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A Tracer study of Bachelor of Art Industrial Art Graduates of KNUST: Employability and Performance Appraisal within five years

Ebenezer K. HOWARD, Benjamin K. ASINYO, Cyril ADALA, Eugene O. AGYEI, Beatrice O. ATENCAH and Benjamin EGHAN

Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Department of Industrial Art

College of Art and the Built Environment, Kumasi – Ghana

Corresponding Author: asinyoboss@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study evaluates, among others, the employment status, performance and job satisfaction of graduates of the BA Industrial Art programme from 2012 to 2017. The objective is to serve as a guide for programme revision and policy direction to fill curriculum gaps in meeting the expectations of the industry. The study was based on mixed-method research design involving quantitative and qualitative approaches and employs descriptive survey and observational methods through triangulation of questionnaire and interviews. Data collected through questionnaire were analysed with SPSS, whereas thematic analysis was used for data obtained through interviews. The study finds 20% of the 350 sampled population with relevant jobs in their respective fields of study. 45% have no jobs whereas 35% have diverted into other fields due to lack of employment in their areas of specialisation. The need to revise the industrial art programme into job-specific programmes or develop demand-driven programmes to address the needs of industry is highly recommended. This is to make the programme relevant to reflect current best practices towards the training of right calibre of graduates, who will fit into specific positions in the industry for sustainable development of the industrial art subsector.

Keywords: *Tracer study, BA Industrial Art, Performance appraisal, Employability skills*

INTRODUCTION

Entry to the world of work takes many paths, with many opportunities and associated risks. However, preparing for a successful transition from education into the job market is greatly enhanced by human capital development which the universities owe as a responsibility (Tagoe, 2009). The purpose of any organisational institution is to provide quality human resources acceptable to employers and society (Macalalad et al., 2016). In response to this, top universities now make it a priority to develop employability skills in their students by providing academic staff with relevant support and resources. They integrate these employable skills into their curriculum and course design, provide students with work placements and exposure to professional

settings as well as providing advice and guidance through career services (Macatangay, 2013). Studies have shown that most organisations, especially in the educational sector, employ tracer studies to track and keep records of graduates after their programme of study to assess the performance and progress of their alumni (Millington, n.d as cited in Shongwe & Ocholle, 2015). This is done to guide the development of new programmes and the revision of existing ones to make them relevant to the industry. With respect to the KNUST policy on tracer studies, the objective is to document changes in the lives of graduates and determine the extent to which the training given during studies has contributed to the changes observed. This, however, influences the decision-making process or policy formulation through the provision of empirically driven feedback (Guidelines for the Conduct of Tracer Studies - KNUST, 2018).

Empirical studies have shown that several tracer studies have been conducted on graduates from universities in Africa. A tracer study by Zembere & Chinyama (1996) on university graduates in Malawi from 1987-1995 reveals that the survey of graduates by universities is of great importance with 80% affirmative response. Graduates did not consider grades at the university as more pressing in searching for a job. However, employers place more value on the grades attained by graduates in their selection process. The study further indicates that over the years, there had been a declining trend in the number of graduates securing jobs after school and even those who secure jobs have no link to their programme of study. The reasons for this trend, according to the study by Zembere & Chinyama (1996), were attributed to job market flooding and the decline of the country's economy.

Another tracer study conducted by Mayanja et al. (2001) on graduates of the University of Makerere in Uganda shows interesting findings establishing that Faculty of Art (FOA) graduates get jobs as much as Faculty of Science (FOS) graduates. Moreover, the study noted major differences between graduates of various generations but not the courses. Thus, FOS graduates had slightly better chances of securing jobs immediately after graduation, whereas FOA graduates had better chances for career growth and promotion to top management. Again, a report on a tracer study of the Graduates of the Department of Information and Communication Studies from 2000-2007 in University of Namibia (Nengomasha & Chiware, 2009) addressed the weaknesses of the programmes offered by the Department through a curriculum review exercise in 2007.

Further, findings from a study conducted by Dabalen, Oni, & Adekola (2001) on labour market prospects of university graduates in Nigeria emphasised serious disconnect between university training and the needs of the labour market. This mismatch has been and continues to be socially costly to Nigeria. The large numbers of unemployable graduates and the low productivity of those who find work reflect a poor social return on the investment. Shongwe & Ocholla (2011) from the findings of their tracer study, established that graduates of University of Zululand are not satisfied with the curriculum offered by the Department of Library and Information Science (now Information Studies), indicating that they were misdirected by the curriculum and suggested that relevant causes such as cataloguing and classification should be included in the curriculum. This is because most graduates employed after school realised skills gaps in the jobs that relate closely to their programmes of study.

As expressed by Taabazuing (2011) on a tracer study of Agricultural Graduates from the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), there is consensus that the training of agricultural graduates tends to emphasise theory rather than the practical application of the theories. Taabazuing further argues that teaching methods and examination of students in the universities do not encourage students to fish for knowledge but rather memorise and reproduce what the lecturer taught in class. Students, on the other hand, think that the certificate is what matters and not what one is capable of doing. With this mindset, students feel reluctant to read more into their fields of study but rather depend on the provided information by their facilitators.

They are therefore compelled to find short cuts, including cheating, to excel through their academic programme to acquire a certificate. The author emphasised, "Agricultural training tends to produce job seekers, but not entrepreneurs who can create their jobs or effectively help the private sector to develop". The study reveals that there is a gap between the knowledge and skills given to agriculture graduates and what is required by employers. For example, teaching and learning methods in agricultural institutions tend to neglect the development of soft skills such as critical thinking and problem solving which allow graduates to adapt to the changing demands of the job market easily. Contrary to the aforementioned curriculum and delivery gaps, a tracer study by Osei & Dontwi (2014) on graduates of CEMBA, CEMPA and MSc. Industrial Mathematics, confirms that KNUST - Institute of Distance Learning graduates overall are satisfied with the programmes they pursued and that the programmes improved their social life' and helped in their career development.

Every institution has a long-term goal and the purpose of its existence. KNUST, located in Kumasi was established in 1952. Its vision is to be globally recognised as the premier science and technology university in Ghana and to be among the top ten Universities in Africa; producing high calibre graduates with knowledge and expertise to support the industrial and socio-economic development of Ghana and Africa. The institution aims at advancing knowledge in science and technology for sustainable development in Africa. Its mission is to advance knowledge in science and technology through creating an environment for undertaking relevant research, quality teaching, entrepreneurship training and community engagement to improve the quality of life. KNUST also offers service to the community, which is open to all the people of Ghana and positioned to attract scholars, industrialists and entrepreneurs from Africa and other international communities (PLAN2K14, 2005).

The Bachelor of Art (BA) Industrial Art is one of the programmes offered by Department of Industrial Art (DIA), KNUST. It is one of the six departments under the Faculty of Art in the College of Art and Built Environment. DIA comprises of Metal Product Design, Ceramics, Textiles and Fashion Sections. Hence, the BA Industrial Art Programme has options for the respective sections. The programme aims at providing students with professional skills to enable them work in any industry with little or no supervision. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to trace where the graduates of the Industrial Art programme find themselves after school, establish their employment status, evaluate their performance in industry, establish their perception and satisfaction of the Industrial Art curriculum, and to ascertain whether or not the skills and knowledge they acquired through the programme are relevant to their job requirements. This is to foster

policy direction and guide possible revision of the programme to fill in the gaps inherent in the curriculum to make it relevant towards current best practices. It will also ensure training of the right calibre of graduates to meet the expectation of industry for sustainable development of Ghana, Africa and the world at large.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study utilised the mixed-method research design based on quantitative and qualitative research approaches. It employed descriptive survey and observational methods through triangulation of questionnaire and interviews. Data collected through questionnaire were analysed with SPSS, whereas thematic analysis was used for data obtained through interviews, primarily in support of questionnaire responses. To describe systematically and accurately the facts and characteristics of a given population or area of interest (Dulock, 1993), descriptive research is used for the population or phenomenon being studied. The target population of this study comprised Textiles, Ceramic and Metals Product Design graduates from 2012-2017 produced by DIA, KNUST. The sample population for the study was 305, which is 50% of the accessible population through randomisation of stratified sampling process (Table 1). Purposive sampling method was however used for selecting interviewees. Textiles, Metals and Ceramics graduates were purposely chosen because of the objective of the research. The purposive sampling method is most effective when one needs to study a certain educational domain with experts within (Tongco, 2007; Nortey, 2014).

TABLE 1. **Population and sample size**

Target Population Programme Option	Accessible Population (Graduate Output 2012 -2017)	Strata	Simple randomisation of 50% (Sample size)
Ceramics	170	ST – 1	85
Textiles	262	ST – 2	131
Metals	178	ST – 3	89
Total sample size			305

For instrumentation, questionnaire and interview were the main data collection methods used for this study. Both closed-end and open-ended questions were used with five (5) key thematic sections comprising; general information, educational background, programme specialisation, the transition from school to work and improving the programme's curriculum. The interview guide was designed to find more information from respondents on how to improve the programme's curriculum and the problem associated with it. This was to ensure the relevance and authenticity of data (Agyei et al., 2018). Copies of the answered questionnaire were assembled and coded into variables. They were then analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS (20.1 Version).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of respondents

TABLE 2**. Gender**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent
Male	209	68.5	69.0
Female	96	31.5	31.0
Total	305	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2018

With regards to the gender of the respondents (Table 2), the distribution indicates 68.5% males and 31.5% females. This indicates that in the last five (5) years, the Department had admitted more males than females, implying that the programmes: Ceramics, Metal Product Design and Textiles are a male-dominated programme.

Entry requirement for respondents

TABLE 3**. Entry requirements**

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
SSSCE/WASSCE O Levels/A Levels	285	93.4	93.4
	2	0.7	0.7
Matured	7	2.3	2.3
Diploma	9	3.0	3.0
Others	2	0.7	0.7
Total	305	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2018

With respect to the entry qualification of the respondents (Table 3), 93.4% were admitted through the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE) and West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE), 0.7% by O' levels and A' Levels, 2.3% through matured, 3.0% through Diploma and 0.7% others who had no interest to disclose their entry qualifications. The results show that majority of the respondents were admitted with SSSCE/WASSCE due to the education reform in Ghana that replaced the A' and O' levels with SSSCE/WASSCE. Thus, more respondents fall under the SSSCE/WASSCE as compared to O' and A' Levels, Matured and Diploma.

Year of admission for the respondents

TABLE 4. **Year of Admission**

Academic Year	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
2007/2008	31	10.2	10.2
2008/2009	12	3.9	3.9
2009/2010	74	24.3	24.3
2010/2011	79	25.9	25.9
2011/2012	109	35.7	35.7
Total	305	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2018

Concerning the year of admission (Table 4), in 2007/2008, 10.2% of the total applicants were admitted into the Industrial Art programme. 3.9% of the total respondents were admitted in 2008/2009, 24.3% in 2009/2010, 25.9% in 2010, and 35.7% in 2011/2012 academic years. Evidently, 2011/2012 recorded a higher number of respondents as compared to the other years.

Reasons for studying Industrial Art

TABLE 5**. Respondents' reasons for studying Industrial Art**

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Respondents' choice	128	42.0	42.0
Offered by the university	100	32.8	32.8
Recommended by a family member	35	11.4	11.4
Recommended by a professional who reads the same/similar programme	22	7.2	7.2
Other	20	6.6	6.6
Total	305	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2018

With respect to the respondents' reasons for studying industrial art programme (Table 5), 42.0% indicated that it was a programme of their choice. 32.8% of the respondents indicated that it was what the university offered them, even though they did not choose it. Moreover, 11.4% also studied it because a family member recommended it. Just 7.2% stated that it was recommended by a professional who read the same or similar programme. 6.6% of respondents had other reasons, which they decline to indicate.

The major reason given by the 42.0% of the respondents who chose to read industrial art was that they were well informed about the programme such that they knew it was designed to train students to fit into Jewellery and Metal Smithing, Ceramics, Textiles, Fashion and its allied industries in Ghana. The study identified that as many as 32.8% of the respondents were offered the industrial art programme by the university though they did not have much interest. To some, the programme was recommended by their family members and professionals who had read the same or similar programme and therefore served as a motivation factor for them. Further, observation revealed that being denied admission for a long time compelled the applicants to accept any programme the university offered them. This category of respondents (18.7%) could promote the industrial art programme in terms of increase in enrolment, but this may have skill gap implications on the industry. The respondents further explained that staying at home for a long time made them lose their self-confidence. Others were of the view that the industrial art programme was the only way they could gain admission into the university based on the relatively flexible entry requirements.

Respondents' view on Internship/Industrial attachment offered during their study

TABLE 6. **Internship**

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	155	50.8	51.7
No	150	49.2	48.3
Total	305	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2018

Concerning whether or not respondents undertook internship/industrial attachment during their study, evidence of the study (Table 6) shows that 50.8% of the respondents offered internship, whereas 49.2% of them did not. Internships are considered as programmes that engage students' in-service activities, primarily to provide them with hands-on experience that enhances their learning or understanding of issues, relevant to a particular area of study (Furco, 1996 as cited Bukaliya, 2012). The study revealed that majority of the respondents had the chance to offer internship during their undergraduate study at KNUST. The respondents' confirmed that the internship exercise helped them gain professional skills which is helping them in their current employment. Again, it provided them with the opportunity to connect with professionals in their fields, thereby helping them to gain employment opportunities after school. Furthermore, the internship created a platform, which enabled them to work with different people in a different environment. This notwithstanding, the intensions of other respondents for an internship was to build their curriculum vitae after school.

It was evident that internship is not mandatory but optional for students of the industrial art programme; hence making a significant number of respondents (over 49%) not able to undertake any internship

during their 4-year study. Could this mean that the respondents who offered internship did so based on the link they had with people in the industry? This is based on the premise that some respondents who did not undertake internship indicated they had no link with people working in the industry.

A further probe to this internship gap revealed that some companies denied students the opportunity to embark on an internship because the programme is not relevant to their operations. Other companies also demanded internship fee, which the respondents were not able to provide. This is because as the intake of students in the academic institutions keeps increasing considerably, the local textile industry and its allied industries are fast declining in terms of numbers, sizes, output and infrastructural development, amidst operational and external challenges. However, it is practically impossible to allow more than 20 students to be admitted in one factory to do industrial attachments since their presence there requires dual responsibilities by managers and technicians (Howard, 2018).

Some students contended that the programme was not suitable for the industry. Therefore, they lost hope and decided not to offer the internship though they also wanted to build their curriculum vitae after school and also gain professional skills and knowledge in their field of study. Some also admitted that the factories in the study scope were few since most had collapsed with limited placement for internship. The busy schedule of the few existing factories also denied students the opportunity for internship. Matured students faced some difficulties of embarking on internship since the study found most of them working and taking care of their families during vacations when they were supposed to embark on optional internship. They argue that offering internship will not fetch money into their pockets but rather end up being used by the companies. These notwithstanding, some respondents regretted not offering an internship during their study because after acquiring their jobs, they found it difficult to understand some basic skills, which they could have acquired through an internship.

Employment status of respondents

The results in Table 7 show the employment status of respondents. The question was to determine the level of employment of Industrial Art graduates within the period under study.

TABLE 7. **Employment status**

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	242	79.3	79.0
No	63	20.7	21.0
Total	305	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2018

The distribution in Table 7 shows that 79.3% of the respondents are employed as against 20.7%, who are unemployed. Majority of the respondents who have been employed established that they started searching for jobs right after graduation. The scope of businesses for self-employed respondents includes bread and second-hand clothes sellers, cleaners, cooks, make-up artists, online-businesses among others. Some were also into teaching in government and private schools; teaching courses not related to Art. In pursuance of career upgrading, the study found that some of the employed industrial art graduates have diverted from Art to business, education, safety, and health sectors to be employed immediately after school.

Furthermore, some have inherited their family businesses while others indicated that they have family links with some reputable companies and for that matter did not find it

difficult in securing jobs after school. Over 20% of the respondents were unemployed. Could it be that they have not searched for jobs or there are no jobs in Ghana for them? Interview responses proved that these graduates started searching for jobs while in school and have since not gotten one, with some justifying that they are not finding the right jobs. Some confirmed that companies reject them because they do not have much idea about the job, or are not specifically trained for such jobs. Others indicated that they are not employed because they have decided to further their education since the first-degree certificate is not enough for a well-paid job. It is evident that unavailability of jobs and lack of job specificity training are the major issues confronting graduates in the study area. According to Agulijam (2020), the unemployment rate in Ghana was approximately 6.78% of the total labour force in 2019. Ghana's unemployment rate is above the global unemployment rate but is an average as compared to the African region. For graduates to acquire relevant jobs, it is the responsibility of the government to partner with the private sector for the creation of more jobs. The academic institutions on the other hand have to develop job-specific and demand-driven programmes to safeguard the unemployment situation in the country.

Further studies of respondents

TABLE 8. **Further Studies of respondents**

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Completed postgraduate studies	49	16.1	16.3
Postgraduate student	76	24.9	25.3
Terminated graduate studies	9	2.9	1.3
Not enrolled in any postgraduate programme	171	56.1	57.0
Total	305	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2018

Table 8 shows the characteristics of respondents for further studies. 16.1% had completed postgraduate studies, 24.9% are in the various levels of their postgraduate studies, 2.9% have terminated their postgraduate studies, whereas 56.1% have not enrolled in any further studies.

The respondents who had completed their masters' degrees stated that it was a privilege to further their education. Some furthered in areas of art whereas others diverted to other programmes. They added that furthering in their course of study has broadened their knowledge and opened up some job opportunities which they were not exposed to after completion of the undergraduate degree. Those who diverted to other programmes hold the view that most of the art firms are no longer in operation and it will be a risky venture to further their education in art. The justification is that they may end up with no job. The 56.1% respondents who have not enrolled in any postgraduate programme indicated that they have lost interest in art after the undergraduate studies and therefore, they do not see the need to further their education in art. Some emphatically stated that they had no interest in art but they were forced to study it because that was the programme which was offered to them by the institution and so they do not wish to further in the same programme.

Those who have terminated their postgraduate programme in art (2.9%) gave

varied reasons; some said they are no longer interested in the art programme anymore in that the programme did not meet their expectations. Others complained that they are not financially stable and so they have deferred until indefinitely. Others argued that they could not combine schooling with their work given that their employers deem it inappropriate since they cannot have study leave, and also, they do not have sufficient time to continue the programme.

Respondents' view on chances of finding a job after further studies

TABLE 9. **Chances of finding a job**

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
To a very high extent	270	88.5	90.0
Not at all	35	9.8	10.0
Total	305	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork November 2017 – January 2018

Concerning the chances of finding a job after further studies, the results in Table 9 show that 88.5% of the respondents find jobs at a very high extent whereas 9.8% have no chance at all in finding a job. According to the respondents, higher education attracts employment and promotion. Moreover, they stated that some companies encourage their employees to further their education so that they can help them to flourish based on the knowledge and skills they acquired after further studies. They also believe that a person can find a job as quickly as possible without higher education because some reputable personalities did not even attend school or have never had the chance to study in school, yet own respectable companies both international and national and create employment for the unemployed. To them, success cannot be determined by education.

Respondent's view on the challenges encountered while studying BA Industrial Art

TABLE 10. **Challenges encountered while studying Industrial Art**

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Quality of teaching	56	18.4	18.7
Facilities	107	35.1	35.7
Student workload	81	26.5	25.3
Teaching and learning materials	60	19.7	20.0
Industry linkages	1	0.3	0.3
Total	305	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2018

Inferring from Table 10, 18.4% of the respondents encountered some challenges with respect to quality of teaching. The students lamented that they were treated as though they already understood what was being taught, especially with practical-oriented courses, which the students required much attention to be able to work better. 35.1% of the respondents complained of inadequate facilities to facilitate teaching and learning. They indicated further that the Department lacks physical infrastructure such as laboratory, exhibition rooms and working areas for effective teaching and learning. In most cases, practical materials were provided by the students themselves, which does not provide equal opportunity for all students to work to achieve optimal result. Over twenty-six percent (26.5%) confirmed that the workloads on students were huge and overweighed their learning abilities. Most of the respondents raised issues that they were overloaded with individual, group, project and research assignments in which they were expected to submit in a very short time.

Again, 19.7% said the teaching and learning materials were inadequate and outmoded. Students were made to search for up-to-date information on their own using the internet, which was sometimes difficult to understand without assistance. Few respondents (0.3%) argued that there were no efforts made by the authorities to link or connect them to available industries after completing their education. It is obvious that the art industries in Ghana are not enough to employ the students after school. After completing their education, the industrial art graduates do not find jobs as compared to their counterparts from other programmes such as the applied sciences, engineering, etc. Agyei et al. (2018) confirm that art graduates seem neglected in society and by the industries in Ghana. Courses such as law, business management, medicine, engineering, etc., are well recognised disciplines in the country, which makes graduates who fall under such category relatively find jobs quickly.

Respondent's view on recommending the programme they studied to others

TABLE 11. P**rogramme recommendation**

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	93	30.5	31.0
No	212	69.5	69.0
Total	305	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2018

Out of the total respondents accessed for the study, 30.5% of them agreed to recommend the programme they studied to prospective applicants whereas 69.5% of them vouched not to recommend the programme to prospective applicants (Table 11). Majority of the respondents do not wish to recommend the programme to prospective applicants with the major reason that the programme is cost-intensive. They also stated that the industries available for the programme are very few and for that matter will not advise students to enrol in the same programme because of limited employment opportunities. The implications are that the enrolment levels will decrease making the programme unattractive to applicants, which will affect the development of the industrial art subsector.

Review of the Existing Curriculum of the Programme

In finding out the job prospects in the study area, it was contended that the BA Industrial Art curriculum needs to be revised to reflect the advanced practical knowledge and skills required in the industry. It was argued that the existing curriculum is outmoded and irrelevant to industrial practices. Therefore, the curriculum should be revised to help the upcoming graduates fit into industry with newer technological ideas and improved skills. This will enable the industry to grow and provide more jobs for graduates to help minimise unemployment situation in the country. It was also argued that improving the curriculum without the creation of adequate jobs in the subsector will be useless and would, for that matter, make no difference.

The respondents, however, suggested that the government needs to expand the existing industries and build more industries in line with the new and revised industrial art programmes to absorb more graduates after school. Again, improvement of the Industrial Art sector will be very useful for graduates with respect to their future professional development. Such initiative should be based on current best practices with generation of new ideas towards training of graduates equipped with critical thinking and problem-solving abilities to respond to future challenges in the industrial art sector.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this study was primarily to trace where the graduates of the Industrial Art programme find themselves after school and establish their employment status. In addition, it evaluated their performance in the industry, establish their perception and satisfaction of the Industrial Art curriculum. The aim was to guide revision and policy direction of the programme to train the right calibre of graduates for the industry towards sustainable development of Ghana. The study revealed that the self-employed graduates are into all manner of businesses including selling of bread and second-hand clothes, working as cleaners, cooks, make-up artists, online-businesses men and women as well as teaching in public and private schools with very few working in relevant firms. The study found that some of the employed industrial art graduates have diverted into professions such as business, education, safety, and health sectors to be employed immediately after school. In the area of programme revision, over 94% of the respondents suggested curriculum review to make the industrial art programmes useful for career progression and development. The revision should include updates of programme contents, teaching methods and materials/logistics among others. Others suggested the need for design and development of new programmes to reflect specific needs in the industry. Such initiatives are expected to broaden the knowledge and skills in the industrial art for the development of the country. The study, therefore, recommends revision of the industrial art programme into job-specific programmes or development of demand-driven programmes through regular tracer studies and stakeholders' engagement to address the needs of the industry. Majority of the respondents agreed to recommend KNUST to prospective applicants but not the Industrial Art programme they studied. This indeed calls for some retrospection and evidence-based revision to make the programme relevant to reflect current best practices. It will also produce the right calibre of graduates to take up critical and specific positions for optimal performance to salvage the woes of the industry.

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