ALIGNING HIGHER EDUCATION TO WORKFORCE NEEDS IN LIBERIA: A TRACER STUDY OF UNIVERSITY GRADUATES IN LIBERIA

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Mr. Joseph Flomo and Mrs. Nowai Flomo, my beloved father and mother. This dissertation is also dedicated to my beloved wife and children. I love you so dearly.

Abstract

This study investigated the congruence between higher education and the labor market from the perspectives of college graduates in Liberia. It specifically examined the alignment of the skills college students acquire in college to Liberia's labor market.

The study employed a Tracer Study quantitative research methodology. Tracer study as a methodology examines the output and outcome of learning students acquire from college from different kinds of respondents such as college graduates, employers, and postgraduate training institutions. This study investigated the congruence between higher education and the labor market in Liberia from the perspectives of college graduates who graduated from the University of Liberia and Cuttington University from 2005-2009. The study surveyed 400 graduates using research questionnaire. The questionnaire used in this study was a modified version of the Association of African University's tracer study question. The instrument was developed by the Association of African University for use in any African country. As such, modifying it to meet a specific country's context was imperative for achieving the desired result of this research.

Findings from the study indicated that universities in Liberia are to some extent providing skills that are relevant to Liberia's labor market. However, graduate respondents expressed dissatisfaction about the study condition at their alma maters and expressed the need to improve the study conditions at their institution in Liberia. Such study conditions included improvement in learning environments, improvement in curriculum, faculty and universities and alumni connections. Unlike results from previous

studies in other African Countries that found that there were large unemployment among graduates, this study find that more participants in this study were employed.

The finding of the study also revealed that college graduates are not satisfied with their current employment situation and that universities should improve on the skills they are developing in students for better alignment between college education and the world of works.

The findings of this study are important for curriculum development, higher education policy development, and higher education quality assurance. For improvement in learning condition, the study recommended that universities in Liberia need to begin to think about strategies that are useful for developing programs that could improve the alignment between higher education and the labor market in Liberia. One such program could be a strong curriculum program in internship and practicum that could provide graduates with relevant skills for their chosen careers.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Improving the alignment between higher education and the labor market in countries across the world constitutes a major concern for higher education institutions and policy makers (Atchaoarena, 2009). Even in developed countries, improving the alignment between the development of skills through higher education and their utilization in the labor market remains a challenge (Atchaoarena, 2009). The relationship between higher education and the world of work is widely assumed to have much in common in developed countries (Schomburg and Teichler, 1999).

The concern about misalignment between higher education and the labor market is even greater in developing countries. Ssempebwa (2006) found that unemployment in Uganda was attributed entirely by the public and policy makers to the failure of higher education institutions in providing college graduates with the requisite skills for the labor market. Several other studies carried out in Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and other African countries raised concerns about the misalignment between higher education and the labor market. Misalignment between universities and the labor market is not only a problem in developing countries, but a concern in developed countries as well. Several authors argued that universities in all settings should engage the labor market in designing curricular and co-curricular programs that are geared toward developing students with skills for the labor market.

Despite the concern about misalignment between higher education and the labor market, scholars have found that higher education is considered as a key player for the provision of skilled workers for the labor market and for individual personal economic benefits. For example, as education systems expand and economies develop, people aspire to attain higher education, and, especially in developed economics, the attainment of higher education becomes a requirement for working life (Atchaoarena, 2009).

In several countries, the desire to attain higher education is fuelled by cultural values, where traditionally, a university education is considered prestigious (Atchaoarena, 2009). In addition, and sometimes more importantly, there is often a perception among parents and students that a college level qualification can protect against unemployment and ensure a relatively high level of wages. This economic rationale – with its prospect of high rates of return explains why individuals are willing to invest in higher education despite the concerns of misalignment between the labor market and university training in many developing countries. For governments, increasing the level of participation in higher education often forms part of a broader strategy geared towards the development of skills for competitiveness and the establishment of a learning society. Within the context of globalization, the increase of skilled workers in the knowledge economy is required for the development of nations and peoples (McIntosh et al, 2009).

To provide a better understanding of the alignment between higher education and the labor market, several tracer studies (e.g. studies of graduates) have been done to determine how universities and colleges provide college students the relevant skills for the labor market (Teichler, 1999, 2000; Kellermann & Sagmeister, 2000; Woodley &

Brennan, 2000). Findings from these studies have been obtained from the perspectives of college graduates, academics, employers, and the general publics in several countries. These findings have been informed by the knowledge about the composition of the samples (often, college graduates, employers, academicians) within country specific context. The findings from most of these studies have been used to inform universities' curricula and higher education policies in several countries.

Problem Statement

One of the numerous problems facing African countries today and that threatens development is the increasing rate of unemployment among university graduates. This phenomenon has been ascribed to the lack of alignment between African universities' training and the labor market on the continent (Sawadogo, 2010; Cabal, 1993; World Bank, 2009). Some scholars assert that curriculum at many of the universities in African countries have no alignment with labor market needs (Kaijage, 2000; Anyanwu, 2000). Even though some African universities, for example, Makerere University (Uganda) and the University of Western Cape (South Africa), have made remarkable progress in becoming national institutions that try to develop curricula that align skills development through higher education to the labor market, many African colleges and universities are still far from the reality of providing graduates the relevant skills for the labor market needs (Ssempebwa, 2006). Several factors (discussed later in this paper) have been found to contribute to the failures of institutions to provide quality education for skills development. For example, Sayon (2004) found that two-thirds of the teaching faculty at

Liberian universities held only bachelor's degrees in their fields. Additionally, Liberian institutions did not have adequate textbooks, libraries with relevant academic materials, and there were limited student support services. The condition at Liberian universities is a common phenomenon at many African institutions and, and thus, is impacting the alignment of African higher education to the labor market. In fact, the relevance of the African universities to the labor market has become a growing concern for both governments and citizens throughout the continent, which is leading to the call for urgent and concerted response from African governments and universities (Somda, 1995; World Bank, 2011).

To better understand the alignment/misalignment between universities and the labor market around the world, and to specifically delve into understanding whether the education provided to students in Liberian higher education system has relevance to Liberia's labor market, this research critically examined the perceptions of university graduates in Liberia as to whether universities in Liberia are providing skills that are aligned with Liberia's labor market needs.

Contextual background

Liberia is a nation that has emerged from fourteen years (1989-2003) of Civil War. Founded by freed slaves from the United States in 1822, Liberia declared its independence on July 26, 1847, thus becoming the oldest independent country in modern Africa (Lulat, 2005). Despite its long existence (in terms of time), Liberia has experienced enormous mismanagement, human right abuses, and a poor educational

system. From 1847 to 1980, Liberia was ruled by Americo-Liberians (freed American slaves who went to Liberia and their descendants). During this time period, Liberia was relatively peaceful with few incidents of conflict between the indigenous people and the central government, which was predominantly led by Americo-Liberians. From 1980 to 1990, the country was ruled by a military leader, President Samuel K. Doe. President Doe's administration was accused by the international community of human right abuses, corruption, and ethnic hatred. The economics of the country also declined sharply during this time. Social institutions in the country, including higher education, declined in quality (Sawyer, 2005). As a result of many people's dissatisfactions, the country plunged into a Civil War in 1989.

The Civil War that began on December 24, 1989 in Liberia further worsened the political and economic challenges the country was facing. It is estimated that about 250,000 people died during the Civil War, and another 500,000 left the country to seek refuge in other countries. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) asserts that most of the skilled people in the country left during the war, and most of this skilled population has not and may not return to reside in Liberia. As a result, the country was left with limited skilled workers in the economic, political, and social sectors (Sawyer, 2005).

Additionally, the economic condition declined as foreign investors exited or left the country, and companies were shut down in the early 1990s. The predominant resources of the country (rubber, timber, gold, diamond, iron core, etc.) were looted massively by warlords and other criminals. The United Nations sanctioned the

exportation of diamonds and timber from Liberia as these resources were being used by warlords to finance their arms struggles. Since the end of the Civil War and until today, the unemployment rate of Liberia has remained at 85%, which shows that only about two of every ten persons in Liberia are employed (UNESCO, 2003). The government of Liberia claimed that the unemployment rate is no longer 85%, though it does not have any empirical evidence to support its claim.

In post-war countries such as Liberia, the challenges facing developing countries are large and complex. One strategy among many within these difficult contexts is to understand how higher education institutions contribute to the development of the workforce (Mauritius Tertiary Education, 2008). Having empirical data to understand how higher education institutions contribute to workforce development could enable the Liberia higher education system and policymakers to provide evidence-based programming and policies for the skill development of students for Liberia's labor market. As Liberia gradually returns to normalcy after fourteen years of Civil War, human resource development is part of its efforts to stabilize the development of the country. But the development of Liberia is not feasible if university education in Liberia is not aligned with the post-war labor market of Liberia.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate the congruence between Liberian higher education and its post-Civil War labor market. Specifically, this study was concerned with how various types of Liberian university graduates perceive their undergraduate education as it contributes to skill development, job satisfaction, and employment prospects.

The research questions that guided this study were; 1) What are the characteristics of Liberian university graduates? 2) What are perceptions of Liberian university graduates in relation to skills developed in college, job satisfaction, and employment opportunities in the Liberian labor market? And 3) how, and to what extent, do year of graduation, gender, field of study, and employment sector (e.g., public/private) shape these perceptions? In discussing these relationships, this study aimed to improve higher education policies and practices in Liberian higher education.

Chapter 2

Context, Literature and Theoretical Framework

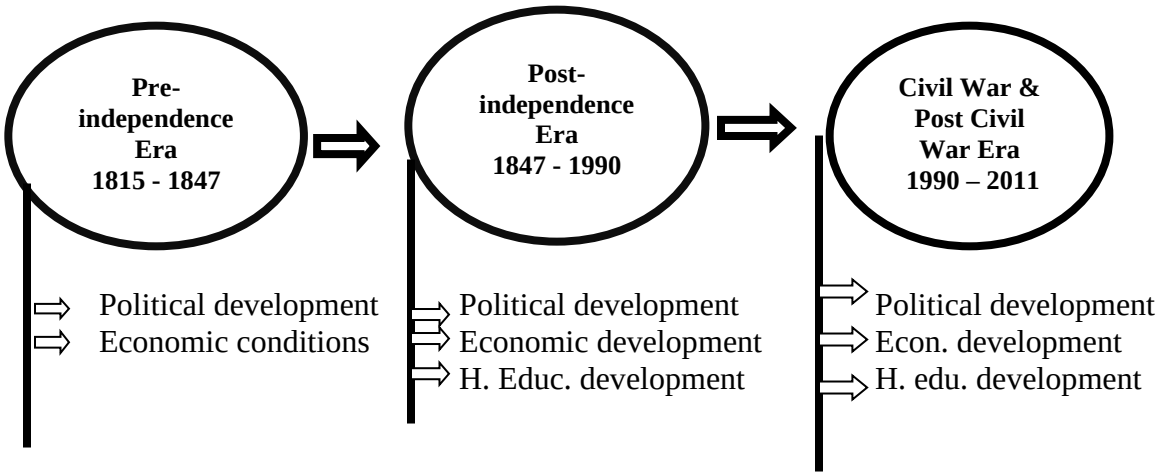
Introduction

In chapter one, I established why it is important to align higher education to the labor market so that higher education is viewed as one venue for economic and political development of a nation. In chapter two, I discussed three distinct sets of literature as each contributes to addressing the research question. First, I discussed the political history, economic history and the evolution of higher education in Liberia and how this context shapes reform efforts in this country. Second, I summarize tracer studies (their purposes and methods) in the context of developing nations and the post-war economies of countries in Africa. For the third section, I outline the limits and opportunities for using such studies in the context of Liberia. Fourth, I examined how tracer studies have been used to spur educational reform and bolster economic development in selected countries. Fifth, I further examined higher education and labor market alignment in Europe and the United States. Lastly, the chapter took a critical examination of the relationship that exists between college education and employment, using Matching Theory (Coles & Smith, 1998) as one theoretical framework to understand graduates' unemployment, underutilization of graduates' skills, and mismatches between graduates' skills and employers' needs.

Research context: Liberia

In this section, I discuss the timeline of the political history, economic history, and the evolution of higher education in Liberia. I have divided the sections into pre-independence dispensation, independence dispensation, the dispensation of Civil War, and post- Civil War time (see Figure 1 below). Specifically, I have chosen to discuss the country's history, economic conditions and higher education in Liberia from 1815 onward since this is the period during which formal education began in Liberia (Allen, 1923). This is important to state as historians traced the history of Liberia back to the 12th Century A.D. (Massing, 2010; Jansen van Vuuren, 2008; Dunn-Marcos, 2005).

Figure 1: Development of Liberia



Pre-independence Era (1815 -1847)

Liberia's Political History before Independence

When the condition of blacks who were slaves and were freed in South and North America became a problem in the American society in the nineteenth Century, a struggle

for liberty began to develop across the Americas. Blacks' struggle for freedom resulted in few changes in their condition in America. After the struggle for liberty in the American Revolution, free and enslaved African Americans faced continued hardship and inequality. A number of white Americans, for a variety of reasons, joined them in their efforts to resolve this complex problem. One possible solution (advocated at a time when the assimilation of free blacks into American society seemed out of the question) was the complete separation of white and black Americans. Some voices called for the return of African Americans to the land of their forbearers, Africa (Allen, 1923).

Movements to Return Free Black to Africa

In 1815, Paul Cuffee, an African-American Quaker and maritime entrepreneur, financed and captained a successful voyage to Sierra Leone, where he helped a small group of African American immigrants establish themselves (Van der Kraaij, 1983). Cuffee believed that African Americans could more easily survive and could be of better service in Africa than in America with its system of slavery and its legislated limits on black freedom. Cuffee also envisioned a black trade network organized by Westernized blacks, who would return to Africa to develop its resources while educating its people in the skills they had gained during captivity (Flomo, 2006). Cuffee died in 1817 without fully realizing his dream.

Though Paul Cuffee did not realize his dream, the partial success of his African venture encouraged white proponents of colonization to form an organization called the American Colonization Society (ACS) to repatriate those free African Americans who would volunteer to settle in Africa. The ACS was established in 1816 by Robert Finley as

an attempt to satisfy two groups in America (Allen, 1923, Livingstone, 1976). Ironically, these groups were on opposite ends of the spectrum involving slavery in the early 1800s. One group consisted of philanthropists, clergy, and abolitionists who wanted to free African slaves and their descendants and provide them with the opportunity to return to Africa. The other group was the slave owners who feared free people of color and wanted to expel them from America. According to Livingstone (1976), both of these groups felt that free blacks would be unable to assimilate into the white society of America. John Randolph, one famous slave owner called free blacks "promoters of mischief." At this time about two million black people lived in America, of which 200,000 were free persons of color (Livingstone, 1976). Henry Clay, a southern congressman and sympathizer of the plight of free blacks, believed that because of unconquerable prejudice resulting from their color, they never could amalgamate with the free whites of America (Smith, 1987).

Many free African Americans, however, including those who had supported Paul Cuffee's efforts, were wary of this new organization because the American Colonization Society was dominated by Southerners and slave holders and it excluded blacks from membership. Some free African Americans wanted to stay in the land (America) they had helped to build, and they planned to continue the struggle for equality and justice in America.

On December 21, 1816, a group of exclusively white upper-class males, including James Monroe, Bushrod Washington, Andrew Jackson, Francis Scott Key, and Daniel Webster, met at the Davis Hotel in Washington D.C. with Henry Clay presiding over the

meeting. They met again one week later and adopted a constitution for the American Colonization Society (Allen, 1923). The Society's members relentlessly pressured the U.S. Congress and the President for support. In 1819, they received $100,000 (USD) from Congress and in January 1820 the first ship, the Ship Elizabeth, sailed from New York headed for West Africa with three white American Colonization Society's agents and 88 African American emigrants (Flomo, 2006).

The ship arrived first at Freetown, Sierra Leone and then sailed south to what is now the northern coast of Liberia and made an effort to establish a settlement. All three whites and twenty-two of the emigrants died within three weeks from malaria. The 66 survivors returned to Sierra Leone and waited for another ship. The British governor allowed the immigrants to temporarily relocate to a safer area, while the ACS worked to save its colonization project from complete disaster (Flomo, 2006). The second ship that left America for Africa was the Nautilus. The Nautilus sailed twice in 1821 and established a settlement at Mesurado Bay on an island they named Perseverance in Liberia (Livingstone, 1976). It was difficult for the early settlers, comprised of mostly free-born blacks, who were not born into slavery, but were denied the full rights of American citizenship. The native Africans resisted the expansion of the settlers, resulting in many armed conflicts. Nevertheless, in the next decade 2,638 African Americans migrated to the area (Livingstone, 1976). Also, the colony entered into an agreement with the U.S. Government to accept freed slaves captured from slave ships.

In 1821, the American Colonization Society dispatched a representative, Dr. Eli Ayres, to purchase land along the coast, further north of Sierra Leone. With the aid of a

U.S. naval officer, Lieutenant Robert F. Stockton, Ayres forcefully purchased land for the settlers. One account says Ayres bought a piece of land "at gun-point -- to part with a '36 mile long and 3 mile wide' strip of coastal land for trade goods, supplies, weapons, and rum [altogether] worth approximately $300" (Cassell, 1970, p. 31)

On April 25, 1822, the survivors of Shebro Island (the place in Sierra Leone where the emigrants had sought refuge from malaria) arrived at Cape Mesurado and began to build their settlement. With the wavering consent of the new immigrants, the American Colonization Society governed the colony through its representative.

Believing that the colonial agent had allocated town lots and rationed provisions unfairly, a few of the settlers armed themselves and forced the society's representative to flee the colony. The disagreements were resolved temporarily when an American Colonization Society's representative came to investigate the colony's problems and persuaded Ashmun to return. Steps were initiated to spell out a system of local administration and to codify the laws. This resulted, a year later, in the Constitution, Government, and Digest of the Laws of Liberia. In this document, sovereign power continued to rest with the ACS's agent, but the colony was to operate under common law. Slavery and participation in slave trade were forbidden. The settlement that had been called Christopolis was renamed Monrovia (Liberia's capital) after the American president, James Monroe, and the colony as a whole was formally called Liberia (the land of the free), from the Latin "liber".

In 1827, the quest for the emancipation of free blacks began taking ground in the United States. Various U.S. states began forming colonization societies akin to the

American Colonization Society. Slave states in the North, increasingly interested in getting rid of their free black populations, encouraged the formation of colonization societies. These groups organized themselves independently of the ACS and founded their own colonies in Liberia for transplanting free African Americans. Some of the "volunteers" were emancipated only if they agreed to emigrate. The Maryland State Colonization Society established its colony in Cape Palmas, Liberia (currently Maryland County). Virginia and Mississippi also established Liberian colonies for former slaves and free blacks in Liberia.

As the campaign for the emancipation of free blacks to Africa continue to spread, the colonies established by the Virginia Colonization Society, the Quaker Young Men's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania, and the American Colonization Society merged as the Commonwealth of Liberia and claimed control over all settlements between Cestos River and Cape Mount. The Commonwealth adopted a new constitution and a newly-appointed governor in 1839. A former Virginian, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, a trader and successful military commander, was named the first lieutenant governor and became the first African-American governor of the colony after the appointed governor died in office in 1841. Joseph Jenkins Roberts was born in Norfolk, Virginia to a Methodist missionary.

Liberia's Pre-independence Economy

During this period (1815-1847), the commonwealth received most of its revenue from donations by colonization societies in the United States. It also generated revenues from custom duties which angered the indigenous traders and British merchants on whom

they were levied. The British government advised Liberian authorities that it did not recognize the right of the American Colonization Society, a private organization, to levy these taxes. Britain's refusal to recognize Liberia's sovereignty convinced many colonists that independence with full taxing authority was necessary for the survival of the colony and its immigrant population. In October 1846, Americo-Liberian colonists voted in favor of independence.

Post-independence era (1847-1990)

Liberia's Post-independence Politics (1847 – 1989)

On July 26, 1847, the Liberian Declaration of Independence was adopted and signed by eleven men, all Americo-Liberians. In it, Liberians charged their mother country, the United States, with injustices that made it necessary for them to leave and make new lives for themselves in Africa (Livingstone, 1976; Allen, 1923). They called upon the international community to recognize the independence and sovereignty of Liberia. Britain was one of the first nations to recognize the new country. The United States did not recognize Liberia until the American Civil War in 1862 (Livingstone, 1976). In 1848, the Liberian Constitution was ratified and the first elections were held in the new republic. The Liberian colony's former Governor, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, was elected Liberia's first President.

As the new republic grew, it became evident that others of like situation would want to be like them. In 1854, the Maryland Colony declared its independence from the Maryland State Colonization Society, but did not become part of the Republic of Liberia. It held the land along the coast between the Grand Cess and San Pedro Rivers. The

independent state of Maryland (Africa) requested military aid from Liberia in a war with the Grebo and Kru peoples who were resisting the Maryland settlers' efforts to control their trade. President Roberts assisted the Marylanders, and a joint military campaign by both groups of African American colonists resulted in victory. In 1857, Maryland became a county of Liberia. The society in Liberia developed into three segments: the settlers with African American lineage; freed slaves from slave ships that were arrested on the seas and in the West Indies; and indigenous native people. The interactions between these groups would have a profound effect on the history of Liberia.

When the Civil War in America ended in 1865, it was time for blacks in America to make a decision about being freed, no matter what their origins were. That same year, 346 immigrants from Barbados joined the small number of African Americans coming to Liberia after the American Civil War. With overseas immigration slowing to a trickle, the Americo-Liberians (as the settlers from America and those emancipated from slave ships on the sea and their descendants were starting to be called) depended on immigrants from nearby regions of Africa to increase the republic's population. According to Boley (1983),

> The Americo-Liberians formed an elite [class] and perpetuated a double-tiered social structure in which local African peoples could not achieve full participation in the nation's social, civic, and political life. The Americo-Liberians replicated many of the exclusions and social differentiations that had so limited their own lives in the United States (p. 271).

Boley (1983) referred to that social differentiation as the absolute equality of all men before the law, which he believed was the only true basis of reconstruction. In addition, the Americo-Liberians brought with them the racial injustice they had suffered in the United States (Lulat, 2005). They were divided along racial lines as the Mulattoes (African American who were of bi-racial background) try to exert authority over the African Americans who were purely of Negro descent. Furthermore, Americo-Liberians did not allow the indigenous of Liberia to participate in any form of government or higher learning during this time (Lulat, 2005). Lulat (2005) further asserts that Americo-Liberians considered themselves "civilized" and considered indigenous "uncivilized." As such, Americo-Liberians did not have anything to do with the indigenous.

A government official, Benjamin Anderson, journeyed into Liberia's interior in 1868 to sign a treaty with the king of Muserado, made careful note of the people, the customs, and the natural resources of those areas he passed through, writing a published report of his journey. Using the information from Anderson's report, the Liberian government moved to assert limited control over the inland region (Van der Kraaij, 1983). The act of including indigenous people into the government system, though to a very limited extent, was established. Thus, Americo-Liberians and indigenous people became, to an extent, united.

As new developments took place in the republic, the challenge of drawing a clear demarcation began. The challenge was locating Liberia's political boundaries with respect to the colonies that surrounded it. In 1903, the British and Liberian governments came to an agreement about the borders between Sierra Leone and Liberia. The two

governments agreed that the Mano River would be used as the political boundary between the colony of Sierra Leone, which was under British rule, and the Republic of Liberia. Thus, the Mano River began and is today the boundary between Liberia and Sierra Leone.

On the political front, the quest for indigenous people to be included in the government system was making headway as the indigenous people were protesting for their presence in the law making and ruling processes. In 1904, the Liberian government instituted an administrative system that brought indigenous peoples into an indirect political relationship with the central government through their own paid officials. However, this did not give the indigenous people any political power. They were not allowed to vote or allowed to disagree with any government policy. The government levied taxes on them and they were obligated to obeying the order of government. From 1900 to 1945, the government dealt with a lot of rebellions from natives. Finally, in 1946, 96 years after independence, the right to vote and participate in elections was extended to Liberia's indigenous people (Flomo, 2006).

After many struggles and survivals, the nation stood the test of time. In 1944, William V. S. Tubman, the son of an Americo-Liberian was elected to the first of seven terms as president of Liberia. President Tubman was hailed as the most popular president among both the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous people. He built schools for indigenous children and he allowed the recruiting of indigenous people for the Liberian army. He extended the right to vote to them. President Tubman traveled extensively into

the interior of the country and spent time bridging the gap between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous people.

His successor was his Vice President, President William R. Tolbert, the grandson of a freed slaved who was born and reared in Charleston, North Carolina. President Tolbert's grandfather arrived in Liberia with his family in 1879 as the largest emigrant family up to that time. President Tolbert was an ordained Baptist minister and he served as the President of the Baptist World Alliance. He served as interim president from 1971-1972 and was officially elected president in 1972.

Tolbert soon begin losing the confidence of his people (Americo-Liberians) and his party, the True Whig Party, the only political party in the country at the time, because he was promoting indigenous into high political positions. After the death of his vice president**,** James Edward Greene, he selected Bennie Warner as his vice president. Bennie Warner, a Methodist Bishop, was from the native tribe of the Bassa people. He was not a member of the True Whig Party. Bishop Warner's tribal background was a big problem to the ruling class as they saw Bishop Warner's ascendency to the vice presidency as inappropriate for an indigenous Liberian.

President Tolbert's administration was filled with mixed-feelings among both his people and the indigenous. Though for the first time in the 125 years of Liberia's independence, he allowed the founding of a second political party, problems remained. On April 4, 1979, hundreds of people demonstrated on the streets of Monrovia against the increment in the price of rice, the staple food of Liberia. The April 4th riot was the beginning of trouble in Liberia. The Americo-Liberians had run the nation for 133 years

with relative peace, though they monopolized the political, economic and educational systems and kept the natives as underdogs. The beginning of the end came in 1978 when a young Liberian, Gabriel B. Matthews, announced the formation of an opposition political party in the country and was approved by President Tolbert.

In 1980, Master Sergeant Samuel Doe overthrew President William Tolbert and established a military government called "The People's Redemption Council". He executed many of President Tolbert's cabinet ministers. The constitution of Liberia was suspended and military decrees were used to rule the nation. Political parties remained banned until 1984. Elections were held on October 15, 1985, in which Doe's National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) was declared the winner. The elections were characterized by widespread fraud and rigging. The period after the elections saw increased human rights abuses, corruptions, and ethnic tensions. The standard of living, which had been rising in the 1970s, declined drastically. On November 12, 1985, former Army Commanding Gen. Thomas Quiwonkpa invaded Liberia by way of neighboring Sierra Leone and almost succeeded in toppling the government of Samuel Doe. Members of the Krahn-dominated Armed Forces of Liberia repelled Quiwonkpa's attack and executed him in Monrovia.

During the early years of his administration, President Doe was a strong ally of the United States. He had great relationship with President Ronald Reagan. He [Doe] openly supported U.S. Cold War foreign policy in Africa during the1980s, and once even challenged diplomats to a fistfight when they criticized the U.S. in his presence. He developed his political and speechmaking skills by watching Reagan's speeches on

television. However, when President Doe's administration became characterized by massive corruption and nepotism, and he began hunting down everyone he believed was opposed to him, and subsequently, the United States began distancing herself from Doe and his government and then problems started for him.

Liberia's Post-independence Economy (1847 – 1989)

This session on the economic landscape of Liberia begins with the launching of the Open Door Policy in Liberia in the late 19th Century (Frempong, 1999; Van der Kraaij, 1983). It is important to establish this because before the creation of the Republic of Liberia, the indigenous people who occupied the current geographical locations of Liberia were already trading with merchants from Europe, especially Portugal.

The U.S. President William McKinley and his Secretary of State, John Hay introduced the Open Door Policy, to established diplomatic ties with China and other countries at the end of the 19th Century (Van der Kraaij, 1983). This model was intended to be used by the U.S. government for solidifying diplomatic relations with Liberia as well. Van der Kraaij (1983) asserted that when the diplomatic and political relationship established by the Open Door Policy between Liberia and the U.S. was not succeeding, the Liberian government however chose to transform the Open Door Policy model into an economic Open Door Policy. In this later model, the Liberian government created policies for attracting foreign investors. This later formation indeed attracted several foreign investors to Liberia. The first company that began investment in Liberia as a result of the Open Door Policy was an American company called Firestone Rubber

Plantation. Firestone was followed by other rubber companies like BF Goodrich and Uniroyal. Some iron ore companies in the mining industry included Bong Mining Company, Liberia American-Swedish Minerals Company, Liberia Iron Ore Company, and Liberia Mining Company. Other companies, including Liberia Gold and diamond Corporation, National Gold and diamond Corporation, etc, also began mining gold and diamonds in Liberia. Additionally, several agricultural companies investing in crops other than rubber began investing in Liberia. Several logging companies including Bolado Sawmills, Liberia Lumber Company, Liberia Industrial Forestry Corporation, Maryland Logging Company, etc. began also investing in Liberia's economy (Van der Kraaij, 1983).

Liberia also experienced economy growth after World War II due to an agreement between the Liberian government and the United States (The Defense Area Agreement of 1942). During World War II, the United States used Liberia as a base for fighting in North Africa and the Far East (Van der Kraaij, 1983). During this period, the U.S. government built the current seaport (Freeport of Monrovia), an international airport (Roberts International Airport), and a communication system called the Omega Navigation System in Liberia (Van der Kraaij, 1983). Van der Kraaij (1983) asserted that the purpose for these infrastructures was to facilitate American's fight against its World War II enemies. However, when the war ended, these facilities became commercial facilities and they started to earn income for the government of Liberia.

By the mid 1950s, Liberia had the fastest growing economy in the world second to Japan (Van der Kraaij, 1983). It had the largest mercantile fleet and the largest rubber

plantation in the world. Additionally, it was the main exporter of iron ore and ranked third on the world market for iron ore exporters. According to Van der Kraaij (1983), "Export rose from $9 million in 1943 to $537 million in 1979 while government revenues went up from $1.5 million to approximately $200 million in the same period" (p. x). The labor market also saw an incremental growth. Employment in the private sector increased from 30,000 jobs in 1944 to 150,000 jobs in 1979. Additionally, employment in the public sector (government jobs) increased from 1,200 in 1944 to nearly 40,000 in 1979.

No model goes without criticisms. So was it with the Open Door Policy. Many critics of the model argued that it was not ideal for a developing economy as it exposed Liberia to foreign investors who were interested in profit making (Frempong, 1999, Van der Kraaij, 1983). Critics asserted that the Open Door Policy was more beneficial to the Americo-Liberians elite class since the profit from it provided them personal resources, while it enabled companies to deplete the natural resources that were in parts of the countries occupied by indigenous (Van der Kraaij, 1983). Additionally, because the country lacked skilled human resources, many of the managers who worked for the foreign companies that operated in Liberia were foreign individuals who were imported by the various companies. Van der Kraaij (1983) lamented that companies such as Firestone' annual profits were five times the annual revenue of Liberia.

Most of the companies that were started as a result of the Open Door Policy in Liberia remained opened until the inception of the Civil War in 1989. However, Frempong (1999) asserted that the economy of the country decline considerably due to bad government practices by the administration of President Samuel Doe. Van der Kraaij

asserted that corruption has always been a part of the governing system in Liberia. He further explained that said corruption contributed to the poor infrastructure that was built by the ruling class of Liberia since the founding of the country. Frempong (1999) argued that the administration of President William Tubman immensely contributed to the collapse of Liberia. President Tubman was president of Liberia for 27 years (1944-1971). According to Frempong (1999), President Tubman built the country's economy around himself and created an authoritarian government that was meant to profit the Americo-Liberians elite at the expense of the native. By the time of his death in office in 1971, crisis was emerging in the country over the unfair distribution of the nation's resources among the indigenous and the ruling class (Frempong, 1999). Frempong asserted that Tubman's mishandling of Liberia's economy created mistrust for President William Tolbert when he took office. As such, the Tolbert administration was under constant pressure from opposition politicians until his overthrow in 1980 by President Samuel Doe.

Evolution of Higher Education in Liberia (1847-1989)

The quest for higher education in Liberia began with the Massachusetts Colonization Society (MCS) in 1848, one year after the declaration of independence (Lulat, 2005; Livingstone, 1973; Allen, 1923). Many members of the society were interested in starting higher education in Liberia, especially the president of the society, Professor Simon Greenleaf (Allen, 1923).

As this concern for the creation of a higher education in Liberia was being discussed, a conference was held by stakeholders to discuss the feasibility of starting a

higher education institution in Liberia (Allen, 1923). On May 30, 1849, the President of the Massachusetts Colonization Society, Professor Greenleaf, presented a draft resolution declaring that Liberia ought to have, within itself, the means of educating its citizens for all duties of public and private life (Allen, 1923). He stated that the Colonization societies in the United States should work together to raise enough funds for the project. He authorized the societies to create a board that would manage the project. At a meeting of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society on December 6, 1849, a committee was set to write a project proposal and present it to Professor Greenleaf.

On January 16, 1850, the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Colonization Society met with delegations from every national and state colonization society. At that meeting, the committee set up for the project presented a paper to the delegates. The paper stated that the committee was working to recruit individuals who would be interested in the project. It said that the project was necessary and needed to be started as soon as possible. However, there was some skepticism about whether it was possible to start an institution of higher learning in a country with few educated people (Livingstone, 1976; Allen, 1923). Livingstone (1976) asserted that only 25% of those who moved to Liberia were educated. This percentage of those who emigrated to Liberia, according to Livingstone, were largely the Mulatto populations of the African American, since according to him they were privileged to have had access to education in the United States.

The work of the committee was endorsed by those attending the meeting. To raise fund for the project, the society created a nonprofit organization called the Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia and it was incorporated in Massachusetts on March 19, 1850 (Allen, 1923).

In June 1850, Professor Greenleaf, at the request of the Trustees, communicated with the president of Liberia, President Joseph Jenkins Roberts. According to Allen (1923), the Trustees requested President Roberts to appoint people who would serve on a board of education that would be formed in Liberia. He was also requested to identify a place where the college could be built. The Trustees informed the president that it was only going to raise funds for the project, and the government of Liberia would be responsible for the construction of the college. President Roberts was asked his opinion regarding the committee's request. In his response, the president stated that he was delighted that the possibility of creating a higher education institution in Liberia was in sight as he has long waited for such opportunity. He endorsed the proposal of the Trustees of Donation.

Allen (1923) asserted that on December 3, 1850, President Roberts delivered a message to the Legislature of Liberia informing them about the plan of the Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia. The Legislature embraced the proposal to build a college in Liberia and promised to create a chapter of the Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia. The Legislature promised that it would ensure that every mandate in Professor Greenleaf's letter would be executed to the letter. In responding to the Legislature acceptance, the Trustees of Donations said that its energy was geared toward

higher education and not elementary or primary education since those were already begun (Allen, 1923).

On December 24, 1851, the Liberian Legislature passed an act establishing the proposed college. They named the proposed college "Liberia College" and they instituted a Board of Education for the college. The act empowered the Board of Education to recruit teachers. It also granted one 100 acres of land to the college at Clay-Ashland, on the St. Paul River about 15 miles from Monrovia.

Work for the college was going on in both the United States and Liberia. The Trustees of Donations was raising funds in the United States, while the Liberian Legislature and the Board of Education were allocating land and recruiting men for the college project. Some of the members of the various colonization societies began giving their U.S. estates and properties to the Trustees of Donations as gifts for the college project in Liberia. By 1855, three years later, the Trustees of Donations had raised $22,000 for the project (Livingstone, 1976; Allen, 1923).

A break in preparation for the proposed college came when the man behind the vision, Professor Greenleaf, died on October 6, 1856. Professor Greenleaf was recognized as a distinguished man and the foremost promoter of higher education in Liberia. He believed that the greatest need of the country was a literary and scientific college that would develop skilled human resource for the Liberian labor market, and on a larger scale, for Africa.

The request for leadership for the proposed college became the next question. The Board of Education began searching for a president. In October 1854, The Trustees of

Donations directed its secretary to ascertain whether the services of Liberia President Roberts could be obtained as their agent for the transaction of business in Liberia concerning the college. The secretary, on November 12, 1855, wrote a letter to President Roberts asking him if he would be willing to take over the presidency of the college. On November 17 of the same year, President Roberts wrote the Trustees of Donations expressing his willingness to serve as president of the college. At this time, President Roberts had completed his second term as President of Liberia, and his successor had been inaugurated.

In the summer of 1856, President Roberts visited the United States at the invitation of the Trustees of Donations, and on July 26 1856 he was unanimously elected as the first President of Liberia College. He accepted the position. His salary was fixed $1,500. He suggested to the Trustees that he wanted the college to be purely national, in no sense sectarian and its government entirely free from all denominational control. His suggestion was accepted by the Trustees.

After electing President Roberts as the president of the proposed college, the next subject was to decide on the kind of building to build. A plan was drawn up for a three-story brick building, 70 feet long by 45 feet wide (Allen, 1983). A smaller adjoining building, containing the kitchen, was also planned. The Trustees of Donations loaded a ship with bricks and other building materials in the United States and sent it to Liberia. The ship left the U.S. on December 28, 1856 and arrived in Liberia the following February.

In 1857, the site that was given by the government for the proposed college was discovered to be swampy and unfit for the project. In July 1857, the Board of the proposed college decided to build the college at Cape Mesurado, within the limits of Monrovia. This decision met with strong opposition from the residents of Clay-Ashland, who they claimed that the charter of the college stated that the college be built in their town. After several delays, the cornerstone of the college was laid at Cape Mesurado with appropriate ceremonies on January 25, 1858. While the construction of the college was going on, the Methodist Missionary Society asked the Trustees of Donations if they could participate in the administration of Liberia College. But after careful considerations by both the Trustees for Donations and the Board of the college, the proposal was rejected on grounds that they did not want the college to have any religious affiliation.

While construction work was going on, the controversy over the college site arose again. This time, it became more complicated and complex as it became more political than educational in nature. The politics concerned location of the college as the residents of Clay Ashland did not want the college to be built in Monrovia. Due to this disagreement, the Legislature of Liberia decided to pass an amendment to the laws relating to the location of the college. The amendment stated that the site for the college was to be relocated at Cape Mesurado since the site in Clay-Ashland was swampy, and secondly, the work on the building for the college was already begun and the building could not be broken down. The amendment also granted twenty acres of land in Monrovia as the future site of the college.

Further, it authorized the Board to select one thousand acres of land anywhere within any of the four counties that made up the republic. Though the Legislature made this decision, a trivial misunderstanding between Joseph Roberts, the president of the College, and President Steven A. Benson, president of the Republic of Liberia, caused another long delay. The latter took offense at a letter that was written by President Roberts to the Trustees of Donations concerning the way in which people were politicizing the relocation of the college and refused to sign the amendment passed by the legislature. It was December 1860, nearly three years after the corner-stone of the college building had been laid, that Roberts and Benson came to a compromise and the act was signed. The work on the building was resumed, and the roof of the building was put on in April 1861. The whole cost of the building was $18,000 USD.

The struggle for land and building had finally come to an end. The next issue was the selection of faculty for the college, which was given a careful consideration. A consultation was held with the President of Liberia, the Trustees of the College and the New York State Colonization Society, which had funds for education in Liberia (Allen, 1983. According to Allen (1983), the following appointments were made: Joseph J. Roberts, President and Professor of Jurisprudence and International Law; Rev. Alexander Crummell, Professor of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy and of Linguistics and Literature; Rev. Edward W. Blyden, Professor of Greek, Latin and Literature. Reverends Crummell and Blyden were also to teach Logic, Rhetoric, History, Hebrew, French, Mathematics and Natural Philosophy. Crummell and Blyden were both Liberians. They had to travel to the United States in 1861 to interview with the Trustees of Donations for

Education in Liberia for their appointment to be confirmed. Rev. Alexander Crummell was a graduate of Cambridge University in England. Rev. Edward W. Blyden was a native of St. Thomas, Danish West Indies. He went to Liberia at age sixteen and attended the Alexander High School in Monrovia. He was proficient in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, and English.

The inauguration of the college leadership took place on January 23, 1862. A procession was held, in which all public officials, including the President of Liberia, took part. The Hon. B. J. Drayton, Chief Justice of Liberia, delivered the introductory address. The President of the College, President Roberts, gave the keynote address. In his speech, he stressed the importance of the study of law, language and literature. He credited the Trustees of Donations for the formation of the College. He gave high praise to his faculty, especially the "young giant", Professor Blyden.

Everyone thought the College would have opened immediately, since in fact the faculty was set in place. But that was not the case. A few months following the inauguration, President Benson appointed Blyden and Crummell as members of a commission to proceed to America in order to promote emigration to Liberia. President Roberts also traveled to England and the U.S. in the interest of the College. All these travels delayed the opening of the College for another year.

The vision for higher education in Liberia finally became a reality when Liberia College was opened on February 2, 1863 with seven students (all male) who presented certificates of good moral character and were examined in Greek, Latin and mathematics. They were found qualified according to the standard set forth by the college and were

admitted. Within a few months thereafter, three other students were admitted. Other students also attempted the admission process, but did not pass the entrance examination; they were therefore rejected and denied admission.

The opening of the college brought daylight to Liberia. Colonization societies in America made raising funds and providing educational materials for the college a priority among items they had on their agendas. The Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia and the New York State Colonization Society collected nearly 4,000 volumes for the college library, including 600 from the Harvard College Library (Allen, 1923). In addition, the relationship of Liberia College to distant parts of Africa, England and Portugal was created. Merchants from Mohammedan tribes speaking Arabic occasionally visited Monrovia, and from them President Roberts obtained Arabic manuscripts. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions also contributed Arabic books. At the same time, steps were being taken to establish a literary correspondence with the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut, Lebanon.

The college flourished for 34 years, when it had to close due to the shortage of teachers and the deteriorating conditions of the college building. This kept the college closed until, on January 11, 1899, Rev. Garretson W. Gibson, who had been president of Liberia, accepted the request of the Trustees of Donations to assume the presidency of the college. Other faculty members were also appointed. The Trustees of Donations also sent some funds for the renovation of the college facilities and the reopening of the college. The reopening of the college was embraced both at home and abroad. By 1903, the college had grown to 36 students, eight of whom were women. This was the first time

women were enrolled in the college. Also, all students attending the college were children of Americo-Liberians. The indigenous were not given the opportunity to send their children to school.

In 1901, President Gibson resigned from the presidency of the college to assume the office of President of Liberia for a second term. Rev. Robert B. Richardson (D.D., LL.D.) became president of the college and Professor of English. Other professors that joined the faculty of the college that same year were Rev. Arthur F. March (M.A., D.D), Professor of Latin, Greek and French; Rev. Oscar H. Massey (M.A.), Professor of Natural Science; Hon. Fredrick E.R. Johnson (LL.D.), Professor of Jurisprudence; Hon. Edwin J. Barclay, Professor of Mathematics. President Garretson Gibson (D.D., D.C.L.) also continued to serve the college as Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy.

The period of the twentieth century was a time of growth and challenge for Liberia College. Financial support for the college grew from $10,000 in 1860 to $50,000 USD in 1920. Liberia College struggled through the years and finally in 1951, the Legislature of Liberia passed an act granting Liberia College full university status. Thus, it became the University of Liberia in 1951. The University of Liberia is known as the oldest degree granting institution in West Africa. It served as the training ground for many African leaders during the colonial period.

As the University of Liberia was in operation, the Episcopal Church of the United States of America also started its own educational program in Liberia. The Episcopal Church in America had started its mission program in Liberia in 1821 and by 1847, the church was well established in Liberia. As the Episcopal Church in Liberia grew,

education was always a major priority. Bishop Samuel D. Ferguson, the missionary of the Episcopal Church in Liberia, wanted to have a manual arts school, a teacher-training institute and a theological institution for the building of an independent cadre of Liberian clergy. He wanted the Church to rearrange its education agencies so that the manual, professional, and theological training would be woven into primary, secondary, and higher education. The result of this was the establishment of Cuttington University College, the second institution of higher education in Liberia. Cuttington University College is situated in Suacoco, Bong County, about 120 miles away from Monrovia, Liberia's capital.

In 1885, the treasurer of the Episcopal Church in the United States, Robert Fulton Cuttington, donated $5,000 to Bishop Ferguson "for the establishment of a manual labor farm, which should afford opportunity for practical instruction of the boys in the mission schools and at the same time serve as a pattern for others" (Allen, 1923).

On February 22, 1889, Bishop Ferguson laid the cornerstone of the first building at Cape Palmas and named Epiphany Hall. It was completed in 1896. With the addition of a divinity school in 1897, the institute was renamed Cuttington Collegiate and Divinity School in honor of Mr. Cuttington. For four decades, Cuttington provided a classical education to scores of Liberians (both Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians) and other Africans, particularly from Sierra Leone and Ghana.

In 1948, Cuttington was relocated to its present site, in Suacoco, Bong County, 120 miles north of Monrovia (Lulat, 2005). The 1,500 acre site was donated by the Government of Liberia. It reopened in 1949 as Cuttington College and Divinity

School. Over the next for 40 years the institution grew to include six degree-granting divisions: Education, Humanities, Natural Science, Social Science, Nursing and Theology. Cuttington College and Divinity School was later named Cuttington University College, the name it bears today (Lulat, 2005).

Other institutes of higher learning did not develop in Liberia until the mid-twentieth century. One of these institutions was Liberia's second public post-secondary institution, the William V. S. Tubman College of Technology, incorporated in 1978, formerly Harper Technical College, which was founded in 1971 (Lulat, 2005). There were also four private institutions that had junior college status by the mid-1980s. In addition, there were two public Rural Teacher Training Institutes, and two additional seminaries, the Assemblies of God Bible College and the Liberia Baptist Theological Seminary. Both of these seminaries were accredited to grant baccalaureate degrees in theological disciplines.

Liberia Civil War and post-Civil War Era (1990-2011)

Political Condition

On December 24, 1989, the dawn of a new beginning of suffering and massive atrocities began when small group of rebels, calling themselves "Freedom Fighters" led by Doe's former procurement chief, Charles Taylor, invaded Liberia from the Ivory Coast . Taylor and his National Patriotic Front rebels rapidly gained the support of Liberians because of the repressive nature of Samuel Doe and his government. Barely six months after the rebels first attacked, they reached the outskirts of Monrovia.

The 1989-2003 Liberian Civil War, which was one of Africa's bloodiest civil wars, claimed the lives of more than 200,000 Liberians and further displaced a million others into refugee camps in neighboring countries. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervened and succeeded in preventing Charles Taylor from removing Doe from power. Prince Johnson, who had been a member of Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), but broke away because of policy differences, formed the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). Johnson's forces captured and killed Doe on September 9, 1990.

An Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) was formed in Gambia under the auspices of ECOWAS in October 1990, and Dr. Amos C. Sawyer became Interim President. Taylor refused to work with the interim government and continued fighting. By 1992, several warring factions had emerged in the Liberian Civil War, all of which were absorbed in the new transitional government. After several peace accords and declining military power, Taylor finally agreed to the formation of a five-man transitional government in 1995.

After considerable progress in negotiations conducted by the United States, the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity (now the African Union), and ECOWAS, disarmament and demobilization of warring factions were hastily carried out. Special elections were held on July 19, 1997, with Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic Party emerging victorious. Taylor won the election by a large majority, primarily because Liberians feared a return to war had Taylor lost.

During the six-year reign of Charles Taylor, his government did not improve the lives of Liberians. Unemployment and illiteracy stood above seventy-five percent and little investment was made in the country's infrastructure. Pipe-borne water and electricity were still unavailable, and schools, hospitals and roads remained derelict. Rather than work to improve the lives of Liberians, Taylor was accused of supporting the bloody Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, fomenting unrest and brutal atrocities in the region, and leading to the resumption of armed rebellion from among Taylor's former adversaries.

On June 4, 2003 in Accra, Ghana, ECOWAS facilitated the inauguration of peace talks among the Government of Liberia, civil society, and the rebel groups called "Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy" (LURD) and "Movement for Democracy in Liberia" (MODEL). LURD and MODEL largely represented elements of the former United Liberation Movement – Kromah (ULIMO-K) and United Liberation Movement-Johnson (ULIMO-J), factions that fought Taylor before the 1997 elections. Also on June 4, 2003, the Chief Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone issued a press statement announcing the indictment of Charles Taylor for supporting atrocities committed in Sierra Leone during the Sierra Leone civil war. On July 17, 2003 the Government of Liberia, LURD, and MODEL signed a cease-fire agreement that envisioned a comprehensive peace agreement within 30 days. The three combatant groups subsequently broke that cease-fire repeatedly, which resulted in fighting that eventually reached downtown Monrovia.

On August 11, 2003 under intense U.S. and international pressure, President Taylor resigned his position as president of Liberia and departed into exile in Nigeria. This move paved the way for the deployment by ECOWAS of what became a 3,600-soldiers peacekeeping mission in Liberia (ECOMIL). On August 18, 2003, leaders from the Liberian Government, the rebel groups, political parties and civil society signed a comprehensive peace agreement that laid the framework for constructing a 2-year National Transitional Government of Liberia, effective October 14 of the same year. On August 21, they selected businessman Gyude Bryant as Chair and Wesley Johnson as Vice Chair of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL). Under the terms of the agreement the LURD, MODEL, and Government of Liberia each selected 12 members of the seventy-six-member Legislative Assembly (LA). The NTGL was inducted into office on October 14, 2003 and served until January 2006, when the winners of the October/November 2005 presidential and congressional elections took office.

According to national and international observers, the October 11, 2005 elections and the subsequent November 8, 2005 run-off elections were the most free, fair and peaceful elections in Liberia's history. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf defeated George Weah 59.4% to 40.6%, though the defeated candidate challenged the credibility of the election's result. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf became Africa's first democratically elected female president. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) certified Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as the winner on November 23, 2005. Johnson-Sirleaf was inaugurated into office on January 16, 2006.

Economy Condition during and after the Civil War

President Doe's administration (1980-1990) preceded the brutal Civil War that ended in 2003. When President Doe took office in 1980, Liberia's external debts was $537 million (Tiepoh, no date). Redelet (2007) stated that the Doe administration defaulted on Liberia's debts payment, and instead engaged in massive borrowing. The Civil War of 1989-2003 added to the problem. By the end of 2005, Liberia's total external debt was $3.7 billion (Davis, 2009; Mekay, 2007; Radelet, 2007; Liberia National Debt management Task Force, 2005). Under the leadership of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Liberia qualified under the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) frameworks and most of its debts were forgiven in 2009, thus, reducing Liberia's external debts to $1.6 billion.

Current Employment Landscape of Liberia

The employment sector in Liberia is comprised of public (government) and private (non-government) sectors. The public sector is comprised of government ministries (e.g. Ministries of Education, Finance, Public Works, Gender, etc.) and autonomous agencies (e.g. National Port Authority, Forestry Development Agency, Maritime Affairs, etc.). The public sector is also comprised of public educational institutions (K-12 & higher education), military and police, Special Security Agency, and the judicial system (excluding private law firms). The private sector is comprised of

private companies, local business, and local and international nongovernmental organizations.

The latest data available on unemployment in the country shows that unemployment has remained at 85% since the war ended in 2003, with about 80% of people living below the poverty line (Index Mundi, 2009; World Food Program, 2011). Sixty percent of people employed in Liberia are employed in the public sector and the remaining 40% are employed in the private sector. As found in Uganda by Ssempebwa (2000), most of the people hired by government agencies in the public sector in Liberia are hired based on their personal contacts with people in the places they get employed.

Higher Education Condition in Liberia (1990-2011)

The period of the war generated a new face in the history of higher education in Liberia. As the war was subsiding in the middle of the 1990s, religious institutions began many new institutions of higher education. Most of these institutions were church-owned institutions. The African Methodist Episcopal Church upgraded its junior college of Business (Monrovia College) to a full degree-granting institution and renamed it A.M.E. University (year). The Roman Catholic Church also turned its high school (St. Patrick High School) into a polytechnic college and named it Don Bosco Technical College (year). The Bethel World Outreach Ministries also opened its West Africa School of Missions and Theology. Many other institutions of higher learning sprang up during the Civil War, including New Life Bible College and Seminary, United Methodist University, Liberian Christian College and others. Until today, most of these institutions

are still open. The rise of these institutions and many others created a serious policy challenge for the country's higher education system. On May 30, 2005, the Minister of Education published in a national newspaper (the *Analyst News Paper*) that several of the older and newly founded institutions were operating in violations of the ministry's accreditation procedures. The Minister in the press release threatened to close down or fine institutions that were not in accordance with the ministry's mandate.

The reason for this massive creation of new institutions of higher learning is not exactly known. Anecdotal evidence within Liberia suggests that most of the founders of these institutions created them (the institutions) for personal profit making. In addition to the massive creation of new institutions, the enrollment of students in college increased from 10,000 in 1989 to about 26,763 in 2008, with 72% male enrollment and 28% female enrollment (MOE, 2009; Sayon, 1994).

The armed conflicts in Liberia additionally exacted a heavy toll of human life and hindered or reversed progress toward meeting the basic learning needs of people (Liberia Human Development Report, 2006). The civil conflict left the whole nation in poverty and insecurity, and robbed millions of youth of their right to higher education as compared to several other sub-Saharan countries like Ghana and Nigeria (African Development Fund for Liberia, 2006). Universities in Liberia were looted, destroyed and occupied, and safe access to higher education was denied to students (Sayon, 2004). The massive displacement and exile of the Liberian population, non-availability of trained faculty and teaching-learning materials, inadequate remuneration of faculty and staff, and the absence of a well-functioning higher educational authority destroyed the higher

educational system (Sayon, 2004). The repeated cycle of violence from 1989 – 2003 also resulted in a profound degradation of the country's institutional capacities and the administration's human resources, ranging from physical damage to universities' properties to losses in human lives. As a result of these challenges, the provision of higher education in Liberia declined.

The unemployment rate in Liberia, which has remained at 85% since the end of the war in 2003, is also creating an enormous challenge for the higher education system in Liberia as it makes access to college a problem for people who want to go to college (African Development Fund for Liberia, 2006; Liberia Millennium Goals Development Report; 2004; Liberia Human Development Report, 2007). This is also hindering growth and expansion of the system.

The lack of resources is also preventing the higher education system from providing access to college education for many people. Colleges and universities do not have enough resources to accommodate the number of students that graduate from high school each year. Over 30,000 high school graduates sit for universities' entrance and placement exams, and only about ten percent (10%) of examinees are admitted to all colleges and universities annually (Liberia Education, 2010).

One key factor contributing to the problem of limited resources is the government's failure to provide higher education throughout the country and to subsidize private institutions (Sayon, 2004). For example, in 2007 the government of Liberia subsidized only thirty percent of the University of Liberia's annual budget and it did not provide funds to any private institution in 2007 (Liberia Education, 2007; Sayon, 2007).

One consequence of this financial constraint is that the University of Liberia does not currently have any research activities. In addition, the average salary of faculty at Liberia's university is $300.00 per month without any allowance for research. This amount was less than the average monthly cost of transportation for a faculty member who lived ten miles away from campus. As a result, 90% percent of faculty members in colleges and universities in Liberia taught in more than one institution.

Finally, colleges and universities in Liberia lack the modern infrastructure needed for the provision of higher education (Liberia Education, 2007; Médecins du Monde, 2007; Sayon, 1994). In 2005, the President of Cuttington University reported to his funders that most of the dormitories and a science lab that were built just before the war began were destroyed during of the war. He lamented that rebels massively looted the library, museum, and other college facilities. Additionally, many universities lack well equipped libraries, science laboratories, and technology. Cuttington University has however made enormous progress in repairing many of its facilities.

The use of Tracer Studies to Spur Educational Reform and Bolster Developing Economies

In several countries, the desire to acquire higher education is fuelled by cultural values, where traditionally, a university education is considered prestigious (Atchaoarena, 2009). In addition, and sometimes more importantly, there is often a perception among parents and students that a college-level qualification can protect against unemployment and ensure a relatively high level of wages. This economic rationale, with its prospect of high rates of return, explains why individuals are willing to invest in higher education

despite the concerns of misalignment between the labor market and university training in many developing countries. For governments, increasing the level of participation in higher education often forms part of a broader strategy geared towards the development of skills for competitiveness and the establishment of a learning society. Within the context of globalization, the increase of skilled workers in the knowledge economy is required for the development of nations and peoples (McIntosh et al, 2009).

To provide a better understanding of the alignment between higher education and the labor market, several tracer studies (i.e., studies of graduates in other countries) have been done to determine how universities and colleges provide college students the relevant skills for the labor market (Teichler, 1999, 2000; Kellermann & Sagmeister, 2000; Woodley & Brennan, 2000). None of these studies have been done in Liberia. Findings from these studies in several countries have been based on the perspectives of college graduates, academics, employers, and the public. These findings have been informed by the knowledge about the composition of the samples (often, college graduates, employers and academicians) within a country specific context. The findings from most of these tracer studies have been used to inform universities' curricula and higher education policies in several countries. Furthermore, the outcomes of many of these tracer studies have been used to contribute to economic development through the means of improving skills development for their labor markets in specific countries (Kellermann & Sagmeister, 2000).

However, one of the persistent problems facing African countries today and that threatens their economic development is the increasing rate of unemployment among

university graduates. This phenomenon has been ascribed to the lack of alignment between African universities' training and the labor market needs on the continent African (Sawadogo, 1995; Cabal, 1993; World Bank, 1988). Some scholars assert that curriculum at many of the universities in African countries have poor alignment with labor market needs (Kaijage, 2000; Anyanwu, 2000). Even though some African universities, for example, Makere University (Uganda) and the University of Western Cape (South Africa), have made remarkable progress in becoming national institutions that try to develop curricula that align skills development through higher education to the labor market, many African colleges and universities are still far from the reality of providing graduates the relevant skills for the labor market needs (Ssempebwa, 2006). Several factors have been found to contribute to the failures of institutions to provide quality education for skills development.

For example, Sayon (2004) found that two-thirds of the teaching faculty at Liberian universities held only bachelor's degrees in their fields. Additionally, Liberian institutions did not have adequate textbooks, libraries with relevant academic materials, and had limited student support services. The condition at Liberian universities is a common phenomenon at many African institutions and, thus, is impacting the alignment of African higher education to the labor market. In fact, the relevance of the African universities to the labor market has become a growing concern for both governments and citizens throughout the continent, which is leading to the call for urgent and concerted response from African governments and universities (Somda, 1995; World Bank, 1992).

To better understand the alignment/misalignment between universities and the labor market around the world, and to specifically delve into understanding whether the education provided to students in Liberian higher education system has relevance to Liberia's labor market, this research critically examines pertinent literature that exists on the alignment of higher education to the labor market as one mean of fostering economic development in Liberia. It examines studies that have been done in comparable African countries for the development of their higher education system and for the improvement of their economic system.

Higher Education-labor Market Alignment in Africa

Tracer studies have been used in African countries to evaluate higher education institutions, and in some cases, to evaluate specific units of instruction. All studies reviewed in this research investigated graduates who graduated from bachelor's degree programs in their institutions.

Kaijage (2000) conducted a tracer study of the knowledge and skills of graduates of the Faculty (Department) of Commerce and Management at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Kaijage (2000) did a quantitative study of 648 graduates and their employers to ascertain how "the technical knowledge and skills acquired by Faculty of Commerce (FCM) Bachelor of Commerce graduates... are being utilized in the job market" (p. 1). Kaijage (2000) further sought to answer the "what graduates consider to be knowledge and skills required of them" by their employer (p. 1).

Kaijage sampled 648 graduates who graduated from FCM from 1985-1996 and 226 employers. Eighty-four percent (84%) of the graduates who responded were employed and sixteen percent (16%) were unemployed. The characteristics of employers in both the private and public sectors sampled by Kaijage ranged from employers with fewer than 100 employees, to employers with over 1,000 employees.

Kaijage's (2000) results showed that graduate respondents indicated that the following skills were required by their employers: sense of responsibility; willingness to learn; ability to solve problems; ability to effectively communicate in oral and written English; ability to communicate with empathy, integrity and honesty; reliability; creativity; self-confidence; knowledge of effective financial management, business mathematics, computer skills, and other business skills. According to Kaijage (2000), these same skills were also identified by employers as being relevant for the labor market in Tanzania. Kaijage concluded that employers from the private sector were more satisfied with FCM graduates than employers in the public sectors. However, Kaijage (2000) found that employers overall were not satisfied with the English language proficiency of FCM graduates. Kaijage (2000) found that graduates of FCM were taking up to two years to be absorbed into the labor market by employers.

Omoifo et al (1996) surveyed 1,047 graduates of the University of Benin, Nigeria who graduated between 1980 and 1995 to determine the factors that influenced their enrollment at the University of Benin and in addition asked them to rate "study provisions, conditions and elements of the programs" (p. 1). The study also sought answers from graduates' current employers as to what extent they (graduates) use

knowledge acquired at the University of Benin in their current positions. Omoifo et al. (1996) found that graduates expressed satisfaction with the admission standards at the University of Benin. However, the study indicated that graduates expressed that the learning condition in the institution was poor and not up to standard. Omoifo et al. (1996) also found that most responding graduates indicated that only a few (5 of 18) programs at the University of Benin were "good or very good." Unlike Kaijage's (2000) finding in Tanzania, Omoifo et al. (1996) found that "in general, 81% of graduates [of the University of Benin] were of the opinion that field of study was very important to being employed" (p. 2). However, Omoifo et al. (1996) found that only 43% of graduates considered their jobs linked to their studies: most graduates were not working in the specialization for which they were trained in college. Also, responding graduates indicated that there was not a common job seeking pattern among them, and some graduates returned to their previous positions from which they had come to study. Others were employed while studying at the University of Benin. For those who sought employment after graduation, it took 7 – 24 months to get employment. Lastly, job satisfaction among respondent graduates was low (41%).

Another tracer study was conducted with graduates of the Faculty (Department) of Arts and Agriculture at the University of Nigeria by Anyanwu in 2000. Anyanwu (2000) investigated how graduates got their first employment after graduation and the factors they (graduates) considered as important criteria for being employed, and the extent to which the knowledge and skills they acquired during studies was used in current employment. Anyanwu sampled 720 graduates and 626 responded. Five hundred and

seventy-nine (579) returned questionnaires that "were found useful for the analysis" (p. 5) and the rest of the 626 were incomplete and thus, were not used in his analysis.

Overall, Anyanwu (2000) found that a greater portion of graduates (60%) got their first employment by applying for vacant positions. A lesser percentage got their first employment through personal contacts with an employer, the influence of parents, university placements, and campus job fairs. The respondents' perception of the five most important criteria for being employed were: field of study, the major area of study, the reputation of the university, personality of the respective graduate, and grade [GPA]. Anyanwu's (2000) results indicate that respondening graduates reported that knowledge of English, technical knowledge of a major field of study and the methodology of teaching in the university enhanced their job skills. "Overall, most of the respondents agreed that they applied, to a high extent, all the knowledge and skills acquired during studies" (p. 15).

Ssempebwa (2006) examined unemployment in Uganda by sampling 177 graduates from universities in Uganda. Ssempebwa also sampled 14 study programs, three university vice-chancellors and officials of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, the Council for Higher Education, and the National Chamber of Commerce. Ssempebwa asserts that the mass unemployment among university graduates in Uganda was being blamed on the failure of universities to adequately train graduates for the labor market in Uganda. Ssempebwa (2006) however, found that graduates' unemployment was due to socioeconomic factors in the Ugandaian society and not universities' failure to adequately prepare students for

the labor market. Ssempebwa asserted that the high unemployment rate among college graduates in Uganda was due first to limited employment opportunities. Second, there was nepotism in the labor market such "that 50% of graduates who were employed had achieved their first employment placement through a personal contact, suggesting that 50% of the available employment opportunities were distributed sociologically rather than meritoriously" (p. 7).

An additional study conducted in Malawi was done by Zembere and Chinyama in 1996. Zembere and Chinyama (1996) traced graduates of the University of Malawi who graduated between 1987 and 1996. The primary objective of the study was to examine the changes in career patterns of the graduates in order to provide a basis of evaluation of the current programs of the University. Zembere and Chinyama (1996) administered 1,975 questionnaires and received 575 responses, a response rate of 29.4 percent. These authors found that 76% of respondents started job-seeking prior to graduation. The respondents also stated that factors that were important to employers in hiring them were field of study, specialization, and personality. Only 27% stated that GPA was a factor for employment. These authors also found that nearly 50% of respondents had changed jobs since graduation.

Zembere and Chinyama (1996) also found that 67% of graduates were employed by the public sector, 31% were employed by the private sector, and 2% were self-employed. Most graduates received on-the-job training for a minimum of two years before being appointed to a substantive post (Zembere & Chinyama, 1996). For skills, employers were seeking graduates who had high efficiency in written and oral English.

Also, the study found that the other most important "abilities and attitudes" employers required of graduates were "sense of responsibility, self confidence, reliability and willingness to perform, commitment, ability to solve problems, initiative, willingness to learn, ability to coordinate, ability to work under pressure, ability to collaborate, and leadership qualities" (Zembere & Chinyama, 1996, p. 11). About 75% of respondents reported that the training they received from the University of Malawi prepared them for their appropriate positions. However, some of the respondents admitted that they lacked some of the general skills (English language skills, problem solving, etc.) required for their jobs.

Maharasoa and Hay (2001) investigated graduate employment in South Africa and found that employment after graduation for graduates from South African institutions depended predominantly on areas of concentration and faculty member contacts with employers. Maharasoa and Hay (2001) used focus groups and personal interviews to gather data from graduates (1991-1995 graduates) from three universities and deans or department heads from these institutions. These authors also collected data from faculty. A surprising result reported by Maharasoa and Hay (2001) is that responding graduates perceived that they were overqualified for the positions in which they were employed. In addition, a majority of respondending graduates in these authors' study said that their education in college was very relevant to their current employment; only 8% said otherwise.

In conclusion, the above five studies conducted with graduates from African Universities explicitly show that employers seek college graduates with some specific

and some general skills. The first and foremost important skill that these studies found is graduates' ability to effectively communicate in writing and orally. Secondly, these studies also show that employers seek graduates with skills such as independence, interdependence, negotiation skills, numeracy, critical thinking, and others (Edward, 2006). Similar to studies from British and other universities, these African studies reveal that employers seek to employ graduates who acquire skills in college that are aligned with their jobs.

The results of studies from the African universities show that job availability in developing countries is limited, and carefully preparing students with the necessary skills and abilities that are required for the labor market is important if graduates will succeed in gaining employment in labor markets in these countries. As proposed by Bloom et al. (2005), this could lead to the economic development of these countries. These tracer studies also point out the enormous challenges that higher education institutions face in developing countries due to lack of sufficient resources to administer the necessary programs they deemed necessary for the alignment of university training to the labor market.

Global Efforts to Align Higher Education to the Labor Market

As demonstrated throughout this paper, scholars, institutions, and countries around the world are continuing to be concerned about the possible misalignment between higher education and the labor market. This section of the paper discusses two

examples of international (Europe and U.S.) efforts to better align higher education with the labor market.

The Bologna Process - European Efforts

On June 19, 1999, 29 European ministers in charge of higher education in their individual countries signed the Bologna Declaration in Bologna, Italy to form what has come to be known as the Bologna Process. The process currently comprises of 46 European countries (http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/Bologna/about/index.htm). Additionally, several other bi-lateral and multi-lateral organizations, such as the European Commission, Council of Europe, UNESCO European Center for Higher Education, and BUSINESSEUROPE are involved with the process. The Bologna Process also involves higher education institutions, students, staff, employers, and quality assurance agencies. The goal of the Bologna Process is to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) so as to facilitate international cooperation and academic exchange among European higher education institutions. The goal of the Bologna Process is to:

- facilitate mobility of students, graduates and higher education staff;
- prepare students for their future careers and for life as active citizens in democratic societies, and support their personal development;
- offer broad access to high-quality higher education, based on democratic principles and academic freedom (http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/Bologna/about/index.htm).

The Bologna Process has developed a qualification framework that guides the work of the Bologna Process. The framework is divided into three cycles: Bachelor, Master, and doctorate. Each of these cycles has established criteria that must be met. For example, for a student to graduate from a university in a member state, the framework calls for such students to have attained certain skills that are relevant to the labor market and to the development of society. According to Adelman (2009), the Bologna's "qualifications framework is a statement of learning outcomes and competencies a student must demonstrate in order for a degree at a specific level to be awarded (p. 9). Adelman (2009) asserts that the Bologna Process and all its modifications is one of the best higher education models from which to learn. Adelman (2009) further asserts that "The core features of the Bologna Process [credit transfer system, skills development, student-faculty exchange) have sufficient momentum to become the dominant global higher education model within the next two decades [2010-2030]" (p. viii). Though Adelman (2009) praised the Bologna Process, he admits that the Bologna Process has a major challenge in the area of language. Adelman asserts that the communication of the goals and work of the Bologna Process across the languages of member countries pose a challenge that may be limiting the work of the EHEA.

Higher Education-Labor Market Alignment in the United States

The philosophy for starting colleges and universities in the United States, which began with Harvard University in 1636, was to provide students with the necessary skills to serve in the labor market (Geiger, 2005; Brubacher & Rudy, 2004; Thelin, 2004). The

labor market at the time included church related ministry, farming, and politics. This central purpose of founding higher education in America has remained one of the focus points of the United States (US) higher education. Throughout the history of US higher education, colleges and universities, educational policymakers, and the American public have always worked to align higher education with the labor market. Thelin (2004) asserted that the creation of liberal arts colleges, community colleges and trade schools in the United States were geared toward providing students with skills necessary for the labor market. Geiger (2005) asserted that the divergence of church institutions from a sole focus on religious training to training students for diverse disciplines shows that these institutions were determined to produce students with the relevant skills for the general affairs of the American labor market. The founding of land grant universities (Geiger, 2004; Brubacher & Rudy, 2004; Thelin, 2004) in the United States was also a move geared towards skills development for America's labor market.

Bardhan et al. (2009) analyzed data from three sources to determine the alignment between U.S. higher education and the labor market. Bardhan et al. (2009) first examined data from Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The IPEDS data covered the period 1984-2006. The IPEDS contains data on all degree completions in the United States. The second data source analyzed by these authors was the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment Statistics. The data set in this sample covers the period 2000-2006. The final data source used by these authors was the Center for Economic policy Research Uniform Extracts of Current population Survey. This data

base contains data on occupational characteristics, wages, and employment, and covered the period 1984-2006.

Bardhan et al. (2009) found that higher education in the United States was closely aligned with the labor market as a function of college major. For example, they found that students who major in Computer Science have better skills and are more responsive to labor market needs than students from other college majors like students in pre-medicine.

Despite the development of American higher education, there still remains skepticism about whether American higher education is providing students the relevant skills for its labor market (Bennett et al., 2000). Bennett et al found that there is growing skepticism among American policymakers, employers, academics, and students that colleges and universities are not adequately providing skills that match the American labor market. According to Bennett et. al (1997), Marshall and tucker asserts that there is immense pressure from the labor market on higher education institutions to produce graduates with skills for "capacity for abstract thought, to solve real-world problems, to communicate well in oral and written forms and to work well with others" (p. 9).

The Bologna Process is being replicated in other countries, including the United States as a means to solve some of the misalignment issues that concerned the American higher education system. In the United States, some American states and universities have adopted the Bologna Process and have named their version as the "Tuning Process". According to the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (MOHE), "The Tuning Process is a faculty-led initiative to involve students and employers in creating better alignment

between students' mastery of agreed-upon learning objectives for specific degrees and workplace relevance" (MOHE, 2009, p. 1). The anticipated benefits of the Tuning Process include making higher education more responsive to knowledge development, making higher education relevant to societal and workforce needs, simplifying credit transfer among institutions, and facilitating the retention of students, especially disadvantaged students MOHE (2009).

The Tuning Process in the United States began with a grant from the Lumina Foundation under the title *Tuning USA.* The Foundation worked with students, faculty members, and education officials from Indiana, Minnesota and Utah. The *Tuning USA* project was a one year project and was geared toward creating "a shared understanding among higher education's stakeholders of the subject-specific knowledge and transferable skills that students in six fields must demonstrate upon completion of a degree program" (www.luminafoundation.org). The fields included in the *Tuning USA* project were biology, chemistry, education, history, physics and graphic design. States involved in the Tuning USA process selected subject areas to study. For example, Minnesota chose to study Biology and Graphic Design.

College and Employment

In the wake of rapid growth in higher education participation in Britain, and the increase in global market competition experienced by many employers, British universities came under intense pressure in the late 1980s to equip graduates with more than just the academic skills traditionally represented by a subject discipline and a type of

degree. A number of reports issued by employers' associations and higher education organizations in Britain urged universities to make more explicit efforts to develop the key, core, transferable and/or generic skills needed in many types of high-level employment (CIHE 1996).

From the perspective of employers, employability often seems to refer to work-readiness, that is, possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that will enable new graduates to make productive contributions to organizational objectives soon after commencing employment. Indeed, studies of employer demand for graduates in engineering and science disciplines have found that appropriate work experience and evidence of commercial understanding rank highly as selection criteria because of commercial pressures to seek graduates who will not require long 'learning curves' when they start employment (Mason, 1998, 1999). However, in an extended discussion of the employability concept, Hillage and Pollard (1998) put more emphasis on individuals possessing the skills "to move self- sufficiently within the labor market to realize potential through sustainable employment" (p. 11). In a similar way, Harvey and Morey (2003) highlighted the skills which graduates need in order to manage their own careers and those which will enable them to continue learning throughout their working lives. Harvey and Morey (2003) identified communication skill, independent decision making, technology skills, team participation skills, and problem solving skills.

These broader conceptions of employability partly reflect the influence of the 1997 Dearing Report which identified a set of key skills which were "relevant throughout life, not simply in employment" (NCIHE, 1997, Page 18) Dearing defined these skills as

Communication, Numeracy, IT and Learning how to learn at a higher level and recommended that provision of such skills should become a central aim for higher education.

Within higher education, the generic skills needed to enhance graduate employability (whether defined in terms of immediate work-readiness or longer-term career prospects) are now typically seen as including the skills emphasized by Dearing; literacy, problem-solving skills and team-working skills. In addition, the employability skills agenda is commonly defined to include 'Understanding of the world of work' which typically refers to knowledge about the ways in which organizations work, what their objectives are and how people in those organizations do their jobs (Coopers & Lybrand, 1998).

To respond to the need of the labor market, Cooper and Lybrand (1998) asserted that universities should typically include modifications to existing course content (sometimes in response to employer suggestions), the introduction of new courses and teaching methods and expanded provision of opportunities for work experience – all intended to enhance the development of employability skills and/or ensure that the acquisition of such skills is made more explicit. In some cases, universities should seek to embed the desired skills within courses. In addition, students should also be offered stand-alone skills courses which are effectively bolted on to traditional academic programs (Coopers & Lybrand, 1998). In fact, many universities now use a mix of embedded and stand-alone teaching methods in their efforts to develop employability skills.

As described above, employability skills illustration is explicitly aimed at enhancing graduates' skill sets in ways that should increase their attractiveness to potential employers (McIntosh et al, 2002). This is an underlying rationale for the inclusion of graduate labor market outcomes in measures of university performance (Chinyama, 1996). Success in the graduate labor market is typically defined as graduates securing employment in jobs which make appropriate use of the skills and knowledge developed in the course of their university studies (Kaijage, 2001; Anyanwu, 2000; Chinyama, 1996). Coles and Smith (1998) termed this as matching theory

Matching Theory

In matching theory (Coles & Smith, 1998), labor market failure on the part of individual graduates – unemployment or underutilization of graduate-level skills in employment -- reflects mismatches between graduates and employers, which may come about for a number of reasons. For example, Coles and Smith (1998) emphasize that in a random matching model, mismatches between job-seekers and employers may arise because of imperfect information, resulting in time and search costs for prospective partners to obtain information about better matches. They also propose an alternative 'stock-flow matching' model in which, after an initial round of match-making, agents may simply wait for appropriate partners to enter the market at a later time period. Other strands of matching theory emphasize the role of institutional and labor market rigidities in contributing to mismatches between job-seekers and employers, for example, the

higher incidence of underutilization of skills among female graduates who combine part-time employment with care of young children (McIntosh et al., 2002).

In a recent investigation of labor market mismatch in the Netherlands, Allen and van der Velden (2001) find that education-job mismatches (individuals holding jobs for which their formal qualifications are higher or lower than required) do not correspond closely with skill-job mismatches (individuals holding jobs for which their skills are above or below those required). One possible explanation for this is that, within given educational qualification categories such as degree-holders, there may be unmeasured differences in skills between individuals, and individuals deemed by employers to be relatively low-skilled may be less likely than others in their qualification group to be offered jobs which require their level of formal qualification.

Recent British evidence in support of this hypothesis of heterogeneous skills within qualification levels has been presented by McIntosh et al (2002) who found that less than half of the people identified in the 2001 Skills Survey as over-qualified (in terms of formal certification) for their jobs were also over-skilled (that is, in their own evaluation, not making much use of their skills and abilities in their present jobs).

Another proposition advanced by Allen and van der Velden (2001) is that the selection criteria used by employers when screening job applicants may include factors such as work experience, gender and social background which are distributed unevenly within educational qualification categories. This is another potential line of explanation why individuals with similar levels of formal certification may encounter varying degrees of success in securing employment in jobs which make use of their graduate-level skills

and knowledge. Thus matching theory, together with the literature on over education and underutilization of skills, points to several reasons why the teaching, learning and assessment of employability skills might be expected (all things being equal) to contribute to superior labor market outcomes for graduates in possession of those skills.

Assume that a university makes a concerted effort to develop employability skills in the ways described above, while another university does not. Graduates from the first university (the university that makes the efforts to develop employability skills) will be referred to as producing "skilled graduates" in contrast to "non-skilled graduates" from the second university.

First, the quality of employer-graduate matches in the labor market (and the speed with which such matches are achieved) should be improved for skilled graduates relative to non-skilled graduates by the better information which skilled graduates acquire about alternative job prospects as a result of their exposure to different employment conditions during industrial placements and/or to course content which is explicitly related to practical applications of subject matter in employment. The latter source of information is especially likely to be enhanced for skilled graduates from the university where employers have been involved in the design and delivery of courses.

Second, employers' information about job applicants is likely to be improved by their involvement in providing student work placements or by their relationships with certain universities which are built up in the course of contributing to course design and delivery. Even employers who do not have direct links with any universities will be able to obtain references for skilled graduates which have been supplied by other employers

who do provide placements. In addition, the job applications made by skilled graduates may contain information about the development of problem-solving, team-working and other skills ostensibly valued by employers, which may increase their chances of being called to interviews where they will have a chance to demonstrate their suitability for the jobs in question.

Third, the uneven spread of employability skills teaching can be expected to increase the heterogeneity of skills among graduates in ways that will favor skilled graduates in terms of securing jobs which formally require possession of a degree. With proper training, employers will likely favor job applicants who can demonstrate practical skills and commercial understanding gained during work placements and the high-quality communication and other generic skills which employability skills teaching sets out to develop.

Recent efforts to evaluate British universities' efforts in developing graduate employability skills have made use of available data from the annual First Destinations Survey of full-time undergraduate leavers from British universities, which is carried out by the Careers Service at each university and captures information on students' employment outcomes roughly six months after graduation. The performance indicators developed to date have typically focused on graduates' success in finding employment after graduation and in their being employed in a job deemed, by specified criteria, to be of graduate quality.

For example, in a study of 1993 graduates from pre-1992 universities, Smith, McKnight and Naylor (2000) found that the probability of graduates being employed six

months after graduation is positively related to the type of degree and is also strongly influenced by their specializations, measures of prior educational attainment (e.g., high school GPA), age at graduation and social class background. Most of these factors are also found to strongly affect the probability of graduates in employment, although age at graduation has only a weakly significant effect for female graduates and no significant effect for males.

Six months after graduation is a very early stage in graduates' careers and the *Moving On* survey of 1995 graduates (Elias, McKnight et al, 1999) found that the likelihood of being employed in a non-graduate occupation declines over the first few years after graduation as some individual graduates manage to secure graduate-level employment after first accepting a period of lower-level employment. However, an initial period of under-employment was found to have lingering negative effects on those graduates' salary and career development, suggesting that data on employment status six months after graduation may in fact be useful indicators of future labor market prospects.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter is divided into five parts. The first section includes the research design, the second section contains information about the sample for the study, the third section provides a description of the methodological approach, the fourth section describes the instrumentation, and the fifth section offers an overview of the data analysis.

This research employed a quantitative methodology in an effort to more comprehensively examine the performance of higher education in Liberia in relationship to the Liberian labor market (Patton, 2002). The research is critical to curriculum development, Liberia's post war economic development, and university policy improvement. Currently, there is only anecdotal evidence that Liberian higher education institutions are not developing students with the relevant skills for the labor market needs of Liberia. The study examined the perceptions of graduates of the University of Liberia (UL) and Cuttington University College (CUC) who graduated from 2004-2009. The focus was on the extent to which graduates perceived that they possessed skills (e.g., effective verbal and written communication skill, quantitative and analytical problem solving skill, team-work skill, critical thinking skill, and public relations*)* as a result of attending the institutions from which they graduated.

Critically examining the perceptions of graduates about the relevance to their current employment of the skills they received at the University of Liberia and Cuttington University College has implications on five levels. First, better knowledge of the perspectives of graduates, as well as future collaborations with them, could be funneled back into the development of curricular and co-curricular programs that could contribute to the provision of relevant labor market skills to college students in Liberia (Golden & Schwartz, 1994).

Second, by not having empirical data on the skills of graduates based on their perceptions, college administrators in Liberia are unaware of graduates' concerns about how they (colleges) are developing skills in their students (Golden & Schwartz, 1994). Furthermore, an awareness of the perspectives of graduates is important as results of this study could enhance communication and networking between higher education institutions and employers which could contribute to increased involvement of current and future students in college activities. Cress et al. (2001) have suggested that research examining the application of "[college] graduates' skills and knowledge" after college is important for improving programs at colleges and universities (p. 25).

Third, this study is critical as it could enable policymakers to begin to evaluate accreditation criteria and policies for educational governance in Liberia (Schomburg, 2003) so as to improve or enhance the current accreditation process being administered by the Liberian Higher Education Commission. The National Commission on Higher Education is the national body charged with the responsibility to ensure the quality of higher education in Liberia. It accredits universities base on several criteria which include

campus facility, curriculum, faculty qualification and university administration. Four, the data gained from this study is useful information for universities in Liberia by providing them with the perspectives of graduates about what relevant skills college graduates in Liberia are expected to have before coming into the labor market. Such information could motivate institutions to begin to develop co-curricular programs or career development programs geared towards developing skills in students so as to better prepare their students for the labor market in Liberia. And finally, data from this study could provide opportunities for higher education institutions and employers to begin to collaborate on curricular program development and research projects. At a time when other institutional priorities (based on limited resources) often hinder the advancement of intentional students' skills development on campus (Zimmerman-Oster & Burckhardt, 1999), the findings from this empirical study will inform purposeful practice so as to assist institutions to consider student skills development as an essential part of their curriculum. In addition, institutions could incorporate these findings into program learning objectives and provide substantial outcome assessments of their student development programs. This may in turn have an impact on institutional priorities, policies, and funding allocations.

Tracer Study Methodology

The study adopted a tracer study methodology to gather and analyze data regarding the perceptions of graduates (Schomburg, 2003). A tracer study methodology constitutes one form of quantitative empirical study (Schomburg, 2003; Association of

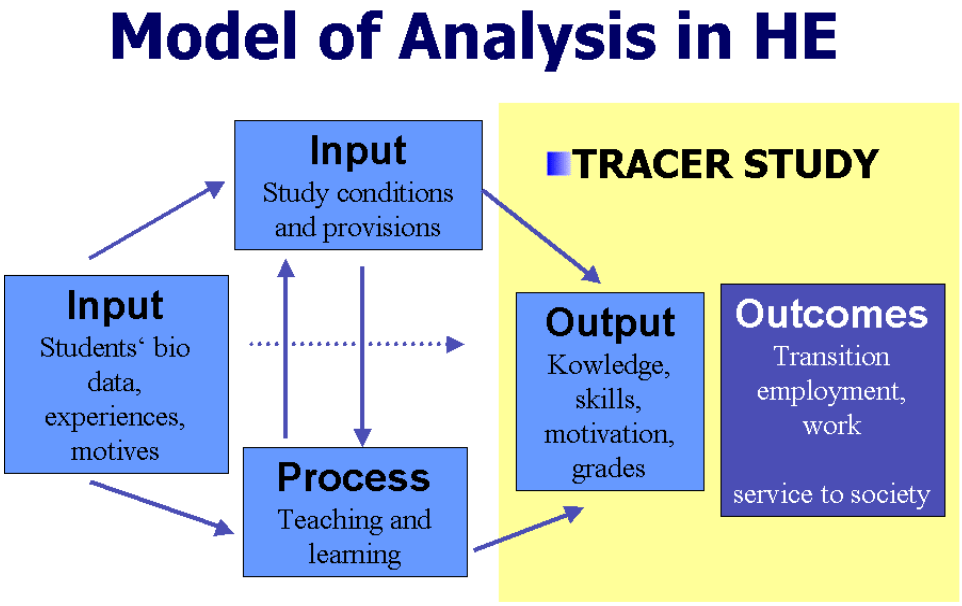
African Universities, 2002). It serves as a method of evaluating the results of education and training provided by colleges, universities, or programs provided within an institution (Schomburg, 2003) by obtaining the perspectives of alumni, employers, and/or institutional staff and students. According to the Association of African Universities (AAU, 2002), "results of such studies can often demonstrate the success of education and training relating to the graduates, labor market, and employers" (p. 1). Data gathered through a tracer study "can also indicate possible deficits in a given educational program and serve as a basis for future planning activities, such that academic programs might be brought more closely into line with the needs of the country in question" (AAU, 2002, p. 1).

Schomburg (2003) asserted that a tracer study evaluates the output and outcome of higher education using the "Model of Analysis in higher Education. The Model of Analysis in Higher Education is referred to by other scholars (e.g. Chapman & Miric, 2005) as the "Production Function Model." It evaluates students learning through four categories that includes input, process, output, and outcome. It analyses an educational institution, educational system, or field of study by exploring the resources invested in institution for the learning process (Input: teacher, money, time, textbooks, etc.) invested in an institution or educational system for instructions. It also explores how instructions or the impartations of knowledge (Process: teaching style, student assessment, course evaluations, etc.) and the evaluation of such is administered at an institution or in an education system. The model also measures the output (quality of education and good performance of students) and outcomes (employability of graduates, lifetime earnings,

service to society) of education students received at an institution, from an educational system or a field of study (Chapman & Chiric, 2005; Schomburg, 2003).

Tracer study as a quantitative methodology focuses on the output and the outcomes of the Model of Analysis in higher education as portrayed in figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Model of Analysis in Higher Education



Key Variables in the Evaluation of Higher Education

Adopted from Schomburg, H. (2003). Tracer Study Hand Book (p. 25)

Institution Review Board

All graduates signed consent forms (See Appendix A) prior to completing the questionnaires (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003; Patton, 2002). Prior to data collection for this study, I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of

Minnesota. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Minnesota.

Research Design

This study utilized a tracer study quantitative method to examine the perceptions of Liberian university graduates in relation to skills they developed in college and if these skills are relevant to Liberia's labor market. The study also examined the graduates' job satisfaction level (Schomburg, 2003).

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the characteristics of Liberia's university graduates?
2. What are perceptions of Liberian university graduates in relation to the relevance of skills developed in college to the Liberian labor market?
3. How and to what extent are these perceptions shaped by their field of study?
4. To what extent are graduates satisfied with their jobs in the Liberian labor market?

There are five universities and several smaller colleges in Liberia. For the purpose of gathering a representative samples from all college graduates in Liberia, this study selected the University of Liberia and Cuttington University. These two institutions were selected because of their comparability on significant dimensions such as size, number of graduates per year, number of their graduates in Liberia's labor market, and the longevity of their existence. Also, universities and colleges in Liberia are characterized as public and private universities. Public universities and public colleges are institutions own and

operated by the Government of Liberia while private university and private colleges are institutions owned by churches, individuals or other nongovernmental organizations. Base on these categorizations and previously stated reasons, it was expedient that this study chose the University of Liberia (the largest and oldest public university) and Cuttington University (the largest and oldest private university) in Liberia as representative samples for university graduates in Liberia.

Research Sample

The population surveyed was graduates of the University of Liberia's College of Business and Public Administration and W.V.S. Tubman Teachers College. The College of Business and Public Administration at the University of Liberia has four areas of concentration, which includes Accounting, Economics, Business Administration, and Public Administration. The William V.S. Tubman Teachers' College at the University of Liberia has two concentrations, which includes Primary Education and Secondary Education (http://www.universityliberia.org/lu_academic2_program.htm).

In addition, graduates of Cuttington's College of Education and Theology and College of Humanities and Social Sciences were also surveyed. Cuttington's College of Education and Theology offers the Bachelor's in Education and Theology. While its College of Humanities and Social Sciences offers Bachelors in Economics, Public Administration, Management, Accounting, and Sociology. The study only considered graduates who have business and education related degrees.

Questionnaires were administered to graduates as the primary means of data collection (Creswell, 2003). Two hundred graduates from each university were asked to complete survey questionnaires. The graduates selected to participate were identified by the following attributes: a) graduates of UL and CUC who graduated from 2004-2009; b) must have attended their institutions for at least their junior and senior years; and c) must have received bachelor's degrees in one of the following field of study from their alma maters; Education (primary and secondary) and business (Accounting, Public Administration, Management Business, and Economics).

To trace the graduates, the researcher requested records of graduates who graduated during this time period (2004-2009) from the registrars' Offices of these two universities. Another method of tracing graduates was snowballing (Hoyle et al., 2002). That is, the researcher asked other graduates for their colleagues' whereabouts. Lastly, the researcher used public media (radio and TV) to discuss the purpose of the study and asked graduates who were interested in the research to contact the researcher (Schomburg, 2003). Through these different media, the researcher compiled the names of 500 graduates from each institution. The researcher wrote each name on a piece of paper and placed it in two separate baskets according to institution. He then randomly selected 200 names from each basket and used the four names he selected from the two basket as the sample from which to collect data (Hoyle et al., 2002). He then contacted each person by phone or in person. At his first meeting with each person, the researcher asked them to participate in the study and informed each person that he/she would receive $10 (US dollars) upon completion of the questionnaire. The researcher then hand-delivered the

questionnaires to participants who consented to participate in the study. The researcher also set up a local office and employed and trained a research assistant who assisted him to collect questionnaires from research subjects. 393 questionnaires were returned by respondents, accounting for a 98.3% return rate.

Instrumentation

The Association of African University graduate tracer study questionnaire was modified for context specification to Liberia to collect data for the study (http://www.aau.org/studyprogram/). The questionnaire is currently the standard instrument used by African universities and researchers to do tracer studies of graduates from African universities and other African institutions of higher learning. The Association of African University grants permission to researchers doing research in Africa to use the instrument (http://www.aau.org/studyprogram/). The questionnaire contains eight sections, with 43 items and collects data on graduate's biography, information on study and training, study provision and conditions, programs and courses, and impact of studies on career. Because it is an international instrument, it is not specifically designed to fit a specific country context. As such, each study that uses the instrument modifies it for the country in which it is used. Hence, this study modified the instrument at the permission of the Association of African Universities to meet the country specific context of Liberia. In modifying the instrument, the study changed some of the careers mentioned in the instrument since these trainings are not offered in the fields of study this research is considering.

The Association of African Universities' graduate tracer study questionnaire has eight sections with 43 items. Appendix B is a copy of the modified survey questionnaire used in the current study. I briefly discussed below each section of the questionnaire.

Course of study at your university – This section of the instrument determines the institution from which a student graduated. It also determines the student's field of study, their decision for enrolling at the institution, and how long they attended their institutions.

Retrospective assessment of study at your university - This section seeks their perceptions about the study conditions of their institutions during their attendance.

After graduation – This section of the questionnaire determines whether a student began job searching prior to graduation or after graduation. It also determines whether they are employed or unemployed at the time of completing the questionnaire. And if they are employed, the instrument asked about how they obtained their employment (whether by manpower allocation, personal application to vacant position, personal or family contact, or faculty or university recommendation). This section of the instrument also seeks their perceptions about the factors that were important in their being hired and what kind of initial training (if any) they received.

Current employment – For a subject who is employed, this section seeks to determine base on the person's perceptions, how many times he/she has changed employers since graduation, current employment status, how long the person has being working for his/her current employer, and their job title. The section also asks for brief descriptions about professional tasks or job description, the number of hours work per

week, the type of employer (public, private, self-employed or nonprofit), and the economic sector. The section also asks question about salary and fringe benefits.

Job requirements and use of qualifications – In this section, graduates who are employed are asked, based on their perceptions to state whether they use skills acquired from college. This section seeks to determine the alignment or relationship between graduates' education and their current position. It also seeks to determine graduates' level of job satisfaction. Lastly, the section seeks to determine whether graduates are utilized or underutilized in their current positions.

Socio-biographical data – this section of the instrument seeks to determine graduates' parents' level of formal education. It also asks respondents to state whether they were employed prior to enrolling in college, what job skills training they have completed before coming to college, and respondents' genders.

Concluding comments – This final part of the instrument seeks answer to the strength and weaknesses of the two institutions in this research from the perception of graduates. It also asks graduates about any suggestions they have about improving the programs from which they graduated. The section concludes with question about how the two institutions could stay connected to its graduates.

Protection of Human Subjects

The University of Minnesota's Institution Review Board (IRB), prior to commencement of the study reviewed the research proposal and all related instruments.

The Institution review Board upon review of the research proposal and the instruments included approved the research.

Informed consent of participants was obtained prior to completion of research instrument by each participant. The statement soliciting participation in the study indicated the purpose of the research, invitation to voluntarily participate, and the population of the study (See Appendix A). The expected duration required to complete the instrument, description of benefits and risks, and protection of confidentiality was clearly stated on the first page of the questionnaire. Signing of the consent form by a participant indicated that the participant agreed to participate in the research.

Data Analysis

The research questions guided the analysis of this study. Data extracted from the questionnaire was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Schomburg, 2003). The methods and procedures performed in this study corresponded to those of previous research studies that have used the Association of African University tracer study questionnaire (Schomburg, 2003).

An initial analysis was conducted to determine if there were differences in responses between graduates of the two institutions. For those 43 survey items with scaled responses, a set of t-tests for independent samples was performed. Descriptive statistics for variables such as employment sector, job satisfaction, field of study, and study condition and provision, (Creswell, 2003; Schomburg, 2003) were accounted for by the study. In addition, descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations was

tabulated for the above variables and others for respondents (Howard, 2007: Utts & Heckard, 2005; Agresti & Finlay, 1997). These responses were compiled and summarized using frequencies where appropriate (Utts & Heckard, 2005; Agresti & Finlay, 1997). Relative frequencies from the graduates' expectations and actual behaviors were reported (Howard, 2007: Utts & Heckard, 2005; Agresti & Finlay, 1997).

Finally, the responses of graduates were analyzed using independent sample t-test to determine if there were mean difference in their perceptions based on their field of study, job satisfaction, employment sector, and study condition and provisions. (Howard, 2007: Utts & Heckard, 2005; Agresti & Finlay, 1997).

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

Although the purpose of this research was not focused on a comparative analysis of graduates' perspectives based on hypothesized differences between the two institutions in the preparation of graduates, the possibility of statistically significant and large differences between respondents from the two institutions was a possibility. As the comparative analysis of characteristics of respondents from the two institutions indicated in Chapter 2, the two groups of respondents were not statistically significant in terms of key characteristics such as year of graduation, degrees, major field of study, employment status, age, and gender. However, to be cautious, for each major set of items on the survey an initial analysis was done to identify sets of data for which institution specific analyses needed to be conducted.

The first analysis examined whether or not the responses relative to the importance of college attendance to the labor market indicated statistically significant differences between respondents from the two institutions. Results of independent sample t-tests for the importance items indicated statistically significant differences ($p < .05$ or greater) for only three of the 43 items. The difference in means ranged from .12 to .19 on a five-point scale ranging from 1.0 to 5.0. The differences were neither prevalent enough to warrant analysis of the data within each of the two sets of respondents, so respondents from the two groups were treated as one data set for subsequent analyses.

After conducting an initial statistical analysis of the data and discovering that there was not a statistical significance between respondents from the two institutions,

further statistical analyses were conducted to address the research questions articulated for this study. The research questions, as proposed in the methodology section, that guided this study are as follows:

1. What are perceptions of Liberian university graduates in relation to the relevance of skills developed in university to the Liberian labor market?
2. How and to what extent are these perceptions of the relevance of the skills developed in university shaped by their field of study?
3. To what extent are graduates satisfied with their jobs in the Liberian labor market?

Given the heterogeneity of the content of the full set of 43 items on the survey, not all of the questions were analyzed in the context of the primary purposes of this research. There were three primary purposes for this research, and those primary purposes were used in conducting the statistical analysis and in the ordering of the presentation of the results.

In the first section, the results of analyses comparing those graduates who were employed with those graduates who were not employed are presented. Two sets of analyses are presented in this section. The first set of analyses compares employed graduates from the not employed graduates in terms of individual characteristics such as gender, age, degree, and major. The second set of analysis focuses on differences between employed and unemployed graduates' perceptions of their university experiences in relation to the relevance of skills developed in college to the Liberian labor market.

In the second section, analyses focused on the relationship between university preparation and the work-related skills graduates used in their current employment. For example, the section analyzed question related to the usage of skills acquired in college and their usefulness in the current position of graduates. This section focused exclusively on those who are employed as the information pertains to the university preparations and the skills actually used in an employment setting. This section finally places special emphasis on the extent to which the perceptions of the relevance of the skills developed in college are shaped by graduate respondents' fields of study.

The third section presents subtitle related to graduate respondents' level of job satisfaction. It presents analyses that consider respondents' perceptions about their job benefits such as salary, insurance, job security, etc.

Section I: Descriptions of Respondents and Their Perceptions about the Relevance of Skills Obtained in College in Relations to the Liberian Labor Market

Descriptive statistics were obtained to examine the reasons given by graduates for their current status as being employed or not employed. The employment situation of graduates in this research referred to whether they were employed or not employed at the time when they completed the survey instrument used in this research. One item on the instrument asked graduates to indicate how long it took for them to be employed after graduation, but there was no opportunity for those who were previously employed and then were unemployed at the administration of the instrument for this research to reflect on the relevance of their university experience prior to employment. The respondents in

this research are classified as “employed” and “unemployed” at the time they completed the survey instrument.

Of the 393 responding graduates, 267 (67.9%) were employed and 126 (32.1%) were unemployed. The respondents included 201 females (51.1%) and 192 males (49.9%). A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if there were gender differences in employment rates. Results indicate there was not a gender differences in employment among respondents.

Year of Enrollment, Year of Graduation, and Degrees Obtained. This study included graduates who had enrolled in their institutions from 1984 – 2005, but included only graduates who obtained their degrees from 2005 – 2009. The study specifically examined graduates who earned the Bachelor of Science degrees and the Bachelor of Arts degree in Business and Education.

Table 1

Characteristics of Respondents by Year of Enrollment, Year of Graduation, and Degree Obtained (N = 393)

			Institutions			
			UL		CUC	
Total	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total	393	100	198	50.4	195	49.6
Year of enrollment						
1984 -1989	13	3.3	6	3	7	3.5
1990 – 1995	27	6.9	14	7	13	6.5
1996 – 2000	89	22.6	44	22.2	45	22.9
2001 – 2005	264	67.2	134	67.6	130	66.7
Year of Graduation						
2004	33	8.4	14	7.1	19	9.7
2005	42	10.4	21	10.6	21	10.8
2006	33	8.4	20	10.1	13	6.7
2007	54	13.7	23	11.6	31	15.9
2008	95	24.2	57	28.8	38	19.5
2009	36	34.6	63	31.8	73	37.4
Degrees						
Bachelor of Science	204	51.9	101	51	103	58
Bachelor of Arts	189	48.1	97	49	92	47.2

As the results in Table 1 indicates, the highest percentage of respondents had enrolled during the most recent time period; 2001-2005 (N=264; 67.2%) than during the previous time period, 1984-2000 (N=129, 32.8%). Factors responsible for this could be due to the fact that 2001-2005 is closer to the time period when the study was conducted and it was easier to locate such graduates. In addition, the graduation years chosen by the study could also be an influencing factor. In comparing enrolment between the two institutions, the University of Liberia had more enrolment (198 persons) than Cuttington University College (195 persons).

Table 1 also shows that there were more graduates from the two institutions in 2009 (136 persons; 34.6) than in previous years. Among 2009 graduates, Cuttington graduated 73 persons while the University of Liberia graduated 63 persons.

More students in the set of respondents had obtained the Bachelor of Science degrees (N=204, 51.9%) compared to the Bachelor of Arts degree (189, 48.1%). Between the two institutions, about the same numbers and percentages of BSc graduates graduated from Cuttington University (N=103, 52.8%) and the University of Liberia (N=101, 51%). Of those who received the B.A. degree slightly more graduated from the University of Liberia (N=97,49%) than from Cuttington University (N=92, 47.2%).

When Did Graduates Start Seeking Employment and How Long it took to be employed? Table 2 indicates that a majority of graduates (N=229, 58.3%) sought employment before they graduated from college and another 102 graduates (26.5%) sought employment after graduation. Another group of respondents (N=20, 5.1%) did not

seek employment before or right after graduations, but went on to further studies or other activities.

Of the 393 graduates, 35% indicated they obtained employment in the first three months and 49.5% in four to six months after graduation. Another 16% of respondents indicated it took seven months or longer to obtain employment.

Table 2
When Graduates Started Seeking Employment and How long it took Graduates to be employed? (N=393)

	Total	
Response	N	%
When Graduates Started Seeking Employment		
Before graduation	229	58.3
After graduation	102	26.5
I did not seek employment	20	5.1
I was employed prior to graduation	40	10.2
How Long it Took to be Employed after Graduation		
1-3 months after graduation	90	35
4-6 months after graduation	131	49.3
7-12 months after graduation	28	14
More than 1 year after graduation	12	5

Note: Percentages do not equal to hundred percent due to rounding

Factors Considered Important for Employment. Graduates were asked to indicate degree of importance for each of nine factors in their being employed by their current employers. Table 3 contains the response and percentages in each of five response categories ranging from not at all important to very important. What follows is a brief summary of important findings graduates considered as factors that contributed to their acquisition of employment with their current employers.

Field of Study. Table 3 indicated that 24.7% of respondents said that their field of study was very important in their being employed. Another 25.1% said that their field of study was important for their being employed currently. In addition, 31.8% said field of study was somehow important, while 12.7% said it was slightly important for their being employed. Only 5 said that their field of study was not important for their being employed.

Main Focus of Subject Area/Specialization. As seen in Table 3, the main focus of graduates' subject area/specialization was considered very important for employment by 34.5% of the respondents. Another 18.8% said that it was important for their employment, about 39.5% said that main focus of subject areas/specialization was somehow important for their obtaining employment. Few respondents,

Table 3
Degree of Importance of Set of Factors Explaining Current Employment

	Importance											
	Not important (1)		Slightly important (2)		Somehow important (3)		Important (4)		Very Important (5)		$\bar{X}$	SD
Total	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Field of study	15	5.6	34	12.7	85	31.8	67	25.1	66	24.7	3.51	1.15
Main focus of subject areas	5	1.9	14	5.3	105	39.35	50	18.8	92	34.5	3.79	1.03
Theme of thesis	180	28.2	48	18.2	26	9.8	8	3.0	2	.8	1.50	.85
GPA at graduation	213	81.3	43	16.4	2	.8	3	1.1	1	.4	1.23	.55
Institution's Reputation	3	1.1	8	3.0	72	27.4	116	44.1	64	24.3	3.87	.85
Department's reputation	153	60.2	82	31.1	15	5.7	8	3.0	6	2.4	1.52	.74
Individual personality	22	8.3	58	21.8	100	37.6	71	26.7	15	5.6	3.00	1.02
Previous work experience	5	1.9	11	4.2	47	17.8	119	45.1	82	31.1	3.99	.91
My personal Contact with someone	22	8.3	58	21.8	100	37.6	71	26.7	15	5.6	3.62	1.03

5% said that it was slightly important, while only 2% said that it was not important for their obtaining employment.

Theme of Thesis. The themes of students' theses were not considered as an important factor for employment. Only one percent of respondents said that it was very important for their obtaining employment.

GPA at Graduation. As noted in Table 3, GPA at graduation was not considered an import factor for employment since 81.3% of the respondents said that it was not important, while only 1.1% said it was important and .4% said it was very important.

Institution's Reputation. The institution's reputation was considered as very important factor for current employment by 24.3% of respondents. Another 44.1% of the respondents said that it was important for their getting employment, 17.8% of the respondents said that it was somehow important. Only 3% and 1.1% of respondents saw institution's repetition as slightly important or not important, respectively.

Department's Reputation. The department's reputation was not considered as an important factor for employment by 60.2% of the respondents. Another 31.1% thought it was slightly important, while 5.7% thought that it was somehow important. Only 2.4% thought that the department's reputation was a very important factor for their being employed.

Individual Personality. Graduates' individual personality was considered as a very important factor for employment by 5.6% of respondents. Another 26.7% of respondents said that their personality was a factor for their obtaining employment with their current employers and another 37.6% said that their personality was somehow a

contributing factor for their being employed with their current employers. Another 21.8% said that their individual personality was slightly important, while 8.3% said it was important.

Previous Work Experience. Of the respondents, 31.1% said that previous work experience was a very important factor for their being employed. Previous work experience was also rated as an important factor by 45.1% of the respondents. Another 17.5% of the respondents said that previous work experience was somehow important for their obtaining a job. Only 1.9% said that previous work experience was not important for their being employed.

Personal Contact with Someone. Of the respondents, 37.6% said that they had personal contacts with someone at the time when they sought employment with their current employer. This subset indicated how important personal contacts were for their getting hired at their present place of work. Of the subset of employed respondents, 5.6% said that their personal contact was very important, while 21.8% said it was slightly important for their being employed. Only 8.3% of respondents said it was not important for their being employed, while 26.7% indicated that personal contacts with someone was important.

Types of Employment Settings. Table 4 describes the current employment setting of graduates. Respondent graduates were almost equally divided between private and public employers. Of the 267 employed graduates, 53.8% of respondents were employed in the public sector. Most of those employed in the public sector were in the educational sector, and they were either schoolteachers or school administrators. Another 44.3% of

respondents were employed in the private sector, and only 5% of respondents were self-employed.

Table 4
Type of your Current Employer (N=267)

Types	N	%
Private Employer (Non-governmental)	116	44.3
Public Employer (government)	141	53.8
Self Employed	5	1.9

Table 5

Gender as a Factor for Employment (N = 393)

	Total		Employed		Unemployed	
Genders	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	192	49.9	130	67.70	62	32.29
Female	201	50.1	137	68.15	64	31.84

Note: Not all percentages are equal to 100% due to rounding

Gender as a Factor for Employment. Table 5 presents employment status as a function of gender. The results of a chi-square list of association indicated there was not a gender difference for graduates who were employed (X^2 =.209; p = .647). As a result, I did not find it warranting to do further analysis of differences between the two genders or analysis of within group differences. Table 5 shows 50.1% (201 persons) of respondents were female and 49.9% (192 persons) were male. Employment and unemployment within groups were similar between the two groups. 67.70% of 192 male was employed while 68.15% of 201 female was employed as well. Unemployment among male was 32.29% while unemployment among female was 31.84%

Age as a Factor for Employment. The ages of respondents ranged from 25 years old to 51 years old. Because of the variability in respondents' ages, employment and unemployment of respondents are presented for the following age groups; 25 – 30 years old, 31 – 35 years old, 36 – 40 years old and 41 – 51 years old.

Employment rate for 31-35 years old was 44.7% (118, N=378). The rate of employment for other age groups was as follows: 25-30 years old 18.7% (54), 36-40 years old was 23.5% (63) and the rate for 41-51 was 11.8% (32). Unemployment of respondents for 25-30 years old was 11.7% (46, N=378). Unemployment rates for other age groups were as follows: 31-35 years old 22.8% (16), 36-40 years old 29.4% (37), and 41-51 years old 19.6% (12).

Table 6

Employment and Unemployment by Age Groups (N = 378)

	Employment Status			
	Employed		Unemployed	
Age Group	N	%	N	%
25-30	54	18.7	46	11.7
31 -35	118	44.7	16	12.8
36 – 40	63	23.5	37	29.4
41 – 51	32	11.8	12	9.6

Note: All percentages are not equal to hundred due to rounding.

Degree Obtained as a Factor for Employment. The employment rate (N=267) by degree was not statistically significant (x^2 = .461; ρ = *.615).* Employment rate for graduates with B.SC. was 53.2% (142), while employment rate for graduates with B.A. was 46.8% (125). Among unemployed graduates (126), those with B.Sc. were 49.2% and those with B.A. were 50.8%.

College Major As a Factor for Employment. There were five majors assessed in this study; Accounting, Business Management, Primary Education, Secondary Education, and Economics. Employment rate was highest among respondents with B.A. in Primary Education (72.5%; within group %) than in other specializations. Employment rate among graduates with B.Sc. in Accounting was 66.6% (71 within group %), graduates with B.Sc. in Business Management was 62.5% (45 within group %), graduates with

B.Sc. in Economics 68.8% (22 within group %) and graduates with B.A. in Secondary Education 68.8% (55 within group %). Overall, employment rate among respondents was high among Accounting major (27.7%; N=267) than all other majors (Primary = 26.0%; B. Management = 18.3%; Secondary Education. 20.4%; Economics. 8.1%).

Section II: Relationship between University Preparation and Work Related Skills for Currently Employed Graduates

This section consists of a comprehensive description of the employment situations of those 267 graduates who were employed. Analyses are made with careful attention given to certain aspects of employment and the same for individual characteristics (e.g., gender, degree obtained, etc.) noted above. This section examines graduates experiences in both private and public employment sectors. Graduates perceptions about remunerations and graduates current positions are analyzed.

Skills Required By Employers. The first question posed to respondents assessed whether they were using the skills they acquired in college. Graduates respondents said that the skills they acquired in college were being utilized in their current positions. 25.8% of the 267 employed graduates said that they were using skills acquired in college, while 42.7% of them said that they were to an extent using the skills they acquired in college. Another 29.2% said they were using skills acquired in college to some extent. Only 2.7% of respondents said the skills they acquired in college were not being use in their current employment.

Table 7
Skills Required by Employers (N = 267)

	Not expected (1)		Slightly expected (2)		Somehow expected (3)		Expected (4)		Expected to a high extent (5)		$\bar{x}$	SD
Skills	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Willingness to learn	1	.4	0	0	11	4.2	107	41.3	140	54.1	4.49	.61
Ability to express yourself in writing	0	0	0	0	0	0	48	18.6	210	81.4	4.18	.39
Ability to solve problems	3	1.2	20	7.8	77	29.8	119	29.8	39	15.1	3.16	.40
Willingness to perform/commitment)	10	3	2	.6	9	3.2	12	4.2	234	89.1	4.86	.48
Reflective capability	27	10.4	31	11.9	92	35.4	70	26.9	40	15.4	3.25	1.16
Leadership skills	6	2.3	20	5.1	87	34	83	32.4	60	23.4	3.67	.99

The next set of six questions asked graduates to indicate the skills (e.g. willingness to learn) expected by their employers. Graduates responded on a five-point scale from "not expected" (coded 1) to "expected to a high extent" (coded 5). The item means ranged from a high of 4.86 for "willingness to perform (commitment)" to a low of 3.16 for "ability to solve problems". In each of the following six sections, results will be discussed for each question.

Willingness to Learn. As seen in Table 7, 54.1% of graduate respondents said willingness to learn was to a high extent expected of graduates by employers. Another 41.3% of respondents said that they were expected to be willing to learn. 4.2% of respondents said willingness to learn was somehow expected, while only .4% said willingness to learn was not expected of them.

Ability to Express Yourself in Writing. Of the respondents, 81.4% of the graduates asserted that the ability to express oneself in writing was a major skill required by employers. All graduate respondents said that employers expected (18.6%) or expected to a high extent (81.4%) that graduates were able to express themselves in writing effectively.

Willingness to Perform/Commitment. Willingness to perform was also considered a key skill expected of graduates by employers according to 89.1% of graduates. Another 4.2% of graduate respondents said they were expected to have the willingness to perform to the expectation of the employers or they were expected to be committed to their work. Another 3.2% said they were somehow expected to be willing to perform, less than one percent (.6%) said they were slightly expected to be willing to learn or be committed

while 3% said they were not expected to be willing to perform. Overall, graduate respondents said that they were expected to be willing to perform or were required by employers to be committed to their positions.

Reflective Capability. Reflective capability was not considered to a high extent a skill that employer sought. 15.4% of graduates said that employer to a high extent sought graduates with reflective capability, another 26.9% said employers to an extent sought graduates with reflective capability, while 35.4% asserted that employers somehow expected graduates to have reflective capability. 11.9% of graduate respondents asserted that reflective capability was slightly expected by employers while only 10.4% said that reflective capability was not expected at all by employers.

Section III: Respondents' Satisfaction in Regards to their Current Employment and Learning Condition

This section of the analysis focuses on how satisfied graduates were with the skills they acquired in college and if these skills were useful at their current employment. It also takes into consideration graduates perceptions about how satisfied they were with the study conditions at their alma mater.

Course Content and Specialization. According to graduate respondents, the course contents of the programs of graduates at their institutions did not prove much useful at their place of work. Only 9.9% indicated that it was to a high extent useful in their place of work. Overall, 36.1% said that they to a very high extent use the knowledge and skills they acquired during their course of studies. Another 32.9% of respondents said

that they to an extent use the knowledge and skills acquired from their course of studies, while 28.2% said they use the knowledge and skills acquired in their course of studies to some extent. Only 2% said they use the knowledge and skills they acquired in college to slightly some extent and .8% said they do not use the knowledge and skills they acquired in their course of studies.

Table 8

Usefulness of Elements of The Study Program in Graduates (N = 267)

	Responses											
	Not useful *(1)*		Slightly useful *(2)*		Somehow useful *(3)*		Useful *(4)*		Very Useful *(5)*		$\bar{x}$	*SD*
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Element	267	100	267	100	267	100	267	100	267	100		
Course content of major	49	19.4	88	34.8	91	36.0	23	9.1	2	0.8	2.37	.92
Opportunity for specialization	95	37.5	111	43.9	37	14.6	9	3.6	1	0.4	1.85	.82

Table 9

Factors Determining the Relevance of Skills Acquired in College to Current Position and Overall Job Satisfactions (N = 267)

	Response											
	To no extent (1)		*To slightly some extent (2)*		*To some extent (3)*		*To an extent (4)*		*To a very high extent (5)*		$\bar{x}$	*SD*
Questions	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
To what extent is your current employment related to your field of study?	3	1.2	12	4.7	53	20.8	75	29.4	112	43.9	4.10	.96
When you look at your current work tasks altogether: to what extent do you use the knowledge and skills acquired during your course of studies	2	.8	5	2.0	72	28.2	84	32.9	92	36.1	4.20	.89
To what extent is your position and status relevant to your level of education?	7	2.8	40	15.7	88	22.4	82	32.3	37	14.6	3.40	1.01
Altogether, to what extent are you satisfied with your professional situation?	105	26.7	106	27.0	110	28	48	12.2	24	6.1	2.44	1.18

Relationship Between Current Employment and Field of Study of the Respondents. Of the 267 employed graduates, 43.9% said that their current positions were related to their field of studies. Another 29.4% said that their current employment was to an extent related to their field of study, 20.8% said that their current employment was to some extent related to their field of study. Only 5% said that their current employment was slightly related to their field of study. Another one percent said that there was no relationship between their field of current employment and their field of study.

Extent of Use of Knowledge and Skills. When asked about the extent to which they use the knowledge and skills acquired during their course of studies, 36.1% of respondents said that they use the knowledge and skills they acquired in college. Another 32.9% said that they to an extent use the knowledge they acquire in college. While another 28.2% said that they use their knowledge to some extent, 5% of respondents said that the knowledge they acquired in college was slightly relevant to their current position. Only 3% said they did not use the knowledge they acquired in college to any extent.

Relevance of Education to Current Position and Status. When asked to what extent respondents' positions and status were relevant to their level of education, only 14.6% of the respondents said that their current positions were to a very high extent related to their level of education. Another 32.3% said that their current positions were related to their level of education, while another 22.4% said that their current positions were to an extent relevant to their level of education. Only 15.7% of respondents said that their positions were to a slightly some extent related to their level of education, and only

7% of respondents responded that their positions and status were not at all relevant to their level of education.

Respondents' Satisfaction with Current Professional Situation. Graduate respondents expressed dissatisfactions about their overall professional situations. Only 6.1% said that they were to a very high extent satisfied with their professional situations. While 12.2% indicated that they were to some extent satisfied with their professional situations, another 28% said they were to an extent satisfied with their professional situations. 53.7% of respondents said that they were not satisfied with their professional situations.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Summary

Countries across Africa have witnessed a variety of catastrophes in the latter half of the 20th Century, ranging from Civil War to HIV/Aids pandemics and from hunger to drought. The current researcher's perspective is that Liberia has experienced some of the most damaging forces as a result of the Civil War that raged in Liberia from 1989 to 2003. Given that the Civil War ended less than a decade ago, one might have expected that graduates of universities in Liberia would have been more negative about how well prepared they were than graduates from universities in other countries considering that all institutions of higher learning in Liberia experienced massive destruction during the Civil War. Results from the present study indicated that was not the case.

As much as many institutions of higher learning in Liberia are still working on developing proper facilities for the provision of quality higher education, graduates from these institutions have good opinions of the programs their alma maters are offering. Over 60% of respondents in this study indicated that they were to an extent satisfied with the skills their institutions provided them for the labor marker. Unlike graduates from Liberian universities, omoifo et al. (1996) found that college graduates from universities in Benin State, Nigeria did not have satisfactory opinion about the kind of education they were receiving at their institutions. Omoifo et al. (2000) found that 81% of graduates from these institutions said that less than half of the programs offered by universities

were not relevant for the labor market in Nigeria. In Tanzania, graduates respondents criticized the kinds universities for not providing relevant labor market skills to students (Kaijage, 2000).

This study investigated the perceptions of university graduates in Liberia as a means of assessing the quality of education universities in Liberia are providing to the citizens of Liberia. Using the Association of African Universities' questionnaire, this quantitative study explored the congruence between university education and the skills needed in the workforce in Liberia from the perceptions a group of 393 university graduates from University of Liberia and Cuttington University.

This final chapter of the study presents a summary of the research findings. It uses the research questions to present a summary of the findings of this research, discussed how findings in Liberia compare to other studies using the same survey instrument in other countries in Africa to draw policy implications from the finding, and presents recommendations for future research. Because there was not a significant difference between the two institutions that were studied in this research, the research following summary is organized according to the research questions that guided this research. These questions were:

1. What are the characteristics of Liberia's university graduates and to what extent do these characteristics impact their employment situation?
2. What are perceptions of Liberian university graduates in relation to the relevance of skills developed in university to the Liberian labor market?
3. How and to what extent are these perceptions of the relevance of the skills developed in university shaped by their field of study?

4. To what extent are graduates satisfied with their jobs in the Liberian labor market?

Characteristics of Liberian Universities Graduates

The graduates surveyed in this study were from the two largest universities in Liberia; the University of Liberia (a public university) and Cuttington University (a private university). Graduates from Liberian's universities were from wide enrollment ranges (1984 -2005).

Perceptions of Liberian University Graduates in Relation to the Relevance of skills Developed in College to the Liberian Labor Market

Graduates' perceptions about the education they received from their institutions indicated that to they were to some extent using the skills they developed in university in their places of employment. To a larger extent, they said that their alma maters needed improvements in the knowledge these institutions were providing. Graduates were especially not satisfied with the learning facilities at their various institutions they postulated that these conditions were having negative impact on students learning.

Graduates said that the skills they acquired in college were relevant to the Liberian labor market. They indicated that skills such as the ability to express oneself in writing, the ability to solve problems, the willingness to perform/commitment to work, reflective capability and leadership skills were very relevant in the Liberian labor market. They identified these skills as important in the employment decision of employers. The

finding from this study also is also evidenced in several other studies that were done at other African University such as University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania (Kaijage, 2000), University of Benin in Nigeria (Omoifo et al., 1996), University of Uganda (Ssempebwa, 2006), etc. In addition to skills developed in college, graduates also said that some aspects of college were relevant for their current work or position. They identified institutional reputation, field of study and individual personalities as factors that are relevant for being employed in the Liberian labor market. On the other hand, GPA at Graduation, theme of thesis and departmental reputations were not considered as important factor at all. These findings agreed with previous studies (Ssempebwa, 2006; Anyawu, 2000).

Overall, graduates said that the skills they acquired in college were to an extent relevant for the Liberian labor market. However, they postulated that there was a need for improvement in the curriculum content, learning environment and instructional faculty at their alma maters.

Extent to which Perceptions of Relevance of Study is shaped by Field Of Study

After an extensive analysis of comparison of graduate perceptions of their college experience in relations to their chosen career, no significance difference was found in their perceptions. As such, the study treated the different groups as one unit and did further analysis. Graduates from public and private sectors and all careers identified the same set of skills that were required by employers. As asserted by Zembere and Chinyama (1996), graduates in both sectors said that employers were seeking graduates who had proficiencies in written and oral English. The ability to effectively communicate

was highlighted by respondent graduates. This is a common finding that is seen in most tracer studies done with graduates and employers (Edward, 2006; Ssempebwa, 2006; Maharasoa & Hay, 2001; Anyanwu, 2000; Zembere & Chinyama, 1996). Though field of study as a function of the relevance of skills developed in college to the labor market was not significant, graduate respondents however identified specific core skills such as willingness to learn, ability to express oneself in writing, ability to solve problems and ability to perform or commitment that employers were seeking in graduate at the time of employment. Respondent graduates in general, acknowledged the positive contribution of the program of study to their personal development and its utilizations to the labor market.

Graduates Satisfactions with Their Jobs in the Liberian Labor Market and Their Perceptions about Their Alma Maters

Graduates overall expressed that they to some extent use the knowledge they acquired in college**.** They especially expressed satisfaction about the reputitions of their institutions and how that contributed to they obtaining employment. The repetition of institutions here seems to be as a result of the past fame (pre-war status) that the institution possessed. The University of Liberia for a long time prior to the Civil War was a training institution for many of the leaders in the Liberian and some African governments. In the 1960s it was the training grounds for African leaders from many of the colonies that were struggling for independence from the colonial masters. This repetition is one reason several Liberia college students would prefer the University of Liberia or Cuttington University to other institutions that sprang up during the Civil

Crisis. Another factor for the good appraisal of these institutions by graduates, despite their current poor learning condition and poor curriculum is that most of the top government officials in Liberia are graduates of the University of Liberia and Cuttington University.

However, they expressed overall dissatisfactions about the study conditions at the institutions from which they graduated. They asserted that conditions at their alma maters needed to be improved if learning was to happen. Graduates dissatisfaction about the condition of institutions concurred with findings of several nongovernmental reports (e.g. UNICEF, LTTP) about the poor condition of Liberian universities. Several of these poor conditions include classroom over crowdedness, poorly ventilated learning rooms, lack of laboratories for students, limited student affairs services, etc. The quality of instructional and administrative staff at universities in Liberia has also remained one of the most difficult challenges. It is estimated that that only 4% of faculty at all Liberian university holds a terminal degree while only 52% of all faculty holds Master's degrees. The remaining 44% has either Bachelor's degree, high school diploma or some form of high school education.

Graduates also expressed dissatisfactions with curriculum being used at the institutions for instructions. Graduate respondents postulated that there was a need for their alma maters to improve their curriculum to include emphasis on communication skill development. In addition, graduate respondents also expressed that there was a need for universities in Liberia to improve co-curricula programs that provide opportunities for internship.

A campaign by the National Commission on Higher Education (the government's entity charged with the responsibility to accredits and steer the affairs of higher education in Liberia) to centralize the curriculum of freshmen and sophomore classes is seems to be making headway as universities are beginning to buy into the Commission's idea. The Commission has proposed to universities and colleges to develop one set of freshman and sophomore curriculum for all universities, four-year colleges, and community colleges. According to the Commission, this will create unison in the learning and skills students will acquire in college. The question of a set of curriculum for junior and sophomore students has come up several times. According to the commission, at this stage in the learning process, students divert to their specializations. Thus, each institution should develop courses in the specializations they offer.

The implementation of the unified freshmen and sophomore curriculum has not started yet. A committee comprising of universities administrators and faculty are working on the development of the freshmen and sophomore curriculum. The Commission hopes to lunch the curriculum immediately when the committee completes their work.

It is not succinct as to whether this is the right route to address the curriculum deficit at Liberian's universities and colleges. If fact, I will answer this question with an infinitive "no" because institutions in Liberia have very limited qualified faculty and administrative staff to implement curriculum. The issue of academic quality, quality assurance, academic freedom and ethics in the classroom and on campus must be addressed in Liberia in order for quality instruction and curriculum implementation to take place. For example, over 75% of Liberian university faculty teach in more than three

universities at the same time. Some of them even have full time status in two or more institutions while they maintain employment with companies outside the academy. As a result, they do not have adequate time to do quality classroom access, or provide services needed by their students and institutions. In fact, anecdotal evidence in Liberia suggests that some university faculty request money and in some cases sex in exchange for grades.

Furthermore, graduate respondents express overall dissatisfaction about their employment condition in regards to underemployment, and benefits. Graduates asserted that many of them were underpaid for the positions they were in or the credential they had. The challenge with the issue of under payment in Liberia is a national policy issue. There is not a policy as to the amount to pay a college graduates versus a high school graduate, etc. Each company or business decides their salary scales for their employees. Some companies even hire their staff on a probationary basis and do not pay them during their probation period. These probation periods normally last for up to ninety days or three working months.

Policy implications

Several scholars consider higher education as an avenue for nations' developments. The finding of this study regarding graduates' dissatisfaction about study condition agreed with previous studies (Kaijage, 2000; Omoifo et al., 1996). For higher education to be relevant for a nation's development, it must be aligned to its labor market. As said by graduate respondents, universities in Liberia need to improve their curriculum to make their programs closely align with Liberia's labor market needs. They

need to also consider extra curricula activities that include internship for skill development is important for universities as they endeavor to develop students in Liberia.

In addition, the Liberia National Commission on Higher Education needs to begin to enact policies for higher education quality assurance. The commission needs to ensure or enact policies for the improvement of learning condition at the various institutions of higher learning. Such policies would address issues of improved campus facilities, recruitment of quality faculty by institutions and enforcement of the implementation of quality curriculum.

Furthermore, as higher education evolves in Liberia, education policy makers in Liberia should provide more supports to universities and colleges in Liberia so that institutions of higher learning are equipped to develop the programs they need. Compensation for faculty and university staff should be given careful attention as these could improve the services that higher education institutions in Liberia provide. Finally, for universities in Liberia to provide quality programs for quality labor market skills development in students, they must develop good student affairs programs on their campuses. Such student affairs program should include services gear towards building external partnership for internship and student employment that would provide college students to develop on the job skills.

Lastly, universities and colleges in Liberia should engage employers in the curriculum development process at their institutions. The ultimate goal of graduates after college is to have place in the labor market. Engaging employers in the development of

curriculum will help institutions to know skills that employers are look for in graduates after college.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research was the first empirical research on the congruence between the skills higher education institutions in Liberia develop in students and the Liberian labor market. The first written research on higher education in Liberia was written in 1923 (Allen, 1923). In this research, Allen (1923) took an evolutional perspective of higher education in Liberia from its inception to the time of his written. Since then, several government reports, nongovernment organizations' reports, and individual analysis of higher education in Liberia have been written. However, none of these research or report did an analysis of the relevance of higher education in Liberia to Liberia's labor market.

As Liberia develops and submerges from fourteen years of Civil War, it is relevant to begin to assess the relevance of university education to its labor market. Assessing the relevant of university education to Liberia's labor market is important for several reasons. First, it could empower universities to build quality program that could enable university graduates to have essential labor market skills. This could subsequently contribute to quality human resource development for Liberia. And quality human resources in Liberia could alleviate the importation of manpower from foreign countries.

As much as this research is relevant to Liberia's development, there is a need for further research in the area of quality in higher education. Since this is the first research in assessing the congruence between knowledge obtained in universities in Liberia to the

labor market in Liberia, it could serve as a foundation for future research higher education in Liberia. Future research should consider surveying the perceptions of employers about how they (employers) perceive the skills graduates are coming with to the labor market. Assessing the perceptions of employers in Liberia about the skills graduates possess does several things. First, it provides opportunities for universities in Liberia to begin to design programs to the need of employers. Second, it could serve as a means of creating internship or extra curricula skills development opportunities for graduates if employers and universities agree to work together on developing skills in graduates. And lastly, it could provide opportunities for collaborations between universities and employers, and such collaborations could lead to the two supporting each other in diverse ways.

Also, future research should consider surveying institutions of higher learning to ascertain as to whether the claims of graduates are true and what they (institutions) are doing to enhance the quality of their programs. This research only assessed the congruence between universities skills and the labor market from the perceptions of graduates. A future research should an analysis of perceptions of graduates and their institutions to ascertain whether the perceptions of graduates as discovered by this study is a reality of what is happening in various universities in Liberia.

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Appendix A
Letter of Request for Participations

Dear Graduate,

I kindly ask you to participate in a survey which is aimed at all graduates of the University of Liberia and Cuttington University College who graduated between 2004 and 2009. With the help of this survey, I hope to attain a broad overview concerning the study programs, employment situations, occupations, and professional careers of graduates from the University of Liberia and Cuttington University College. Your experience and perceptions could serve as an important tool for curricular and co-curricular program improvement at the two institutions and other universities in Liberia.

I therefore ask you kindly to contribute to the success of this survey by your participation. I hope you decide to complete the survey which should take you no more than 45 minutes.

As you will notice your experiences during your studies as well as during your further professional life are being asked for in this questionnaire. I am interested in your personal perception and experiences in order to obtain an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the study program and of the study conditions of the university from which you graduated.

I assure you that your answers will only be used for scientific purposes in the framework of this survey. In the description of results of this survey no identification of individual persons will be made. This survey is intended for my doctoral dissertation and the only person besides me who may have access to this survey will be my academic advisors at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, U.S.A.

YOUR INFORMATION WILL BE TREATED STRICTLY CONFIDENTIALLY.

Please return the completed questionnaire to me as soon as possible. I may also be calling on you to ask if I may pick it up at your location.

Thank you very much for your kind participation.

John S. Flomo Jr.
Ph.D. Candidate (Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development)
University of Minnesota – Twin Cities
Flomo001@umn.edu
651-442-0546

For further question(s) about this study, please contact me or my academic advisors.

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Appendix B
SURVEY PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project: Dissertation Research

Topic: Aligning Higher Education to Workforce Needs in Liberia: A Tracer Study of College Graduates in Liberia

Researcher: John S. Flomo Jr, Doctoral Candidate, [University of Minnesota]

I agree to complete the enclosed survey in order to provide information relevant to the topic described above. I understand that all the information I provide will be treated to preserve my anonymity and reported in the research documented only in aggregate form or with all identifiable attributes masked.

Signed_____ Date_____

Aligning Higher Education to Workforce Needs in Liberia: A Tracer Study of College Graduates in Liberia

NOTES ON THE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

If possible, please answer each of the following questions. If a question is not applicable to you, please go on to the question specified (e.g. GO TO QUESTION 12).

If questions are itemized, please check (☑) the most appropriate answer. In some cases I ask you for numbers only, and in others I leave space for you to write an answer. Should there not be enough space for your answers, please include an additional sheet of paper. If you add additional sheet, please clearly print your name and the question(s) being addressed.

Since this study is on multi-institutions, some questions have space for you to write the name of your institution. Please write the name of the institution from which you graduated where required.

It will take you approximately 45 minutes to complete this questionnaire.

I. COURSE OF STUDY AT YOUR UNIVERSITY

Name of the university from which you graduated: _____

1. Please provide information on your study and training.

	Year	***Course of Study (e.g. Education, Business)***	***Concentration (if app.)E.g. B.Sc. in A/C with con. in Finance***	***Title and class (e.g. B.A. Cum laude)***
Year first enrolled in college				
Bachelors' degree earned (B.A., B.Sc, etc.)				
Professional training (if applicable) Start date: Completion date:	_____ ----------	_____ ----------	_____ ----------	_____ ----------
Masters' degree (if				

application) Start date: Completion date:	_____ ----------	_____ ----------	_____ ----------	_____ ----------
Doctorate degree (if applicable) Start date: Completion date:	_____ ---------	_____ ----------	_____ ----------	_____ ----------

2. **How important were the following factors in your decision to enroll at the university you mentioned above? Please respond to each factor on the five-point scale with 1 as "not important" and 5 as "very important."**

	Not important (1)	***Slightly important (2)***	***Somehow important (3)***	***Important (4)***	***Very important (5)***
Close to home of parents and/or family					
Availability of scholarships at this university					
Availability/quality of dormitory					
Personal contact with someone at this university					
Reputation of the university					
Reputation of the department					
Practice-oriented study program in my subject					
Areas of specialization provided					
Admission standards					
My prior grade					
Advise by my parents/relatives					
Other: (please specify):					

II. RETROSPECTIVE ASSESSMENT OF STUDY AT YOUR UNIVERSITY

Please answer also the questions in section 2 with regard to the degree course.

3. How do you rate the study provision (class handouts, computer labs, books, library, science lab, etc.) and study conditions you experienced? Please rate each of the applicable options on a 5-point scale with 1 as "not important" and 5 "very important."

	Not important (1)	***Slightly important (2)***	***Somehow important (3)***	***Important (4)***	***Very important (5)***
Assistance/advice for your final examination					
Opportunity for out of class contacts with faculty					
Academic advice offered					
Chances to participate in research projects					
Teaching quality of lecturers					
Structure of degree program					
Testing/grading system in examinations					
Possibility of individual structuring of studies					
Provision of supervised practical work experience					
Contacts with fellow students					
Chance for students to have an influence on university policies					
Availability of technical equipment					

(e.g. computer, measuring instruments)					
Quality of equipment of laboratories/workshops					
Supply of teaching materials					
Equipment and stocking of libraries					
Accommodation facilities on the campus					
Catering facilities on the campus					
Quality of the buildings					

III. AFTER GRADUATION

The following questions refer to the period after you graduated from college with your Bachelor's degree.

4. When did you start seeking a job?

Before graduation	
After graduation	
I did not seek employment	
I was employed prior to my enrolment in college	

5. Please indicate your employment situation and your occupation after receiving your Bachelor's degree. *Please check only one appropriate category for each line. If your employment situation changed during the respective period or if you were involved in different activities (e.g. studying and working), please name the most frequent one.*

Period after graduation	***Got employed***	***Started professional training***	***Started advanced academic study***	***Not employed, seeking employment***	***Not employed and not intending to be employed***	***Others***	***Comments***
1-3 months							
4-6 months							
7-9 months							
10-12 Months							

More than a year but less than 2 years							
2nd year							
3rd year							
4th year							
5th year							
More than five years							

6. How did you get your first employment after graduation?

	Yes	***No***
Manpower allocation		
Application to vacant position		
My own advertisement		
Public employment agency		
Private employment agency		
University's placement office		
University's teaching staff		
Employers' campus visits		
Contacts established with employers through work experience in the course of study		
Contacting employers without knowing about a vacancy		
The employer offered me a vacancy		
I set up my own business/was self-employed		
Joining the business of my parents/relatives		
Personal connections/contacts with someone in the company/ministry/school		
Through parents'/relatives' help		
I am working for the same employer as I did before my studies		
I have not found any employment		

7. In your opinion, how important were the following factors for your being employed?

	Not important (1)	***Slightly important (2)***	***Somehow important (3)***	***Important (4)***	***Very important (5)***
My field of study					
Main focus of subject area/specialization					
Theme of my thesis/projects, if applicable					
My GPA at graduation					
Reputation of the					

university					
Reputation of the department					
My previous work experience					
My personality					
My personal contact with someone					

8. What kind of initial training did you receive for your first job after graduation? (Check only one).

No training	
Only on the job training	
Training including off-the-job courses, etc.	
Other (please specify)	

IV. CURRENT EMPLOYMENT AND WORK

If you work in more than one job, please refer only to the one that is most clearly related to your field of study.

IF CURRENTLY YOU ARE NOT EMPLOYED OR OTHERWISE PROFESSIONALLY ACTIVE --> GO TO QUESTION 26

9. How long have you been working with the present employer in your present position:

Years	
Months	

10. Please briefly describe your professional tasks/job description *(e.g. production management and supervision)*

11. On average, how many hours per week do you work in this present job title?

12. Please state the type of your employer? *Please check one item only.*

Public employer (Government agency)	
Private employer (e.g. NGO, businesses, private university)	
Self employed	
Other: (Please specify)	

13. In which economic sector are you currently employed or otherwise professionally active? *Please check one item only. The answer should only concern your main occupation.*

Economic Sector	***Check one only***
Agriculture, forestry, fishery	
Mining, energy, water supply, etc	
Construction	
Production industry	
Transportation	
Banking, finance, insurances	
Trade	
Other commercial services	
Health care	
School	
College/university	
Non-profit organization	
Government agency	
Other (please specify)	

14. How much is your monthly gross income? Please respond with number and kind of currency (e.g. LD or USD).

From major occupation (Amount, currency)	
From other sources (Amount, currency)	

V. JOB REQUIREMENTS AND USE OF QUALIFICATIONS

15. To what extent do you use skills acquired during your university education in the following areas (if applicable) for your current job?

	To a very high extent (1)	***2)***	***3)***	***4)***	***Not at all (5)***
Knowledge of methods					
Computer application (e.g. typing, emailing, Word processing, etc)					
Planning, design, calculation, and construction (product- and process oriented)					
Experimental and practical working					
Knowledge of non-technical areas					
Social sciences (education, psychology,					

sociology, politics)					
Economics (finances, costing, etc.)					
Law (elements relevant to discipline/subject)					
Knowledge of the English language (writing & oral)					
Interpersonal communications, team working					
Scientific and technical knowledge					
Mathematics					
Natural sciences (physics, chemistry), material science					
Ecology and conservation					
Theoretical basics of engineering sciences (technical mechanics, thermodynamics, structural engineering, electrical engineering, etc.)					
Operation, measurement, and control technology					
Applied technical fields (technical sets, machine systems, installations, connections)					

16. To what extent are the following skills and attitudes expected from you in your current job?

	Not Expected (1)	***Slightly expected (2)***	***Somehow expected (3)***	***Expected (4)***	***Expected to a high extent (5)***
Willingness to learn					
Ability to express yourself in writing					
Ability to solve problems					
Willingness to perform/commitment					
Reflective capability					
Leadership skills					

17. How useful did the following elements of the study program prove for your current work? Please rate each of the applicable options on the 5-point scale.

	Not useful	***Slightly***	***Somehow***	***Useful***	***Very***

	(1)	*useful (2)*	*useful (3)*	*(4)*	*useful (5)*
Course content of major					
Opportunity for specialization					

18. To what extent is your current employment related to your field of study?

	To no extent (1)	*To slightly some extent (2)*	*To some extent (3)*	*To an extent (4)*	*To a very high extent (5)*
Check only one					

19. When you look at your current work tasks altogether: to what extent do you use the knowledge and skills acquired during your course of studies?

	To no extent (1)	*To slightly some extent (2)*	*To some extent (3)*	*To an extent (4)*	*To a very high extent (5)*
Check one only					

20. To what extent is your position and status relevant to your level of education?

	No appropriate (1)	*Slightly appropriate (2)*	*Somehow appropriate (3)*	*Appropriate (4)*	*Highly appropriate (5)*
Check one only					

21. If your current employment is not linked to your knowledge and your level of education: why did you take it up? *Check all that apply*

	Check all that apply
At the beginning of the career envisaged I had to accept work hardly linked to my study	
My current job ensures a higher income	
In doing this job I have better career prospects	
I prefer an occupation which is not closely connected to my studies	
I prefer a job not clearly linked to my studies	
My current work is very satisfactory	
I was promoted to a position less linked to my studies than my previous position(s)	
My current job provides the opportunity for part-time or flexible schedules etc.	
My current job provides the opportunity to work in a locality I prefer	
My current job allows me to take into account family needs	
I could not find any job closely linked to my study	
Other (please specify):	
Not applicable (I consider my job linked to my studies)	

VI. ASSESSMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND WORK

22. Altogether, to what extent are you satisfied with your professional situation?
Please take also into account in your statement any professional sidelines.

	To a very high extent (1)	***2)***	***3)***	***4)***	***Not at all (5)***
Overall satisfaction					

VII. SOCIO-BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Please provide details about yourself in order to enable me to interpret your work biography as accurately as possible.

23. What is the highest level of education attained by your parents? Father and Mother.

	No formal education	Completed 6^{th} grade	Completed 12^{th} grade	Enrolled in college, but never finished	Graduated from college	Earned advanced degree(s) Master/Doctorate
Father						
Mother						

24. Did you complete any training prior to your first enrolment in college?

Yes (What training)	
No	

25. What is your gender and age? Check one only

Male	
Female	
Age	

VIII. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

26. In your opinion, what were the strengths of your program of study at the time you were enrolled at the university from which you graduated?

27. In your opinion, what were the weaknesses of your program of study at the time you were enrolled at the university from which you graduated?

28. Taking into account your professional experiences: what changes do you suggest in the study conditions and provisions at the university from which you graduated?

29 What kind of connections/contacts do you have with the instructors at your university and how should connections/contacts be fostered between the instructors, university, and its graduates? *Multiple replies possible*

	Current contact	*Suggested contact*
Alumni Newsletter		
Email communication from campus administration		
Strong alumni organization		

30. In your opinion, what is the best way of promoting contacts between the university and the graduates?

Thank you very much for completing the questionnaire.
----------End of questionnaire----------

[The portion below is OPTIONAL]

Please enter your name and address and/or name and address of your employer in the appropriate space in order to enable me to send you - if you wish – a copy of the results of this survey. This portion will be cut off (for data protection) immediately after receipt of the questionnaire.

☐ Please tick this box if you are interested in receiving a report of the results of this survey.

Your Name & address	Your employer's name & address