

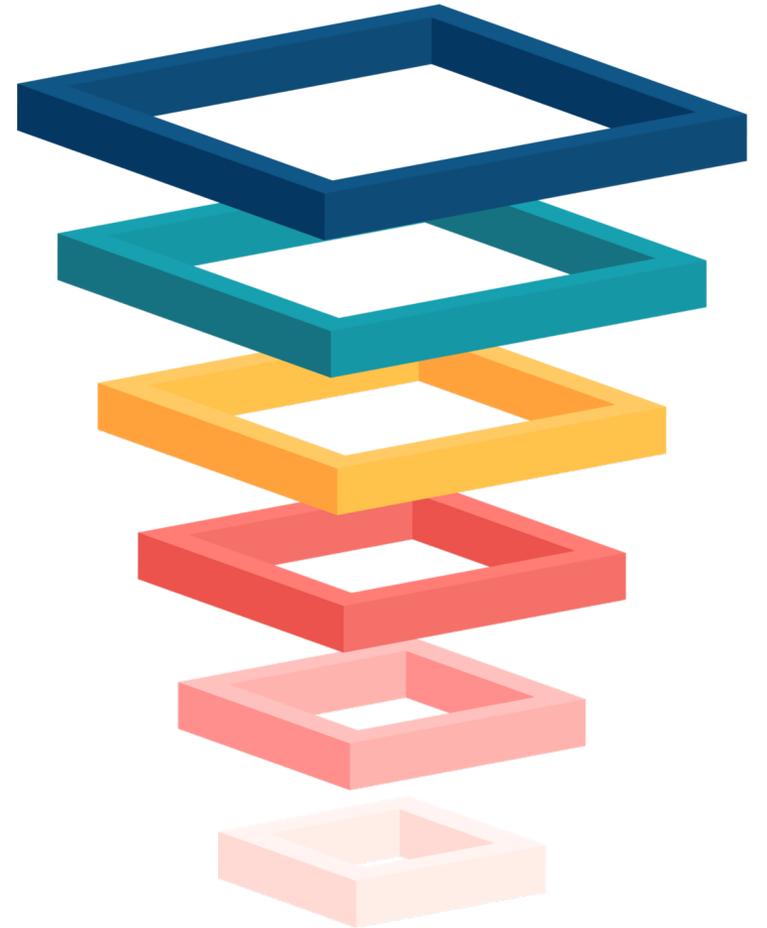
How tertiary education and industry partnerships can improve students employability: evidence from West and East Africa

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Outline of this presentation

- ✓ Study Context and Problem
- ✓ Methodology
- ✓ Literature Findings and Interview Analysis
- ✓ Conclusions & Recommendations



Study context and problem

- ✓ Employability refers to skills, knowledge and competencies that improve student's ability to secure and retain a job, progress at work and cope with change, secure another job if he/she so wishes or has been laid off and enter more easily into the labour market at different periods of the life cycle (ILO, 2015)
- ✓ The African Development Bank (2021) reports that 10 to 12 million youth in Africa enter the labour force each year. Out of this, a small fraction (3.1 million) of the African youth get jobs, leaving most of the youth unemployed.
- ✓ A major concern among stakeholders is that there is a mismatch between knowledge, skills and attitudes of graduates and the needs of employers – **skills gap**.
- ✓ According to PWC's 22nd Annual Global Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Survey (2019), 65% of African CEOs said the skills gap was preventing them from innovating effectively. 59% conceded that their quality standards and customer experiences were being undermined.

Methodology

The **purpose** of the study was to investigate how universities and colleges can form and sustain partnerships to improve students' employability

Objectives of the study were to:

1. Understand graduate skills that employers in sub-Saharan Africa value.
2. Explore how universities can collaborate with industry to co-design curricula and enhance student learning outcomes.



Methodology

Systematic review

- Academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, African Journals Online, and African Education Research Database (by ESSA and the REAL Centre, University of Cambridge)
- Working papers from charities and development organisations

Interview, focus group and roundtable discussions

- Academics, career service professionals, students, graduates, and industry personnel (24)
- Countries of focus: Ghana, Burkina Faso, Kenya and Rwanda

Literature Findings & Interview Analysis

Connected Community Career Services Approach

HEI provision of career services (with a focus on connected communities) is considered key for students' transition to employment across the globe, and this is no different in the SSA region.



Literature Findings & Interview Analysis (cont.)

There is no universally accepted list of employability skills. However, employability skills that employers in SSA value are organised into four main themes - Intellectual Resources; Meta-Skills; Personal Resources; and Job-Specific Skills. This is based on the **Work-Readiness Integrated Competence Model (WRICM)**

According to some industry stakeholders, the curricula in many (African) universities do not address the needs of employers. HEIs must engage with industry to better understand employers' needs and then **redesign their curricula to incorporate compulsory job readiness programs/modules** that prepare students for the job market.

Literature Findings & Interview Analysis (cont.)



- a. HEIs must **share expectations and learning outcomes with industry partners hosting their students for internships** and other career related
- b. **Feedback from other employers/industry** about students from specific universities was another factor in selecting a university to partner with.
- c. Exposing students to industry early in their college life prepares them better for work.
- d. The quality of an HEI – Industry partnership strongly relies on the resources potential partners can provide. Key resources comprise of institutional factors such as finance, time, staff, and equipment.

Sub-Saharan African Industry Partner Quotes

(1 of 2)



- a. The quality of programmes and activities designed by the university to prepare students for work is one selection factor for me. **HR Manager, Burkina Faso**
- b. We would partner with a university when we know the graduates coming out of that university are good potential candidates for work. **HR Manager from Rwanda**
- c. What will attract us also is because we have worked with students from various universities for some time and we know what some students are able to do as compared to other institutions. **HR Professional, Ghana**

Sub-Saharan African Industry Partner Quotes

(2 of 2)



- a. Most of the lecturers you find in our universities today are very academic, without any industry experience. So, they churn out students who are also academic and do not understand current industry trends. **CEO, Ghana**
- b. The educational curriculum must be a fusion of both theoretical and practical or hands-on training. The schools must have internship programmes that create opportunities for students to learn from industry before they graduate. **CEO , Ghana**
- c. Students should engage with the staff and faculty working in various departments in their HEIs to shadow or work with them while in school to get some work experience. **HR Professional, Kenya**

Case Illustrations from HEIs in SSA

What works!

- a. Co-designing curriculum
- b. Career fair collaborations
- c. HEIs are encouraged to attend industry-focused conferences and play active roles in contributing to the cause of such conferences
- d. Career Service Departments keep strongly to their word when engaging with employers and manages their expectations with reasonable timelines and outputs
- e. Commitment from management to make resources available

Some hurdles

- a. Delays in the submission of internship reports
- b. Some employers are reluctant in allowing students to return and complete their degree programmes after their internships
- c. Bureaucratic processes may slow formal agreements which can affect timelines and realisation of objectives.

Conclusions & Recommendations



- a. A functional career and guidance office with dedicated and competent staff who have industry experience to support students with their career development and facilitate employer engagements on behalf of the HEI.
- b. HEIs must leverage on the network of their staff/faculty and students to establish partnerships with industry.
- c. Following up on alumni to know their place of work would also broaden the scope of such networks and enable HEIs to have more engagement.
- d. HEIs that are proactive about preparing their students for work, i.e., **curricula that equip students with skills for work** are attractive to employers who are looking to engage universities