

KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY,  
KUMASI, GHANA

Graduate Employability: The Link between Design Education and the Graphic  
Design Industry.

by

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A Thesis submitted to the  
Department of Communication Design in the  
Faculty of Art,  
College of Art and Built Environment in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF COMMUNICATION DESIGN:  
(COMMUNICATION DESIGN)

SEPTEMBER 2015

## CERTIFICATION/DECLARATION

I, Acheampong Adu, declare that this submission is my own work toward the M. Comm. Design degree and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of the University, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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## **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, based on a rash of complaints from employers in the design industry, entry-level graphic design graduates in the industry are considered largely incompetent. The design industry expects certain kinds of employable skills which graduates from training institutions do not adequately possess. As a result, a gap has emerged between academic institutions and the expectations of design industry. Accordingly, the study explored and described the skills, attitudes and knowledge plus the contextual pressures needed to meet the demand placed on Ghanaian graphic design graduates. The study primarily adopts qualitative research approach, using interview and participant observation as the primary methods for data collection.

Two categories of informants: employers in the design industry and employees (thus, Ghanaian graphic design graduates) were used for data collection. The study area covers ten graphic design firms in Kumasi. The results of this study indicates that employers in the design industries expect graphic design graduates to have a clear evidence of additional knowledge, skills and behaviours aside from their university certificate. The changing nature of the workplace, coupled with changes in global economy, technology, differences in people's behaviour put considerable responsibility on graphic designers. For a graduate to have a competitive advantage in design industry, he or she must possess a broad range of competencies which include industry knowledge, changing nature of work, time-management, work experience, communication skills, problem-solving, broaden knowledge, technology, collaboration, emotional intelligence, self-respect, self-usefulness, and confidence. A graduate designer must therefore be multi-skilled to begin professional practice.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATION/DECLARATION.....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	ix
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	xi
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.0 Overview .....	1
1.1 Background to the Study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	3
1.3 Objectives of the Study .....	4
1.4 Rationale for the Study .....	5
1.5 Research Questions .....	5
1.6 Delimitation .....	6
1.7 Limitations .....	6
1.8 Research Design.....	7
1.9 Importance of Study.....	10

1.10 Organization of the Chapters .....	11
CHAPTER TWO .....	12
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE .....	12
2.0 Introduction .....	12
2.1 Industrial Age Paradigm .....	12
2.2 Employability Issues .....	14
2.2.1 Employability as a process .....	16
2.2.2 Competency as a tool for Enhancing Employability .....	18
2.3 Employability Model .....	23
2.3.1 USEM Model .....	24
2.3.2 DOTS Model .....	25
2.3.3 Career EDGE model .....	26
<b>2.3.3.1 The Career EDGE Components</b> .....	28
2.4. Graphic Design Profession .....	33
2.4.1 Transitional Period for Graphic Design Graduate into Professional Practice of Design .....	35
2.4.2 Additional Professional Training of Graphic Designers .....	38
2.5 Graphic Design Education .....	40
2.5.1 Learning outcomes for Design Graduates .....	42
2.7 Graphic Design Trends and Challenges .....	47
CHAPTER THREE .....	55
METHODOLOGY .....	55



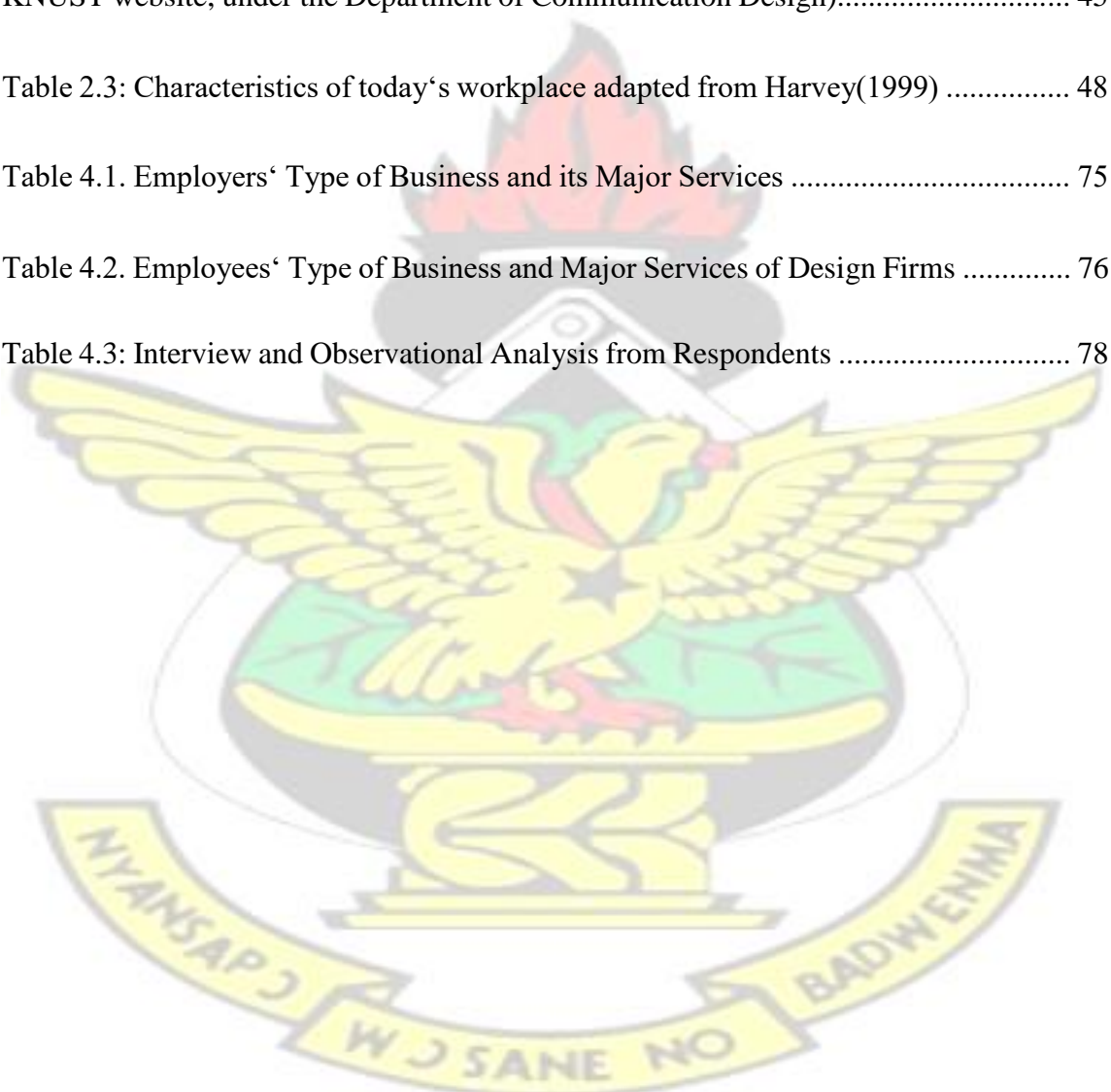
3.0 Introduction .....	55
3.1 Research Philosophy .....	56
3.2 Research Design.....	57
3.4 Research Methodology .....	58
3.4.1 Qualitative Inquiry .....	59
3.5 Research Method.....	59
3.5.1 Interviews.....	60
<b>3.5.1.1 The Interview Protocol</b> .....	61
3.5.2 Participant Observation.....	61
3.5.3 The Choice of Interviewees: .....	62
3.6 Population .....	63
3.6.1 Population sampling .....	63
3.6.2 Sampling size.....	64
3.6.3 Purposive sampling.....	65
3.6.4 Snowball Sampling .....	65
3.7 Data Collection .....	66
3.7.1 Triangulation.....	68
3.8 Analysis of Data.....	69
3.8.1 Thematic Analysis .....	69
3.9 Ethical Considerations .....	70
CHAPTER FOUR .....	71

RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS.....	71
4.0 Introduction.....	71
4.1 Respondents‘ Working Activities .....	71
4.2 Results.....	73
4.3 Analysis and Discussions.....	78
4.3.1 Business Sustainability Skills .....	78
4.3.2 Professional Skills.....	82
4.3.3 Personal Skills.....	87
CHAPTER FIVE .....	90
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	90
5.0 Introduction.....	90
5.1 Summary of Findings.....	91
5.2 Conclusion .....	97
5.3 Recommendations.....	100
5.3.1 Recommendations for Practice:.....	101
5.3.2 Recommendations for Research .....	103
REFERENCES .....	103
APPENDICES .....	113
APPENDIX A.....	113
APPENDIX B .....	113
APPENDIX C .....	114

APPENDIX D .....	115
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## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2. 1: Adapted from Reigeluth (1992), a valuable synthesis of industrial age paradigm and information age .....	14
Table 2. 2: Design training outcome for graduates by DECODE (Adopted from KNUST website, under the Department of Communication Design).....	45
Table 2.3: Characteristics of today's workplace adapted from Harvey(1999) .....	48
Table 4.1. Employers' Type of Business and its Major Services .....	75
Table 4.2. Employees' Type of Business and Major Services of Design Firms .....	76
Table 4.3: Interview and Observational Analysis from Respondents .....	78





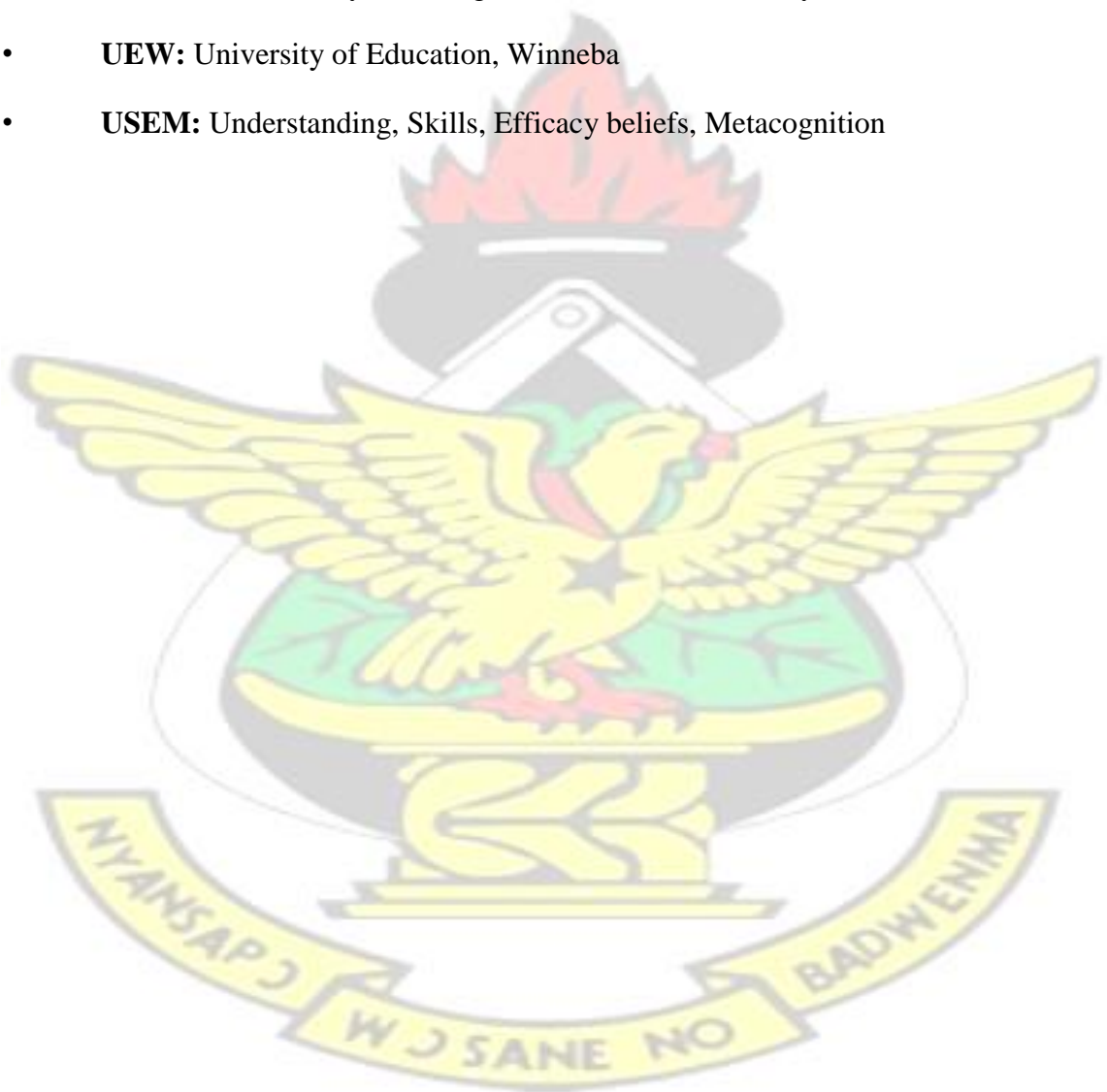
## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2. 1. Magic Bullet Model of Employability adapted from Harvey (2002), employability and diversity .....	17
Figure 2.2: A model of graduate employability development. (Adapted from Harvey, Locke and Morey, 2002) .....	18
Figure 2.3: The iceberg model of —central and surface competencies by Spencer and Spencer (1993) .....	21
Figure 2.4 adapted from AIGA —Designer of 2015 Competencies .....	23
Figure 2.5 The Four main elements of employability adapted from Hillage and Pollard (1998) .....	24
Figure 2.6: The Career EDGE model by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) .....	28
Figure 2.7: A metaphorical model of employability derived by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) .....	29
Figure 2.8: Learning Factors (Eraut et al., 2005) .....	37
Figure 2.9: Context Factors (Eraut et al., 2005) .....	38

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- **AIGA:** America Institution of Graphic Artist
- **CareerEDGE:** Career Development Learning, Experience (Work and Life),  
Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding and Skills, Generic Skills,  
Emotional Intelligence
- **DECODE:** Department of Communication Design

- **DOTS:** Decision learning, Opportunity awareness, Transition learning, Selfawareness
- **HRFOCUS:** Human Resource FOCUS
- **KNUST:** Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
- **PDP:** Personal Development Planning
- **PSC:** Professional Standards Councils
- **SCONCUL:** Society of College, National and University Libraries
- **UEW:** University of Education, Winneba
- **USEM:** Understanding, Skills, Efficacy beliefs, Metacognition



# KNUST

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

All thanks to Almighty God, my overall great provider for a successful outcome. An attitude of profound gratitude and appreciation is expressed to all who supported and encouraged me to make this study a reality.

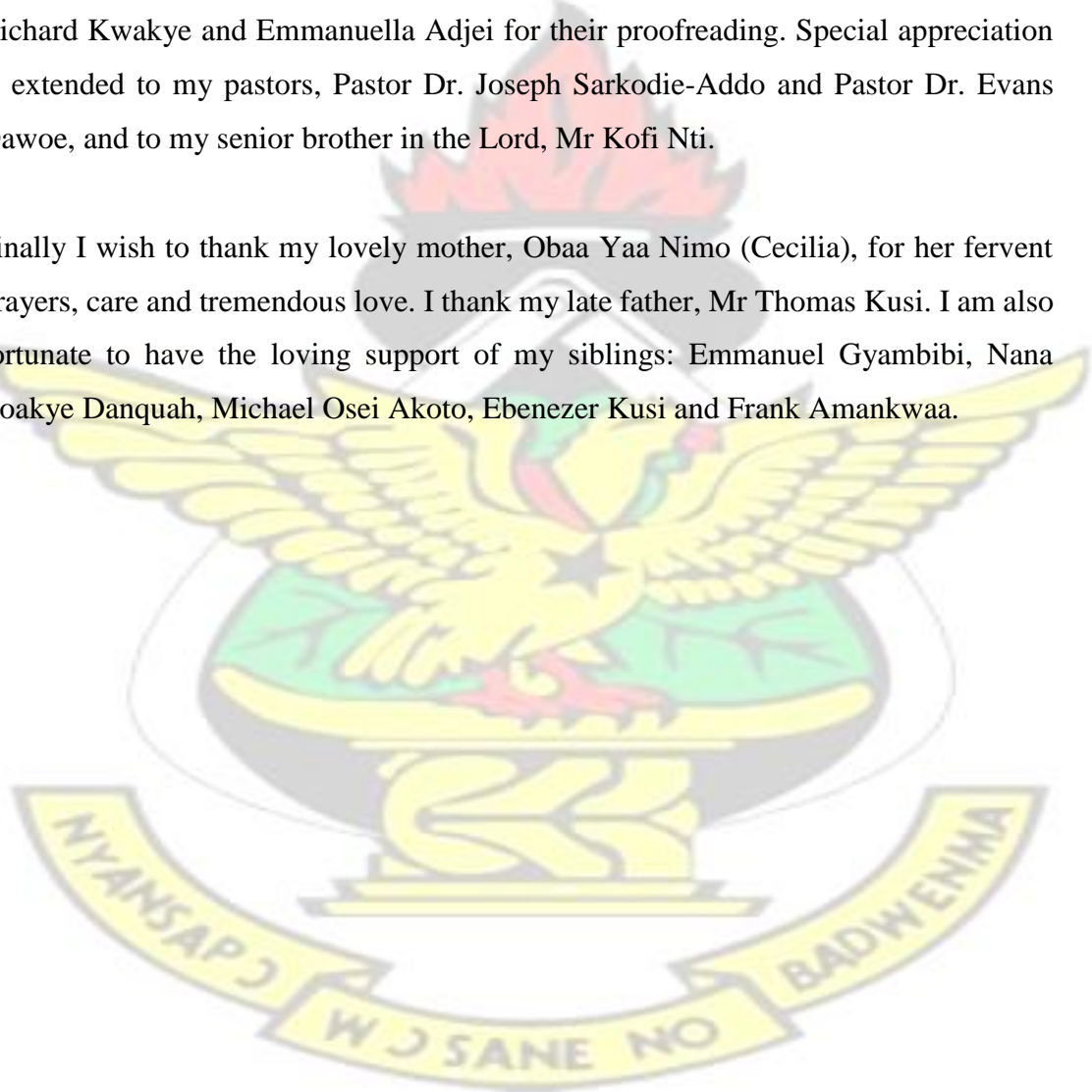
I am indebted to my supervisor, Mr. K.G. deGraft-Johnson, for his guidance, commitment and dedication, whose encouragement challenged me to do my best. I also wish to thank Dr. Edward Appiah for his invaluable advice that helped restructure and refine the study. My sincere thanks go to Dr. George Kushiator for his proper guidance.

I am grateful to Mr Odame Asante, my senior colleague, who provoked me to deeper thinking in relation to key issues for the study. My earnest thankfulness is extended to my colleagues, especially Amo Isaac, Mark Okyere, Benjamin Prempeh, Joseph

Danquah, Mr Kelly and Mr Prosper Dzukey for their resourcefulness, suggestions and guidance. I wish to thank all participants who made the data collection possible.

I owe great debt to Joshua Osei Nti, for his unfeigned care and massive support. I thank Emmanuel Owusu and Allnice for supporting me during the study. My appreciation goes to Precious Asabea-Boakye, who challenged me to enroll in the Master's programme. My deepest gratitude to Mary Boahene, who willingly offered her laptop to be used for this study. My sincere thanks go to Emmanuel Gyambibi, who has supported me financially throughout my Master's programme. I thank Richard Kwakye and Emmanuella Adjei for their proofreading. Special appreciation is extended to my pastors, Pastor Dr. Joseph Sarkodie-Addo and Pastor Dr. Evans Dawoe, and to my senior brother in the Lord, Mr Kofi Nti.

Finally I wish to thank my lovely mother, Obaa Yaa Nimo (Cecilia), for her fervent prayers, care and tremendous love. I thank my late father, Mr Thomas Kusi. I am also fortunate to have the loving support of my siblings: Emmanuel Gyambibi, Nana Boakye Danquah, Michael Osei Akoto, Ebenezer Kusi and Frank Amankwaa.



# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Overview**

This chapter comprises the background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, delimitations and limitations of the study. Also included are the following: definition of terms, importance of study as well as organization of the chapters.

### **1.1 Background to the Study**

The traditional practices of graphic design that produced artefacts, objects, spaces and crafts, have now diversified integrating complex issues (Coulter, 2014). These issues consist of progressively complex social, technological, economic factors, variances in people's preferences, cultural behaviours and experiences (—AIGA - Designer of 2015 trends, 2015). The challenge is that these complexities are factors that now delineate design's role, in a much broader perspective than it traditionally possessed: —the making of things and beautiful things (—AIGA - Designer of 2015 trends, 2015). As cited by Acheampong (2013) in Hanushek, Woessman and Zhang (2011), rapid changes in these trends plus global demands affect the practices of the industry.

In the current competitive global economy, countries face these complex challenges; such is the state of the design industry in Ghana especially, in Accra and Kumasi, where there are, currently, numerous design agencies. In order to have a competitive advantage, most design firms in Ghana have diversified their major services into many areas. The system is such that within one design firm, there are compounded design practices such as advertising, photography, motion graphics, web designing, printing



and more. These compounded practices significantly reduce the original design practices of that particular design firm. Design practices are currently affected by complex trends: technological integration, economic viability, cultural behaviours and people experiences in contemporary times. These trends put considerable pressure on the design industry. The contemporary world is dynamic in knowledge, with rapid changes in technology, eliciting outmodedness, and as such people with competency are in demand to move along with these trends (Kowaltowski et al., 2010).

Ghanaian graduates entering the industry do not always meet the demands of the industry (Acheampong, 2013). The June 2011 edition of the Human Resource Magazine (HRFOCUS, 2011, p. 16 - 17) reported that many employers complain about the competencies of graduates from Ghana's universities; many, it can be concluded, are not adequately prepared for the industry. This creates the impression that, the educational training outcomes do not match the industry's expectations. Of course, students are basically trained for the industry and once the industry has become complex, the training of graduates must derivatively become complex. According to Kowaltowski et al. (2010), modern trends and globalisation in the professional practices of design, call for learning improvements with a high sense of design professionalism. In this study, professional practice makes reference to graphic design industry plus its several ancillary activities. Employers' demand is high, for design graduates with a defined set of skills to meet these complex challenges (Coulter, 2014).

Although there is a high demand for effective employees, design graduate should be prepared or trained to survive successfully after school, so they would be adoptable to the changing nature of the industry. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century design graduate must, however, possess competencies that meet basic workplace demands demanded by employers.

These industry demands have become integral for a period of time, with —competency involving the —knowledge, skills, abilities, traits and behaviours that make an individual function effectively, in a particular function or task (Boyatzis, 1982).

In recent years, based on a flurry of complaints from creative directors, studio managers and owners of design establishments, graphic designers from training institutions entering the industry, are considered largely incompetent. Education produces graduates for the industry. The learning outcomes by design education which are the key objectives of the various taught courses are believed to meet the industry standards. The industry expects graduates to possess certain kinds of employable skills which graduates do not adequately possess. As a result, a gap has emerged between academic institutions and the expectations of design industry. It is against this background that this study seeks to explore the skills, attitudes and knowledge plus the contextual pressures needed to meet the demand placed on Ghanaian graphic design graduates. This study will help identify the competencies or employability that must be attained to meet the complex situation in the world of design.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Many employers complain that the competencies of graduates from Ghana's universities do not sufficiently match industry needs (HRFOCUS, June 2011, p. 16 - 17). Accordingly, a preliminary survey conducted by the researcher on creative directors, studio managers and owners of design establishments indicates that, entrylevel graphic design graduates do not adequately meet industry's demands and employers' expectations.

Graphic design graduates repeatedly encounter employers who question their competence and relevance to the challenging situation facing industry. Employers are looking for additional qualities in the workplace, that redefine a graduate designer in a much broader role, to effectively handle issues that go beyond just mere design.

These demands define a graduate designer in a much broader role as a result of complex trends in the industry (—AIGA - Designer of 2015 trends, 2015). The industry keeps on changing its activities in order to stay competitive and relevant in the job market. As has been observed, —design is a profoundly changing field of practice and discipline of study (Littlejohn and Davis, 2010, p. 2). Therefore, the role of design in contemporary context goes beyond traditional design training. This has now amplified training needs and incrementally, diversified learning outcomes. These challenges might just be the situation that would not allow graphic design graduates to meet the demands of the industry. However, in the midst of all these challenges, there must be a new set of competencies that every Ghanaian graphic design graduate must possess to be successful in the graphic design profession. To determine the gaps in the graphic design field, an exploratory study was done.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

**The main objective of the study was to:**

1. Describe the competencies that involve skills, knowledge, behaviours, abilities and traits that help graduate graphic designers meet the demands of the industry in contemporary graphic design practice.

Other objectives for this study were to:

2. Investigate the experiences graphic design graduates go through with their employers that contribute to the perception of incompetence in the workplace.
3. Determine some priority areas of industrial needs and employers' expectations, where graphic design educators need to arm students with competencies that could tackle emerging challenges in professional design practice.

#### **1.4 Rationale for the Study**

The rationale for this study is founded on the tension between the training outcomes of graphic design graduates from Ghanaian graphic design departments that probably do not match, in this contemporary world of professional design practice, the industry's needs and expectations. In other words, this study explores the skills, attitudes and knowledge plus the contextual pressures needed to meet the demand placed on Ghanaian graphic design graduates. This study sought to identify the competencies that must be acquired to manage the complex challenges faced by entry-level graduates in the world of design. In the future, a similar study might hope to develop a —competency model for graphic design education curricula in Ghana.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

##### **Main research question:**

- a. What are the entry-level competencies needed by graduate graphic designers demanded by employers for contemporary graphic design practice?

##### **Sub research questions:**

- b. What are the experiences graphic design graduates go through with employers in design firms?



- c. What competencies should education provide, for students to meet the challenges in the professional practice of design?
- d. How can entry-level graduate designers become competent enough to overcome emerging challenges in contemporary design practice?

### **1.6 Delimitation**

The study is a qualitative research study. The study focuses on the competencies of graphic design graduates demanded by creative directors, studio managers and owners of design establishments. Concerning the employee participants, the study focused on only graphic design graduates from the government universities in Ghana.

The study relied on two categories of informants for data collection:-

- i. Employers - Design firm owners, creative directors and studio managers
- ii. Employees - Ghanaian graphic design graduates who are degree holders, within the first five years of working experience in a particular design firm.

The study area covers ten (10) graphic design firms in Kumasi. In this study, the selected design firms were those whose activities cover a much broader aspect of graphic design work (including operating a printing press, digital printing, and producing interactive design, advertising, branding and signage). This is to help inform the reader about the diversified nature of contemporary design firms.

### **1.7 Limitations**

A number of limitations emerged during this study. As of the time the interview was being conducted, most of the employers were not available. Some of the companies



did not respond to the official letters sent to them. Power fluctuation (—dumsorll), transference from one company to the other, as well as data triangulation, delayed the data collection process.

## **1.8 Research Design**

### **a) Paradigm**

This study aimed at exploring the skills, attitudes and knowledge plus the contextual pressures that graphic design graduates must acquire to meet the demands of the design industry by employers. Ontologically, the study focused on interpretivistic direction. As a result of this, the study arises from an epistemological positioning based on an interpretivist research paradigm. Epistemologically, this study relies on a qualitative research approach to inquire meanings subject to people's view, belief, and experience, hence subjectivism. Subjectivism, according to Gephart (1999), is the understanding given to the social reality of individual's behaviour, thoughts, experiences and action, and as such interpreting their meanings with context. This helped to understand the phenomena being explored through employers' expectation from graphic design graduates. From the constructivist point of view, reality and meaning cannot be in existence from external domain, rather, are formed by the subject of the individuals through interactions with the domain (Gray, 2004). For that reason, meanings are constructed differently from individuals' own understanding of a subject concerning the same phenomena (Gray, 2004, p. 17). Therefore, data collection was garnered through participant responses and activity, and hence constructivism was the philosophy adopted.

Interviews and observation were used as the primary method for data collection. Qualitatively, data were largely collected and collated from the views of participants, thus accounting for their inductive nature. In interpretive research, variables are not predetermined before data collection. However, emphasis is placed on meanings made from the overall complex nature of human condition affecting what happens or how someone reacts in a particular emerging situation (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994).

### **b) Research Method**

As noted above, the study relied upon qualitative research methodology to collect data. Interviews and participant observation were the primary methods for collection of data for this study. Literature from scholars, books, articles provided secondary information. The reason for using a qualitative approach was to find out the subject views of participants. One-on-one interviews and participant observation were used as the primary method for data collection to understand the on-going situation by getting physical evidence and to provide direct detailed information on employers' expectations and individual design graduates' experiences with employers in the workplace.

Interview protocols were used as the research instrument for collecting data. A list of semi-structured questionnaire also assisted in data collection. This was grouped into sections relating to employers' expectations and graduate experiences with employers. The purpose was to bring out the specific information necessary to answer the research questions. The interview protocol made all participants answer the same set of questions to ensure the validity of the study.

### **c) Population for study**

- The study area for this research was in Kumasi.

- The sample size for the study was ten (10) graphic design companies in Kumasi.
- Fifteen (15) interviewees which comprise five (5) employers and ten (10) employees as recommended by (John W Creswell, 2007) quoted by Polkinghorne (1989), researchers can interview from five (5) to twenty-five (25) individuals who all have similar experiences. Creswell (2007, p.61)

The snowball sampling technique was used in collecting information from participants who shared the same experience on the subject matter of the study, who then recommended other likely persons to help with the information needed for the study (Davenport and Prusak, 2000). This technique provided the needed information necessary to address the research questions for this study.

#### **d) Data collection**

The researcher did a purposive sampling among two categories of informants:

- i. Employers - Design firm owners, creative directors and studio managers
- ii. Employees - Ghanaian graphic design graduates with degree holders in graphic design who are practising in graphic design companies

The study purposively selected these two categories of participants to help adequately answer the research questions. This was achieved by collecting information on graphic design employers' expectations and on graphic design graduates' experiences with employers in the workplace. The objectives for this study were thereby addressed.

Direct one-on-one interviews and participant observation were used as the primary methods for collecting data. Semi-structured guides were used as the research

instrument for the study in collecting data. During the snowball sampling, saturation level was achieved when responses from participants became repetitive, and as such no new knowledge emerged (Gray, 2004). Accordingly, a total number of fifteen participants were interviewed.

Thematic analysis was adopted for data analysis in this study. Data was analysed using the qualitative data analysis method, where observation and interview transcripts were coded, and patterns identified, grouped into categories and further grouped into major themes. Data was finally presented in tables and discussion (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Ethical considerations were used extensively in this study to protect participants' identity and privacy. The purpose of the study was explained and a consent form (Appendix B for employers and Appendix C for employees) was given to respondents (employers and employees) in accordance with ethical issues.

### **1.9 Importance of Study**

According to Hawkins (1999), —to be employed is to be at risk, to be employable is to be secure. The numerous graduates produced by Ghanaian universities and fundamental shifts in the job market recruitment have made acquiring a degree no longer enough to guarantee a design graduate a satisfying future career. This is exacerbated by the challenging circumstances in contemporary professional practice. Professional design industry is looking for work-ready graduates with clear evidence of additional specific skills aside from a university certificate. This study will help students become more mindful of their knowledge, skills, abilities, traits and



behaviours during their time at the university. Next, it will assist students to work toward developing a competitive advantage in the job market, and to advance their future careers beyond mere university learning. Graphic design industries in Ghana hopefully, will be fortified with effective design graduates competent enough to meet the challenging situations brought on by the trends that have emerged.

Producing competent and employable graduates form part of the education process in Ghana. Universities in Ghana can be guided to offer graphic design programmes that attract and retain high quality students to elicit a competitive advantage in the global market. Employability is of key importance to Ghana's economy; therefore this study aims at helping reduce unemployment.

#### **1.10 Organization of the Chapters**

Chapter One comprises the background of the study, the problem statement, objectives and research question relevant to the study. Chapter Two covers the review of related literature and concepts associated with the challenging situation entry-level design graduates encounter in the industry. Chapter Three includes the research design and methodology necessary to resolve the research question. Chapter Four contains the statement of results, analysis and discussion. Chapter Five involves the summary, conclusions and recommendations for further studies by policy makers.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, the research questions outlined at the beginning of this study were addressed. This study seeks to identify the expected competencies that Ghanaian graphic design graduates must acquire to meet the demands of contemporary design practice. The following topics were reviewed: The Industrial Age Paradigm, Employability, Competency as a tool for enhancing Employability, The Graphic Design Profession, Graphic Design Education, Graphic Design Industry, Graphic Design Trends and Challenges.

#### **2.1 Industrial Age Paradigm**

As the Industrial Revolution evolved, services of people were needed in industries. There has been, however, a shift from the Industrial Age to the Information Age (Toffler, 1980, 1990) which now requires individuals to possess certain qualities or skills in order to function effectively in industry. Before the Industrial Age was the Agricultural Age, where most people were either merchants or farmers. The Agricultural Age then evolved into the Industrial Age, where machines and processes were created for mass production.

The Industrial Revolution became a great defining moment for mankind. While it reduced human effort, it created opportunity for large wars, and the production of nuclear weapons that could be used against nations. During this era, machines became relevant to improving standards of living in everyday life. According to —Industrial

Revolution, in Encyclopaedia Britannica, (2015), developments in tools and machines, brought the automated factory; hence industrialisation became a major significant development. Technological, socioeconomic, and cultural features were mainly involved in the Industrial Revolution (—graphic design, in Encyclopaedia Britannica, (2015). Changes in technology, social and economic lives have caused a shift from the Industrial Age to the Information Age (Aslan, Huh, Lee and Reigeluth, 2011). According to Reigeluth and Joseph (2002) —many social scientists have observed great differences between the industrial age and the emerging information age, among them are Banathy, (1991); Bell, (1973); Naisbitt & Aburdene, (1985); Toffler, (1980). Reigeluth (1992) also provided a valuable synthesis of Industrial Age and Information Age paradigm. This is presented in Table 2. 1

**Table 2.1: Culled from Reigeluth (1992) A Valuable Synthesis of Industrial Age Paradigm and Information Age**

Industrial Age	Information Age
Standardization	Customization
Compliance	Initiative
Conformity	Diversity
Compartmentalization	Holism
Parts-oriented	Process-oriented
Bureaucratic organization	Team-based organization
Centralized control	Autonomy with accountability
Adversarial relationships	Cooperative relationships
Autocratic decision-making	Shared decision-making
One-way communications	Networking
Planned obsolescence	Total quality
Boss as —king	Customer as —king

Rapid change in the current Information Age compels industries to stay competitive. Industry now values people who can move along with these rapid changes. Reigeluth

and Joseph (2002) say that —employers, even in the manufacturing sector, are now looking for people who can solve problems, take initiative, and offer diverse perspectives as part of teams (p. 9). Employers in industries want people with employable skills to meet these complexities. How can employability in the Graphic Design profession, in Ghana, arise from a constructive merger of academia and industry? The next section looks at the employability issues for academia, graduates and industry.

## 2.2 Employability Issues

Before discussing employability issues, it is necessary to understand the concept of employability. Employability is a complex concept that involves a number of interrelated areas (Cole and Tibby, 2013). It is not just about helping students acquire a job after graduation but —it is about supporting students to develop a range of knowledge, skills, behaviours, attributes and attitudes which will enable them to be successful not just in employment but in life (Cole and Tibby, 2013, p. 5). Hillage and Pollard (1998) suggest that,

*"In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment." (p. 2).*

On the other hand, Brown et al. (2002) protest about the Hillage and Pollard definition, and defined employability as —the relative chances of finding and maintaining different kinds of employment (p. 9).

Next, Yorke & Knight, (2006) define employability as,

*“A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (p. 5).*

Wiley (2014, p. 3) in collaboration with Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONCUL) in UK and Ireland suggest that such

*“...achievements” may be quantifiable, yet the definition provided immediately (Higher Education Academy, 2012) hints at complexity in its acknowledgement that “the emphasis is on developing critical, reflective abilities, with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner” (Harvey, 2003, p. 3)”.*

This indicates that the concept of employability is complicated in itself. Harvey (2001), however, analyses employability in two general groups. The first explains the student's ability to obtain a job after graduating from school. The second group talks about improving students' attributes such as \_skills, knowledge, attitudes and abilities' to equip them for lifetime profession. Further, Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2010) argued that there is more to employability than getting a job right after six months of completing school. Lees (2002) affirms that —being employed means having a job, being employable means having the qualities needed to maintain employment and progress in the workplace (p. 3). Given the broad understanding of what constitutes employability, it is quite predictable that employability goes beyond just acquiring a job; it means possessing valuable characteristics, skills and knowledge which make a person function effectively in every area.

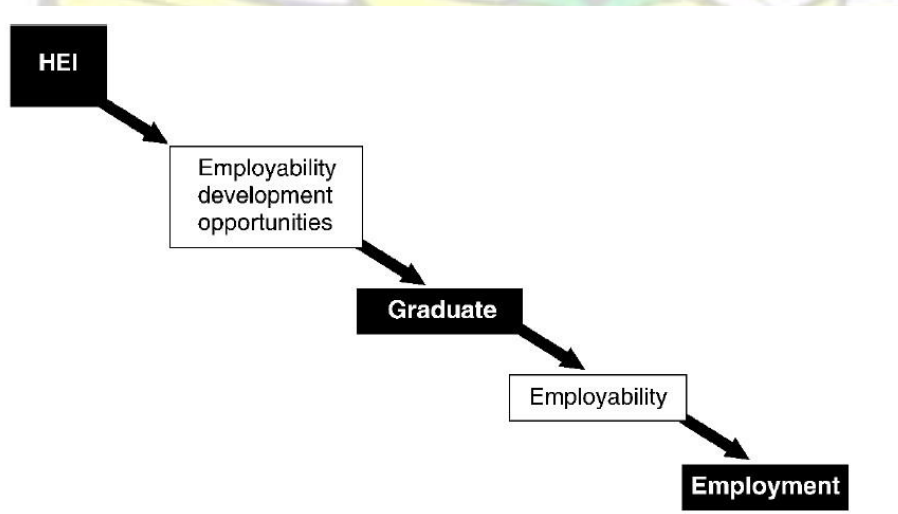
Employability is an issue of concern in many areas of industry in Ghana (HRFOCUS, 2011). Industries are looking for graduates with clear evidence of employable skills to



function effectively at the workplace. Higher education basically prepares graduates for industry or for advanced study. However, there is continuous concern expressed by employers that graduates do not meet the requirements of industrial work (Acheampong, 2013). In order to understand the issues involved in employability, the next section talks about the processes involved in employability.

### 2.2.1 Employability as a process

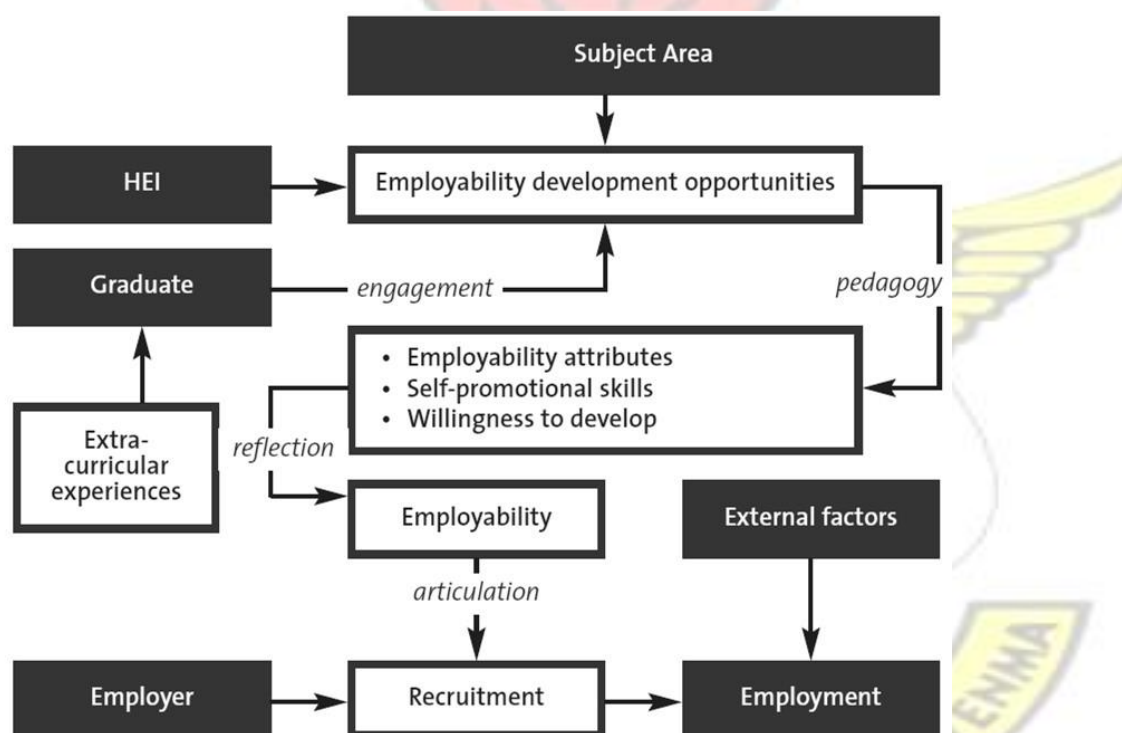
The employability process mainly involves —graduates, institution and employer (Harvey, 2002). —The magic bullet model by Harvey (2002) implies that, higher education institution provides —employability development opportunities for graduates to enhance —employability to get —employment from the employer (Harvey, 2002, p. 17). His model is shown in Figure 2. 1.



**Figure 2.1: Magic Bullet Model of Employability; culled from Harvey (2002), Employability and Diversity**



An additional model by Harvey, Locke and Morey (2002), which also considers the processes between —employability-development opportunities‖ that —higher education institution‖ provides plus the —employment‖ of the —graduate‖ given by —employers‖. The model implies that, it is the employer who ultimately determines a graduate's 'employability' (Figure 2.2). The Harvey, Locke and Morey (2002) model consist of three main parties; 1) Graduates 2) Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and 3) Employers. Figure 2.2, presents four main areas of —employability‖ which are i) Employability attribute-development; ii) Self-promotional or jobgetting skills; iii) Willingness to learn and continue learning; iv) Reflection and articulation (Harvey, Locke and Morey, 2002)



**Figure 2.2: A Model of Graduate Employability Development. (Culled from Harvey, Locke and Morey, 2002)**

Harvey, Locke and Morey (2002) explained that, the first three processes are supported by the student's —reflection‖ and —articulation‖ while Higher Education Institution provides —personal development planning‖ opportunities for students. However,

—attribute development; Self-promotional or job-getting skills mainly depend on the student. In this case, the student must be willing to learn, and learn continually to possess these attributes (Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007). These selfattributes have direct impact on the student and the outcome of his or her visible skills (Spencer and Spencer, 1993; Boyatzis, 1982). Therefore, students must take every opportunity available to gain a competitive advantage in industry, and strive for a lifetime career. Harvey, Locke and Morey (2002) in their model (Figure 2.2) indicate that there must be as part of the curriculum, additional employability development through extra-curricular activities. Harvey, Locke and Morey (2002) further added that the opportunities for securing a successful job either by selfemployment or being employed by an employer are also influenced by —external factors like family responsibilities and prospects that are beyond the institution or the graduate’s control. Accordingly, it is important to understand how employability can be enhanced to form a valuable outcome. Competency that consists of skills, traits, attitudes and knowledge (Vathanophas and Thai-ngam, 2007), could be an effective tool that contributes massively to the success of those involved in gaining employability, especially students.

For this reason, the next section talks about competencies since establishments largely rely on employees’ competencies to gain the upper hand on their competitors (De Vos and De Hauw, 2010, p. 5).

### **2.2.2 Competency as a tool for Enhancing Employability**

De Vos and De Hauw (2010) cited Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) who assert that —competency development is an important means for enhancing

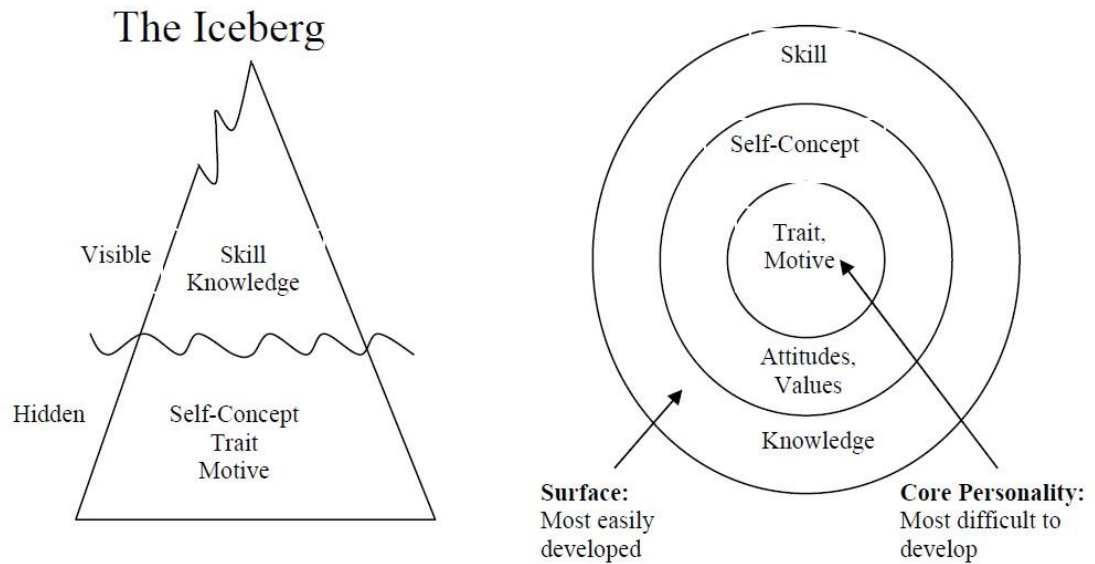
employability, and that —several authors like De Cuyper et al. (2008), Forrier and Sels (2003) highlight the importance of including competency development in the study of employability (p. 7).

The first time the word —competency was used, could possibly be traced to David McClelland, who, in 1973, used it in his article —Testing for competence rather than for intelligencel. However, in 1982, it was Boyatzis who first represented detailed information on —Job Competence Assessmentl. According to Boyatzis (1982), competency is —an underlying characteristic of a person which results in effective and/or superior performance in a jobl. Spencer and Spencer (1993), meanwhile, proposed competency to be the specific fundamental attributes of a person that support the effectiveness of that person's performance on a given task.

Spencer and Spencer (1993) on the other hand, suggest five categories of competency characteristics: —motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge and skillsl.

First, —motivesl are the individual's thoughts that trigger the behaviour towards a specific goal which might be different from others. The second one, which is —traitsl, describes the —physical characteristicsl and usual reactions made towards situations. —Self-conceptl examines the individual's attitudes, self-perception or values. Fourth, —knowledgel refers to one's specific area of domain concerning a subject matter. Lastly, —skillsl refers to the individual's ability to function well either through visible or psychological task. Spencer and Spencer (1993) explained that —knowledge and skillsl are the visible and relatively —surfacel competency characteristics. However, —motives, traits and self-conceptl tend to be the hidden competency characteristics that are deep-rooted and more —centrall to the —personalityl. Comparatively, these

—surface competencies thus —knowledge and skills, can easily be developed through effective training (Spencer and Spencer, 1993). Figure 2.3 demonstrates the iceberg model of —central and surface competencies by Spencer and Spencer (1993).



**Figure 2.3: The Iceberg Model of “Central and Surface” Competencies by Spencer and Spencer (1993)**

The outcome of the iceberg model by Spencer and Spencer (1993) suggest that, —knowledge and skills are the visible competencies normally seen and required by employers as technical competencies whereas —motives, traits and self-concept are hidden competencies that control an individual’s ability to function. —Motives, traits and self-concept are believed to have a direct influence on visible competencies (Boyatzis, 1982), effective for a given task. This implies that if a design graduate possesses these —visible and —hidden elements of competency, he or she can successfully meet the requirements of a specific task within an industry.



The American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) has developed a skill-set with the theme —Designer of 2015 Competencies. AIGA —Designer of 2015 competencies propose a set of competencies for academia and industry to meet the future demands for designers. These competencies by AIGA are believed to assist academia in restructuring their syllabuses and industry for enrolling their workers to meet the challenges that may arise. AIGA's website concerning the —Designer of 2015 competencies states that,

*Since 2006, AIGA and Adobe have teamed up to try to define the set of competencies that design studios and corporate departments have been looking for in designers. One that has traditional skills and yet a much broader perspective on problem solving. Through interviews, focus groups, workshops and surveys that were conducted with some of the profession's best thinkers-educators, observers of the field and AIGA members-we have attempted to characterize future designers. The initial phase of the research involved translating the expectations of participants into the essential competencies that will be needed, in various combinations, by tomorrow's designer (AIGA).*

The outcomes of the —Designer of 2015 Competencies by the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) are represented in figure 2.4.

Although, these competencies by AIGA (n. d), are believed to equip all the people (academia, students, graduates and employers) involved in design to meet future expectations, Davis (2008) argues that, these competencies are not suitable for educators and design practitioners since they do not predict a long-term vision.



01	Ability to create and develop visual response to communication problems, including understanding of hierarchy, typography, aesthetics, composition and construction of meaningful images
02	Ability to solve communication problems including identifying the problem, researching, analysis, solution generating, prototyping, user testing and outcome evaluation
03	Broad understanding of issues related to the cognitive, social, cultural, technological and economic contexts for design
04	Ability to respond to audience contexts recognizing physical, cognitive, cultural and social human factors that shape design decisions
05	Understanding of and ability to utilize tools and technology
06	Ability to be flexible, nimble and dynamic in practice
07	Management and communication skills necessary to function productively in large interdisciplinary teams and "flat" organizational structures
08	Understanding of how systems behave and aspects that contribute to sustainable products, strategies and practices
09	Ability to construct verbal arguments for solutions that address diverse users/audiences; lifespan issues; and business/organizational operations
10	Ability to work in a global environment with understanding of cultural preservation
11	Ability to collaborate productively in large interdisciplinary teams
12	Understanding of ethics in practice
13	Understanding of nested items including cause and effect; ability to develop project evaluation criteria that account for audience and context

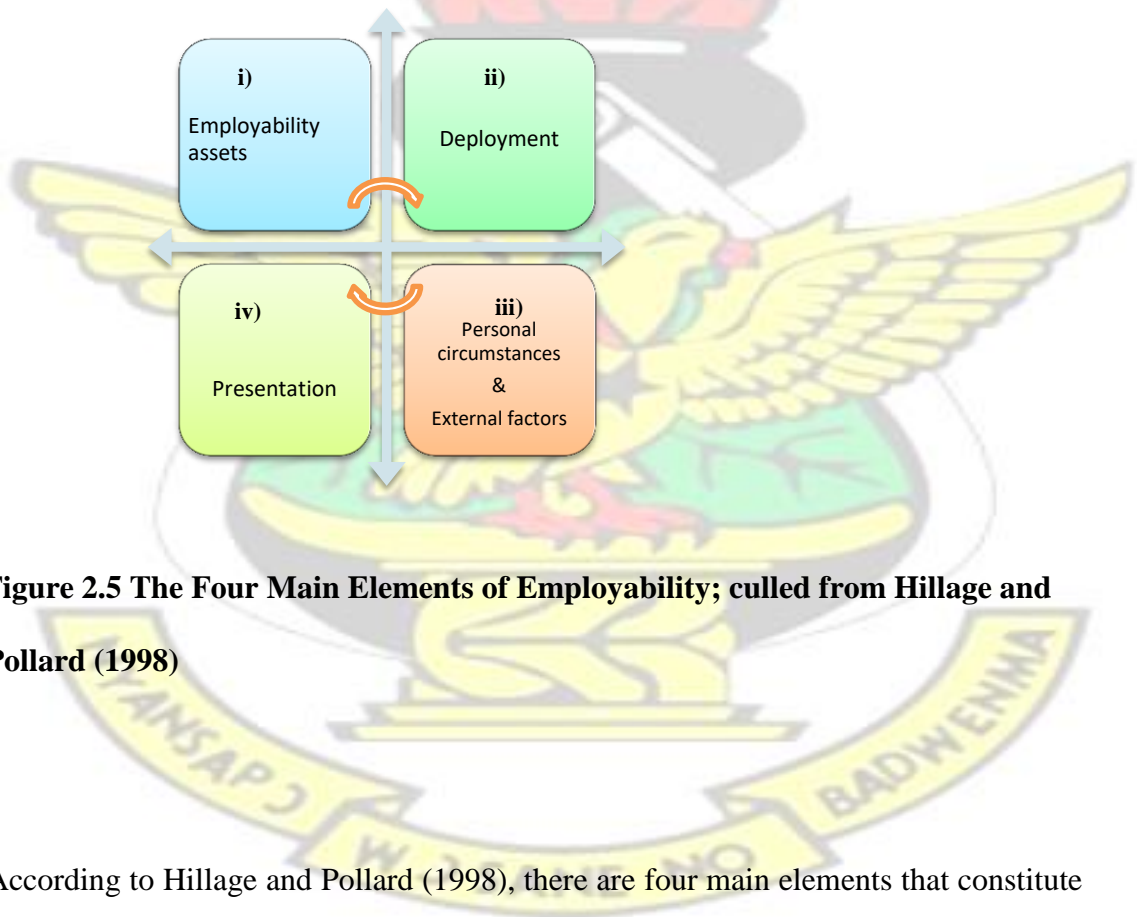
**Figure 2.4 Adapted from AIGA “Designer of 2015 Competencies”**

There is also, however, a further point being made by (Davis, 2008) that, it is good to have something as a guide than nothing, and that the list of competencies provided by AIGA gives a great source for embracing opportunities for the realities that designer

will face. The next section looks at employability models and their interactions with those involved in the employability process — academia, graduates and employers.

### 2.3 Employability Model

According to Microsoft Encarta (2009), a model is —a simplified version of something complex used in analysing and solving problems or making predictions. Hillage and Pollard (1998), explained that there are four main elements that constitute employability. The diagram below illustrates the four main elements of employability by Hillage and Pollard (1998).



**Figure 2.5 The Four Main Elements of Employability; culled from Hillage and Pollard (1998)**

According to Hillage and Pollard (1998), there are four main elements that constitute employability which are, first, —employability assets which constitute knowledge, skills and attitudes; secondly, —deployment which has got to do with profession management abilities; —presentation which is the third, involves the techniques and

skills for getting job; The fourth, which is —personal circumstances is governed by personal sense of duty and exterior issues like prospects that arises in the job market.

Although four main elements of employability by Hillage and Pollard (1998) simplifies the complex nature of employability, Bowden et al. (2000) stressed that employability is not just about training graduates to get good employment but equipping them to add value to their skill-set to address societal needs. They further explained that, graduate attributes gotten from their educational training must shape them to support their career and support the people around them.

Moreover, another employability model proposed by Bennett, Dunne and Carre (1999) for higher education entails the following: i) disciplinary content knowledge, ii) disciplinary skills, iii) workplace awareness, iv) workplace experience and v) generic skills. Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2010) argued that although this model to some extents includes all the essential elements needed by graduate, it still lacks some vital elements of employability. In agreement to Dacre-Pool and Swell, the researcher believes that the model by Bennett, Dunne and Carre (1999) lacks personal circumstances and external factors as proposed by Hillage and Pollard (1998). The study places much emphasis on the following employability model because it provides clear of information for this study. These models are; **1) USEM** by Yorke and Knight, 2004, **2) DOTS** model (Law and Watts 1977), and **3) —Career EDGE** by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007)

### **2.3.1 USEM Model**

The USEM model by Yorke and Knight (2004) stands for:

**Understanding, Skills, Efficacy beliefs, Metacognition**



According to Knight and Yorke (2004), this model seeks to throw more light on employability to academia for research (p. 37). Knight and Yorke (2004) further explained that an individual must have an understanding of current issues and by what means the workplace operates. In relation to skills, Knight and Yorke (2004) focused on educational training, how to get a job and the overall existence of a graduate. Meanwhile, they clarified that efficacy beliefs reveal how the student perceives himself or herself to be, and how to utilise opportunities for selfdevelopment. Accordingly, Knight and Yorke (2004) elucidated that metacognition balances an individual perception for improvement, to contribute meaningfully to the society.

The USEM model seeks to help academia in their study. Although, the **USEM** model is a recognised and valued scholarly model (Cole and Tibby, 2013), Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) opposed its strength when it comes to employability. They opine that the strength of this USEM model could be perceived as weakness, since it does not give clarity to inexperienced people like students and parents the basic and specific meaning of employability. Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) acknowledge the simple nature of the DOTS model by Law and Watts (1977) because it allows individuals to manage the complexity of career development.

### **2.3.2 DOTS Model**

The **DOTS** model by Law and Watts (1977) is meant to streamline the improvement of employability that focuses on

- i) **Decision learning** — where students are being trained to use their skills to effectively manage stress and tension in a situation that requires decision making.
- ii) **Opportunity awareness** — talks about the emerged favourable

conditions that give a particular individual the chance to choose from.

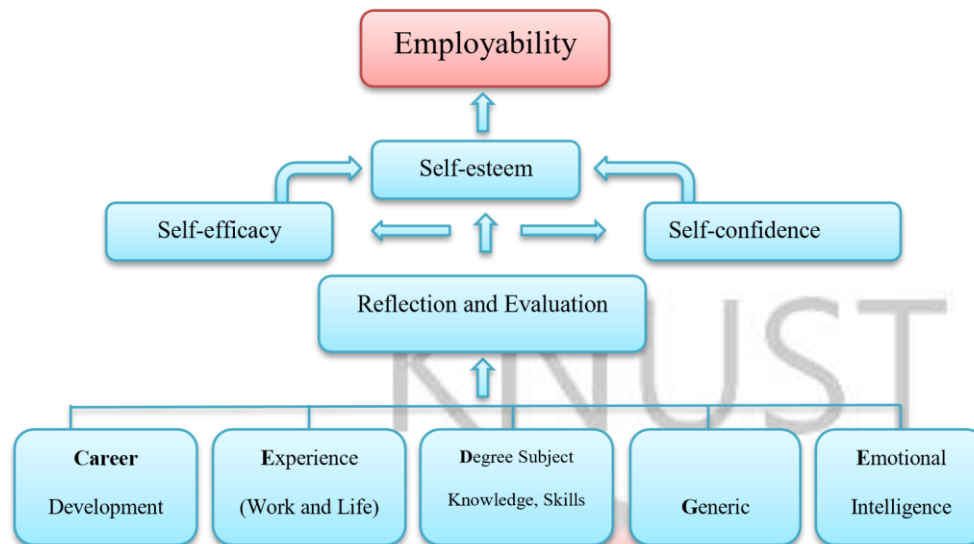
Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2010) added that opportunity awareness is about taking advantage of what necessitates positive conditions and its demands.

- iii) **Transition learning** — focuses on what constitute the realities ahead in life as a person progresses in a livelihood profession. This assists the individual to upgrade his or her skills to meet the challenges in the future.
- iv) **Self-awareness** — comprises of an individual's personal attributes, behavior, notion, beliefs that creates assurance for satisfactory outcome.

Although Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) acknowledge the simplicity of this model, McCash (2006) contends that the DOTS model minimises peculiar matters related to societal, economic and governmental contexts. Meanwhile, Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) admit that the DOTS model has inadequacies, and that, it will not help students to analyse complex issues if they are only prepared for simple conditions. Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) therefore proposed a model popularly known as —Career EDGE, and it is discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

### 2.3.3 Career EDGE model

The current study emphasizes, —The Key to Employability, as described by DacrePool and Sewell (2007). This emphasis was imperative because the model is relevant in addressing the study's research questions. In name, —Career EDGE serves as a convenient mnemonic for five key components at the —lower tier of the model.

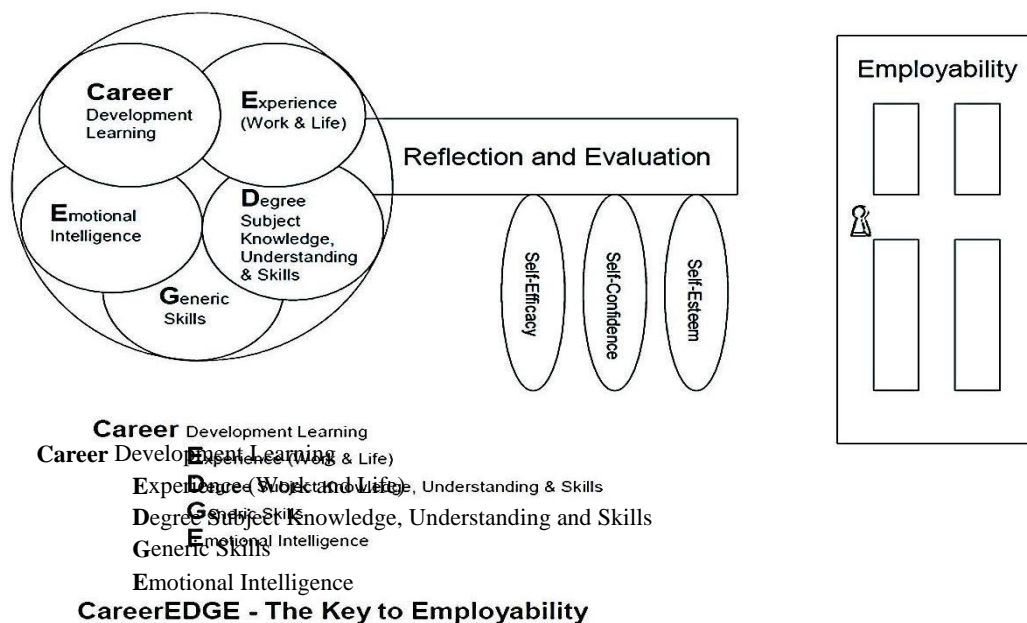


**Figure 2.6: The Career EDGE Model by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007)**

According to Cole and Tibby (2013)

*The CareerEDGE model is valuable in that it can be used to explain the concept of employability to those new to the subject, and to students and their parents as well as appealing to academics. It will therefore be a useful tool for those involved in employability activities and support. It can also be used to develop a way of evaluating employability that can be adapted for use at different stages and with different groups of people. It has been successfully used by many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to support their employability strategy and process (Cole and Tibby, 2013, p. 8).*

Pond and Harrington (2012) also admit the CareerEDGE model creates an influential impression for an individual (2012., p. 17). Pond and Harrington (2012) recognised the usefulness of the CareerEDGE model and used it in their study which concentrated on the means by which various organisations achieve the underlying policies they manage. Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) suggested the model may be useful for educationists as a universal approach to curriculum design for employability.



**Figure 2.7: A Metaphorical Model of Employability: derived by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007)**

Furthermore, they explained that a pragmatic implementation of this concept will not only afford students the opportunities to access and develop key components or perhaps everything on the lower tier, it will also will result in the development of important links to employability such as self-efficacy, self-confidence and selfesteem. According to Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007), the model portrays the image of a —keyll which is considerably useful as a pictorial conceptualisation of the model. This metaphorical image (figure 2.7) of a —keyll alludes to the —keyll to choosing and securing professions in which the graduate has the opportunity to achieve satisfaction and success. To simplify and clarify the purpose of this study, the components of Career EDGE model is explained in details.

### 2.3.3.1 The Career EDGE Components

- i) Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills.



According to Johnes (2006), people generally enroll in Higher Education in order to: acquire comprehensive, in-depth knowledge in a specific discipline, to obtain a degree, get a higher qualification and thus get a good or better job. Also, the fact that the better qualified have far greater employment opportunities remains undisputable (Johnes, 2006). This aforementioned motivator is further underscored by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) when they mentioned in their model that —Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills are essential for employers’ assessment of graduates on how successfully they have completed their degree course. However, it must be placed on record that —Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills alone cannot guarantee a secured, satisfying and successful career (Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007).

## **ii) Generic skills**

The term Generic Skills are variedly referred to as —core skills, —key skills or —transferable skills (Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007, p. 8). It is noteworthy that acquiring key competencies will make a graduate more valuable and can help secure a successful career throughout one’s lifespan. Yorke and Knight (2002), in their report, interpreted generic skills from employers’ perspective as brilliant graduates contribute profitably and productively to the company.

According to Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007), a research spanning twenty-five years, by —The Pedagogy for Employability Group (2004, p.5) reported that employers expect to find the following key competencies in graduates:

*“imagination/creativity; adaptability/flexibility; willingness to learn; independent working/autonomy; working in a team; ability to manage*

*others; ability to work under pressure; good oral communication; communication in writing for varied purposes/audiences; numeracy; attention to detail; time management; assumption of responsibility and for making decisions; planning, coordinating and organising ability; and ability to use new technologies” (Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007, pp. 9 – 10).*

### **iii) Emotional Intelligence**

Dacre-Pool and Sewell, (2007), referring to Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2004, p. 197) defined **‘Emotional intelligence’** as:

—...the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth.¶

As noted by Dacre-Pool and Sewell, people with strong levels of emotional intelligence are self-motivating and are able to motivate others for great achievements. Goleman (1998, p. 7) argues that emotional intelligence can be learnt and therefore must be taught in the higher institutions of learning. However, the researcher is of the view that the development and practice of emotional intelligence should be encouraged at every stage of formal education – from the basic level through to second cycle and the Higher Educational levels.

### **iv) Career Development Learning**

Career development learning needs to be emphasised in Higher Educational Institutions (Watts, 2006). This will help graduates make informed decisions about their careers and present themselves effectively to prospective employers (DacrePool

and Sewell, 2007). There is practically little to be gained and much to be lost in developing employability, if a student cannot identify a market in which to advertise their newly developed employability (Foster, 2006).

#### **v) Experience - Work and Life**

Most contemporary employers are much more interested in graduates who have added the value of work experience to their graduate certificate. Graduates with work experience are more likely to secure employment than graduates without any experience (Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007). Training institutions must therefore give students the needed guidelines on life and work-related experience to stand a higher chance of being employable.

#### **vi) Reflection and Evaluation**

Reflection and evaluation, according to Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007), encourage —Personal Development Planning (PDP) as a highly appropriate vehicle. The DacrePool and Sewell (2007) explanation about PDP implies that, when students are given the favourable chance through acquisition of skills, experiences gained through learning and personal attributes, they are able to reflect and evaluate what pertains in the learning practices. On the other hand, if students are not given these favourable chances, it is doubtful to fully give attention to the extent of how they develop their personal planning concerning employability, and the necessary measures that can help further develop it.

Accordingly, Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) suggest that Personal Development Planning (PDP) is capable of supporting students to:

- Strategise, keep records and replicate their knowledge that has been acquired through involvement of practices over time, such that their confidence and obtainable employability skills are developed.
- Grasp meaning into what manner they can transfer their acquired skills to become useful in different working environment that are new to them.
- Figure out the realities ahead and make appropriate plan that are largely dependent on their level of personal attained knowledge.
- Prove validity of prospective work opportunity plus the capacity to deal successfully with a future specialised career to those individuals who employ them.

#### **vii) Self-efficacy/Self-**

#### **confidence/Self-esteem**

The so called —three S's namely; —self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem are very vital in this component since they connect to —knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and personal attributes and employability (Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007). Bandura (1995) is of the view that, efficacy-beliefs influence people's thinking, feelings, their sense of self-motivation and behavior.

Bandura further identifies a number of appropriate suggestions of efficacy-beliefs to employability as —mastery experiences, vicarious experiences provided by social models and social persuasion.

Extending the definition of self-efficacy as stated above, Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) suggested —self-confidence is how an individual (designer) relies on his or her own abilities that portrays effectiveness and usefulness to the general public.

Self-confidence gives people certainty with —presence (Goleman, 1998, p. 68).



Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) therefore suggested that a person's development in —self-efficacy must practically be replicated in —self-confidence. In summary, this model CareerEDGE by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) simplifies the complex nature of employability issues to both experts and non-experts who are involved in the —employability process.

Despite the complex nature of the processes involved in employability, the above mentioned employability models give a clear concept of employability, and provide necessary information for the study.

Employability models – aside professions – determine for themselves particular skill sets. Service-oriented professions may place greater emphasis on people's skills than, say, professions that are manufacturing or research-oriented. Examining relational activities in a particular profession will offer clues. How are skills weighted, and assessed in a profession like Graphic Design?

#### **2.4. Graphic Design Profession**

Microsoft Encarta (2009) defines a profession as —an occupation that requires extensive education or specialized training. According to the —Professional Standards Councils (PSC), (n.d.), —a profession is a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards. PSC, referring to —Cruess, Sylvia R., Sharon Johnston, and Richard L. Cruess (2004) propose that, a —professional is a —member of a profession and that —professionals are governed by codes of ethics, and profess commitment to competence, integrity and morality, altruism, and the promotion of the public good within their expert domain.

However, Schein (1972) is of the view that, a professional is someone practicing in a full-time job and as such, probably dependent on that occupation for livelihood or lifetime living. A professional is supposed to be well acquainted with the practices of the occupation better than the clients (Cheung, n.d.). Contrariwise, Eraut (1994) opines that professions represent:

—...a group of occupations the boundary of which is ill-defined. While most powerful professions of law and medicine are commonly perceived as the ‘ideal type’, few others (rarely) approach their degree of influence. Publicsector professions with significantly less power, such as teachers and nurses, were described by Etzioni (1969) as ‘semi-professionals’; but this simply added one further ill-defined category.¶ (Eraut, 1994, p. 1)

Yeoh (2002), inspired by the American Institute of Graphic Arts, is of the view that the graphic design profession is built on the planning as well as the execution of visual communication contextually in a way that satisfies its intended audiences or clients. Davis (2005), in tracing the evolution of the graphic design profession, relates that:

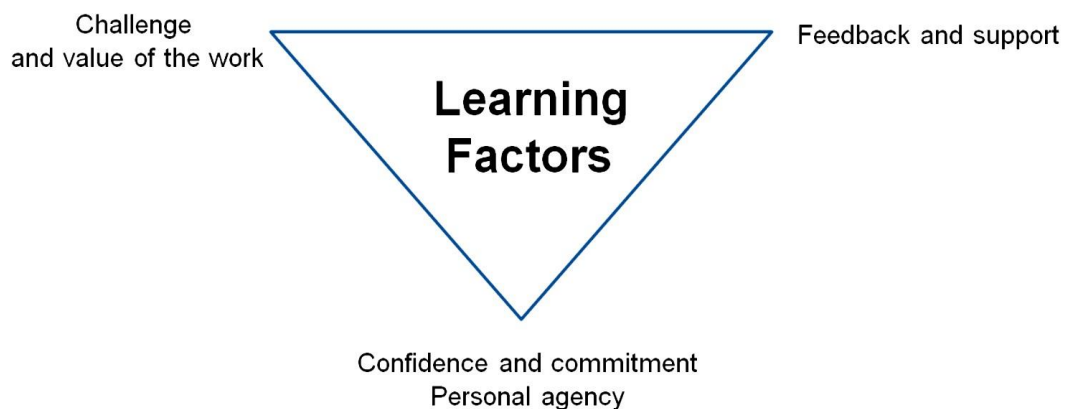
—graphic design arose from the —trades¶ of printing and typesetting, and, until recently, its practitioners were educated in working apprenticeship or vocational programs focused almost entirely on the technical and formal issues necessary to bringing image and text to print. Encouraged by the information age and the growth of the knowledge economy, however, the field has developed new aspects and behaviors that more fully express its more recent status as a profession.¶

According to the American Institute of Graphic Arts (Standards & Directory, 2015), a professional designer is one who —adheres to principles of integrity that demonstrate respect for the profession, for colleagues, for clients, for audiences or consumers, and for society as a whole. This compels every practicing and teaching designer to enrol in a professional body to adequately add value to the profession. The expected ethics of a professional designer as proposed by the AIGA are: —i) the designer's responsibility to clients; ii) the designer's responsibility to other designers; iii) fees; iv) publicity; v) authorship; vi) the designer's responsibility to the public; and vii) the designer's responsibility to society and the natural environment (Standards & Directory, 2015).

#### **2.4.1 Transitional Period for Graphic Design Graduate into Professional Practice of Design.**

The study sees the transitional period as the interval between the time graduate students experience a change and pass from school to the industry or advance their studies. Eraut (2007) explains that the major challenge at this transitional period from educational training to the industry consist of —different types of discourse and epistemologies. Boshuizen (2003) acknowledged that graduates experience a —gap and mismatch within the transitional period. He further mentioned that the —gap and mismatch arise when graduates are not adequately prepared to meet an unfamiliar working situation in the industry. Cheung, (n.d.) added that this mismatch may be due to the fact that employers see graduates as experts, and as such, do not need any training.

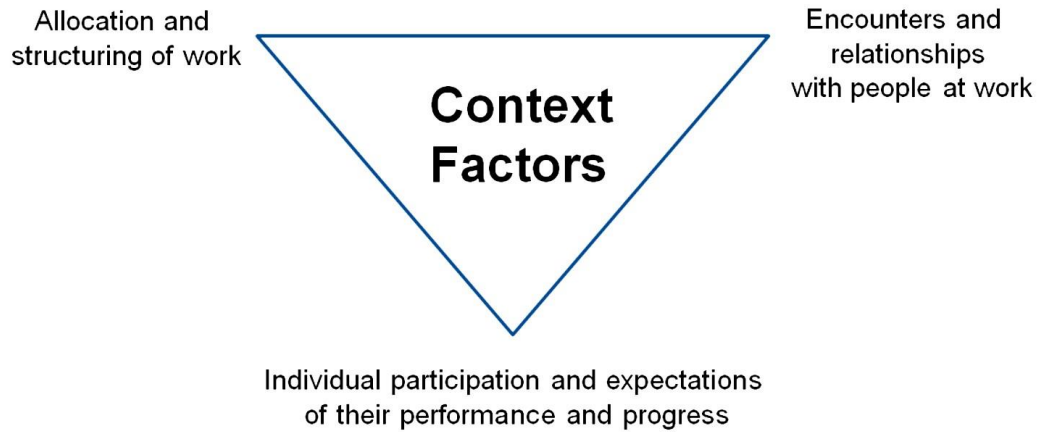
However, Eraut (2007) and colleagues reported on a research project conducted in 2005. The research project outcome suggested that, —three learning factors‖ at workplace influence the graduates‘ —learning process‖, within the first three working years. These factors are: **Challenge**, 2) **Support**, and 3) **Confidence**. Figure 2.8 shows the learning factors at workplace suggested by Eraut (2007).



**Figure 2.8: Learning Factors (Eraut et al., 2005)**

Eraut (2007) further asserts that —confidence‖ in particular occurs when a person is able to respond adequately to the —challenges‖ at their workplace, whereas the exercise of that confidence to meet those challenges relies on the amount of —support‖ they felt has been provided in that effort. Eraut (2007) added that —feedback‖ greatly influences an individual's performance and that the individual's —commitment‖ to the challenge towards the —value of the work‖ is also driven by coworkers‘ appreciativeness.





**Figure 2.9: Context Factors (Eraut et al., 2005)**

At a later time, Eraut (2007) emulated the —first triangle‗ to a —second triangle‗ which focuses on the —contextual factors‗ that influence the —learning factors‗. The second triangle shows the —allocation and structuring of people’s work, their relationships at work and their level of participation in workplace activities‗ (Eraut, 2007).

Based on the understanding of the —context factor‗ propounded by Eraut, further study revealed that to make good progress as —novice professionals‗ (young designers), the quality of work must be adequately new such that the —confidence‗ level of these young designers are not minimised. The capacity of work needed to deal positively with new —challenges‗, must work in conjunction with colleagues to build a working relationship for —feedback and support‗. According to Eraut, feedback is necessary for the self-assessment of the performance of the —novice professionals‗ which encourages their —commitment‗ to the industry.

On the other hand, the challenges emerging out of employability might not come from the failure in setting out curriculum outcomes in design education, but rather, from challenges in the transitional stage of the graduate as they enter a new working environment. Kowaltowski et al. (2010), therefore pointed out that global competition and its modern trends require additional training for the designer toward a high sense of professionalism. The next section examines the professional training of graphic designers in relation to other professionals.

#### **2.4.2 Additional Professional Training of Graphic Designers.**

Davis (2005, p. 67) stated that graphic design has been stimulated by the —Information Age and the improvement in the —Knowledge Economy has raised —new aspects and behaviours that more fully express its more recent status as a profession. A contrary explanation by McCoy (1997) is that, the public does not identify graphic designers as professionals. Despite these criticisms, the designers' professional standards compared with that of architects or medical personnel, may be inferred —as a structure of 'major' to 'minor' professions (Swindells, Atkinson, and Sibley, 2001, p. 130). The implication about graphic designers not being recognised as —professionals is that, graphic design education curriculum outcomes do not adequately train its students toward being professionals (McCoy, 1997). Accordingly, Heller (2005) stated that, there is a dilemma for design school as to whether graduates are too many or there are few who are competent to be professionals. However, it is also likely that the criticisms about graphic designers not being recognised as professionals are *not* extensively a failure in the education curriculum outcome, but that, modern trends and globalisation call for additional skill training with a high sense of design professionalism (Kowaltowski et al., 2010).

Even though there is either compulsory or voluntary industrial attachment as part of the Ghanaian graphic design programmes for design students, it appears there is no professional body that offers additional professional examination or recognised formal training programme for graphic design graduates after they acquire their first degree. This kind of training or examination is to efficiently prepare graduates to have the qualities of a —professional designer‡. In Ghana, other professionals such as architects, lawyers, accountants, doctors and pharmacists go through additional professional training after their first degree. The above mentioned professionals go through a professional training to help develop their graduates to be adequately prepared for their future career. Architectural graduates get additional two-year professional practical training and take up a professional qualification examination. Again, Law graduates have to enrol in a one- and-a-half year law school training programme after four years of university education, write a professional qualification examination before they are called to the bar to practice as lawyers (—Ghana Bar Association,‡ 2013). Similarly, after completing a four-year degree programme at an accredited pharmacy institution, pharmacy graduates go through a twelve-month internship programme, then write professional examination, after which successful candidates are inducted, and then practice as pharmacists (Registration & Guidelines, 2015). Likewise, after three years of preclinical training, students of Human Biology undergo three years of additional practical training, supervised by a qualified Doctor, and then take a professional qualification examination which certifies them to practice their profession. An argument put forth by some people is that —professionals such as architect[s], doctors and pharmacist[s] have to routinely deal with —life and death‡ and safety issues of their clients, so by comparison, graphic

designers have lighter responsibilities (Cheung, n.d. p. 4). According to Cheung, ( n.d. p. 4) it is important to note however, that several scholars of design including Heller and Fink, (1996), Heskett (2005) and Frascara (2006) have stated that graphic designers have made a massive impact on the world's economy, institutions and on civilisation. This viewpoint is in direct contrast to the above issue concerning graphic designers not being recognised as professionals; by implication many people gratuitously demean the value of graphic designers in an organisation or in a community. If this perception continues, graphic designers will remain in the lower rungs of the social status; consequently, the graphic design profession would eventually require no professional training, and continue to revel in being —exotic menials, an expression first used by the renowned American designer George Nelson to describe designers (Heskett, 2009, p. 71). On the other hand, Heskett (2009), referring to Simon (1981), asserts that, —design was not restricted to making material artefacts, but was a fundamental professional competence extending to policy-making and practices of many kinds and on many levels (p. 71).

It is clear from the discussion that the public expects a high sense of professionalism from graphic designers. This necessitates the training of Graphic Design students to become professionals who would make meaningful and acceptable contribution to the society. The next section therefore looks at the Graphic Design education and its anticipated learning outcomes for design graduates.

## **2.5 Graphic Design Education**

The Bauhaus design school in Germany crafted a graphic design education in 1919, which was known to be the earliest establishment for graphic design practices



(Drucker and McVarish, 2009). Bauhaus contributed significantly to the growth of modern design education (Swanson, 1994), making graphic design around the world, a modern design profession (Davis, 2005; McCoy, 1997). According to Ho (2010), efforts by design education to improve teaching and learning processes by setting out learning outcomes have come through its curricula. This requires that students go through professional practices, through design education to acquire design skills that practically meet employability demands. Ellmers (2006, p. 1) pointed out that, insufficient research in Graphic Design education minimises learning opportunities, precisely in the area of practical assessment and self-reflection that calls for improving learning outcomes. Souleles (2012) affirms that self-reflective appraisal encourages students to sense critical meanings in the processes involved in design, under a context that reflects in the final outcome in their design works. Through the teaching process, this appraisal gives students the confidence to make a significant contribution to design process without depending much on others (Ellmers, 2006, p. 7). Therefore, each component in the teaching process makes students work-ready for the industry (Ho, 2010).

In Ghana, various institutions including universities and polytechnics that offer undergraduate, postgraduate programmes in Design, emphasise different aspects of graphic design. Ghana boasts of two main groups of design university institutions: government universities and private universities. Government universities in Ghana that offer degree programmes in graphic design are Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and University Of Education, Winneba (UEW). The private universities include Radford University College and St. Margaret's College.

A Graphic design graduate in Ghana must have completed a four-year degree programme in an accredited public or private university, or a three-year HND programme at a polytechnic. At the end of the four-year training a university graphic design graduate is awarded a Bachelor of Art (B.A) certificate. Graduates can practice as designers after going through such training. Other accredited institutions, aside from those cited above, that offer Graphic Design programmes include: Christ Apostolic University College, Ho Polytechnic, Tamale Polytechnic and Takoradi Polytechnic. The graphic design curriculum in these recognised institutions focuses, *inter alia*, on preparing students for the industry or for advanced studies.

### **2.5.1 Learning outcomes for Design Graduates**

At the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), the curriculum for the Department of Communication Design (DECODE) places much emphasis on —conceptual, technical and collaborative skills. DECODE believes that these fundamental skills support a —student’s ability to tell an interesting and meaningful story about a service or product.

DECODE envisages that design graduates would exhibit the following abilities:

1. Produce a body of work suitable for seeking professional opportunities in their chosen field of art and design.
2. Solve creative problems within their field of art and design, including research and synthesis of technical, aesthetic, and conceptual knowledge.

3. Communicate their ideas professionally, and connect with their intended audience using visual, oral, and written presentation skills relevant to their field.
4. Execute technical, aesthetic, and conceptual decisions based on an understanding of art and design principles.
5. Evaluate work in their field, including their own work, using professional terminology.
6. Recognize the influence of major cultural and aesthetic trends, both historical and contemporary, on art and design products.

The above statements give a picture of the abilities of a design graduate after school.

However, these learning outcomes by DECODE do not fully touch on

multidisciplinary capabilities and issues to do with —technological feasibility, economic viability, and environmental and human resource sustainability, variances in people's preferences, cultural behaviours and experiences| which according to AIGA, makes design complex. The researcher is of the view that, once these factors affect the graduate designer, these multidisciplinary areas should be integrated into the taught courses to help students meet the demands of industry, as well as resourcefully prepare those students who might further their career in academia.

Upon completion, graduates from the Department of Communication Design are expected to meet the following student performance criteria in Table 2. 2:

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ <b>Design Skills</b> ○ Effectively use visual media, including freehand drawing, to convey ideas and concepts throughout the creative process. ○ Apply basic design principles to creative work.</li></ul> |
|--|

<p>□ <b>Communication Skills</b> ○ Create engaging narratives that demonstrate an understanding of the elements of storytelling: idea, structure, conflict, character, and imagery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Clearly and confidently present ideas in both formal and informal group settings.</li> <li>○ Coherently explain complex ideas in short-form, simplified writing.</li> </ul>
<p>□ <b>Problem Solving</b> ○ Apply strategic elements focused on the target customer, the product/ service, and the market.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Gather, assess, and apply relevant information, including historical research, as part of the conceptual and design process.</li> </ul>
<p>□ <b>Conceptual Thinking</b> ○ Communicate relevant objectives through the use of appropriate aesthetic choices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Think conceptually and execute projects beyond traditional advertising media.</li> <li>○ Generate original ideas. ○ Develop ideas that can be articulated within project parameters.</li> </ul>
<p>□ <b>Professional Readiness</b> ○ Present an original portfolio to acquire a job within the industry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Articulate career goals and plan to achieve them.</li> <li>○ Submit work according to professional presentation standards. ○ Collaborate with other members of a creative team.</li> </ul>

**Table 2.2: Design training outcome for graduates by DECODE (Adopted from KNUST website, under the Department of Communication Design).**

According to DECODE, a graduate with these —professional skills and behaviours will have competitive advantage in the —global marketplace for art and design.

Appiah (2014) believes that —the outcomes of design profession have changed and are seen as commodities as well as businesses to create products (p. 22). He further explains that, the fast changes in the profession at the moment require designers to create new avenues to meet the challenges that have emerged. Kowaltowski et al.(2010) state that;



*Recent job market trends and the globalisation of the design profession call for educational enhancement. Higher design quality from design professionals is expected as well. The contemporary world, with its dynamic production of knowledge and speed in technological advances, as well as obsolescence, demands professionals capable of keeping up with this pace. The new order also implies that design students need a deeper understanding of background knowledge and need to acquire new abilities and attitudes towards design, with an increased demand on creativity. Producing designs that are fresh and new to the problem domain are expected of our students and of design professionals as a whole (Kowaltowski et al., 2010).*

In addition, solutions to these emergent challenges require multidisciplinary teams, in such a way that will answer to the need for simplicity and authenticity (Grefé, 2011). Moreover, Yeoh (2002) mentioned that having a mastery using computing medium does not necessarily solve recent challenges facing graphic designers, rather, giving —meaning and "life" to the design process and creativity is one valuable way to do so. It is clear from the discussion that students will go through some fundamental training from school. However, the ever-changing nature of the profession and recent trends in graphic design industry require practical experience from graduates for them to function effectively in the design industry.

## **2.6 Graphic Design Industry**

The traditional practice of graphic design involved creating —artefacts, objects, spaces, and messages where the concern is often function, formal qualities of things, the emotional connections that people make with objects, and a problem-solving approach within conventional formats such as book design or logo design (Coulter, 2014). In more recent times, there is —interaction design where —tools, games and

simulations and the issues of performance are a major concern (Coulter, 2014). Interaction design uses design skills to influence people's behaviour and to transfer information —through a set of tools and systems that assist designers in the industry to manage and —provide affordances for certain behaviours such as people experiences (Coulter, 2014).

The Graphic design industry includes printing plants, advertising outfits, paper manufacturing mills and equipment and chemical manufacturing factories (Kondoh, 2007). Specialised units within a design company may include: a creative unit, production unit, advertising unit, web interactive unit, media engagement unit, marketing and branding units, account and finance units, management/client service unit, and an administrative and human resource unit. The work categories involve corporate branding, print advertisements, web design, and advertising services. Recent trends and challenges in graphic design are discussed in section 2.7.

The design industry is characterised by many factors. Table 2.3 summarises the needs of today's workplace and is based on the work of Harvey (1999).

**Table 2.3: Characteristics of today's workplace, adopted from Harvey (1999)**

<b>Characteristics of today's workplace</b>	
<b>Workplace challenges</b>	Understanding that the world of work is unpredictable, and requires a wide range of skills for an individual to function effectively.
<b>Teamwork</b>	Group and interpersonal skills are essential when dealing with the collaboration required in multi-skilled, culturally diverse team situations.
<b>Changing nature of work</b>	Today's workplace requires employees to be multi-skilled; perform their own administrative tasks; and be aware of modern technological changes associated with their profession.

<b>Job (in)security</b>	Employees no longer expect to stay in one job for an extended time. Careers can be built across a range of diverse employment positions.
<b>Broader expertise</b>	The workplace involves the demonstration and application of professional skills, which go beyond the normal university requirements for written assessment and exams.
<b>Transferability of skills</b>	The more environments in which students exercise their professional skills, the more able they are to transfer learning from one learning context to another.
<b>Interactive attributes</b>	Communication, Teamwork, Interpersonal skills.
<b>Personal attributes</b>	Intellect, disciplinary knowledge., willingness and ability to continue learning, ability to find things out, willingness to take risks and show initiative, flexibility and adaptability, ability to pre-empt and ultimately lead change.
<b>Self-skills</b>	Self-motivation, self-confidence, self-management, selfpromotion.

The description by Harvey (1999) of the characteristics of today's workplace gives an idea to academia, graduates and employers about what to expect in the industry, thence, to recognise the value of well-developed employable skills for early and successive career advancement. All the people (employers of design firms, design students and the contemporary professional design practice) involved in the process of employability must therefore take the opportunity to manage these outcomes that confront today's industry. The next paragraph discusses the recent trends and challenges in the design industry.

## 2.7 Graphic Design Trends and Challenges

In tracing the evolution of the Graphic Design industry, Professor Meredith Davis, during an AIGA presentation (in Boston, which took place on April 4, 2008), explains that:

*In the middle of the twentieth century, students entered the field through technical support. Under an apprenticeship model, they earned the right to create form only after serving time in the mechanical production of*

*more experienced designers" ideas. Designers who were successful across a lifetime of form-making occasionally gained access to strategic projects at the highest levels of business. Their preparation for such work was gained on the job. In the later decades of the twentieth century, technology collapsed the preparation of art for print under expert software. Networked communication demanded new skills in building and managing systems that have less to do with inventive form than with understanding users and technology. The strategic role for design expanded and demanded more expertise than could be gained from running a design office.*

According to the website of America Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA 2014

Centennial Celebration at AIGA Raleigh), Coulter (2014) in an interview with Professor Meredith Davis reported that design industry is expanding into a different new dimension and that, the recent trend that has emerged is —*design for conversation*”. The interview report continues to explain that, in the context of —*design for conversation*”, designers make use of opportunities for others to function in the society. This means that designers need to possess a different set of competencies aside from the traditional practices of craftiness. In contrast, the basic elements and principles of design are not neglected. Furthermore, the report specifies that the current trends which include —issues of technological feasibility, economic viability, and environmental and human resource sustainability make design complex.

Despite these challenges, there has been an attempt to appropriately equip designers in a wide-ranging context to meet the emerging trend issues (—AIGA - Designer of 2015 competencies, n.d.).



The America Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) has come up with six major trends in design with the theme —Designer of 2015 trends. These trends are as follows:

**i. Wide and deep: meta-disciplinary study and practice**

Lantz (2009) defined meta-discipline as, the —creation of a discipline based on the integration of other disciplinary knowledge into a new ‘whole’. The field of design practice and its scope of study is deeply evolving (Littlejohn and Davis, 2010). Consequently, for the designer who wishes to remain competitive, relevant and profitable in the market place of ideas and products, he or she must tap into a multi- or interdisciplinary pool of experience and knowledge; designers must have broader knowledge in varied disciplines like science, economics, mathematics, social science and others. This is especially important because professional associations raise design awareness to draw in business, government and other design stakeholders, thus reaffirming the fact that design plays a key role in a cooperative novelty and can solve societal problems (Littlejohn and Davis, 2010). Despite the fact that the —creative act is a key factor that identifies design’s professional identity (Wang and Ilhan, 2009), cooperative technologies involve the public in conventional activities of the design field (Littlejohn and Davis, 2010). The public involvement necessitates, —what is designed, how it is designed and who designs it, therefore, calling for designers to closely interact with their environment (Sanders and Stappers, 2008).

AIGA Designer of 2015 trends further explain that, how designers interact with the people, necessitate the need to accept the emerging challenges by teaming up with other related disciplinary fields.

## **ii. Expanded scope: scale and complexity of design problems**

According to AIGA Designer of 2015 trends, —design problems are nested within increasingly complex social, technological and economic systems and address people who vary in their cognitive, physical and cultural behaviours and experiences. As design professionals promote design to the society, it amplifies the societal need for design and gives more complex role to designers (Littlejohn and Davis, 2010). As a result, design must make a meaningful contribution to other disciplines. The issue of complexity in design has caused a shift from concentrating on single artefacts to the systems in which design functions (Littlejohn and Davis, 2010). —As designers move from designing discrete objects to designing experiences, strategies, systems, and services, the complexity of relationships expand to which designers must attend (Davis, 2008). Having considered these challenges, it proves that the role of designers currently transcends the hitherto traditional narrow-minded view and has become somewhat complex.

It is important to note however, that societal changes affected by global economy, in a period of digital revolution, proliferation of information and interactive technologies, reinforce changes in the field of design (Redström, 2005). Given the complex challenges in field of design, it is quite predictable that designers must expand their scope to successfully meet all these challenges.

## **iii. Targeted messages: a narrow definition of audiences**

AIGA —Designer of 2015 trends explains that, —messaging will shift from mass communication to more narrow definitions of audiences (special-interest design),

requiring designers to understand both differences and likenesses in audiences and the growing need for reconciliation of tension between globalization and cultural identity.

In this manner, differences in people's preference for design, which is influenced by their self-traits, their surroundings plus cultural perceptions, oblige designers to finetune their way of interacting with their audiences. In this case, audiences turn out to be the recipient of communication and as such, the designer must know audiences from different viewpoints and use the appropriate method to communicate effectively (AIGA - —Designer of 2015 trends).

#### **iv. Break through: an attention economy**

Under this section, AIGA (n. d) on the —Designer of 2015 trends mention that,

*Attention is the scarce resource in the information age, and the attention economy involves communication design, information design, experience design and service design. The trend toward an “attention economy” encourages discussion of what is currently driving clients’ conception of form, the attraction of business to design and the problems of designing for a market that values the short term “grab” (AIGA “Designer of 2015 trends”).*

The sentiment expressed in the quotation above, embodies the view that designers must add value to their services, since customers choose what is valuable for them and not what designers perceive to be good-looking. Davis (2005) explained that the growth of the knowledge economy requires designers to develop new ways to fully define its current position as a professional group. Undoubtedly, this means that design competes against thousands of other demanding interests to gain the

attention of potential customers. This calls for the right set of competencies to break through to an economy's pinnacle.

**v. Sharing experiences: a co-creation model**

This section by AIGA - —Designer of 2015 trends|| holds the view that, designers should be concerned with the —rise in transparency of personal and professional lives|| through public interactions that focus on building frameworks for people's need, demand and setting boundaries for the end user of design products or services.

**vi. Responsible outcomes: focusing on sustainability**

AIGA - —Designer of 2015 trends|| describes that, focusing on sustainability outcomes require designers to use design skills to overcome political and business forces by providing meaningful solutions to the society (AIGA) (n. d). This requires coming up with policies that define the needs of the community using design skills to give valuable involvement.

Moreover, support of the above-mentioned position, can be found in Davis (2008) as he gave ample evidence about a few trends in design which are:

*i) Increasing complexity in the scale of design challenges, ii) Thinking about the people for whom we design as participants in the design process, iii) Emergent and remix technologies; designing social interaction, iv) The importance of understanding community, v) The demand for new knowledge base that supports new practices (Davis (2008) .*

Furthermore, —global competition, constant training and equipment updating, multichannel marketing demands speed and flexibility, keeping up with changes in



consumer preferences (—Opportunities and Challenges for Graphic Designers, 2011) are among the contemporary trends that offer challenges to design education and to the industry.

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for the design profession. Such opportunities include —expanded roles and changing expectations, mass customisation and personalisation, new business models for design firms, integrated, cross-media marketing (—Opportunities and Challenges for Graphic Designers, 2011). Moreover, Davis (2008) proposes a ‘new’ way of teaching design so as to adequately prepare students for contemporary practices. This proposal, according to Davis (2008), implies that

- the best training for students is through involvement in practices over time from uncomplicated to complicated learning processes.
- the learning process must give equal opportunities to each student to practice within equivalent setting.
- the student’s learning outcome must be the topmost concern.
- the computer gives broader sense of expression to design customary tools like brush, pencil, and materials like inks, images, textures and fonts.
- the fundamental values of what constitute —good design should be applicable to everyone at any given place in the world.
- Educational training institutions must follow the rules and principles of design in taught course in art that properly shape design outcomes.

These trends and challenges affect processes in design. They additionally, inform all those involved in the employability process (academia, graduates and industry) to strategically put in proper measures to create opportunities for themselves and for society.

In conclusion, this chapter set out to examine the related literature about the processes involved in employability, the current practices of the design industry and the modern trends and challenges that have brought complexities into the design process. Academia, graduates and employers are all involved in the employability process. The chapter also interrogates literature aimed at finding competencies from the skills, attitudes and knowledge plus the contextual pressures needed to meet the current demands placed on Ghanaian graphic design graduates.

For some time now, creative directors, studio managers and owners of design establishments have expressed concerns that, the entry-level skills of graphic design graduates from the universities, do not adequately meet the challenges in the design industry. For this reason, there is an emerging competency gap between academia and the expectations of design industry. Some of the significant issues that might have contributed to the inadequacies of graduates include challenges in the transitional period of graduates into the industry, and the rapid changes in globalisation that has amplified the industry's mandate to meet societal needs.

Above all, the compelling nature of competency (skills, knowledge, attitudes, motives, traits, contextual pressures) enhances employability. Lessons gotten from the study's literature has provided clear, simple and practical demonstration of the complexities in employability for academia, graduates and the industry.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter looks at the strategies adopted for answering the research questions:

- i. What are the entry-level competencies needed by graduate graphic designers that are demanded by the employers in contemporary graphic design practice?
- ii. What are the experiences graphic design graduates go through with employers in design firms?
- iii. What competencies should education provide for students to meet challenges the in professional practice of design?
- iv. How can entry-level graduate designers be competent to overcome the challenges in contemporary design practice?

To adequately answer the main research question, the research scope covered the collection of information on graphic design employers' expectations. The sub research question two (2) focused on the collection of information on graphic design graduates' experiences. The research question three (3) provided general information on some areas where university design educators need to arm students with competencies. The fourth research question concentrated on the issues students and graduates must understand to make them competent for contemporary design practice.

This chapter also outlines the research philosophy, research design, research method, population, data collection, and ethical considerations that this researcher employed in the study.

### 3.1 Research Philosophy

Saunders et al. (2012) explains research philosophy as

*“...how a researcher views the world, her or his taken-for granted assumptions about human knowledge and about nature of the realities encountered, inevitably shape how a research question is understood and the associated research design. The main influence on this, a researcher's philosophy, is her or his personal view of what constitutes acceptable knowledge and the process by which this is developed”.*

Ontologically, the study centered on interpretivistic direction. The philosophical assumption that guided this study arose from an epistemological positioning based upon the interpretivism research paradigm. Epistemology, according to Hirschheim (1992), refers to the belief about knowledge and how that knowledge can be acquired. Epistemologically, this study depended on a qualitative research approach to inquire into meanings subject to a participant's view, belief, experience, therefore subjectivism. According to Gephart (1999), subjective meaning is much concerned with interpretivism. Interpretivist researchers use interviews, observation and document analysis as a common method in their studies (Gephart, 1999). The next section of this study which is ‘research design’ further includes the interpretivist philosophical view as the basis for its data collection.



### 3.2 Research Design

Research design, according to Burns and Grove (2010), is —a blueprint for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings|. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) confirmed that research design is the overall plan for gathering data so as to answer the research question. Saunders et al. (2012) stated that, how a researcher views the world, the assumptions the researcher gives to human knowledge and about nature of the realities encountered, certainly shape how a research question is understood and the associated research design.

This study explores the skills, attitudes and knowledge plus the contextual pressures that entry-level graphic design graduates must possess to meet the demands of the design industry by employers. The study, as previously mentioned, arises from the epistemological positioning of the interpretivism research paradigm. Epistemologically, this study relies on a qualitative research approach to assess participants' views, beliefs, and experiences. The study is therefore subjective in its outlook. According to Gephart (1999), subjectivism is the understanding given to the social reality of individual's behaviour, thoughts, experiences and action, and as such interpreting their meanings with context. This approach helps to understand the phenomena being investigated through employers' expectations of entry-level graphic design graduates. From the constructivist standpoint, reality and meaning does not exist from external domain, rather, are formed by the subject of the individuals through interactions with the domain ( Gray, 2004). Accordingly, meanings are constructed differently from individuals' own understanding of a subject concerning the same phenomena (Gray, 2004, p. 17), therefore, data collection was constructed through participant's responses and activity, and hence the

approach is constructivist. Interviews and observation were used as primary methods for data collection. Qualitatively, the data collection was sourced from the views of participants; as a result, the analysis was done inductively, through interpretation. It is worthy to note that interpretive research sets no predetermined variables, but focuses on the totality of the multifaceted nature of human beliefs, experiences in certain circumstances (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994).

### **3.4 Research Methodology**

Methodology, according to Schwandt (2007, p.193), is —a theory of how inquiry should proceed’ embracing philosophy, assumptions about validity, and sometimes preferred methods. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001, p.647) research methodology is the \_methods, techniques, and procedures that are employed in implementing the research design or research plan, as well as the underlying principles and assumptions that underlie their use.

The study seeks to explore the skills, attitudes and knowledge plus the contextual pressures needed to meet the demand placed on entry-level Ghanaian graphic design graduates by employers. Therefore, a critical look at employers’ expectations, beliefs and employees’ experiences are important to the study. As a result, the exploration method for the study relied on a qualitative approach, thus accounting for its interpretive nature. The researcher considered that this approach would give room for in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and all its complexities. Gray (2004) purports that, phenomenology in its attempt to understand social reality, has to be grounded in people’s experiences of that social reality, which is the main focus of this study. Finlay (2009) avers it requires research methods —that are responsive to both

the phenomenon and the subjective interconnection between the researcher and the researched (p. 7). According to Creswell (2007) data are collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon.

### 3.4.1 Qualitative Inquiry

According to Henning et al. (2004, p 3), —qualitative studies aim for depth rather than quantity of understanding. Nieuwenhuis (2007a, p 51), further asserts that qualitative research is about the understanding of the procedures in which various behavioural patterns are caused by —social and cultural contexts and as such, focuses on —describing and understanding phenomena within their natural occurring context. Qualitative research basically falls within the constructivist paradigm, and is related to data —gathering, analysis, interpretation and presentation of narrative information (Teddle and Tashakkori, 2009).

According to Myers (1997),

*“Qualitative research involves the use of qualitative data, such as interviews, documents, and participant observation data, to understand and explain social phenomena. Qualitative researchers can be found in many disciplines and fields, using a variety of approaches, methods and techniques” (Myers, 1997).*

This study investigates what creative directors, studio managers and owners of design establishments expect from graphic design graduates entering the design industry.

### 3.5 Research Method

Given (2008) defines research method as —the ways in which qualitative researchers collect data to build their argument. Friedman (2014) also explains that research method involves how to conduct research, how to measure progress, and what

constitutes success. A qualitative research method is concerned with —the social, cultural, and physical contexts within which individuals live, work, and interactl (Given, 2008, p. 521)

The study relied upon qualitative research methodology to collect data. Interviews and participant observation were the primary methods for collection of data for this study. Literature collected for the study provided secondary information. The reason for using a qualitative approach was to avoid biases by interviewing participants and adopting participant observation. One-on-one interviews and participant observation were used as the primary method for data collection to understand the on-going situation by getting physical evidence and to provide direct detailed information (Taylor-Powell and Steele, 1996) on employers' expectations and individual design graduates' experiences with employers at the workplace.

### **3.5.1 Interviews**

Gray (2004) explains that in qualitative research, —an interview is a conversation between people in which one person has the role of researcherl. Robson (2002) adds that, interviewing is a research method that makes inquiries from respondents, usually by the researcher, with the hope of getting answers in the course of the interview. Interviews are geared towards understanding the meaning derived from what the interviewees say (Kvale, 1996). Accordingly, interviewing in qualitative inquiry provided a method for collecting rich and detailed information about how individuals experience, understand and explain events in their lives for the study. According to Creswell (2007), respondents in an interview will not necessarily answer the question being asked by the researcher; therefore, the researcher must construct questions in



such a manner to keep participants in line with their responses to the questions. For that reason, a semi-structured interview protocol is used to conduct a successful interview.

### **3.5.1.1 The Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol used as research instrument for collecting data, consisted of a list of semi-structured questions. Gray (2004) described that,

*“The use of semi-structured interviews also allows the researcher to „probe“ for more detailed responses where the respondent is asked to clarify what they have said...this phenomenological approach, then, is concerned with the „meanings“ that people ascribe to phenomena” ( p. 214) .*

Accordingly, the interview protocol for this study was grouped into sections relating to employers‘ expectations and graduates‘ experiences with their employers. The interview protocol made all participants answer the same set of questions to ensure the validity of the study. The questions were thirteen (13) in number (see Appendix B for employers‘ and Appendix C for employees‘ questionnaires respectively). All interviews were tape-recorded for later transcription.

### **3.5.2 Participant Observation**

Participant observation is appropriate —to describe what goes on, who or what is involved, when and where things happen, how they occur, and why—at least from the standpoint of participants—things happen as they do in particular situations| (Danny and Jorgensen, 2014, p. 3). Gravetter and Forzano (2009, p. 147) add that qualitative

research involves cautious observation of participants usually in an interaction form, often with note-taking.

The observational guide for the data collection for this study was adopted from Taylor-Powell and Steele (1996) as cited in Cloutier et al., (1987, section III, p. 50). In their study, Taylor-Powell and Steele grouped components of observation into; 1) characteristics of participants, 2) interactions, 3) nonverbal behaviour, 4) programme leader and 5) physical surroundings. This method was primarily done with the graphic designers to understand the experiences design graduates go through at the workplace and to look critically at some of the issues employers usually complain about.

### **3.5.3 The Choice of Interviewees:**

Nieuwenhuis (2007) explains that in choosing interviewees successfully, much depends on selecting the right participants who can provide the required information suitable to answer the research questions. The study relied on two categories of informants for data collection:

- i. Employers - Design firm owners, creative directors and studio managers
- ii. Employees - Ghanaian graphic design graduates who degree holders, in the first five years of working in a particular design firm.

The study area covers ten (10) graphic design firms in Kumasi. In this study, the selected design firms were those whose activities cover a broad aspect of graphic design work (including a printing press, digital printing, interactive design, advertising, branding, and signage). This helped inform the reader about the diversified nature of the contemporary design firm.

Some of the selected graduate graphic designers worked in a design consultancy firm with general graphic design services. Other graduate graphic designers worked with design firms that specialised in brand design. Some graduate designers were involved in outdoor media placement with advertising and graphic design team. Meanwhile, one graduate graphic designer also worked with graphic design firm that majored in graphic design, embroidery and T-shirt printing. Some participants were from a printing and production company. The other participants worked with a company that produced digital printing, photography and web design. The choice of participants was appropriate because their activities covered a broad range of graphic design services.

### **3.6 Population**

Population is the totality of entities, components, parts or elements from which information or data can be gathered (Parahoo, 1997): for example, characters, objects, occasions or establishments. Burns and Grove (2010) added that population comprises the all-inclusive element that meet the criteria in a study, where a criterion is —a list of characteristics that are required for the membership in the target population. The population for this study contained graphic design graduates at some industries in Ghana.

#### **3.6.1 Population sampling**

Polit et al (2001, p. 234) define a sample as —a proportion of a population. Once more, sampling involves the procedure used in picking out a number of individuals (a sample) from the population, if possible in such a way that the individuals are representative of the larger group from which they were selected (Fraenkel and

Wallen, 2003, p.671). In this context, some graphic design graduates and employers within the professional design practice in Kumasi constituted the population sample for this study.

### **3.6.2 Sampling size**

The quality of the study is not determined by the sample size (Holloway and Wheeler, 2002) and in qualitative research, there are no compulsory rules in determining the sample size. However, sampling continues until there is a saturation point, particularly where the same information keeps on repeating itself (Holloway, 1997). Creswell (2007, p. 61) quoted Polkinghorne (1989) that researchers are therefore recommended to —interview from 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenonl.

In the case of the present study, the sample size was ten (10) graphic design companies in Kumasi. Fifteen (15) interviewees made up of five (5) employers and ten (10) employees. As stated previously, Polkinghorne (1989), as cited by Creswell (2007, p. 61), believes that five (5) to twenty-five (25) individuals is the recommended sample size in qualitative research interviews provided they all experience the same phenomenon.

The study area covered ten (10) graphic design firms in Kumasi. In this study, the selected design firms were those whose activities cover a broad range of graphic design practices (which include printing press, digital printing, interactive designs, advertising, branding, and signage). This is to help inform the reader about the diversified nature of the contemporary design firms.



The total number of interviewees was fifteen (15). Out of these, five (5) were owners of design firms, creative directors and studio managers whereas the ten (10) employees comprised graphic design graduate degree holders, in the first five years of professional work with a particular design firm. There were other potential participants, but as of the time the data were being collected, some had travelled to complete projects outside their work environment, while one graphic designer was ill and did not want to participate in the study.

### **3.6.3 Purposive sampling**

Purposive sampling was used in this study. Creswell (2007) explains that this can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study. Parahoo (1997) also refers to purposive sampling as —a method of sampling where the researcher deliberately chooses who to include in the study based on their ability to provide necessary data.

In this study, purposive sampling was used for only the five employers in the design industry in Kumasi. These employers were chosen purposively because they have direct link with the graphic design department at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Accordingly, these employers have also employed graphic design university graduates.

### **3.6.4 Snowball Sampling**

Gray (2004, p. 88) explains that with snowball sampling, —the researcher identifies a small number of subjects, who, in turn, identify others in the population. Davenport and Prusak (2000) refer to this approach as how researchers interview informants who

are —knowledge source|| in the area of study, —who then suggest other likely persons||. Snowball sampling technique was used in collecting information from only the employee participants (graphic design graduates) who shared the same experience on the subject matter of the study, who then recommended other likely persons to help with the information needed for the study. This approach supported the quest for the needed information necessary to address the research questions laid out for this study.

### **3.7 Data Collection**

In qualitative research, data collection involves, —setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through unstructured (or semi-structured) observations, interviews, documents, and visuals materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information|| (Creswell, 2003, p. 185). Data collection uses related methods meant to gather rich information in response to the research question in a study (Creswell, 2007). The researcher primarily collected data among two categories of informants:

- i. Employers - Design firm owners, creative directors and studio managers
- ii. Employees - Ghanaian graphic design graduates who are degree holders in graphic design who are practicing in graphic design companies.

Interviews and observation were used as the primary method of data collection in this study.

Semi-structured interview questions were used as a guide for data collection in this study. As state earlier on page 70, purposive sampling was used for only the employers and snowballing for only the employees. A total number of fifteen participants were

interviewed. The researcher used a period of three months (April and June, 2015) to collect information from participants. The interview was conducted during participants' working hours. All interviews were tape-recorded and each interview was conducted under an hour. There was a direct, one-on-one interview interaction with simple, easy and short questions which were posed distinctly and understandably.

However, while interviewing, observation was simultaneously being made. Moreover, because of the researcher's background knowledge in graphic design, after each interview, the researcher voluntarily participated in the activities at the workplace so as to observe and understand the situation at the workplace. The purpose was to get detailed information on —what goes on, who or what is involved, when and where things happen, how they occur (Danny and Jorgensen, 2014, p. 3).

Semi-structured observational guide aided the researcher to look at the on-going situation. The observational guide was grouped into components; 1) characteristics of participants, 2) interactions, 3) nonverbal behaviour, 4) program leader and 5) physical surroundings as suggested by Taylor-Powell and Steele (1996) and adopted by Cloutier et al.(1987, section III, p. 50). This helped the researcher to notice some peculiar things that would have been otherwise overlooked in the study. The participants were not aware they were being observed, —given that people often behave differently when they know they are being observed (Taylor-Powell and Steele, 1996) and as such no photographs were taken. In addition, Patton (1990), as cited by Gray (2004), believes that

*“...validity may be threatened when observation methods are being used and participants know that they are being observed. This is because they may behave quite differently in situations where they are not observed.*

*This suggests that covert observation may be more valid and reliable”.*  
(p. 172).

The major focus of the interview was on issues relating to employers' expectations from graduate designers. The other aspect of the interview was on the graduate designers' experiences with their employers. The researcher was patient, tolerant of and sensitive to provocative and unconventional opinions. Some of the interviews were conducted outside the working area for some respondents to freely express their views on the study, without interruption from visiting clients.

### **3.7.1 Triangulation**

Creswell (2007, p. 208), in reference to others (Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al', 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980, 1990), emphasises that, —in triangulation, researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence.

Miles and Huberman (1994) identify various types of triangulation in qualitative research, which are:

- Triangulation by data source (data collected from different persons, or at different times, or from different places). To clarify the answers, a pilot study as suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) was executed on two different sets of external participants. The first set consisted of a different knowledge resource- person in the same field who owns a well-established design firm in a different area located in Accra. This firm owner had been in the design



industry for over ten years and had been employing university design graduates for some time now. The other set of external participants was an inquiry on two different graphic design graduates in different design firms. The findings of these external informants were compared to the original data collected from the main participants of the study. This helped to validate the result of the findings.

- Triangulation by method (observation, interviews, documents, etc.) Interviews, participant observation and literature were the multiple methods used to triangulate the data for validating the results of the study.

### **3.8 Analysis of Data**

Henning et al. (2004) stated that in qualitative research, the data analysis process requires creative skills (such as conceptualising meanings, ability to make sense of phrases) to be able to interpret the understanding gotten from the data in writing from. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis in this study.

#### **3.8.1 Thematic Analysis**

Thematic Analysis is a type of qualitative analysis used to analyse categorisations and related themes (patterns) to the data. It presents detailed information about the data through interpretations by means of varied subjects (Boyatzis 1998). In this study, data was analysed using the thematic analysis method, where observation and interview transcripts were coded, and patterns identified, grouped into categories and further grouped into major themes. Data was finally presented in tables and discussion (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

### 3.9 Ethical Considerations

Gray (2004) clarifies that the central ethical issue about —data collection through interviews is that participants should not be harmed or damaged in any way by the research|| (p. 235). He added that in case a respondent becomes —anxious or upset|| while being interviewed, the interview must stop immediately (p. 235).

In accordance with ethical issues, a consent form (Appendix B and Appendix C) was given to respondents (design firm owners and design graduates). The researcher sought permission from respondents to keep information confidential. The purpose of the study was clarified and then interviews were conducted with participants. The consent form ensured the confidentiality of respondents and as such, pseudonyms were used to hide the true identity of respondents. Interview questions were limited to employers' expectations and graduates' experiences with their employers. This made all participants answer the same set of questions to ensure the validity of the study. The average time for the interview was under an hour. The researcher intended no bias. The results and discussions of the findings for the study are the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter explains the results of the data collected from respondents through interviews and participant observation.

#### 4.1 Respondents' Working Activities

The study depended on two categories of informants for data collection:

- i. Employers - Design firm owners, creative directors and studio managers
- ii.

Employees - Ghanaian graphic design graduates, in the first five years of their working experience in a particular design firms.

Details of the respondents in Table 4.1 represent creative directors, studio managers and owners of design establishments, type of design firms and their major services. All selected respondents and design firms were located in Kumasi. All selected design firms had been in operation for more than six years. The selected design firms for this study were those whose activities covered a broad range of graphic design services (which include printing press, digital printing, interactive designs, advertising, branding, and signage). Again these selected design firms are those who have employed graphic design graduates from Ghana universities. This helped inform the reader about the diversified nature of the contemporary design firms. Pseudonyms are used ranging from *Employer 1* to *Employer 5*, to protect the identity of the respondents.

**Table 4.1. Employers' Type of Business and its Major Services**

Pseudonyms	Type of Design Firm	Years within the Industry	Major Services of Design Firm
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Employer 1	Printing Press	18 years	Print production, design, book publishing, illustration
Employer 2	Advertising Agency	6 years	Briefs writing, marketing, branding, copywriting, concept development, events management, web hosting, graphic design, marketing and advertising
Employer 3	Digital Printing	10 years	Large format printing, graphic design, printing press
Employer 4	Outdoor and Indoor Media	12 years	Signage, design, photography, branding
Employer 5	Graphic Design Agency	6 years	Graphic design, embroidery, T-shirt printing, corporate gifts,

Table 4.1 also presents the number of years a design firm has been in the industry. Employer 1 was solely into printing, but has now added book publication and illustrations to its major services. Likewise, Employer 2 was originally into advertising, but has now taken up web design and events management. Large format printing and designing were the only services of Employer 3, but in recent times, the employer has added a printing press to its major services. Moreover, Employer 4's major area of specialization was sign design, but has now incorporated branding and photography. Similarly, Employer 5 started with T-shirt printing and embroidery as its main services, but now majors in design production.

Details of respondents who are employees (graphic design graduates) are shown in Table 4.2. This table shows the employees' type of businesses and major services at their workplaces. Pseudonyms are used ranging from *Designer 1* to *Designer 10*, to protect the identity of the respondents. Table 4.2 shows that the responsibilities of a graduate employee cover a broad range of task. Their roles cover areas such as branding, graphic design, advertising, outdoor media placement, marketing, embroidery, printing, production, photography, web design.



**Table 4.2. Employees' Type of Business and Major Services of Design Firms**

Pseudonyms	Type of Business	Years of Experience	Major Services of Design Firm
Designer 1	Advertising Agency	2 years	Briefs writing and design, marketing, branding, copywriting, concept development
Designer 2	Graphic Design Agency	4 years	General graphic design services such as printing, ID Cards, calendars, photography
Designer 3	Outdoor and Indoor Media	3 years	Signage, design, photography, branding
Designer 4	Graphic Design Agency	1 year	Graphic design, embroidery, T-shirt printing, corporate gifts,
Designer 5	Printing Press	5 years	Print production, design, advertising
Designer 6	Printing Press	2 years	Print production, design, desktop publishing,
Designer 7	Printing Press	3 years	Print production, design, book publishing
Designer 8	Graphic Design Agency	2 years	Printing, design, book publishing, illustration
Designer 9	Digital Printing	4 years	Desktop publishing, large format printing, graphic designing
Designer 10	Advertising Agency	2 years	Events Management and exhibition, web design, graphic design, marketing and advertising

All the respondents in Table 4.2 consisted of graduate graphic designers in the first five years of employment at various graphic design firms in Kumasi. The purpose was to cover those specific graduates who entered the industry in recent times.

## 4.2 Results

Due to the exploratory nature of the research, a qualitative approach to data collection was chosen, using interviews and participant observation as the primary methods. One-on-one interviews and participant observation were also used for data collection to help the researcher understand the on-going situation, by getting physical evidence and

to provide direct detailed information on employers' expectations and individual design graduates' experiences with employers in the workplace. The researcher asked permission to partake in the workplace activities to unobtrusively, observe the experiences graphic designers go through with their employers.

For triangulation purposes, the researcher collected data from different external participants, at different times and from different places (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to check similar outcomes. This was achieved through a pilot study as suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) on two different sets of external participants. The first set consisted of a different employer with a well-established design firm in a different area located in Accra. This external design firm owner falls within the same experiences of the phenomena in this study. The other set of external participant was an inquiry made on two different graphic design graduates in different design firms. The findings of these external informants were linked to the original data collected from the main participants of the study. This helped to validate the findings.

All results were classified and interpreted in connection with the objectives of this study. Over a period of about one month, fifteen separate interviews were completed. The interviews lasted under an hour, and were tape-recorded for transcription. The interviews and observation had 630 codes in the transcripts by identifying key words, gestures, expressions, sentences, postures, agreements and disagreements, reactions, attitudes, ideas, variances, thoughts, beliefs and any significant observation. These codes were grouped into labels and categorised into minor themes, and finally grouped into major themes.

**Table 4.3: Interview and Observational Analysis from Respondents**

Labels	Minor Themes	Major Themes
productivity, teamwork, ability to manage others, , report writing, briefs, time management, planning, coordinating, pressure, overtime, profit maximization, customer behaviour, experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry knowledge</li> <li>• Changing nature of work</li> <li>• Time Management</li> <li>• Work Experience</li> </ul>	☐ Business Sustainability Skills
Idea development, technology, educational training, creativity, knowledgeable, numeracy, attention to detail, good communication, join forces, team up, contend, participate, interdisciplinary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications</li> <li>• Problem Solving</li> <li>• Broad Knowledge</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> </ul>	☐ Professional Skills
Psychology, passion, interest, motivation, inspiration, flexibility, supervision, reality, trustworthy, welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional Intelligence</li> <li>• Self-respect</li> <li>• Self-usefulness</li> <li>• Confidence</li> </ul>	☐ Personal Skills

The themes identified were in connection with the various labels which were grouped into minor themes in the transcriptions.

The minor themes originated from the transcriptions of this study. They include:

1. *Industry knowledge*
2. *Changing nature of work*
3. *Time management*
4. *Work experience*
5. *Communications*
6. *Problem Solving*
7. *Broad Knowledge*
8. *Technology*
9. *Collaboration*
10. *Emotional intelligence*
11. *Self-respect*
12. *Self-usefulness*
13. *Confidence*

Table 4.3 indicates this study's observation and interview analysis from both employers and employees. This pre-informs the reader about what to expect in the discussion unit of the study. For the purpose of this study, three major themes and their respective minor themes and labels were identified, as shown in Table 4.3. The results section of this study describes the outcome of the study. The table displays a list of labels associated with minor themes and major themes for the findings of the study. This was constructed from the answers given by all the respondents to the interview questions, and from observation.

### **Key observations**

The researcher partook in activities that went on in the design firms —to describe what goes on, who or what is involved, when and where things happen, how they occur, and why (Danny and Jorgensen, 2014). The observational guide for the data collection for this study was adopted from Taylor-Powell and Steele (1996) as cited in Cloutier et al. (1987, section III, p. 50). Taylor-Powell and Steele grouped components of observation into; characteristics of participants, interactions, nonverbal behaviour, program leader and physical surroundings (p. 2) . Some of the key observations during the interview and participant observation are:

- a) Most employers do not provide periodic formal training programmes for graduates within the design firm. Employees need to be trained to in order to get a clear understanding of company's policy. The researcher noticed that some of the employers could not clearly state their company's policies. However, all the employers gave a form of orientation on-the-job training. Three employers were concerned that giving formal training to graduates was



not necessary because most graduates leave the company after a few years. Four employers believed education should rather be responsible for preparing students enough before they enter the design industry. On the other hand, one employer acknowledged that there were some aspects of businesses for which education cannot adequately prepare students. Those aspects of business develop with time, through work experience.

- b)** The employers have such a multiplicity of needs that they themselves cannot agree on a single basic thing they need. Each and every one of them tries to redefine their needs. One employer decided to add videography as a major activity. During a later interview on a different day with the same employer, he opted unexpectedly to move into events management.
- c)** The unhealthy working environment at some of the design firms probably makes it difficult for employees themselves to be competent designers. Most of the printing firms are cluttered, with overpowering chemical fumes from the printing press. Bad eating habits are common because there is no time to go for lunch or —coffee break.
- d)** Again, the competitive nature of the job market requires most graphic design graduates to work overtime and overnight in order to meet deadlines or complete unfinished projects. Some designers go through long non-bargaining working conditions with no percentage increase in salary. However, incentives are given as appreciation.

- e) Some designers think they are in the design industry today because of their poor performance at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). If any other opportunity does arise, they are willing to quit the design industry immediately. For instance, in the course of the interview, one employee said he had wanted to be an architect but his BECE result landed him in visual arts programme at the Senior Secondary School level. One other employee also shared a similar view that he had wanted to be a banker. However, majority of the employees had purposely chosen and thus valued the design profession.

The major themes of the findings were analysed and discussed, and then linked to the minor themes. The first major theme for this study is ‘Business Sustainability Skills’.

### **4.3 Analysis and Discussions**

#### **4.3.1 Business Sustainability Skills**

Business sustainability skills are defined by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG, 2009) as —the technical skills, knowledge, values and attitudes needed in the workforce to develop and support sustainable social, economic and environmental outcomes in business, industry and the community. In addition, the expectation placed on designers also requires understanding of how systems behave and aspects that contribute to sustainable products, strategies and practices (—AIGA - Designer of 2015 competencies, n.d.)

Many employers stated why every graphic design graduate needs business skills as part of the required competencies to assure employability. Two respondents, Employer 1 and Employer 4 are of the opinion that, design graduates should have industry skills

to be able to take hold of reality and apply the knowledge they have gained at university into the industry. One respondent suggested that:

*We're looking for people who understand what's going on in the business world of design for global change... (Employer 5)*

Employer 2 and Employer 3 commented that it is not just about the theories but more importantly, possessing practical industry knowledge. Graduates need to be able to think about the implications of what they have learned and how certain issues might apply in a given business situation.

From observation, having a degree in graphic design is definitely an advantage, but a graduate with the requisite competencies for productive outcomes are the most preferred. This calls for technical skills to meet clients' needs in a professional way. Some employers felt that useful business skills were somewhat lacking in the graduates they have employed:

*Some of the university graduates are really doing well in the industry, whereas some often do not know how to combine things like multitasking; they do not know how things are connected to each other. There is a lack of overall thinking... Employer 4*

While some employers were concerned about the lack of technical business skills, most of the graduates themselves admitted that managing technical business issues is a challenge. Seven employees: Designer 1, Designer 3, Designer 4, Designer 6, Designer 7, Designer 8, and Designer 10 mentioned that the knowledge they gained at the university was different from the reality of industry knowledge. The researcher noticed that pressure from the design industry which required multitasking to meet deadlines was one of the challenges that took employees by surprise. Designer 8 stated that;

*...during school days I had luxury of time to submit a project, but the industry is a different thing altogether, my boss normally complains about that, I'm really trying hard to adjust to that.*

Most employers and designers admitted that their daily work duties required having skills such as industry knowledge, leadership skills, work experience to gain competitive advantage. Hawkins and Winter (1995) highlighted —career management skills and effective learning skills’: creating opportunities; action planning; networking; matching and decision-making; negotiation; political awareness; coping with uncertainty; development focus; transfer skills are the valuable skills needed by employers.

The following were the four minor themes under Business Skills. The first minor theme is —Industry Knowledge.

#### **a) Industry knowledge**

Having industry knowledge requires a graduate designer to keep abreast of current developments in the industry. This requires a graduate to understand that the field of work is unpredictable in terms of its activities, and requires a wide range of skills for an individual to function effectively (Harvey 1999). All the employers suggested that:

*Knowing major trends in the industry for profit maximization, means a graduate understands and uses his design abilities to make profit. Graphic design graduates must quickly catch up with the developments in the design industry, else there's no need for the university certificate.*



One needs to have the inclination to research into issues related to the design industry. Having industry knowledge helps a graduate possess the essential technical attributes and skills to consistently discharge and effect the appropriate job requirements

#### **b) Changing nature of work**

Harvey, (1999) stated that the changing nature of work requires multi-skilled person to execute one's administrative tasks, and become aware of modern technological changes associated with their profession. Majority of employers and employees shared similar views about the changing nature of work. Designers 2, 3, 6, 7 admitted that the design industry is replete with uncertainties and having just one skill is not enough to cope with those changes. Designers have to go the extra mile to be multiskilled to satisfy both employers and clients. Some employers (1, 2, and 4) disclosed that:

*New software is coming up every now and then into the system, the economy sometimes affects our pricing; changes in people's behaviour testify that the industry is not static in its mechanisms. It requires someone with proficiency to handle all these changing nature of the job.*

#### **c) Time Management**

The demands in the industry are such that, designers have to set their priorities right to be able to effectively handle multiple tasks within a given time to meet project deadlines. Both employers and employees admitted that if one was able to manage time efficiently, it built trust, supported productivity and upheld the notion that —time is money. Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) mentioned that employers expect graduates to develop \_time management\_ skills.

#### **d) Work Experience**

From observation, employers value design graduates who have embarked on previous related work, particularly those who are able to apply what they learnt through their experiences. Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) clarified that graduates with work experience have a greater employment advantage than graduates without work experience. The findings of this study reveal that all the designers had undertaken a period of formal ‘industrial attachment’ during their school days. They all shared similar thoughts about the old adage —Experience is the best teacher. On the other hand, Designer 4 and Designer 9 opined that they did not fully benefit from their industrial attachment during school days. The views of Designers 4 and 9 confirm what employer 3 pointed out:

*...the time for students’ attachment is not helpful. They come during the time when the industry is less busy.*

The next section deals with the second major theme, —Professional Skills.

#### **4.3.2 Professional Skills**

According to the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies (CAGC) —professional skills generally refer to skills that match both the disciplinary knowledge and technical skills that remain the most important aspects of any graduate training. By skills CAGC means —behaviours that can be learned, that can be improved with practice, that require reflection, and that benefit from on-going coaching. A graphic design graduate with professional skills is likely to effectively manage technology, and possess good oral and written communication skills for varied purposes or audiences. Next, professional skills are the ability to use design skills to solve social, economic, political, cultural experiences. According to Employer 2:

*...it's more than designing. University graduates should be able to convince clients, propose meaning ideas, and advertise with their trained skills. For instance, some of these graduates I employ are good with designing but when it comes to preparing invoices, writing reports, proposal writing, it becomes a problem to them.*

Graphic design graduates must show ability to define specific components, use technical skills and knowledge learnt from school to achieve a professional outcome, that is to say, competency must be measureable. Professionals are responsible to those served and to society (Cruess, Johnston, and Cruess, 2004).

#### **a) Communication Skills**

Employers 2, 4, 5, 7 mentioned that all designers who demonstrate assertiveness through sharing of information and proposing ideas, understanding the needs of customers, establishing relationships and using networks will always be employable. Communication skills include the efficient way of sharing knowledge in a variety of situations to fellow workers, clients and the public. Harvey (1999) suggests that today's workplace characteristics include communication which is an interactive attribute. This requires a graphic design graduate to have good listening skills, understanding, as well as ability to explain technical issues convincingly. Meanwhile Designer 10 shared the opinion that:

*In school, I wasn't taught how to write a brief, reports, how to do price estimation, prepare an invoice for both the manager and clients. It is difficult to translate manager or client's brief in visual concept. It is one of the areas I think education should tell us the reality of the business world...*

In contrast to what Designer 10 mentioned, Designers 4 and 8 believe that the series of presentation during school times on their design works have rather improved their oral communication skills.

According to Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) communication skills involve good oral and written communication for diverse purpose or audiences. All design graduates must be able to use design skills to communicate effectively, concisely, and correctly in written, spoken and visual forms, to a variety of audiences across a wide range of media.

### **b) Problem Solving**

Problem-solving, according to Mayer and Wittrock (2006), is —cognitive processing directed at achieving a goal when no solution method is obvious to the problem solver” (p. 287). Employer 2 remarked that:

*...one person used lines, patterns and colours to create an effect such that when you look at it for some time, you become dizzy. This means graphic designers can influence people’s behaviour or make a person feel dizzy to solve an organic problem instead of using medicine or drugs to achieve that same effect*

Graphic design graduates can use design skills to solve complex issues at the design industries.

### **c) Broad Knowledge**

Employers 1, 2 and 3 mentioned that the industry is in period of major technological, social, economic and political changes, for that reason graphic designers from the universities are also expected to extend their design skills in these areas. University graduates are therefore expected to see these big changes and use their knowledge acquired in school to meet these changes in the design industry which require a broader knowledge. Employer 2 criticised that:



*...in the printing firms it's normally about designing and printing of books, magazines, posters. But in most advertising firms, the task is different. This involves the graphic designer to do much reading and market research. Designers must read wide. But I think most of the designers are not adequately prepared for this because they are mostly focused on Photoshop skills. Critical thinking, creativity, developing concepts into visual forms is what is expected of graduate designers.*

Designer 1 observed that:

*Issues of concept development, how to convert brief into design, a concept guide line, putting abstract ideas into visual forms that will sell a product is very challenging. Though I was trained to think creatively in school, I had luxury of time to accomplish a project but in the industry, there is no luxury of time and the manager is always on you to delivery works within a very short time.*

AIGA Designer of 2015 trends states that —designers must be able to draw on experience and knowledge from a broad range of disciplines, including the social sciences and humanities, in order to solve problems in a global, competitive market of products and ideas.

#### **d) Technology**

From the study designers are expected to use technology, as a method of applying design skills and knowledge using tools, software, systems which requires a project, procedure, or task for productive processes. The —Designer of 2015 Competencies by the American Institute of Graphic Artist (AIGA) requires —understanding of and ability to utilize tools and technology to meet industry demands. Employer 2 says:

*I think using design skills to advance technology is one thing that is missing in our Ghanaian graphic design graduates. Now if you look at even website development, it has revolved so much that a lot of things are coming up with these websites; blocks are coming up, themes are coming up, templates are there and all that.*

In the light of current technological advancement, graduate designers must learn how to create and solve technological issues using skills in design, acquired through university education. Now people are creating colour schemes, templates for layout that are freely made available to anyone on the internet. Employers 2, 3, 4 observe that:

*...majority of these graduates go to school and learn what has already been created by others, so they come out and they are now coming to do something which a layman can just put a template there and manipulate it and use it for a design. So design education must now focus on creating things for users. It should fuse into technological advancement in the sense that we should be able to now do things that will fuse into what already exists.*

Looking at the trends in the industry graphic design graduate can take advantage of technology and use design skills to outsmart competitors, improve design services on Facebook, Whatsapp, through emailing and so on.

#### **e) Collaboration**

The current global economy calls for collaboration. Collaborating with other people outside one's profession can increase one's knowledge to achieve the best outcome. It is necessary for every graphic design graduate to develop collaborative skills. Both the Employers and Designers acknowledged that:

*It is necessary graphic design education, graduates and industry team up with other disciplines in order to integrate what they know with other opportunities and to convert the knowledge into achievable and accepted result.*

One of the requirements of —Designer of 2015 Competencies‖ by the American Institute of Graphic Artist (AIGA) is that a designer must have the —ability to collaborate productively in large interdisciplinary teams‖.

#### 4.3.3 Personal Skills

This section concentrated on only the graduate employees. The motivation was as a result of the fact that —the real problem only occurs when graduates themselves are unable to learn because the workplace does not offer a safe environment for learning or the graduates are not expected to learn in certain working condition| Boshuizen (2003).

Personal skills are mostly concerned with private traits that drive and affect the outcome of individual's working effectiveness. These individual characters, control how the person behaves, react and respond to pressures or issues. It forms the individual's personal reasoning, emotions, interest and passions, which are uniquely different from other persons. Spencer and Spencer (1993) recognised that —*motives, traits, self-concept*” are hidden competencies that drives an individual's performance in the job. Boyatzis (1982) states that motive and trait competencies have the most direct impact on the individual's outcome. It was observed that those participants (designers) who had a mastery of their personal traits, motives, passion, emotion and self-concept were successful.

All the Designers (1 – 10) shared the same opinion that,

*...their motives and emotion really affect their designs, if the day goes well, their designs are the best and that their emotions affect the way they think and react.*

Accordingly, the **Career EDGE** model by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) implies that, —self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem| have a vital link to an individual's employability . The next paragraphs explain the minor themes under the —personal skills| for this study.

### **a) Emotional Intelligence**

The researcher observed that those designers, who are emotionally strong and evenminded, recover easily from stress and pressure. Designers 1, 2, 3, 6 suggested that graphic design education should take it as a challenge to motivate students emotionally. They suggested that psychology should be part of the education curricula. Jaeger (2003) suggests that developing individual emotional intelligence and equanimity would be an appropriate outcome for students, employees and employers (p. 634).

### **b) Self-usefulness**

Bandura (1995) observed self-efficacy to be the beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the course of action required to manage prospective situations. Designers 2, 5, 6 indicated that they need to be conscious of how valuable they are to the company and to their clients. This would help influence their thinking, feeling about choice of colours, layout, and typography. Designer 8 mentioned that:

*...when I'm down, my design is also dull.*

Bandura (1995) suggests that —mastery experiences, vicarious experiences provided by social models and social persuasion are relevant sources of efficacy beliefs to employability.

### **c) Self-respect**

According to Owens (1993), self-respecting people are truthful in their assessment of themselves. The USEM model (Knight and Yorke, 2004) advocates that selfrespect colours the entirety of what students and graduates do. Quite a number of employees



like Designers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10 shared the view that honesty to oneself bring satisfying results to the managers and clients.

#### **d) Confidence**

Those Designers with confidence was observable from their manners and behaviour. According to Goleman (1998) self-confidence makes individuals to embrace assurance with *‘presence’* (p. 68). Designer 10 remarked:

*Whenever I'm motivated to do something with self-assurance, I succeed massively.*

Norman and Hyland (2003) stated that those who lack self-confidence would be unlikely to develop it through educational activity. During the interview, the researcher realised that those designers with self-confidence had the ability to relay messages properly which resulted in a good relationship. Meanwhile some designers were not bold enough to express themselves, and it affected the quality of their interactions.

Based on the findings of this study, —personal skills, are vital to the employability process as suggested by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007). Those who had control over their personal skills were able to manage the pressure from the industry. Spencer and Spencer (1993) acknowledged that —*‘motives, traits, self-concept’* are competencies that are deeper and central to personal skills which energises an individual's performance in the job, with motive and trait having direct impact on self-concept and also have an impact on skill (Boyatzis, 1982).

By way of summary, the findings and results reveal that business sustainability skills, professional skills and personal skills, to a large extent make a graphic designer

competent to meet the demands of the industry. Eventually, the validity of an interpretive research depends of how it provides similar findings by other researchers using related approaches by the original researcher (Gephart, 1999). The findings and results of this chapter also provided similar results by other people. Harvey (1999) also identified that employers want graduates with —knowledge; intellect; willingness to learn; self-management skills; communication skills; team-working; interpersonal skills|. Moreover, Brennan (2001) pointed out that the top ten competencies required in current workplace are: —working under pressure; oral communication skills; accuracy, attention to detail; working in a team; time management; adaptability; initiative; working independently; taking responsibility and decisions; planning coordinating and organising|.

The logo of Kenya National University of Science and Technology (KNUST) is a large, faint watermark in the background. It features a central shield with a yellow eagle with spread wings, a green star, and a red banner at the bottom with the text 'BADWENINGI'. Above the shield is a red torch. The entire logo is set against a light blue background.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the study's research findings, conclusions, plus recommendations for future research. This information was based on responses gathered through participant observation and interview guide, designed to collect information needed to address the research questions.

The study focused on exploring the competencies of graphic design graduates demanded by creative directors, studio managers and owners of design establishments. The study is a qualitative research study.

The study relied on two categories of informants for data collection;-

i. Employers- Design firm owners, creative directors and studio managers ii. Employees- Ghanaian graphic design graduates with degree holders, within the first five years of working experience in a particular design firms. The study area was in Kumasi which covers ten (10) graphic design firms. In this study, the selected design firms were those whose activities cover a broad range of graphic design services (which include printing press, digital printing, interactive designs, advertising, branding, and signage). This is to help inform the reader about the diversified nature of the contemporary design firms.

### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

The summary describes employers' expectations from graduates, and graduates experiences with their employers. It helps pinpoint some areas that education can equip students with before they enter into the industry.

#### **a) Industry knowledge**

Employers want graphic design graduates to possess 'industry knowledge' so as to quickly catch up with the developments and major trends in the design industry. Having industry knowledge helps a graduate come to terms with the essential technical attributes and skills to consistently fulfill a job requirement. According to Harvey (1999), this requires the understanding of the unpredictable nature of the workforce with a variety of skills for an individual to function competently.

#### **b) Changing nature of work**

Majority of both the employers and employees shared similar view about the changing nature of work. They admitted that global competition, technological transformations,

economic viability, changes in people's behaviour have contributed to the changing nature of the design firms activities. This therefore requires a graduate designer to be multi-skilled; perform their own administrative tasks; and be aware of modern technological changes associated with their profession (Harvey, 1999).

#### **c) Time Management:**

The industry mostly has a short time to meet deadlines, therefore a graphic design graduate who is able to manage several tasks simultaneously, and also set priorities and allocate time effectively in order to meet deadlines would be successful in his career.

#### **d) Experience Work**

The findings of this study show that all the graduates had undertaken a period of formal internship during school days. This helped some of the graduates to learn and gain industrial work experience. While some graduates admitted that they benefited from the industrial internship during school days, others were of a contrasting view. Most of the employers encouraged that industrial attachment during school days must continue. On the other hand, some of the employers stated that the industrial internship during school days is not enough. One Employer said the *"...the time for students" attachment is not helpful. They come during the time when the industry is less busy"*. From observation, employers give value to design graduates who have embarked on work experience, and have applied what they have learnt through their experiences. Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) clarified that graduates with work experience are more likely to secure employment than graduates without it.



This suggests that graphic design training institutions should encourage students with the needed guidelines on life and work-related experience to stand a high chance of being employable.

#### **e) Communication Skills**

Majority of the design graduates admitted that it is a challenge when it comes using design skills to explain complex or technical issues to difficult clients. All design graduates must therefore see the need to use design skills to communicate effectively, concisely, and correctly in written, spoken and visual forms to a variety of audiences using a wide range of media. Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) communication skills involve good oral and written communication for diverse purposes or audiences

#### **f) Problem Solving:**

Today's economy is increasing the demand for thoughtfulness and mindfulness. Educational training should therefore focus on improving students' ability to think critically using design skills to solve complex issues at work.

#### **g) Broad Knowledge**

The industrial age has now advanced into knowledge age, where applied knowledge and ideas are the main source of economic growth. Graphic design institutions must therefore see —*major technological, social, economic and political changes, and extend their design skills in these areas through educational training*".

#### **h) Technology**

Looking at the level where technology has gotten to, student and graduate designers, creative directors and design institutions must learn how to create and solve technological issues using their design skills. Now, people are creating colour scheme, themes, blocks, free layout and websites template on the internet.

### **i) Collaboration**

In this current global economy, it is necessary for graphic design education to prepare students and graduates to team up with other disciplines in order to integrate what they know with other opportunities and to convert these two kinds of knowledge into achievable and accepted result. The —AIGA - Designer of 2015 competencies (n.d.) acknowledged the need to —collaborate productively in large interdisciplinary teams.

### **j) Emotional Intelligence**

The study shows that there is pressure in the industry; which involves technological, social, economic, cultural, political, and people's behavioural changes. Therefore, graphic design graduates with strong emotional intelligence, self-respect, selfusefulness, confidence are very seen to be successful in the design industry than those who are not. Employers should therefore provide a positive state of mind, sound health and welfare for graphic design graduates. This contributes massively to the success of any graphic designer. It affects the outcome or result of any design works and relationship with clients, colleagues and managers.

Lawrence (1996) explained that —one of the most exciting discoveries in educational psychology in recent times has been the finding that people's levels of achievement are influenced by how they feel about themselves. A vast body of research evidence

has accumulated showing a positive correlation between self-esteem and achievement...ll (p. xi). Norman and Hyland (2003) added that those who lack selfconfidence would be unlikely to develop it through educational activity.

In overview, this study aims to explore the skills, attitudes and knowledge plus the contextual pressures needed to meet the demand placed on Ghanaian graphic design graduates. This study was to help identify the competencies that must be acquired to meet the expectations in the professional design practice.

To adequately answer the main research question, the research scope was based on the collection of information on employers' expectations from graphic design graduates. The sub research question two (2), focused on the collection of information on graphic design graduates' experiences with employers. The research question three (3) provided general information on certain areas that graphic design educational training should consider, in order to adequately prepare its student for the industry. The fourth research question was on the things students and graduates must understand to make them competent for contemporary design practice.

**1. What experiences do graphic design graduates face with employers at the design firms in this contemporary time?**

One of the experiences graphic design graduates go through is that, most employers do not provide formal training programmes for them within the design firm. However, there is a form of orientation on-the-job training. This is because some employers believe education should rather be responsible for comprehensively preparing students before they proceed into the design industry. Besides, some employers are concerned

that sponsoring at cost and providing formal training to graduates does not help them, since most graduates leave the company after a few years. Moreover, these experiences that go on in the contemporary design practices, makes it hard for employers to train design graduates to be resourceful competent designers. Therefore, graduates perhaps join the design company to content the stark realities of the business world.

Again, the competitive nature of the job market requires most graphic design graduates to work overtime and overnight in order to meet deadlines or complete unfinished project. At certain seasons where there is much pressure on the company, graphic designers have to work on holidays and on weekends as well. Meanwhile, designers who experience such working conditions, go through a long non-bargaining working hours with no percentage increase in salary. Incentives in the form of money and offers in kind are, however, substances are given as appreciation.

- 2. What competencies should graphic design education provide for students to meet the challenges ahead in the professional practice of design?** From the study, contemporary design practice requires a broad range of competencies. Accordingly, ranges of competencies must be acquired through training to effectively handle complex issues, solve critical problems in technology, and induce social, economic, political and behavioural change. Technology in particular, has advanced such that, every now and then people create colour schemes, templates for websites, layouts, visual effects, wallpapers, blocks, fonts. This calls for teaming up with other related disciplinary fields to focus on the functionality of design.



Design education should prepare students to be multi-skilled and apply design knowledge in other areas like; preparing invoices, brief writing, writing reports, proposal writing, use convincing technical terms, establishing relationships and using networks, understanding the needs of customers

KNUST

### **3. How can graduate designers be competent to overcome the challenges in contemporary design practice?**

From the study, Ghanaian graphic design graduates who possess the following attitudes, skills, knowledge would be competent to overcome the challenges and meet the demands of the contemporary design practice;

—Industry knowledge, changing nature of work, time management, work experience, communication skills, problem solving, broaden knowledge, technology, collaboration, emotional intelligence, self-respect, self-usefulness, confidence

Graduates must therefore invest their thinking and actions in these attitudes, skills, knowledge to meet the expectations of the corporate world.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

Based on the results of the study, employers in the design industries expect graphic design graduates to have a clear evidence of additional knowledge, skills, abilities, traits and behaviours aside from their university certificate. For a graduate to have a competitive advantage in the job market, he must meet the requirements of the

industry. The changing nature of the workplace, coupled with changes in global economy, technology, differences in people's behaviour put considerable responsibility on graphic designers. This therefore requires a graduate designer to be multi-skilled with their profession.

Most employers do not, however, offer formal training programmes to equip graphic designers for the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats aspects of the job within the design firms. There is, on the other hand, a form of orientation through on-the-job training. Some employers believe that the pressure at the workplace makes it hard for them to find the time to train the graphic designers. Again, the competitive nature of the job makes graphic design graduates work overtime and stay overnight in order to meet deadlines. In such instances, most designers go through a long non-bargaining working hours with fixed salary. Most employers often give incentives as a form of appreciation. Graduates have to prepare their minds, and bodies, for the realities of life in industry.

In summary, the design industry has now advanced such that knowledge and ideas are the main source of the industry's growth. Novel patterns of work and practices have developed such that companies have to diversify their activities to stay competitive. As a result, workers who possess a whole new set of competencies are required. Employers are increasingly looking for graphic design graduates with competencies that meet the emerging challenges faced by design industry. Graphic design graduates entering contemporary design workplace are largely considered incompetent to manage these challenges, particularly working in unfamiliar and unexpected situations. The graphic design industry keeps on adding other related design activities

in order to stay competitive in the job market. In recent times, one company may be involved in numerous activities like advertising, photography, motion graphics, web designing, printing and so on. The role of design in contemporary context goes beyond traditional design training. This has now amplified the training needs of students and increased more diversified learning outcome.

Finally, the researcher did not review the graphic design education curricula. The study did, however, cover the learning outcomes outlined by Graphic Design education. The researcher did so in the context that relates it to students' competencies and the expectations of employers, within the demands of industry. Hence, the learning outcomes become the final, proof-laden objectives of the various curriculums being taught.

According to DECODE, the learning outcomes are the foundation of the student's —ability to give meaning to a service or product. Therefore, since the study focused on competencies which also includes students —ability, the researcher based its study on these learning outcomes by the Department of Communication Design (DECODE).

Under the Graphic Design Education section in chapter two, the training outcomes by DECODE covers a broad range of graphic design as a discipline, including the fundamentals of design to the advance level in design. However, the learning outcomes do not cover other related discipline of study that is outside graphic design. According to AIGA Designer of 2015 trends, in recent times, designers must be able to use their design skills to bring solution to multidisciplinary areas. This implies that Graphic Designers must be equipped to use design skills to solve complex social, technological

and economic factors, variances in people's preferences, cultural behaviours and experiences.

Ultimately educators can have the best curriculum, but what the students take to the employers or industry becomes a proof or evidence of the result of the learning outcomes. Therefore employers' expectations, seriously then, become part of the measuring block for graduates' entry-level requirements for employment, which should be considered by design educators.

No single design graduate is however, likely to have all the employable skills required by prospective employers. The contemporary design graduate must, possess competencies that meet workplace demands placed by employers. From the findings of this study, business sustainability skills, professional skills and personal skills, to a large extent can make a graphic designer meet the demands of contemporary design practices.

The findings of this study therefore serve as recommendations. The researcher hopes graphic design educators at the various universities look into these emerged issues to help its graduate become highly employable.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The kind of training students get through education is a crucial source of identifying one's competencies. The graphic design industry depends on these competencies to grow and stay relevant in society. Employers expect certain kinds of competencies.



Most graduates are inadequately prepared to meet those requirements. To triumph over these competency gaps, academia and industry must team up with training institutions including universities, to build supportable underlying strategies that provide the needed competencies for graphic design graduates. The findings and conclusions of this study identify central issues concerning employers' expectations from graphic design graduates. Amid these issues is a rising need for business sustainability skills, professional skills and personal skills for productivity in the design industry. The following recommendations are based on the study's findings:

### **5.3.1 Recommendations for Practice:**

- 1) In order to achieve a satisfactory competency outcome, academia and industry should collaborate to build sustainable underlying strategies that provide the needed requirements for graphic design graduates. Building such sustainable underlying strategies would allow emerging trends in the industry to be factored in curricula planning that address competency gaps to improve graduates performance at the workplace. Graphic design curricula should be tailored to meet the increasingly changing demands of the industry.
- 2) The researcher believes that professional training courses especially during vacation can be helpful. It could serve as a refresher course to teachers who want to refresh their programmes, students to upgrade their competencies and employers to build industry sustainable development.
- 3) On the other hand, employers should clearly define what they want through several means and platforms to graduates and university institutions. This

should include the very likely projects to be worked on, the ideal ethics of the firm, experiences graduate are likely to go through, and the likely benefits for designers.

- 4) Employers must create healthy, working studios for graphic designers to function effectively. This has got to do with welfare, safety and security issues. The nature of the work does not provide proper eating habits, most designers sit behind the computer for a very long time and some leave the office very late in the night. Studies of the work environment ergonomics, lighting and ventilation would assist.
- 5) Employers should also have periodic training programmes in their establishments for the people they take on. Periodic training programmes will equip graphic designers to acknowledge the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the job within the design firms. Some of the employers raised concerns that, when they train employees to familiarise them the business, the employees leave the company with that experience to work for rivals or competitors. It is recommended that there should be a legal contract that binds both persons to act accordingly.
- 6) The industry should create opportunities by sponsoring or funding academic projects to improve the quality outcome of education. Doing so will motivate students to be productive and do research into projects that bring satisfactory results.

- 7) In contemporary times, the industry requires employees with multiple skills. Graduates must therefore be willing and flexible enough to gain experience. Graduates must personally take every opportunity to learn quickly, study, understand and act in accordance with the industry requirements- industry knowledge, changing nature of work, time management, work experience, communication skills, problem solving, broaden knowledge, technology, collaboration, emotional intelligence, self-respect, self-usefulness, confidence.

### 5.3.2 Recommendations for Research

- 1) Further research could be made to provide a competency model for graphic design education, graduates and industry. This will help provide applicable and practical demonstration to simplify complex issues for everyone involved in the employability process (employers, students and academia).
- 2) Academia and industry should take a critical look at the changing nature of the design industry, in relation to changes in global economy, technology, differences in people's behaviour. Academia and industry must partner each other in continuous training programmes to update its prospective employers, students and academics with current trends and needs.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### INTRODUCTORY LETTER

#### DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION DESIGN

Faculty of Art  
College of Art and Social Sciences  
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology  
Kumasi-Ghana  
Email: design.communication@yahoo.com  
Tel/Fax: 233-03220-63683



CASS/CD/DF/4

20th May, 2015

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

#### INTRODUCTORY LETTER MR. ADU ACHEAMPONG

I write to introduce to you Mr. Adu Acheampong, a Fourth Year M.Comm Design student of the Faculty of Art, College of Art and Built Environment. As part of the Post Graduate requirement for Master of Philosophy in Communication Design, the above researcher is undertaking a research project on the topic, "GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY: THE LINK BETWEEN DESIGN EDUCATION AND THE GRAPHIC DESIGN INDUSTRY". The purpose of the research is to explore the skills, attitudes and knowledge plus the contextual pressures needed to meet the demand placed on Ghanaian graphic design graduates.

I would be grateful if you could assist him with any information needed for the study.

Attached is a photocopy of the student identity card.

Your cooperation is highly anticipated.

Thank you

Yours faithfully,

ERIC FRANCIS ESHUN (PhD)  
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

DEPT. OF COMMUNICATION DESIGN  
FACULTY OF ART  
COLLEGE OF ART & SOCIAL  
SCIENCES, KNUST - KUMASI



### APPENDIX B

#### SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR DESIGN FIRM OWNERS, CREATIVE DIRECTORS AND STUDIO MANAGERS

Dear Respondent,

As part of the post graduates requirement for Master of Communication Design at KNUST, the researcher is undertaking a research project on the topic, GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY: THE LINK BETWEEN DESIGN EDUCATION AND THE GRAPHIC DESIGN INDUSTRY. The purpose of the research is to explore the skills, attitudes and knowledge plus the contextual pressures needed to meet the demand placed on Ghanaian graphic design graduates.

Your answers are very vital to this research. The answers you provide to these questions will be recorded and kept confidential. Your cooperation is highly anticipated. Thank you. The questions are:

1. What are the major design activities of this company?
2. What are the relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes to your company?  
Explain.
3. In which areas of these relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes do graphic design graduates from the university normally fall short in their performance in the workplace?
4. What are the recent trends in the design industry that you expect graphic design educators to prepare their graduates for?
5. Do you have any form of training concerning the company's policies that influence the preparedness of graduates to meet the emerging trends in the design industry?
6. How do you expect graduate designers to use their design skills to meet these challenges?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR GRAPHIC DESIGN UNIVERSITY GRADUATES**

Dear Respondent,

As part of the post graduates requirement for Master of Communication Design at KNUST, the researcher is undertaking a research project on the topic, GRADUATE

**EMPLOYABILITY: THE LINK BETWEEN DESIGN EDUCATION AND THE GRAPHIC DESIGN INDUSTRY.** The purpose of the research is to explore the skills, attitudes and knowledge plus the contextual pressures needed to meet the demand placed on Ghanaian graphic design graduates.

Your answers are very vital to this research. The answers you provide to these questions will be recorded and kept confidential. Your cooperation is highly anticipated. Thank you. The questions are:

1. Tell me about what you do on the job
2. What major challenges did you encounter when you joined the design industry?
3. What are the major areas of your design skills that your employer mainly complains about?
4. How do you use your design skills to communicate effectively to social, cultural, clients, technology and economic challenges?
5. In which areas of design skills do you feel you should upgrade yourself in to meet these challenges?
6. Which major areas of design do you think graphic design academics should have adequately prepared you for?
7. What motivates you as Graphic Designer to function effectively in the workplace?

#### **APPENDIX D**

##### **INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATIONAL ANALYSIS FROM RESPONDENTS**

<b>Labels</b>	<b>Minor Themes</b>	<b>Major Themes</b>
productivity, teamwork, ability to manage others, , report writing, briefs, time management, planning, coordinating, pressure, overtime, profit maximization, customer behaviour, experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry knowledge</li> <li>• Changing nature of work</li> <li>• Time Management</li> <li>• Work Experience</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> Business Sustainability Skills

Idea development, technology, educational training, creativity, knowledgeable, numeracy, attention to detail, good communication, join forces, team up, contend, participate, interdisciplinary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications</li> <li>• Problem Solving</li> <li>• Broaden Knowledge</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional Skills
Psychology, passion, interest, motivation, inspiration, flexibility, supervision, reality, trustworthy, welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional Intelligence</li> <li>• Self-respect</li> <li>• Self-usefulness</li> <li>• Confidence</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal Skills

