents did not indicate who their employers were, the Figure shows that 11 graduates of IEPA were employed by the Ministry of Health (MoH) whilst 6 were employees of ‘other’ organisations not identified. Taken together, this finding, in a sense, implied that aside the educational sector, IEPA may have been meeting the training needs of personnel in other sectors of the national economy. In another sense, however, and for the capacity building and/or development functions IEPA was established and mandated to render, the unavailability of information regarding the ‘other’ sectors of the economy within which her graduates were employed could mean that the IEPA needed to undertake more outreach activities with the view to knowing her clientele and their needs, if she was to remain relevant in meeting their 21<sup>st</sup> century needs and aspirations. Undertaking further outreach activities other than what IEPA was currently doing was needful, and perhaps may be the panacea in assisting IEPA to do periodic self-introspection to be able to identify gaps and/or lapses in her curricula and general modes of training and course delivery to bring these in line with the needs of her clientele.

### **What factors did employers consider in the job placement of IEPA graduates?**

In relation to this research question, the IEPA graduates were asked to

identify the factor(s) that they thought informed their own placements in their respective work schedules by their employers. Figure 3 presents the quantitative findings to this question.



**Figure 3: Factors employers considered in the job placement of IEPA graduates**

The results, as presented in Figure 3, are significant as they help to make sense of the issues and factors employers gave general considerations to in deciding how employees were deployed. Thus, reading from Figure 3, respondents indicated that in determining their placement as employees, their employers first considered three key issues, namely: degree specialisation of employees; educational preparation and training of employees; and level of experience of employees. The next set of factors employers gave considerations to, according to the findings as indicated in Figure 3, and in order of priority include: rank of employees; employees' working relations with other colleagues; seniority; and trustworthiness of prospective employees. The rest of the factors, representing the least issues employers gave considerations to in deciding employee placement, include: wishes of employees; employees' career prospects and demeanour of prospective employees. Largely, these findings enlisted appeared consistent, in many respects, with the preponderance of available evidence from human resource development literature (Abdullahi, 2013; Abdollahi & Abdolrahim, 2006; Armstrong, 2009; Chester & Beaudin, 1996; El-Ghalayini, 2017; Ogechukwu & Okoye, 2015; Rebore, 2007; World

Economic Forum, 2017; Wood & Payne 1998). The literature on human capital development theory, for instance, suggests that albeit employee seniority, wishes, demeanour and trustworthiness were defensible criteria in making placement decisions, it was advisable to consider them only after other credible variables such as educational preparation and training, certification, experience, working relationships and career prospects of employees have been given due consideration (Johnson, 2015; Olufemi & Adebola, 2012; Rebore, 2007; Saleem & Balakrishnan, 2015).

Having said that, the results appeared to have contradicted the findings of the baseline research of the nation-wide tracer study conducted in the Central Region in 2014 (Nudzor & Danso, 2015; Nudzor, 2016), and which served as a precursor to the ‘hard-nose’ research activity on which this current article was based. Among other things, the findings of the baseline study suggested that although employers in the Central Region were aware that educational preparation and training ought to take pre-eminence in determining the job placement of IEPA graduates, they prioritised such other factors as seniority, rank, wishes, and trustworthiness of prospective employees.

In respect of the semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of organisations in which IEPA graduates were employed, and who for the purposes of our research were designated as ‘employers’, there was a lot of convergence with the quantitative findings presented in Figure 3. Relative to the research question in contention, the employers, in their respective interviews, appeared to have corroborated the responses of the IEPA graduate employees directly. This is seen in the fact that almost all of them identified the first three factors IEPA graduates prioritised as issues employers gave considerations to in the placement of prospective employees. This was evidenced in the words of one employer, for example:

*We want people who have some knowledge in administration already. So preferably, if they come and say we have trained in educational administration, then they make the best people and we assume that theoretically, they know what to do or they have the background of what administration is. Therefore, we prefer them to people who haven't done any administration at all (Employer 2).*

Another employer construed and summarised the issue of employee placement as hinging basically on the experiences prospective employees bring along with them to the job environment:

*We want experienced persons. Experience is what matters very much in our job here (Employer 5).*

While this employer did not say, neither did he/she imply that IEPA graduates were not experienced to be employed by his or her organisation, it could be deduced from the excerpt that graduates generally without requisite experiences were not considered for employment by this organisation. This insight is particularly helpful in the sense that it sets the criterion by which the organisation in question selected prospective employees for deployment.

In yet another interview encounter, an employer explained the criterion for the placement of prospective employees in his/her organisation to be around the professional training acquired by graduates. He/she was however quick to problematise the way by which potential employees have generally taken advantage of the second degree as a pre-requisite for employment in the organisation to pursue all manner of degrees that were not related to the teaching profession that the organisation specialised in. The interviewee implied further that in instances where second degrees were acquired by existing employees, for career progression purposes, the degrees did not get the recognition they deserve and the personnel did not get upgraded as a result. The interviewee's exact words are presented in the following excerpt:

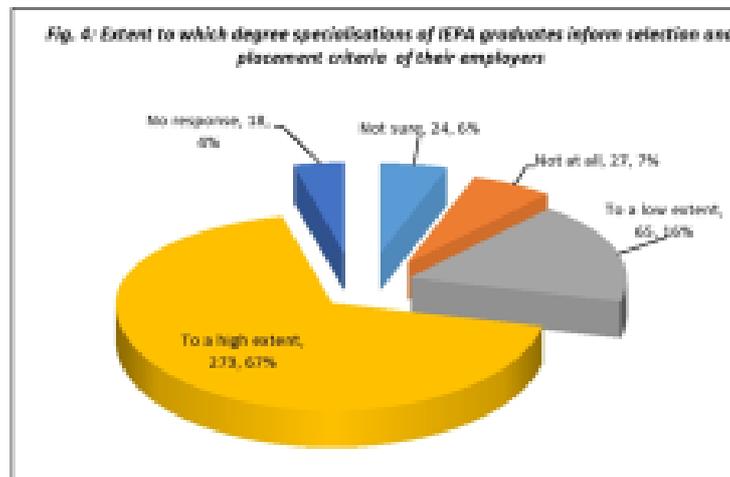
*We consider the degree specialisation of candidates before deploying them... However, it will marvel you to know that most of our teachers are going out to pursue master's degree and some programmes which are not even approved. They go and acquire those degrees but they do not get upgraded because the degrees are not related to their teaching work (Employer 4).*

Clearly, the three examples cited herein serve largely to corroborate the findings derived through the self-administered questionnaires concerning the criteria employers used to determine the job placement of IEPA graduates. The findings to this research question

implied that employers of IEPA graduates resorted to the interplay of factors such as employees' development (i.e. degree specialisation), capacity (educational preparation and training) and know-how (i.e. level of experience) in determining the job placement of IEPA graduates which is in-line with the expectations of the human capital theory (HTC) underpinning this study. This therefore suggested that employers of IEPA graduates perhaps were adopting best practices in terms of their employees' job placement.

### **To what Extent did the Degree Specialisation of IEPA Graduates Inform the Placement Criteria of their Employers?**

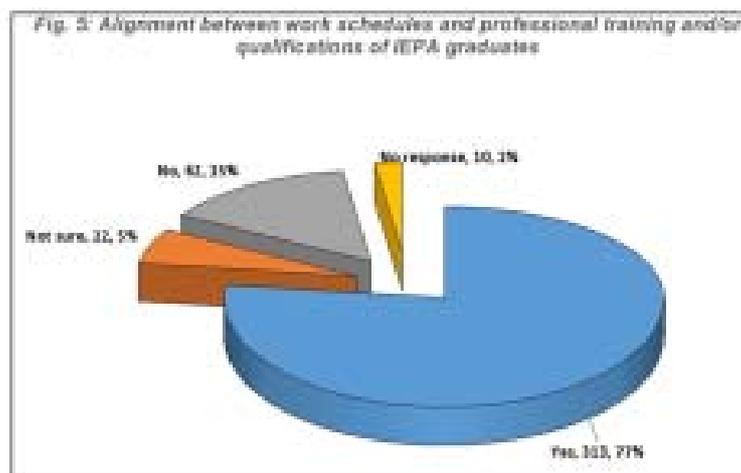
This question sought to find out the extent to which the respondents thought their degree specialisations served to inform the selection and placement criteria of their employers. Findings to this specific question are presented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4: Extent to which the degree specialisation of IEPA graduates informed the placement criteria of employers**

The findings from Figure 4 raise doubts about whether or not respondents genuinely had knowledge of the criteria used by their employers in selecting and placing employees at their respective schedules. From the figure, 4% (indicating 18 respondents) decided not to answer the question about the extent to which their degree specialisations had informed the selection and placement criteria of

their employers, 6% (representing 24 respondents) were unsure whether this was so, whilst 7% (representing 27 respondents) thought their degree specialisations did not inform their placement by their employers at all. The rest are 16% (representing 65 respondents) responding that their degree specialisations informed their selection and placement to a low extent whilst sixty-seven percent (67%, indicating 273 respondents) agreeing to the proposition that the degree specialisations of IEPA graduates indeed informed the selection and placement criteria of their employers to a large extent. In spite of the uncertainty surrounding whether or not respondents were privy to how employers placed and/or deployed their prospective employees in their respective schedules of work, Figure 4 and the findings it illustrates are, nevertheless, helpful for one reason. Essentially, the figure presents some background findings of a sort against which other findings in respect of the overarching research question could be measured for purposes of respondent consistency, confirmability, dependability and trustworthiness. In line with this reasoning, and for purposes of research triangulation, an item on the questionnaire deliberately interrogated whether or not respondents thought the professional training and/or qualifications they obtained from IEPA were aligned to their work schedules. The findings that emanated from the statistical analysis of data relative to this item on the questionnaire are presented in Figure 5.



**Figure 5: Alignment between professional training and/or qualifications of IEPA graduates and their work schedules**

Clearly from Figure 5, 313(77%) of the respondents thought that their work schedules were in line with the professional training and qualifications they had received from IEPA whereas 62(15%) respondents thought this was not the case. Also, from the figure, 22(5%) respondents were not sure whether or not their work schedules were in line with the professional training and/or qualifications whilst 10(3%) of them did not provide answers to the question.

Thus, comparing insights in Figure 4 to those in Figure 5 makes an interesting observation. As the comparison would indicate, 77% of respondents (in Figure 5) agreed that their work schedules were in line with the professional training and/or qualifications they had received from IEPA while 67% of respondents (in Figure 4) thought that their degree specialisations were consistent with the selection and placement criteria of their employers to a high extent. Whilst this seeming contradiction in the findings is interesting, it is important to note that perhaps this may have been occasioned particularly by the introduction of 'to a low extent' as one of the options in Figure 4. When the 16% point for this option (i.e. to a low extent) in Figure 4 is taken to mean that respondents feel or see some form of alignment between their degree specialisations and selection and placement criteria of employers, and therefore added to the 67% for those respondents who agreed 'to a high extent' with the proposition that their work schedules were in line with the professional training and/or qualifications they had received from IEPA, the final outcome of 83% is just 6 percentage points higher the 77% indicated in Figure 5.

So while this article has examined factors determining the job placement of IEPA graduates in the Ghanaian labour market, the findings exemplify and reiterate the human capital development theory adopted as the theoretical resource for the article implicitly. As the framework illustrates in relation to the findings, organisational success results from the interplay of issues related particularly to the employees' capacity, development, know-how and deployment. What this means, or at least implies invariably in practice, is that attainment of organisational goals and objectives, in terms of employee outputs, cannot be achieved, maintained and/or enhanced by delineating employee placement or deployment from the four-variable equation. Seen in this light therefore, the human capital development framework adopted as a theoretical lens points essentially to key consideration for policy-makers and

employers seeking to enhance employee and organisational performance within countries and across the global economy.

### **Conclusions**

This article has reported on an aspect of the nation-wide tracer study which examined how effectively IEPA graduates were placed and utilised in the Ghanaian labour market to enable them contribute their quota towards the developmental agenda of the country. Essentially, the current article has explored the determining variables employers gave considerations to in the placement of IEPA graduates in their respective places and schedules of work. This was undertaken against the backdrop of a dearth of information concerning how IEPA graduates were placed in the labour market to enable them contribute their quota towards Ghana's developmental agenda. In line with the general purpose of the article, the views of both employers of IEPA graduates and the graduates themselves were presented in juxtaposition and discussed to gain a better insight into the criteria that informed the job placement of IEPA graduates by their employers.

It is apparent from the findings of the study that overwhelming majority of IEPA graduate's employees were engaged in educational related establishments across all the levels of education in Ghana. In this respect, it is concluded that the IEPA could be viewed as fulfilling her mandate through the preparation of graduates for careers within the Ghanaian educational sector as a whole. What this implies, therefore, is that IEPA needs, as a matter of urgency, to intensify her outreach activities to ensure that she remains in constant touch with her clientele in order to understand their changing needs and aspirations so as to be able to help meet these demands continually. Against the backdrop of the findings enlisted in the article, it is also recommended that the IEPA intensifies her collaborative efforts with MOE and her agencies, especially GES, to, among other things, undertake research to generate empirical knowledge and research to inform educational policy and practice in Ghana; provide education and training aimed at improving planning, leadership and management capabilities of personnel in the education sector; and improve the operational efficiency of personnel within the GES and educational institutions in Ghana.

In line with the evidence that emanated from the findings to the

effect that the degree specialisation (development); educational preparation and training (capacity); and level of experience (know how) of IEPA graduates largely informed the placement criteria of employers, it is concluded that this is an indication that employers of IEPA graduates generally were being consistent, in many respects, with the best practices admonished by the human resource development literature regarding placement of employees. This finding also indicates that perhaps IEPA may be meeting the needs, aspirations and expectations of her clientele.

Also, the findings indicated that some graduates of IEPA were employed in non-education related sectors of the economy that were not disclosed. The unavailability of this information puts the onus on IEPA to intensify her outreach activities with the view to knowing all her clientele and their needs, if she is to remain relevant in meeting their 21<sup>st</sup> century needs and aspirations. Intensifying her outreach activities other than what IEPA is currently doing is needful, and perhaps may be the panacea in assisting IEPA to do periodic self-introspection to be able to identify gaps and/or lapses in her curricula and general modes of training and course delivery to bring these in line with the needs, aspirations and expectations of her clientele.

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