Examining Research Partnership Needs of Ghanaian Higher/Tertiary Education Institutions

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Abstract:
In the research partnership development literature,developing effectiveresearch partnerships between educational institutions calls for the construction of a 'knowledge sharing culture' within which the principle of 'mutual learning' takes centre stage. Yet in the higher education landscape of many low-income countries, where there are a limited number of research partnership collaborations but yet a myriad of partnership challenges, 'borrowing' and 'replication' of policies and programmes appear to be the order of the day. This article seeksto understand partnership challenges of Ghanaian institutions of higher learning. Using insights from self-administered questionnaires and semi-structured case study interviews conducted, the article examines: (1) thepartnership needs of Ghanaian HEI/TEIs and (2) the means by which these institutions undertake their partnership needs assessments. Regarding the former of these research purposes, the findings reveal that the views articulated by participants are not any different from those espoused in the partnership development literature concerning the partnership needs of HEIs in low-income regions. Concerning the article's latter research purpose, we observe that the partnership needs assessments of Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs are largely students-driven with less inputs from staff, peer institutions and industry. Against this backdrop, we conclude that Ghanaian HEI/TEIs could amelioratemost of their peculiar partnership challenges if they make concerted efforts to broaden the processes by which they undertake partnership needs assessments.

Keywords: Needs assessment, partnership needs, transnational education partnerships, higher education, Ghanaian higher education institutions

1. Introduction

In this era of globalisation with increased connectivity between countries and complex developmental challenges, there appears to be a seeming consensus among nation-states regarding research partnerships. This consensus generallyis about the roles that research partnerships must play in knowledge production and dissemination for the development of global solutions to societal problems. In the light of this, there has been a growing number of research partnership collaborations in recent years, especially between higher/tertiary education institutions (HEIs/TEIs) of high and low-income regions over the last two decades or so, leading to various permutations involving 'north-south' or 'south-south' collaborations with ownership centered either within the northern institutions, southern institutions or shared between both (Africa Unit, 2008, 2010; Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2003; de-Graft Aikins, 2008; de-Graft Aikins et al., 2012). As promising as this is for global development, and as noted aptly by de-Graft Aikins et al. (2012: 1), however, the structures of these partnership arrangements are dependent on a host of factors, including funding organisations and their funding regimes, empirical and geographical focus of the research collaborations, disciplines involved in the partnerships, and the research capacity of collaborating institutions or groups, thus raising pertinent challenges especially for HEIs/TEIs in low-income regions regarding their partnership needs.

In the context of research partnership development literature, research partnerships are described generally as 'dynamic collaborative processes between educational institutions that bring mutual, though not necessarily symmetrical, benefits to the parties engaged in the partnerships (Africa Unit, 2010, p. 18). Generally speaking, successful partnership collaborations between educational institutions tend to change and evolve over time, however, certain features remain paramount are worth isolating for purposes of recognition and rumination. Within research partnership arrangements essentially, partners share ownership of projects, and their relationships are based on respect, trust, transparency and

reciprocity. They (i.e., partners) understand each other's cultural and working environments. Decisions are taken jointly after real negotiations take place between partners. Each partner is open and clear about what they are bringing to the partnership and what their expectations are from it (Africa Unit, 2008, 2010; Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2003; de-Graft Aikins, 2008; de-Graft Aikins et al., 2012).

Clearly, these important features and/or descriptors of research partnerships are helpful as they outline crisply the fundamental ingredients, guidelines and parametersfor setting up effective research partnership collaborations in educational institutions for academic/research purposes. Essentially, this exemplification serves to foreground the argument that setting up and sustaining effective educational partnerships goes or needs go beyond the concept of 'borrowing' or 'replication' of policies and programmes from elsewhere to reflect the creationof 'knowledge sharing culture' within which the principle of 'mutual learning' takes centre stage.

In the Ghanaian higher education landscape (which is the focus of this article), a critical reflection on the partnership activities of the few HEIs/TEIs involved in some forms of partnerships (with organisations either within or outside Ghana) does not seem to mirror the descriptions and/or characteristic features of research partnerships exemplified above fully. Many of the research partnership collaborations in HEIs/TEIs across the country operate largely within health and education research, practice, funding and policy environments that prioritise pressing public health, education and developmental challenges. As such, their long-term sustainability depends on integrated funding systems that provide a crucial capacity-building bridge. However, an underlying theme in recent reflections on how research partnerships work in Ghana is the 'difficulty of sustaining and scaling up short-term achievements of research partnerships, firstly because of lack of sustained funding arrangements, and secondly because of complex micro-political (e.g., power struggles between members) and macro-political processes' (e.g., the demands of the funding organisations) (de-Graft Aikins et al., 2012, p. 1). This difficulty, coupled with the absence of other essential ingredients (e.g. social capital, measurable goals, administrative support and creativity and innovation) to sustain research partnerships raises critical concerns regarding the partnership needs of Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs and the extent to which Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs urgently have the shared understandings, values and links to engender trust and collaboration between and among themselves and their foreign research partnership collaborators.

This article seeks to examine an aspect of these concerns. The article seeks to understand the partnership challenges of Ghanaian institutions of higher learning relative to their partnership needs and the means by which assessments of these needs are conducted. Based on this bi-focal research purpose, two key research questions were developed to guide our analysis of the data gathered, namely:

- What are the partnerships needs of Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs engaged in research partnership collaborations?
- By what means do Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs engaged in research partnership collaborations undertake their partnership needs assessments?

To ensure that the information provided in this article addresses the research questions posed fully to make meaning to readers, the article is organised as follows. The next section undertakes a brief review of literature relative to the partnership challenges of HEIs to foreground the issues emerging from the review in the context of the study. This is followed by the description and justification of the study's research approach and methods. Thereafter, the findings are presented and discussed before the concluding thoughts.

2. Literature Review

Owing to the focus of this article on understanding partnership challenges of Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs, the review of literature for the purposes of setting the context for the study is organised along the lines of two themes reflecting the research questions posed, namely: partnership needs of HEIs in low-income countries; and contextualising partnership needs assessment. For purposes of clarity and succinctness of presentation, these two themes are discussed consecutively.

2.1. Partnership Needs of HEIsIn Low-Income Countries: Insights from the Literature

In the present dispensation, higher education/tertiary education finds itself in a new position in terms of public interest and the role it is expected to play in societies. Essentially, HEIs/TEIs are expected to provide not just specialised human resources but also cutting-edge research that drives sustainable development (Weobong and Dovie, 2014; Altbach and Peterson, 2008). Research evidence indicates that generally countries that have expanded higher education systems with higher levels of investment in their research activities have higher potential to grow faster in today's globalised knowledge economy (Varghese, 2013). This surmises in a sense that HEI/TEIsneed to undertake two key tasks amongst many others. First, they should or need to have in place appropriate research partnership collaborations with the right institutions, agencies and development partners. Second, they need to ensure that their partnership needs are assessed fully and met regularly and timely to be able to fulfil the public interest roles expected of them.

A critical reflection on the research partnership development literature suggests that results relating to the first of these key tasks is promising as manynation states and HEIs across the globe are making significant strides, over the last two decades or so, towards developing research partnership collaborations of different kinds (Africa Unit, 2008, 2010; Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2003; de-Graft Aikins, 2008; de-Graft Aikins et al., 2012). Regarding the second task, the literature identifies a number of partnership needs that HEI/TEIs, especially those in the developing world, are plagued with. A few of these are outlined briefly to set the context and focus for this article.

One of the obvious partnerships need of HEIs that the literature identifies is the issue of sustained funding. The literature identifies this to be a critical need because for small-scale higher education partnerships to transition from the grant stages to the integrative stages sustained funding is required. The literature makes the case that unless there is a clear financing plan in place, no matter how rigorously partnership activities are followed, the partnership objectives may

never be achieved. The imbalance of resources and lack of opportunities to overcome them clearly is noted as one huge obstacle that many HEI/TEIs with research partnerships face, and as such, have had to scale down or increase the time allowed for activities, causing much frustration for partners (Amoah et al., 2000; de-Graft Aikins, 2008; de-Graft Aikins et al., 2012). In some few instances, in the case of Ghanaian HEI/TEIs, funding from external sources (such as the UK Department for International Development's DelPHE scheme, World Bank, USAID or from many development partner organisations) has always been available and secured to support the establishment and initial stages of partnerships, and these have proven to be sufficient, especially for partnerships designed specifically to be short-term engagements. However, in almost all cases involving long-term partnership projects, and in particular where the initial stages have proven to be successful, the funds to execute and sustain project activities have not been readily available (de-Graft Aikins, 2008; de-Graft Aikins et al., 2012).

Closely related to the issue of sustained funding as a major challenge to higher education research partnerships is also the dire need for sustainability planning. From the organisational point of view, 'sustainability' infers continuing to perform and deliver project benefits to primary target groups after the funding from donors terminates (Leon, 2001; Naidoo, 2014). Underscoring sustainability planning principally is the view that all partnership collaborations have to come to an end eventually at some point, but that project impact should continue to be delivered for a considerable length of time (Leon, 2001; Steadman et al., 2002; Weiss et al., 2002). This thus makes sustainability planning a key feature of any collaborative efforts mainly to, among other things, prevent partnership actors and institutions from having 'purely donor-driven visions' (Leon, 2001). This notwithstanding, the preponderance of available research evidence from practice as well as from development and project management literature identifies the lack of sustainability planning as one major challenge that has plagued (and continues to plague) partnership efforts of HEI/TEIs especially in sub-Saharan Africa. In many of these countries, new policy initiatives are not adopted nationwide and sustained after donor-funded projects end. Ghana as a case in point has been the testing ground for many research partnerships over the past 20–30 years; however, most of these initiatives tend to have receded after funding had stopped, particularly as most funding for these partnerships had come from donors (Nudzor et al., 2015; Nudzor et al., 2018; Nudzor, 2020), thus bringing into sharp focus sustainability planning as a need for partnership institutions and actors in Ghana. This need, when met, will enable HEI/TEIs to undertake long-term sustainability plans to facilitate diverse donor engagements to improve the capacity of their institutions and actors to ensure that their research partnerships deliver long-term impacts.

Aside the issues of funding and sustainability planning, HEIs/TEIs generally lack institutional infrastructural capacity that is needed for the implementation of partnerships' plans of action (Africa Unit, 2010; de-Graft Aikins, 2008; Gutierrez, 2008). A typical example is that whereas in developed countries (such as the, UK, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, etc.) access to computers is taken for granted, this has proven to be a major stumbling block in manyHEIs/TEIs south of the Saharainvolved in partnership programmes. The lack of access to technology represents a severe constraint in the sense that because most HEIs/TEIs have limited access to ICT, undertaking partnership activities such as report writing, drafting research outputs as well as maintaining contact have proven to be serious barriers to effective partnership. Dishearteningly, and as Jon Harle (cited in Africa Unit, 2010) notes in the anecdotal responses to his survey of African researchers, partnership funding schemes do not address these most basic needs of higher education partnership institutions in their rationalisation of funding. This resource imbalance and lack of sufficient funding to address it plays and continues to play a key role in hampering effective communication.

The review of research partnership literature also highlights the issue of ownership of partnership projects as a fundamental need of HEIs/TEIs engaged in the 'south–north' research and/or development partnerships (Africa Unit, 2010; de-Graft Aikins, 2008; de-Graft Aikins et al., 2012). In Ghana, much as is the case in Africa, partnerships between the north and south are often characterised by what the Africa Unit (2010) describes as the existence of asymmetries between the two partners at a number of levels, i.e., asymmetries in resources, capabilities and most importantly in 'power' (Gutierrez, 2008, p. 20). Within the field of educational partnerships in HEIs/TEIs in Ghana and Africa essentially, there has been a lot of discussion in recent years about the importance of 'country ownership' of partnership projects. Emphasis has been placed on the need for universities in the 'south' to drive the partnership process. As Hopper (1998, p. 27), for example, puts it, without this kind of ownership arrangement, partnerships risk being, 'yet another episode in which the powerful talk to themselves'. As such, it is crucial, that partnerships involving HEIs/TEIs and those from the 'north' are demand-driven, and involve joint decision-making and activity, from initial programme design and budget determination to project implementation and final reporting. Such partnerships, with their shared sense of 'ownership', are needful as they envisage not only shared rights on both sides but also shared responsibilities. As argued by the Africa Unit (2010), without this joined ownership, the result of any partnership endeavour would be the creation of 'fake' partnerships that exist more or less only on paper.

An equally important partnerships need of HEIs/TEIs engaged in research partnership collaborations relates to the issue of capacity building. As the literature (e.g., Africa Unit, 2010; de-Graft Aikins et al., 2012) suggests, there are a number of funding schemes specifically designed to strengthen the capacity of project implementers; however, these are often short-term measures. This, in the Ghanaian context, has been problematic given that capacity building is a cumulative long-term process. In some cases, the funding schemes appeared to have revitalised some specific areas or given the institutions involved in the projects some strong boost (e.g., the platform created to train and support postgraduate students to undertake research and disseminate the findings to a wide variety of audiences). Yet, these have proven not to have been sustainable. As such, more sustainable funding schemes and longer-term projects need to be considered in the future as a means of placing capacity building in its different manifestations, and as a greater element of HEI's partnerships with the 'outside world'. The proceedings of two conferences on Africa's universities held in the recent

past (i.e., the Frameworks for Africa–UK Research Collaboration meeting in Nairobi in September 2008; and the University Leaders' Forum Conference in Accra in November 2008) underscore these points forcefully.

Also, challenges facing staff members of HEIs/TEIs engaged in partnership projects include the heavy teaching load, low wages and the rising enrolment without accompanying increase in funds. One result of this situation is that higher education partnership institutions, particularly those in low-income countries, are understandably hesitant to allow staff to work on projects that do not necessarily and/or directly contribute to their day-to-day jobs. While one member of staff or perhaps a few of them may be willing to dedicate time and effort over and above what their role requires, this in many instances has proved to be unsustainable and placed a heavy burden on the shoulders of a few individuals. This situation, according to the Africa Unit (2010), for example, is made more difficult by the fact that many partnership funding schemes in HEI/TEIs in the 'south' do not fund staff time. While this presumably has kept the costs of proposals and project activities down, the practice, in the view of the Africa Unit, has severely hampered the effectiveness of many partnership projects in Ghana and Africa. The fact of the case, and as supported by the Africa Unit, is that in the case of 'poorer' partnership institutions, individuals who already can only dedicate limited periods of time a week to project activities tended to face greater barriers by having to do all the administration work instead of actually 'carrying out' the projects. One major result of this situation is that partnership programmes in HEIs/TEIs generally go through periods of intense productivity immediately before and during certain phases of partnership projects activities but tend to lie dormant for most periods in their lifespan because of time constraints of those individuals involved in the implementation of the projects. This thus brings into sharp focus the issues of time and commitment to implementing project activities as dire partnership needs of HEIs/TEIs.

Systematic monitoring and evaluating partnership projects and processes also present yet another major need of HEIs/TEIs involved in 'north-south' research partnerships (de-Graft Aikins, 2008; de-Graft Aikins et al., 2012). In reality, many funding schemes of HEI/TEIs involved in research partnerships do not provide funding to assess the outcome of projects. For this reason, therefore, monitoring and evaluation of project activities is done informally and haphazardly, as in many cases there are no formal monitoring or evaluation processes and mechanisms. One reason for this unfortunate situation has been the difficulty of assessing the quality of the partnerships and undertaking the micro-managing required to monitor them. Consequently, the outcomes of various projects remain unpredictable (Africa Unit, 2010).

In sum, these are but few of the partnership needs of HEI/TEIs that the research partnership development literature highlights. Other relevant needs that the literature pontificates but which are not included here due to lack of space include: commitment/adherence to good management principles and governance systems and structures; clear division of roles and responsibilities between partner institutions; undertaking joint strategic planning and implementation of partnership plans and project activities; building trust and transparency among partner institutions; and undertaking ICT infrastructural development (Africa Unit, 2010; de-Graft Aikins et al., 2012 etc.).

2.2. Undertaking Partnership Needs Assessment in HEIs in Low-Income Countries

Needs assessment has been defined slightly differently in wording in the literature but with some inherent commonalities in features and in meaning. Adentwi (2005, p. 133), for example, defines needs assessment as "a critical study or examination of the society for which an educational proposal is being designed in order to identify the problems, needs and aspirations, resources available, and feasible solutions". For Altschuld and Kumar (2010, p. 20), needs assessment is "the process of identifying needs, prioritising them, making needs-based decisions, allocating resources, and implementing actions in organisations to resolve problems underlying important needs". McNeil (1996, p. 122) also defines need in curriculum as 'a condition in which a discrepancy exists between an acceptable state of a learner achievement or attitude and an observed learner state'. He goes on to explain that by identifying those needs not being met by the curriculum, the curriculum worker is provided with the basis for revising the curriculum in such a way as to fulfil as many unmet needs as possible.

From the above, it becomes immediately discernible that needs assessments are mostly conducted by organisational entities (e.g., education, businesses, community agencies, government institutions, etc.), but may also be conducted informally by smaller groups of people (Altschuld and Kumar, 2010). Besides this, and from an educational point of view, two key arguments can be summed up for what needs assessment is or ought to be. One, needs assessment is or could be considered as the process by which educational needs are defined and priorities set for further curriculum work. Two, needs assessment ought not to be a single one-time operation but a continuing and periodic activity aimed at improving educational outcomes (Oliva, 1992).

Although the general rationale for needs assessment may seem obvious on an individual level, the following six reasons are identified as the most frequently stated rationale or purpose statements for undertaking needs assessments, especially in the area of Student Services (Kuh, 1982).1. To help design programmes to meet student needs rather than programme needs (Mayes and McConatha, 1982). 2. To ensure that student services are changing with the times and in tandem with the changing needs of students (Carney and Barak, 1976). 3. To improve retention and success of 'high risk' students (Mayes and McConatha, 1982). 4. To help identify future goals and objectives for student services (Kuh, 1982).5. To help identify 'unsatisfactory conditions, or challenging situations with which students contend' (Kuh, 1982). 6. To serve as a tool for making policy adjustments or programme changes whenever there is a need for programme or policy justification (Kuh, 1982).

The preponderance of available research evidence also suggests that needs assessments, particularly in education or for educational purposes, are conducted via a variety of ways and forms (Altschuld and Kumar, 2010; Kuh, 1982; Mayes and McConatha, 1982; McNeil, 1996 etc.). Some of these methods of undertaking needs assessments include via: staff appraisal reports; research output; graduation rates; students appraisal reports; alumni surveys; employer surveys; staff

surveys; student surveys; and reviews of emerging trends in international higher education. A few other mechanisms that the literature identifies include: assessment of physical facilities; examining existing curriculum; departmental, faculty, college and institutional strategic plans; and data from peer institutions.

3. Methods

This article is an offshoot of a British Council, Ghana sponsored research project undertaken between 2019-2020 by the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA) of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana (Nudzor et al., 2019). The original research project on which this article is based investigated transnational education (TNE) partnerships and the environment of distance learning generally in HEIs/TEIs in Ghana. The rationale for this research endeavour essentially was to provide insights into the state of HE/TE in Ghana with the view to supporting both Government of Ghana and her international development partners in identifying the key areas where they could work to improve the quality of, and access to Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs, while at the same time providing her international development partners with value in the form of qualitative and/or economically beneficial partnerships. In this section of the article, the research methods and approaches adopted for that original research are described and justified crisply to set the stage and provide meaning to/for the findings to be unveiled by this article.

To help generate evidence-informed findings to address the research questions posed for the original research on which article is based, a multiphase mixed-method research design, informed by exploratory and explanatory sequential designs was used to explore and understand in-depth existing TNE partnerships in Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs (Nudzor et al., 2019). The exploratory sequential segment of this design was characterized by an initial qualitative phase of data collection and analysis (mainly through document analysis and literature reviews to provide context for TNE partnership in Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs and to guide the development of data collection instruments), followed by a phase of quantitative data collection and analysis, with a final phase of integration or linking of data from the two separate strands (Berman, 2017; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Subedi, 2016). The explanatory sequential segment of the multiphase mixed-method research design, on the other hand, consists of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data thereafter to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results (Subedi, 2016). The justification for this design lies in the fact that the quantitative data and results provide a general picture of the research problem; but that more analysis specifically through qualitative data collection is needed to refine, extend or explain the general picture (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The use of multiphase mixed-method research design helped, first of all, to collect and analyse qualitative data (in the form of document analysis and literature reviews) and then based on the qualitative findings, to develop the quantitative aspect (i.e., survey) of the study. This process then led to the collection and analysis of quantitative data, which was then followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative case study data from multiple sites, and finally, the overall integration, interpretation and reporting of the findings of the study.

The sample for the research project on which this article reports comprised Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs and regulatory bodies involved in higher/tertiary education (HE/TE) administration in Ghana. In selecting the sample, census, purposeful random and criterion sampling techniques were employed. First, census sampling technique was employed to study the entire population of HEIs/TEIs to profile them. Second, purposeful random sampling technique was used to sample one hundred and two (102) HEIs/TEIs for a quantitative survey. Third, the criterion sampling strategy (with the help of 'screening questionnaires' employed as the first phase of the survey) was used to select twenty-eight (28) HEIs/TEIs involved in TNE partnerships for a second phase of quantitative survey regarding the nature and scope of their existing partnerships. Fourth, the purposeful sampling technique was used to select 17 HE/TE actors/officials for multi-site case study interviews regarding their respective institutions' experiences and roles in TNE partnerships. Thus, the various sampling techniques used enabled key actors and institutions with rich information about TNE partnerships within the HE sectors in Ghana to be sampled for in-depth study and analysis.

Owing to the composite data collection intent embedded within the variant of the mixed-methods approach adopted for the study, data was collected using document review guide, self-administered questionnaires and open-ended semi-structured interview guide. The document review guide, consisting mainly of a checklist, was designed and used to identify and select relevant documents (e.g., policy documents and regulations, institutional reports, data files, journals on higher education and other written artefacts) needed for initial scoping and literature review for the purposes of the study. Two sets of questionnaires were used to collect data from participating institutions. The first set of the questionnaire was used to screen 102 participating institutions regarding their involvement or otherwise in TNE partnerships. The second set of the questionnaire was used as a follow-up activity for the 28 HEIs/TEIs that indicated they were in some form of TNE partnerships regarding the nature and scope of their existing partnerships. The semi-structured open-ended interview guide, on its part, was used to collect relevant qualitative data through face-to-face interviews with 17 actors/officials (e.g., representatives of regulatory bodies, International Relations' Offices/Registrar's Offices and Heads of Departments of HEIs/TEIs) involved in HE administration in Ghana.

Data collection procedures relating to access to the HEIs/TEIs across the country was facilitated by the British Council, Ghana prior to the research team going to the field for data collection. This took the form of emails and letters sent by the British Council, Ghana to all the institutions to be involved in the study two clear weeks before the research team embarked upon data collection. In addition, personal introductory letters were given to the field officers to be delivered to the institutions to enable them to grant them access to the HEIs/TEIs for the purposes of data collection. In all, the country was divided into zones for data collection purposes, and research data was collected in three phases. Phase one involved desk review of relevant policy documents, empirical literature and technical and institutional reports to provide the context and theoretical support for the research. Phase two constituted a cross-sectional survey involving the collection and analysis of quantitative data from 102 HEIs/TEIs about their involvement (or otherwise) in TNE partnerships with

reasons. Phase three, which was sub-divided into two stages, comprised a follow-up survey conducted with 28 HEIs/TEIs, and in-depth multi-site case study interviews conducted with 17 officials selected regarding the nature and scope of their TNE partnerships.

The analysis of data collected was undertaken based on the three phases of data collection outlined. First, the textual data collected through document and literature reviews were analysed thematically through processes of skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation. Second, the survey data collected was organised and analysed using SPSS Version 20, and the findings presented using descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency tables and charts). Third, the analysis of interview transcripts generated through the multi-site case study interviews was analysed using NVivo 8 to store, code, categorise and analyse the data. The use of NVivo software facilitated a more nuanced comparison within and across cases using coded data as well as data storage (Bogdan&Biklen, 1992). Thus, the thematic analysis used in this study involved a careful, more focused re-reading and review of the data, which involved taking a closer look at the selected data and coding and categorising the data based on the data's characteristics to uncover themes pertinent to TNE partnerships in HEIs/TEIs in Ghana.

4. Findings

The presentation of research findings in this article is done according to the two research questions posed. For the purposes of the article, and owing essentially to the composite data collection and analysis methods employed, evidence marshalled to address the research questions are drawn mainly from questionnaires administered to the 28 HEIs/TEIs involved in TNE partnerships and the open-ended semi-structured interviews conducted with17 actors/officials of HEIs/TEIs engaged in HE administration in Ghana.

4.1. Research Question One: What Are the Partnerships Needs of Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs engaged in Research Partnership Collaborations*?*

This research question sought generally to explore partnership needs of Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs that are engaged in research partnership collaborations. This is done with the view to helping to outline the fundamental ingredients needed for effective partnerships in the higher education/tertiary education sector in Ghana. Insights from both quantitative and qualitative data sources (i.e., self-administered questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) are employed to answer this question. In the case of the self-administered questionnaire, a list of 12 statements about partnership needs of HEIs/TEIs identified through the review of literature were presented, and respondents were required to choose from the list of statements that they considered to be the partnership needs of their HEIs/TEIs. The quantitative findings to this question are presented in Figure 1.
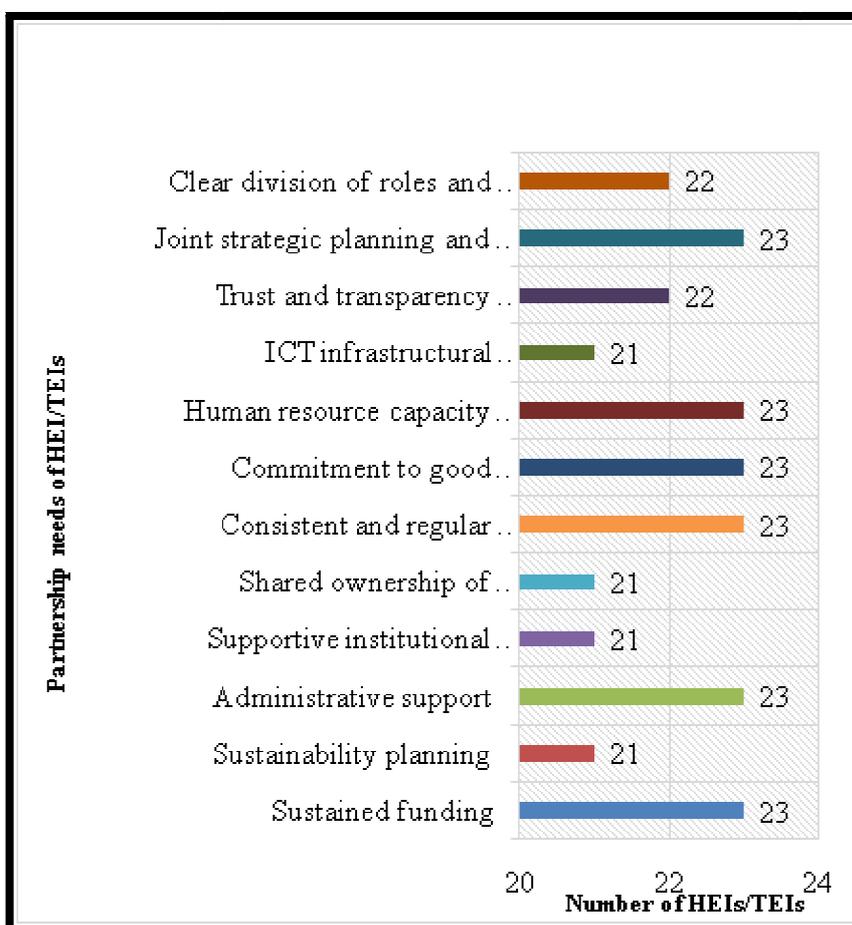

Figure 1: Respondents' Views about Partnership Needs of Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs

Clearly, insights from Figure 1 show that although respondents saw the list of statements provided in relation to the partnership needs of Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs to be important, they considered some needsto be more relevant to their contexts than others. For example, sustained funding, administrative support, consistent and regular monitoring and evaluation, commitment to good management/governance principles and/or structures, human resource capacity building, and joint strategic planning and implementation of partnership plan and project were considered by respondents as the six topmost partnership needs of Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs. Generally speaking, this finding is not different from the views espoused in the partnership development literature concerning the partnership needs of HEIs in low-income regions (Africa Unit, 2008, 2010; Amoah et al., 2000; de-Graft Aikins et al., 2012; Gutierrez, 2008; Zame et al., 2008 etc.). In particular, this resonates aspects of de-Graft Aikins et al.'s (2012) findings reported in the review of literature for the purposes of this research. De-Graft Aikins et al. identify sustained funding, administrative support, social capital, measurable goals, creativity and innovation as five key ingredients that are essential for sustaining research partnerships in Ghanaian and for that matter Africa's HEIs/TEIs. In terms of administrative support being a partnership need for HEIs/TEIs, de-Graft Aikins et al. (2012) point out that HEIs/TEIs that engaged in partnerships need this support for activities like organising meetings (whether face to face or online), writing reports, searching for grant proposals and developing grant proposal budgets which can be time-consuming, cumbersome and add on extra responsibilities that stretch the capabilities and commitments of partnership members. Regarding the issue of sustained funding being a dire TNE partnership need, they contend that for small-scale Ghanaian higher education partnerships to transition from grant stages to integrative stages sustained funding is required. Thus, sustained funding appears ultimately to be a key TNE partnership need because unless there is a clear financing plan in place, no matter how rigorously partnership activities are followed, they are bound to fail (de-Graft Aikins et al., 2012).

Admittedly, some of the other findings illustrated in Figure 1 present an interesting case worth discussing a little further. A case in point concerns findings relating ICT infrastructure development. It is suggested, for example, that respondents considered ICT infrastructural development to be among the least partnership needs of HEIs/TEIs. This appears to contradict the earlier assertion made in the review of literature to the effect that access to ICT systems has proven to be a major stumbling block in many Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs involved in partnership programmes (Africa Unit, 2010; de-Graft Aikins et al., 2012). Thus, in a different context and/or sense, this finding could be interpreted to mean that respondents felt that either the forms of partnerships delivered by Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs do not essentially require the use of ICT infrastructure, or that Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs have the needed ICT infrastructure to support the form of TNE partnership they deliver.

In the case of the multi-site case study interviews conducted with 17 the selected officials of the Ghanaian higher education/tertiary education landscape, the analyses suggest that the insights generated corroborated largely the quantitative findings illustrated in Figure 1. The participants, in their respective interviews, articulated issues that are close to those illustrated by the quantitative data. The following excerpts of the interviews conducted illustrate the convergence between the two data sets (i.e., results from the questionnaires and interview findings):

… one of the issues, that is, sustained funding is a need. Also, we have a small campus and the numbers are not encouraging, but we are hoping to expand it in the future because we have the land available. The problem is the money. And then human resource and capacity building too. We are trying because we have some of our people studying in PhD programmes, and so there is some commitment to staff development… (Senior officer of private HEI/TEI 1).

… we also need to develop our infrastructure. It is woefully inadequate. If you look at our universities, not just my university [mentions the name of institution] but all the universities in Ghana, we have serious infrastructure deficit. We are not competitive enough. It is across Africa, if I must say, with the exception of South Africa and Egypt. They have been able to put up a lot into infrastructural development and it's helping them. If we want to attract students from the best universities like Harvard, to come doing their PhD and graduate programmes here, then we need to make sure that we have the commensurate facilities that they have out there so people can move across the borders and say am coming to Ghana or University of Ghana or University of Cape Coast because the facilities are just like those in their countries (Senior officer of public HEI/TEI 2).

The first has got to do with the programmes, because the foreign partners are having their own programmes that they want to pursue and whether that forms part of the programmes you are also running is very key… Another is the infrastructure requirement. You do have the lecture halls but how are they equipped? The other thing is also as to whether the students are interested in the programmes; because there are some programmes that when you run, you may not get even one student for them. Location is also very key because remember one team… they were particular about where we are located and they said they chose us because of our location (Senior officer of private HEI/TEI 6).

I think there is a need for policy to guide the partnerships. Quality assurance is another important need … More staff are needed too. Programmes run need to be directed to the Ghanaian context. Thus, sustained funding appears ultimately to be a key TNE partnership need because unless there is a clear financing plan in place, no matter how rigorously partnership activities are followed, they are bound to fail… Programmes run need to be directed to the Ghanaian context. Partnerships too should be well established with adequate administrative structures… Finally, the ambience has to be conducive (Senior officer of regulatory body 1).

Clearly, the insights from the interviews conducted are obvious and require little efforts to make them intelligible. The interview insights reinforce three of the partnerships needs elucidated in the review of literature, namely: sustained funding, infrastructure development and programmes content. So, although the qualitative findings illustrated herein appears to be consistent with the quantitative findings illustrated earlier in Figure 1, the seeming divergence between these two data sets is that whereas the former set of findings focuses specifically on what actors of the Ghanaian higher

education consider to be their key partnership needs, the latter's concentration is on wide-ranging partnership issues of HEIs/TEIs in general.

4.2. Research Question Two: By What Means Do Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs Engaged in Research Partnership Collaborations Undertake Their Partnership Needs Assessments?

Available evidence from the higher education literature (for example, Adentwi, 2005; Boadu&Acquah, 2013; Altschuld& Kumar, 2010) suggest that, the success of every TNE partnership basically hinges on the quality of needs assessment that is conducted. Against this backdrop, this research question focused on finding out how the needs assessment of TNE partnerships in Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs are conducted. To answer this research question, insights from both the self-administered questionnaires and semi-structured interviews are employed. In the case of the quantitative data, the questionnaire item developed to answer this research question sought to find out from respondents their level of agreement or disagreement to a set of statements regarding ways in which needs assessment of TNE partnerships in Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs are conducted. Findings to this questionnaire item are illustrated in Figure 2.
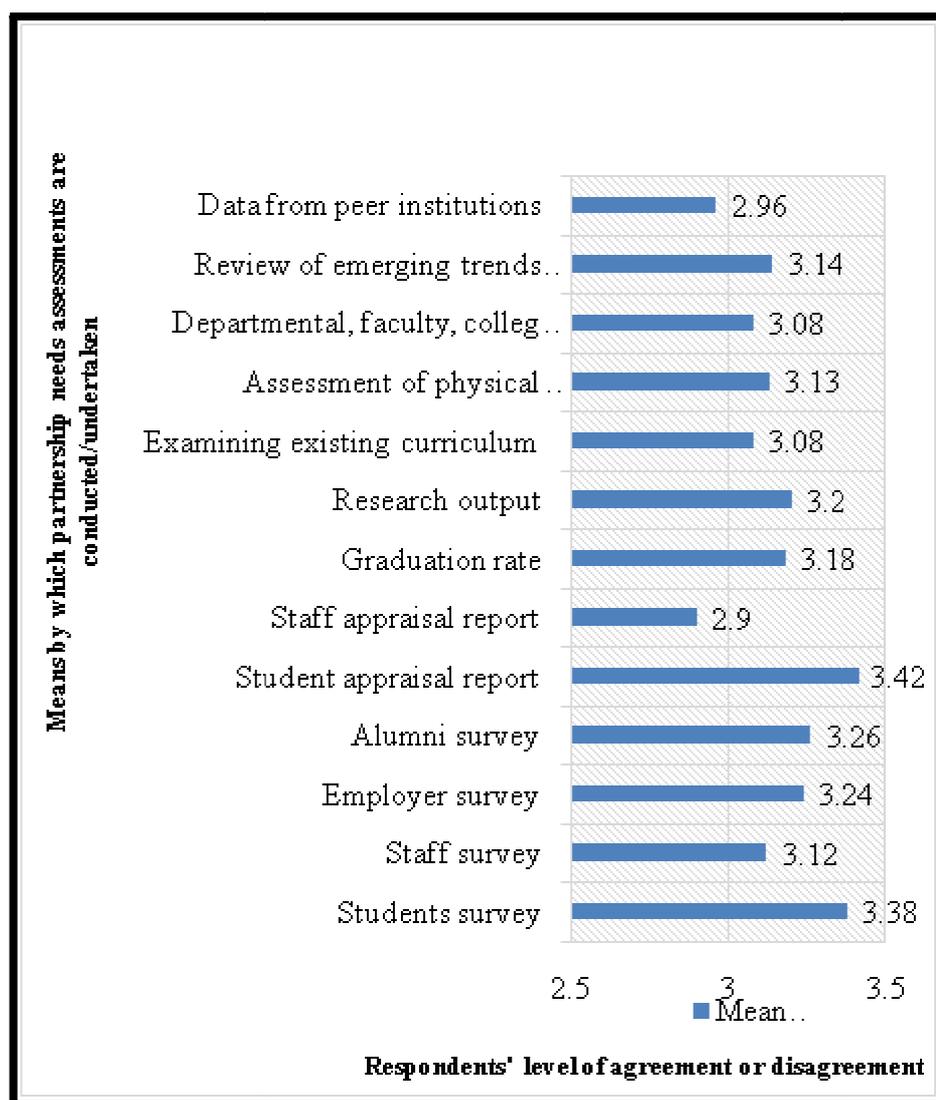

*Figure 2: Respondents' Views about the Means by Which Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs Undertake
Their Partnership Needs Assessments*

As is the case with Figure 1, the interpretation of Figure 2 follows the decision rule which specifies that statements with mean scores from 1.00 to 1.75 are considered to have been strongly disagreed with by respondents, whereas statements with mean scores from 1.76 to 2.50 are considered to have been agreed with by respondents. Conversely, statements with mean scores from 2.51 to 3.25 are considered to have been agreed with by respondents, whereas those with mean scores from 3.26 to 4.00 are considered to have been strongly agreed with by the respondents.

Basing the interpretation of the findings illustrated in Figure 2 on this decision rule established, it can be observed generally that respondents appear to be in agreement with all the statements presented as questionnaire item options in relation to the means by which research partnership needs assessments in Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs are undertaken (i.e.all mean scores > 2.50). This shows that the respondents implicitly have seen or considered needs assessments as:(1) an important process by which educational needs are defined and priorities set for future and further curriculum work (Altschuld and Kumar, 2010) and (2) a continuing and periodic activity aimed at improving educational outcomes (Oliva,

1992). The interesting thing with Figure 2, however, is the point that the respondents' level of agreement to individual statements seem to differ markedly. It is instructive to note, for example, that students survey, alumni survey and student appraisals are the three statements respondents strongly agreed to/with. This suggests that the three are the most prominent ways by which Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs engaged in research partnership collaborations undertake their partnership needs assessments. Put differently, this finding implies that partnership needs assessment processes in Ghanaian HEI/TEIs involved in TNE partnership are largely student-driven, meaning the information they rely on to determine their partnership needs come mainly from students.

Interestingly, insights from the qualitative data largely corroborated the quantitative findings albeit implicitly. In their respective interview encounters, most respondents alluded to the importance of undertaking partnership needs assessments, and have gone on to identify methods that were quite close to the ones identified by the review of literature for the purposes of this article, and which the quantitative findings have flagged up earlier on. Some of the interesting insights from the interviews are presented in the following excerpts:

We give students a questionnaire to answer every semester to know the quality of the course, teaching and learning activities and materials available. From time to time, we also look at the curriculum for some form of revision. The other one too is about faculty, where it is not any priest who can teach theology even though they have all learnt it. You must have a PhD before you teach theology … Before we bring a lecturer, we evaluate the course by comments made by students, syllabus and decide to bring the person a second time or not (Senior officer of private HEI/TEI 1).

We have the alumni office that does a tracer study to know the number of students who leave here, where they go and their impact on the industries (Senior officer of public HEI/TEI 5).

In our university here, we do students and staff survey which we have questionnaires for students to assess lecturers and the facilities we have. We do examine the curriculum, assessment of physical facilities… We also get data from peer institutions because we are not a standalone university (Senior officer of public HEI/TEI 3).

Although revealing, some respondents did suggest that even though there are recognised ways to undertake partnership needs assessments some HEIs/TEIs do not really conduct it. This claim is captured clearly in the words of one interviewee:

… some ways of undertaken needs assessment are through discussions, observation of physical facilities or research. We also sometimes give recommendations. However, Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs do not really do conscious needs assessment (Senior officer of regulatory body 2).

This echoes two clear messages. First, the view expressed by this respondent suggests covertly that although Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs are understand the importance of conducting needs assessment and are aware of some of the means by which this is or could be undertaken, some have the tendency of not assessing the needs of their partnership collaborations altogether for reasons best known to themselves. Second, the finding also suggests that some Ghanaian HEI/TEIs undertake partnership needs assessments without relying on empirical data. Whilst both of these readings are plausible, the crux of the matter as far as this article is concerned is that such a practice has the tendency to result in the ineffective use of resources on the part of the TNE partners (Zame et al., 2008).

Thus, taken together, the findings to the second research question suggest that Ghanaian HEIs/TEIs that engage in research partnership collaborations do have a clear knowledge of some of theways of conducting needs assessments of their partnerships. Having said that, it needs to be pointed out, however, that the prominent ways identified by respondents for doing this (i.e., through students' survey, alumni survey and student appraisals) appear largely to be student-focused and do not necessarily make room for inputs from the wider stakeholder community (e.g., staff, peer institutions, industry etc.).

5. Concluding Thoughts

This article has examined the partnership challenges of Ghanaian HEI/TEIs engaged in research partnership collaborations relative to two key issues, namely: their partnerships need; and the means by which they undertake their partnership needs assessments. Based on the research questions posed, the data gathered and analysed, and the findings elicited, reported and discussed in this article, two key conclusions can be drawn.

First, regarding the question about the partnership needs of Ghanaian HEI/TEIs engaged in research partnership collaborations (and based on the findings reported in this article), it is certain that the higher education landscape of Ghana looks promising as TNE partnership collaborations appear to be emerging rapidly. Having said this, it however needs to be pointed out forcefully that the partnership needs alluded to in this article serve as pointers to the teething challenges that most of the existing partnership regimes are fraught with, and that until attention is paid to and concerted efforts are made to deal with these challenges, the Ghanaian educational landscape will continue to look fertile in terms of partnerships for educational purposes but very difficult to be tilled.

Second, and concerning the research finding which suggests that the means by which Ghanaian HEI/TEIs undertake partnership needs assessments are student-focused (i.e. through students' survey, alumni survey and student appraisals) with less inputs from staff, peer institutions and industry, we conclude that Ghanaian HEI/TEIs could ameliorate most of their peculiar partnership challenges if they make concerted efforts to broaden the processes by which they undertake partnership needs assessments. It is our considered view that if Ghanaian HEI/TEIs ensure that the information they rely on to determine the needs assessment of their partnerships do not come mainly from their students, they would be in a better position to undertake proper stakeholder consultations leading to them being able to deal with some of the challenges they are faced with regarding their partnership needs.

6. Acknowledgements

7. References

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