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# Unemployment trends and labour market entry in Ghana: job search methods perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Statistical information is critical for both government and the general public for monitoring, evaluation, and implementation of employment policies and programmes. This paper revisits the labour market trends between 2012 and 2016 and discusses the importance of job search methods for labour market entry in Ghana. We explored job search methods (Formal and Informal Methods) used by 235 participants from seven regions of Ghana. Results revealed that many of the participants highly relied on informal job search methods to secure jobs across all demographic variables. This has been the case in Ghana when unemployment continues to increase leading to a difficult labour market entry. Our findings, therefore, suggest that in such a restricted labour market, employment success is likely to be determined by ‘whom you know’. The results offer practical recommendations for private and public employment consultancies, as well as policymakers to institute impactful intervention programmes for job seekers on the efficient ways of developing and sustaining meaningful social capital/networks to enhance their chances of finding employment.

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Unemployment continues to be a major problem for both societies and individuals around the world (Wanberg, 2012). While unemployment reduces economic production for countries (Darity & Goldsmith, 1996), it also has a negative impact on people’s psychological well-being (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). Given that employability enhances economic growth and development, many governments have introduced programmes and interventions to reduce the rate of unemployment (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). Such interventions geared toward improving people’s employable skills, also include equipping them to engage in effective job search activities (Holzschuh, 2018; Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001).

In Ghana, the transition from school or job loss to employment has been extremely difficult because of a few employment opportunities (Nyarko, Baah-Boateng, & Nketiah-Amponsah, 2014). While employment and job-creation schemes have been in the forefront of government flagship programmes, recently, the demands for employment has been intensified but the absorption rate of young adults has been unprecedentedly low (World Bank, 2016b). The questions we address are (1) what has been the trend of the Ghanaian labour market from 2012 – 2016? (2) what are some of

the job search methods job seekers employed during the job search processes? and (3) are these methods always important, and how do they improve our understanding of the labour market entry? In this article, we explore the role job search methods (formal and informal) plays in the recruitment process in Ghana. To accomplish this, especially in a difficult labour market (i.e., Ghana), we gauge into the employment and unemployment situation from 2012 to 2016 in Ghana and through a survey, we examine how employed adults successfully secured employment through the various job search methods. This period is critical to be examined because after Ghana moved from low-income to lower middle-income status in 2011, analysts expected upwards growth in terms of human capital development and employment. However, there is still a huge challenge of growth disparities leading to uneven developments in job creation. Thus, sustaining the country's growth through inclusive development has been a major challenge during these periods (Alagidede, Baah-boateng, & Nketiah-amponsah, 2013).

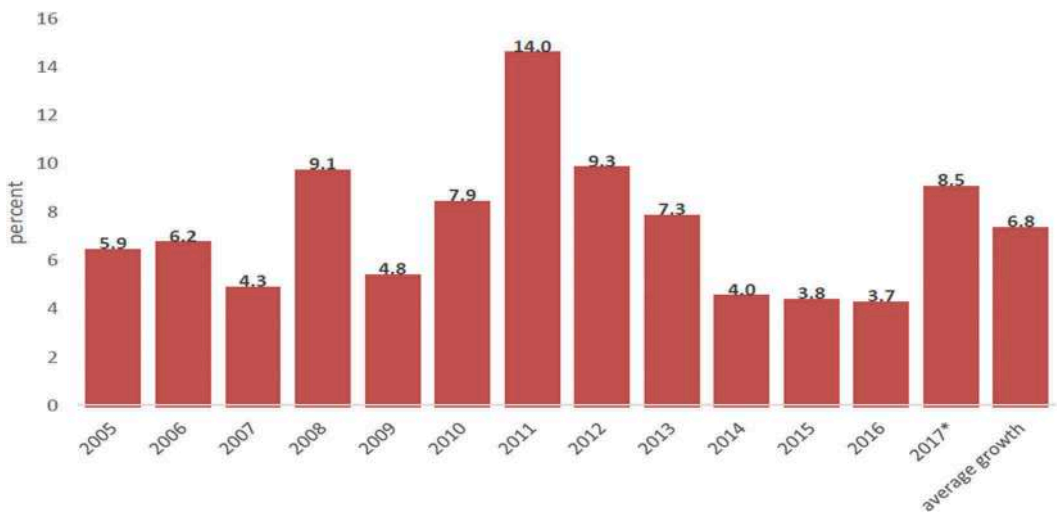
Ghana's labour market, in particular, is interesting to explore for at least two reasons. First, Ghana's economic performance has been strong over the years, but the growth in terms of employment has been poor raising concerns of quality economic growth (Alagidede et al., 2013). Even when employment opportunities are created, they are more dominant in the informal sector where the jobs are characterised by low incomes and poor conditions of service (World Bank, 2016b). Second, the tertiary educational institutions continue to produce large numbers of new graduates. The situation has been worsened due to the recent retrenchment and closing of several financial institutions in the country. With the relatively low employment opportunities, the labour market continues to be strict for most job seekers in the country. It is particularly difficult for young adults to gain employment due to their lack of relevant experience, skills, and jobs, which match their career interest (Wanberg, 2012).

Hence, it will be interesting to investigate sources of job information and job search methods in countries which are going through industrialisation, and retrenchment. Such countries rely largely on informal networks for jobs (Nyarko et al., 2014) and the question remains unanswered whether the influence of informal networks in restricted labour markets will decline or increase, since the labour market will be tighter and a large number of individuals within one's social network may be unemployed. Thus, answers to the questions with respect to the unemployment situation in Ghana are important in that they could provide insights into people's job-seeking strategies during the reemployment process. Furthermore, the study is timely and relevant because it can guide public policies for a greater number of young adults who are unemployed at present.

We used both primary and secondary data in the current study. The secondary data consist of data from the Ghana Statistical Service and the primary data were based on a survey conducted among employed adults in Ghana on their job search behaviour. The rest of the paper is organised as follows: First, we examine the economic outlook of Ghana. Next, we profile the employment and unemployment trends in Ghana from 2012–2016. We review research on job search methods and sources of job information. We then explore the frequently used job search methods that helped job seekers to obtain employment in Ghana. We then present and discuss the findings of the study.

## Economic outlook

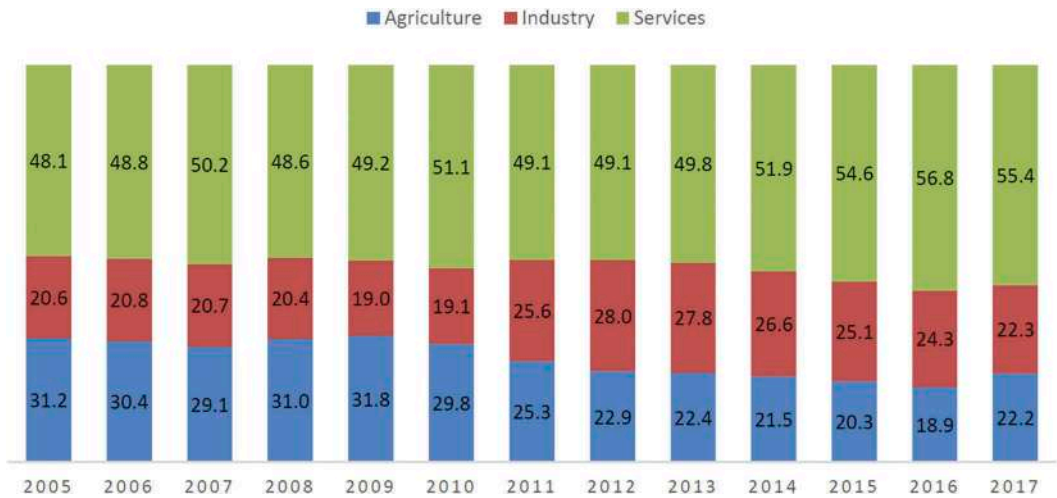
With an estimated total population of 28.3 million (Ghana Statistical Service, 2016), Ghana is regarded as one of the robust economies in the West African Sub-region (World Bank, 2016b). The country is the first sub-Saharan African nation to gain independence from Great Britain in 1957 (Alagidede et al., 2013). The Ghanaian economy has experienced sustainable economic growth which has been bolstered by the discovery and production of oil in commercial quantities since 2011 (World Bank, 2016a). The annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates recorded from 2005 to 2017 ranged from 3.7 percent to 14.0 percent (See Figure 1). Ghana's economic performance expanded significantly with an estimated growth of 9.3 percent in 2017 compared to



**Figure 1.** Annual GDP growth rates (%), 2005–2017.  
Source: Ghana Statistical Service (2017): Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 7

4.3 percent in 2016 (World Bank, 2018). This resilient economic growth was accelerated by Ghana’s primary commodity exports, namely cocoa, gold, and petroleum (World Bank, 2018).

Regarding the sectoral contribution to GDP, the services sector appeared to consistently contribute the highest in the country’s GDP (See Figure 2). The agriculture sector was the next highest contributor to GDP until 2011. From 2011 the industry sector has overtaken the agriculture sector in terms of GDP contribution. While the contribution of the agriculture sector was stable from 2006 to 2010 (approximately 30%), it decreased to 18.9 percent in 2016 and increased to 22.2 percent in 2017. The contribution of industry sector was fairly stable from 2005 to 2010, constituting approximately 20 percent and rose above 25 percent from 2011 to 2015 until it plummeted to 22 percent in 2017. The services sector contributed about half of GDP from 2006 to 2013 and has constituted more than half of GDP since 2014. With an annual GDP growth rate of 8.5 percent in



**Figure 2.** Sectoral contribution to GDP (%).  
Source: Ghana Statistical Service (2017): Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 7.

2017, Ghana was one of the fastest growing economies in the world in 2017 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2018).

Although great strides have been made regarding economic growth, yet the Ghanaian economy is experiencing challenges to translate the growth into the creation of productivity and decent jobs to improve income and livelihoods of its citizenry (World Bank, 2016b). As Ghana's employment opportunities fall far behind its economic growth (Alagidede et al., 2013; Aryeetey & Baah-boateng, 2015; World Bank, 2016a), concerns have been raised about the upward trajectory of the country's growth regarding the creation of employment (Nyarko et al., 2014). The slow pace of employment may be attributed to the paucity in the growth of the manufacturing sector, as the growth and structural transformation have rather been accompanied by a gradual decline in manufacturing and agriculture to the service sector (World Bank, 2016a). Indeed, an empirical study has shown that manufacturing firms in Ghana with low productivity have higher probability of going out of business (Frazer, 2005). Thus, an active policy recommendation has been put forward for Ghana to diversify its economy through productivity gains and value addition to the raw materials (World Bank, 2016b).

## The employment and unemployment situation

The Ghana Statistical Service describes employment as all individuals of working age (15 years and older) who are engaged in any activity to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015b). The growth and development in many economies partly mirror the absorptions of people into the labour market in the sectors of the economy. However, slow pace in absorptions into the labour markets is in sharp contrast with the purported economic performance of Ghana's economy. Table 1 indicates that the agriculture sector (44.7%), employed the highest number of people, followed by the service sector (40.9%) and the industry sector (14.4%) in 2012/2013. While females (47.3%) were more likely to be employed in the service sector compared to males (34.0%), they were less likely to be engaged in the agriculture sector (41.1%) relative to males (48.2%) in the year 2012/2013. In the year 2014/2015, the services sector (80.1%) engaged the majority of the employed population, followed by the industry sector (18.2%) and the agriculture sector (1.80%). The service sector accounted for 45.9% in the total engagement in 2015/2016. The agriculture sector (35.9%) was next contributor followed by the industry sector (18.2%). While males dominated the agriculture sector, females were more likely to be employed in the services sector.

Unemployment is measured by the proportion of the total population which is unemployed (Nyarko et al., 2014). It describes individuals of a legal age of 15 years and older, who are without jobs and currently available for jobs (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015a). Unemployment in Ghana has assumed an alarming proportion and it is more pronounced among the able-bodied young men and women. According to Table 2, the rates of unemployment were 5.8 percent, 5.2 percent, and 11.9 percent in 2012/2013, 2013/2014 and 2015/2016 respectively. The unemployment rates were substantially higher in urban areas than in rural areas for all the years under consideration (see Table 2).

The unemployment rates are higher for females than males for the years under consideration. There are patterns of differences in the rates of unemployment rates reported in the regions (See Table 3).

Table 1. Employment rates by sector.

Sectors	2012/2013			2014/2015			2015/2016		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture	48.2	41.4	44.7	74.4	25.6	1.8	46.2	53.8	35.9
Industry	17.8	11.3	14.4	64.3	35.7	18.2	44.7	55.3	18.2
Service	34.0	47.3	40.9	59	41.0	80.1	36.33	60.5	45.85

Source: Computed from the Ghana Statistical Services: Ghana Living Standard Survey Round 6, National employment Report and Labour Force Report.

**Table 2.** Unemployment rates by demographics.

Demographic groups	2012/2013	2013/2014	2015/2016
All (15+ years)	5.8	5.2	11.9
Male	5.4	4.8	11.1
Female	6.3	5.5	12.5
Urban	8.0	6.5	10.5
Rural	3.5	3.9	7.3

Source: Computed from the Ghana Statistical Services: Ghana Living Standard Survey Round 6, National employment Report and Labour Force Report.

**Table 3.** Unemployment rate by region.

Region	2012/2013			2015/2016		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Western	5.1	6.2	5.6	10.4	11.1	10.8
Central	5.5	3.9	4.6	11.2	11.3	11.2
Greater Accra	6.9	7.4	7.2	15.6	13.3	14.4
Volta	2.5	3.6	3.3	7.2	12.1	9.9
Eastern	2.5	5.9	4.3	6.6	11.1	9.0
Ashanti	4.6	4.7	4.6	13.4	15.1	14.3
Brong Ahafo	2.5	3.4	2.9	10.1	6.8	8.4
Northern	3.2	5.9	4.6	6.1	12.6	9.5
Upper East	10.5	11	10.8	18	18.7	18.4
Upper West	8.8	6.5	7.6	11.8	17.0	14.8
<b>Total</b>	4.8	5.5	5.2	11.1	12.5	11.9

Source: Computed from the Ghana Statistical Services: Ghana Living Standard Survey Round 6, National employment Report and Labour Force Report

While, the Brong Ahafo region recorded the lowest rate (2.9% = 2012/2013; 8.4% = 2015/2016) of unemployment, the Upper East recorded the highest (10.9% = 2012/2013; 18.4% = 2015/2016).

### ***Job search methods and sources of job information***

Job search methods and sources of job information are very critical for successful employment of Ghanaian job seekers (Nyarko et al., 2014). The ability of an unemployed job seeker to acquire the relevant information on job openings is crucial to ensure successful employment speed (Granovetter, 1995). Previous research has demonstrated that sources of job information are important determinants of employment success (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), speed, number of offers (VanHoye, vanHooft, & Lievens, 2009), non-pecuniary benefits (Franzen & Hangartner, 2006) and job quality (Cheung & Gui, 2006).

Research distinguishes between formal and informal job search. With formal search methods, the job seeker relies largely on public intermediaries including employment agencies, newspaper advertisements, subscribing to employment alerts and walking into the prospective employer and asking for potential vacancies (Drentea, 1998). Formal job search methods are not closely knit to interpersonal employment intermediaries (Huffman & Torres, 2001). On the other hand, informal sources involve the use of closely knit and private intermediaries including friends, relatives, teachers, and acquaintances to locate employment opportunities (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Over the past years, substantial research has examined the application of these search methods in employment success. Among the two sources of employment information, informal sources have been widely identified as critical in finding a job (Drentea, 1998; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). For example, Granovetter (1995) demonstrated that the majority of job seekers found jobs through families, friends, and social contacts.

Following this argument, previous research has shown that using social connections to search for jobs is a common job search strategy in all countries (Franzen & Hangartner, 2006; Wanberg,

2012). For example, research revealed that job seekers who have social connections in a company were more likely to be employed than applicants without contacts (Fernandez et al., 2000). A study in China examines the role of the norm of reciprocity in job referral, and subsequent employment satisfaction (Cheung & Gui, 2006). The authors found that job seekers with stronger ties (*guanxi*) benefited more through job referrals, both financially and psychologically (i.e., job satisfaction). In a related study, Van Hoya et al. (2009) reported that job seekers with extensive and strong social ties expended more time in social connections and were more likely to obtain higher number of job offers. The principle of ‘ask, and it shall be given unto you’ also applies to job search. A study which examined the extent to which people got employed through their social contacts when they asked for help showed that about 78% of social contacts did provide support during the job search (O’Connor, 2013).

Results on the impact of job search methods on employment and wages have been mixed. While some found positive relationship between informal job search and wages, others reported negative correlation or no relationship at all. For example, Montgomery (1992) argues that ‘the relationship between wages and the use of a particular job-finding method may be counter-intuitive’ (p. 593). He suggests that although weak ties are relevant for frequent job leads, they do not relate to high wages. Another study also found that job seekers who used contacts to find employment do not perform better in their job search process than those who did not use them (Mouw, 2003). This author demonstrated that the use of higher socioeconomic contacts does not have any impact on wages or employment speed. Again, Franzen and Hangartner (2006) argued that jobs found through social ties do not necessarily lead to financial pay-offs, but comes with non-pecuniary advantages including, reduced cost, and speed of employment.

Gender and racial differences have also been examined regarding the impact of job search methods on the likelihood of employment success. Categories such as gender and race have different access to social connections because of their varying positions on the social hierarchy (Lin, 2000). The analysis of 2781 cases from 1992–1994 of four cities in the U.S.A revealed that white women, blacks, and Latinos were less likely to find jobs through social network contacts (Smith, 2000). For example, McDonald (2010) found that white males received significantly more job leads than females and racial minorities. Some evidence suggests that women who use informal job search methods are more likely to be employed in female-dominated jobs (Drentea, 1998; Huffman & Torres, 2001) because males and females tend to invest in different embedded resources in forming their social connections (Lin, 2000).

People living in rural areas have small social networks and are more likely to have connections with their families, relatives, and close friends. However, empirical studies show that urbanity is positively and significantly related to a number of job leads (Matthews, Pendakur, & Young, 2009; McDonald, 2010), with urban residents receiving more information on job openings (McDonald, 2010). A survey administered to 2881 and 2230 cases in 22 rural communities and three big Metropolises respectively in Canada showed that 80% of the municipal employees used formal search methods as leads for jobs compared to 20% from the rural areas (Matthews et al., 2009). The authors concluded that, while job seekers in the rural areas were less likely to use formal job search methods, those in the urban areas relied more often on formal job search methods.

## Methods

### *Procedures and participants*

An online self-report questionnaire was used to collect the data for the current study. The link of the survey was sent to employees on several online platforms in Ghana. Upon a thorough review of the literature, we found 14 most cited formal and informal job search methods. Participants were asked to complete and submit the survey by selecting from the 14 methods, which they have used to find jobs. All the participants were formal sector employees. A total of 282 participants



submitted their survey. Forty-seven responses were deleted from the data set because more than a page of the survey was blank which rendered them unusable. The final sample was 235 (161 males and 74 females). The average age was 30.24 ( $SD = 3.47$ ). While 59% of the participants held bachelor's degree, 27% held master's, 6% were Ph.D. graduates, and 8% had other qualifications. Participants who were 'single' were 57%, 42% were married and 1% were separated/divorced. Participants from Greater Accra region were 32%, Central region, 18%, Western region, 12%, Eastern region, 9%, Ashanti region, 16%, Volta region, 3%, and Brong Ahafo region, 10%. Out of the total number of the participants, 6.0% were in accounts-related areas, 7.2% in research and lectureship, 6.0% management and administration, 11.5% purchasing, supply, and sales, .4% in consultancy, 7.2%, banking and finance, 1.7%, social work and advocacy, 8.1%, engineering, and 4.7% in health. The majority were teachers (47.2%). All the participants gave their consent to use the data for the purpose of this research with their responses remaining anonymous and confidential.

## **Measures**

### ***Job search methods***

The respondents were asked to indicate whether they used any of the 14 methods during their job search similar to previous research (Huffman & Torres, 2001). They were then asked to indicate the particular job search method that helped them to secure their current jobs. On average, each of the respondents used at least two of the methods during their job search. The analysis only included the type of search method participants reported helped them to secure employment. The 14 methods were: (1) talked to friends, (2) talked to relatives, (3) talked to former teachers (4) responded to newspaper ads, (5) answered a help-wanted sign, (6) used a school placement officer, (7) used a state employment agency, (8) used a temporary employment agency, (9) used a private employment service, (10) used a labour union, (11) just walked in and applied, (12) just sent a resume or called an employer, (13) national service, and (14) others. The search methods were coded 1–14 for the analysis.

### ***Demographic characteristics***

The type of search methods used by the participants was profiled based on their biographic characteristics. The demographic variables used in the current study included age, gender, educational level, marital status, region of work, and type of work. This approach is consistent with previous research (Drentea, 1998; Huffman & Torres, 2001).

## **Analyses and results**

We examined job search methods on the demographic characteristics. Means and percentages were subsequently used by performing cross-tabulations, using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 24.0). The search methods were examined separately, to allow the researchers to explore whether there were differences in the use of search methods with regard to the biographic characteristics.

Table 4 shows the frequently used job search methods by job seekers. Overall, the frequently used methods were talking to friends 91 (38.7%) and relatives 36 (15.3%). The next frequently used methods were national service placement, school placement officers, and state employment agencies (refer to Table 4). Just sending a resume or calling an employer, 13 (5.5%) and newspaper advertisements were frequently used formal job search method, which was quite helpful for successful employment compared to labour union, which was less used 3 (1.3%).

Table 5 depicts job search methods used by age category. Talking to friends and relatives were the frequently used informal search methods among people by age categories. Out of a total of 7 participants who fall within the 18–24 age category, 3 (42.9%) indicate that they talked to friends.



**Table 4.** Frequent job search methods used by job seekers in Ghana.

Job search methods	N	(Percentages %)
<b>Informal methods</b>		
Talked to friends	91	38.7
Talked to relatives	36	15.3
Talked to former teachers	7	3.0
<b>Formal methods</b>		
Used a newspaper ad	11	4.7
Answered a help-wanted sign	7	3.0
Used a school placement officer	15	6.4
Used a state employment agency	15	6.4
Used a temporary employment agency	4	1.7
Used a private employment service	7	3.0
Used a labour union	3	1.3
Just walked in and applied	8	3.4
Just sent a resume or called an employer	13	5.5
National Service	15	6.4
Others	3	1.3
<b>Total</b>	235	100

Source: Survey Data

**Table 5.** Job search methods by age.

Job search methods	18–24 N (%)	25–30 N (%)	31–35 N (%)	36/above N (%)	Total N (%)
<b>Informal methods</b>					
Talked to friends	3 (42.9)	56 (38.4)	26 (38.8)	6 (40.0)	91 (38.7)
Talked to relatives	0 (0.0)	30 (20.5)	5 (7.5)	1 (6.7)	36 (15.0)
Talked to former teachers	1 (14.3)	5 (3.4)	1 (1.5)	0 (0.0)	7 (3.0)
<b>Formal methods</b>					
Used a newspaper ad	0 (0.0)	5 (3.4)	4 (6.0)	2 (13.3)	11 (4.7)
Answered a help-wanted sign	0 (0.0)	3 (2.1)	2 (3.0)	2 (13.3)	7 (3.0)
Used a school placement officer	0 (0.0)	7 (4.8)	6 (9.0)	2 (13.3)	15 (6.4)
Used a state employment agency	0 (0.0)	10 (6.8)	5 (7.5)	0 (0.0)	15 (1.7)
Used a temporary employment agency	0 (0.0)	4 (2.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (1.7)
Used a private employment service	0 (0.0)	4 (2.7)	3 (4.5)	0 (0.0)	7 (3.0)
Used a labour union	0 (0.0)	2 (1.4)	1 (1.5)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.3)
Just walked in and applied	1 (14.3)	5 (3.4)	2 (3.0)	0 (0.0)	8 (3.4)
Just sent a resume or called an employer	0 (0.0)	8 (5.5)	4 (6.0)	1 (6.7)	13 (5.5)
National Service	2 (28.6)	6 (4.1)	6 (9.0)	1 (6.7)	15 (6.4)
Others	0 (0.0)	1 (0.7)	2 (3.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.3)
<b>Total</b>	7 (100)	146 (100)	67 (100)	15 (100)	235(100)

Source: Survey Data

Similar trends were observed for the other age groups. With regard to formal job search methods, the 18–24 age category either used national service placement 2 (28.6%) or walk-ins 11 (14.3%). Finding employment through state employment agencies was the most preferred formal search method among the 25–30 age category (6.8%). While using school placement officers (9%) and national service (9%) were the most frequently used formal job search methods among 25–30 age bracket, newspaper advertisements (13%), a help-wanted sign, state employment agencies (13%), and school placement officers (13%) were formal methods, which were widely used by the older participants (36 years and above). In sum, talking to friends and relatives were the frequently used informal job search methods and utilising school placement officers, state employment agencies, and national service placement were the most preferred formal job search methods among most of the age groups in this study.

Table 6 shows that the majority of males and females used informal methods for securing employment. Out of a total of 161 males, 59 (36%) talked to friends and 24 (14.9%) contacted relatives. While 8.7% used state employment agencies, 6.8% secured employment through national service placements. Talking friends (33%) and relatives (16%) were also strongly used by females

**Table 6.** Job search methods by gender.

Job search methods	Male N (%)	Female N (%)	Total N (%)
<b>Informal methods</b>			
Talked to friends	59 (36.6)	32 (43.2)	91 (38.7)
Talked to relatives	24 (14.9)	12 (16.2)	36 (15.3)
Talked to former teachers	4 (2.5)	3 (4.1)	7 (3.0)
<b>Formal methods</b>			
Used a newspaper ad	6 (3.7)	5 (6.8)	11 (4.7)
Answered a help-wanted sign	5 (3.1)	2 (2.7)	7 (3.0)
Used a school placement officer	9 (5.6)	6 (8.1)	15 (6.4)
Used a state employment agency	14 (8.7)	1 (1.4)	15 (6.4)
Used a temporary employment agency	3 (1.9)	1 (1.4)	4 (1.7)
Used a private employment service	6 (3.7)	1 (1.4)	7 (3.0)
Used a labour union	3 (1.9)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.3)
Just walked in and applied	7 (4.3)	1 (1.4)	8 (3.4)
Just sent a resume or called an employer	7 (4.3)	6 (8.1)	13 (5.5)
National Service	11 (6.8)	4 (5.4)	15 (6.4)
Others	3 (1.9)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.3)
<b>Total</b>	161 (100)	74 (100)	235 (100)

Source: Survey Data

among the informal job search methods. With regard to formal methods, sending resume or using school placement officer (8.1%), newspaper ads (6.8%), and national service placement (5.5%) were more beneficial for females.

Table 7 shows the proportional differences in job search methods, by educational levels. Out of a total of 138 bachelor's graduates, 53 (38.4%) talked to friends and 21 (15.2%) contacted relatives. National service (8.0%) and state employment agencies (7.2%) were the next important job search methods among the first-degree holders. Among the 63 master's graduate 26 (41.3%) talked to friends and 12 (19%) talked to relatives. Although talking to friends (28.6%) were beneficial among Ph.D., just sending resume or calling the prospective employer was the most frequently used job search method for Ph.D. holders (35.7%).

Among the search methods, talking to friends was the greatest job search method for the single (39.8%), the married (36.4%) and the divorced (66.7%) participants. No divorced/separate participants secured employment through relatives, however, 19.5% singles and 10.1% married were employed through it. The divorced individuals secured work through formal job search method of newspaper ads (33.3%), while the single (2.3%) and the married (7.1%) also reported using same means of obtaining employment. Just sending resume was more popular among the singles (3.8%)

**Table 7.** Job search methods by educational level.

Job search methods	Bachelor N (%)	Master's N (%)	PhD N (%)	Others N (%)	Total N (%)
<b>Informal methods</b>					
Talked to friends	53 (38.4)	26 (41.3)	4 (28.6)	8 (40.0)	91 (38.7)
Talked to relatives	21 (15.2)	12 (19.0)	2 (14.3)	1 (5.0)	36 (15.3)
Talked to former teachers	3 (2.2)	3 (4.8)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	7 (3.0)
<b>Formal methods</b>					
Used a newspaper ad	3 (2.2)	4 (6.3)	2 (14.3)	2 (10.0)	11 (4.7)
Answered a help-wanted sign	7 (5.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (3.0)
Used a school placement officer	7 (5.1)	5 (7.9)	0 (0.0)	3 (15.0)	15 (6.4)
Used a state employment agency	10 (7.2)	4 (6.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	15 (6.4)
Used a temporary employment agency	4 (2.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (1.7)
Used a private employment service	6 (4.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	7 (3.0)
Used a labour union	3 (2.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.3)
Just walked in and applied	5 (3.6)	2 (3.2)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.0)	8 (3.4)
Just sent a resume or called an employer	4 (2.9)	2 (3.2)	5 (35.7)	2 (10.0)	13 (5.5)
National Service	11 (8.0)	3 (4.8)	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	15 (6.4)
Others	1 (0.7)	2 (3.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.3)
<b>Total</b>	138 (100)	63 (100)	14 (100)	20 (100)	235 (100)

Source: Survey Data

and the married (8.1%) but not for the divorced/separate participants. Also, 5.3% singles and 8.1% married reported they obtained employment through the national service scheme. Using school placement officers and state employment agencies were higher for the married compared to the singles and divorced/separate (see Table 8).

Table 9 reports job search methods by type of work. Majority of the participants were teachers. Out of a total of 111 teachers, 39 (35.1%) contacted friends and 15 (13.5%) talked to relatives for employment. The usage of informal methods is true for all the other types of profession except for consultancy. For example, among all the informal job search methods, contacting friends were frequent among account records (35.7%), research and lecture (29.4%), management and administration (50%), sales and purchasing (63%), banking and insurance (41%), social work and advocacy (75%), engineering (21%) and health (36%) employees. Talking to former teachers was used more frequently by teachers (4.5%), banking and finance (5.9%) but was less important for the 'other' jobs. With regard to formal method, school placement officers (10%), state employment agencies (9.0%) and just sending resumes (8.1%) were the most frequently used formal methods for teachers. While researchers benefitted more often from newspaper ads (11.8%), just sending resume (11.8%), and national service (11.8%), using labour unions was common for consultancy service. Moreover, national service placement (10.5%) and state employment agencies were frequently used by engineers (10.5%). Overall, using national service was critical for all the professions except consultancy, engineering, health-related work, and sales and purchasing.

Table 10 further demonstrates the use of job search methods in seven regions in Ghana. Among all the informal job search methods, out of the 78 participants in the Greater Accra Region, 27 (35.5%), talked to friends and 12 (15.8%) talked to relatives. Almost half of the participants in the Ashanti region talked to friends to secure employment. There were 42 participants in the Central Region of which 12 (28.6%) talked to friends, 11 (26.2%) contacted relatives and 2 (4.8%) used teachers' referrals. The other regions showed similar trends in the usage of informal job search methods. With regard to formal job search methods, national service placement was the most frequently used in both Greater Accra (10.5%) and Ashanti Regions (10.8%). Using state employment agencies was also preferred by those in the Central Region (9.5%) and Western Regions (13.5%). While sending resumes was an important avenue for those in the Eastern region (19.0%), using newspaper ads (12%), school placement officers (12%), and walk-ins (12%) were frequently used by participants from the Brong Ahafo Regions. None of the formal job search methods were important for job seekers in the Volta Region.

Table 8. Job search methods by marital status.

Job search methods	Single N (%)	Married N (%)	Divorce N (%)	Total N (%)
<b>Informal methods</b>				
Talked to friends	53 (39.8)	36 (36.4)	2 (66.7)	91 (38.7)
Talked to relatives	26 (19.5)	10 (10.1)	0 (0.0)	36 (15.3)
Talked to former teachers	3 (2.3)	4 (4.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (3.0)
<b>Formal methods</b>				
Used a newspaper ad	3 (2.3)	7 (7.1)	1 (33.3)	11 (4.7)
Answered a help-wanted sign	7 (5.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (3.0)
Used a school placement officer	7 (5.3)	8 (8.2)	0 (0.0)	15 (6.4)
Used a state employment agency	8 (6.0)	7 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	15 (6.4)
Used a temporary employment agency	4 (3.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (1.7)
Used a private employment service	2 (1.5)	5 (5.1)	0 (0.0)	7 (3.0)
Used a labour union	3 (2.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (3.4)
Just walked in and applied	5 (3.8)	3 (3.0)	0 (0.0)	8 (3.4)
Just sent a resume or called an employer	5 (3.8)	8 (8.1)	0 (0.0)	13 (5.5)
National Service	7 (5.3)	8 (8.1)	0 (0.0)	15 (6.4)
Others	0 (0.0)	3 (3.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.3)
<b>Total</b>	133 (100)	99 (100)	3 (100)	235 (100)

Source: Survey Data

Table 9. Job search methods by type of work.

Job search methods	Teaching N (%)	Accounts records N (%)	Research/lec- turing N (%)	Management/ Administration N (%)	Sales/purchas- ing/ N (%)	Consultancy N (%)	Banking/ Insurance N (%)	Social/ Advocacy N (%)	Engineering N (%)	Health Related N (%)	Total N (%)
<b>Informal methods</b>											
Talked to friends	39 (35.1)	5 (35.7)	5 (29.4)	7 (50.0)	17 (63.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (41.2)	3 (75.0)	4 (21.1)	4 (36.4)	91 (38.7)
Talked to relatives	15 (13.5)	3 (21.4)	4 (23.5)	3 (21.4)	2 (7.4)	0 (0.0)	4 (23.5)	0 (0.0)	5 (26.3)	0 (0.0)	36 (15.3)
Talked to former teachers	5 (4.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (9.1)	7 (3.0)
<b>Formal methods</b>											
Used a newspaper ad	5 (4.5)	0 (0.0)	2 (11.8)	1 (7.1)	1 (3.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.3)	1 (9.1)	11 (4.7)
Answered a help-wanted sign	0 (0.0)	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (7.4)	0 (0.0)	2 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	2 (10.5)	0 (0.0)	7 (3)
Used a school placement officer	12 (10.8)	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.3)	1 (9.1)	15 (6.4)
Used a state employment agency	10 (9.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (3.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (15.8)	1 (9.1)	15 (6.4)
Used a temporary employment agency	0 (0.0)	2 (14.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (9.1)	4 (1.7)
Used a private employment service	2 (1.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (14.3)	2 (7.4)	1 (100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (3.0)
Used a labour union	2 (1.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (3.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.3)
Just walked in and applied	5 (4.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (3.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.3)	1 (9.1)	8 (3.4)
Just sent a resume or called an employer	9 (8.1)	0 (0.0)	2 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.9)	1 (25.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	13 (5.5)
National Service	6 (5.4)	2 (14.3)	2 (11.8)	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.9)	0 (0.0)	2 (10.5)	1 (9.1)	15 (6.4)
Others	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	2 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>111 (100)</b>	<b>14 (100)</b>	<b>17 (100)</b>	<b>14 (100)</b>	<b>27 (100)</b>	<b>1 (100)</b>	<b>17 (100)</b>	<b>4 (100)</b>	<b>19 (100)</b>	<b>11(100)</b>	<b>235 (100)</b>

Source: Survey Data

Table 10. Job search methods by region.

Job search methods	Greater Accra N (%)	Central N (%)	Western N (%)	Eastern N (%)	Ashanti N (%)	Volta N (%)	Brong Ahafo N (%)	Total N (%)
<b>Informal methods</b>								
Talked to friends	27 (35.5)	12 (28.6)	13 (44.8)	9 (42.9)	18 (48.8)	3 (5.0)	9 (37.5)	91 (38.7)
Talked to relatives	12 (15.8)	11 (26.2)	2 (9.5)	2 (9.5)	4 (10.8)	3 (5.0)	2 (8.3)	36 (15.3)
Talked to former teachers	0 (0.0)	2 (4.8)	1 (3.4)	3 (24.3)	1 (2.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (3.0)
<b>Formal methods</b>								
Used a newspaper ad	5 (6.6)	2 (4.8)	0 (0.0)	1 (4.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (12.5)	11 (4.7)
Answered a help-wanted sign	3 (3.9)	3 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (4.2)	7 (3.0)
Used a school placement officer	3 (3.9)	5 (11.9)	1 (3.4)	0 (0.0)	3 (8.1)	0 (0.0)	3 (12.5)	15 (6.4)
Used a state employment agency	3 (3.9)	4 (9.5)	4 (13.5)	0 (0.0)	2 (5.4)	0 (0.0)	2 (8.3)	15 (6.4)
Used a temporary employment agency	4 (5.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (1.7)
Used a private employment service	4 (5.3)	1 (2.4)	0 (0.0)	1 (4.8)	1 (2.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (3)
Used a labour union	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (6.9)	0 (0.0)	1 (2.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.3)
Just walked in and applied	1 (1.3)	1 (2.4)	1 (3.4)	0 (0.0)	2 (5.4)	0 (0.0)	3 (12.5)	8 (3.4)
Just sent a resume or called an employer	4 (5.3)	0 (0.0)	4 (13.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (4.2)	13 (5.5)
National Service	8 (10.5)	1 (2.4)	1 (3.4)	4 (19)	4 (10.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	15 (6.4)
Others	2 (2.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (4.8)	1 (2.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.3)
Total	76 (100)	42 (100)	29 (100)	21 (100)	37 (100)	6 (100)	24 (100)	235 (100)

Source: Survey Data

## Discussion

### *Statistical information and government intervention programmes*

The review of the basic statistical information shows that Ghana has sustained its economic growth through rigorous economic reform and structural adjustment programmes. Ghana's economy was adjudged one of the fastest growing economies in the world in 2018. However, the mismatch between the economic growth figures and employment of the country's labour force has raised doubts about the quality of growth (World Bank, 2016b). The agriculture sector, which used to be the major employer for most Ghanaians has recently been overtaken by the service and the industry sectors. The unemployment rate has been rising over the years, which poses a major social threat. For example, the unemployment rate doubled from 5.8% in 2011/2012 to 11.9% in 2015/2016 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015a), and the situation is even more disturbing among females and in urban areas (World Bank, 2016a).

Going forward, the country continues to battle unemployment, albeit the high demand for jobs, through various intervention programmes. Successive governments have instituted a number of programmes to aid job creation in order to curb the unemployment phenomenon. Such programmes include *National Service Scheme (NSS)*, *National Youth Employment Programme, (NYEP)*, *Local Enterprise and Skills Development (LESDEP)*, and the *Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Authority (GYEEDA)* (Ghana Statistical Service, 2018). In May 2018, the government launched *The Nation Builders Corps (NABCO)*, which is a flagship programme to address the current graduate unemployment in the country ([www.nabco.gov.gh](http://www.nabco.gov.gh)). The programme aims at training unemployed graduates under seven modules including *Educate Ghana, Heal Ghana, Feed Ghana, Revenue Ghana, Digitise Ghana, Civic Ghana, and Enterprise Ghana*. The programme, which operates under several government agencies is estimated to employ over one hundred thousand unemployed graduates. As such, statistical information on the labour market situation is critical to monitor and evaluate the success of these policies and programmes. In addition, such information provides insights for the government, the private sector, and individuals to make decisions about employment and unemployment in the country. For example, the statistical information from this study could contribute to the training and development of job seekers on the type of job search activities to engage in during their job search process. Consequently, given the paucity of research on unemployment and job search in most developing countries, linking existing job information with survey on job search methods provides a significant contribution to the literature.

### *Survey on job search methods*

The job search methods used in the re-employment process are particularly important for both reemployment and quality of employment (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). In exploring the job search methods in Ghana, we identified 14 frequently used methods (informal and formal) across several demographic characteristics. Out of the 14, we found that informal method (i.e., talking to friends and relatives) appeared to be the most frequently used among Ghanaian job seekers. The results confirm the evidence of prior research on the crucial role of informal job search methods in finding employment (Drentea, 1998; Granovetter, 1995).

### *Theoretical implications*

This study provides both theoretical and practical contribution to the existing literature. The high unemployment situation coupled with the prevailing economic hardships bespeak the application of informal methods during job search. The results inform critical consideration of the role of social capital in the job search process. Some evidence shows that job seekers with extensive and strong social ties expended more time in social connections and were subsequently more likely to secure a higher number of job offers (Van Hove et al., 2009). It follows that soliciting information from

friends, relatives, and employees increases the job seekers' knowledge about prospective employers and helps to enlarge one's social network, which eventually opens job leads.

Job seekers' biographic information has been linked to the type of job search methods used (Drentea, 1998; Huffman & Torres, 2001; Mau & Kopischke, 2001; Smith, 2000). Biographic characteristics such as gender, age, education, job experience, race, location of domicile, have been associated with job search behaviour and reemployment success (Adams & Rau, 2004; Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2005). The current study confirms that job search methods are relevant for all demographic variables during the reemployment process. For example, a meta-analysis shows young, white, male, highly educated, and more experienced individuals tend to engage in high job search behaviour, relative to older, non-white, female, less-educated, and less-experienced individuals (Kanfer et al., 2001). Specifically, our results suggest that both male and female made effective use of formal and informal methods, corroborating previous research findings (Huffman & Torres, 2001). However, some researchers suggest that networks may not be of help to women in the job search process, as they may have weak connections with influential people in the society. For example, Drentea (1998) found that the formal methods have strong positive effects for women to find more integrated jobs and that they were likely to find employment through informal methods only, in female-dominated jobs. However, Huffman and Torres (2001) reported that women were likely to earn less than men, regardless of the search methods used to secure employment, and the touted claim that job search methods adopted contribute to ameliorating staggering inequalities in its various forms has little or no empirical grounding per evidence.

On regional employment patterns, empirical research suggests that rural labour markets and social capital are constrained, compared to the cities' (Matthews et al., 2009). Our data show that those in the rural regions are more likely to use informal methods compared to their counterparts in the urban areas, and vice versa. Albeit, the use of weak ties is not effective in the restricted labour markets and also associated with lower incomes. Research shows that job seekers who combined both the strong and weak ties were more likely to find employment in both the urban and rural communities (Matthews et al., 2009). However, in a restricted labour market, strong ties may be more important paths to a good job fit (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Although weak ties play a major role in job search in urban areas, they are much less effective in difficult labour markets such as the case in Ghana. However, Saks and Ashforth (1997) found that formal job search methods rather than informal job search methods promote individuals' post-employment fits.

Although formal job search methods such as newspaper ads, state employment agencies and national service are beneficial to all job seekers, formal methods such as school placement have been found to be stronger for men, compared to women (Huffman & Torres, 2001). Elsewhere, the Ghanaian job search process to a very large extent, revolved around the popular concept of 'whom you know' Drentea (1998) has stated several merits of the use of formal methods; they include: access to job information enhances employers' knowledge of the skills of the applicant in advance, and prevent segregation premised on gender, race, geographical location, and educational levels. Though the formal application system has many advantages, employers in Ghana have their own preferences for using informal methods to find employees. Even when jobs are advertised by state agencies and private employers in an anticipation of formal responses, the selection processes are usually informal. According to Drentea (1998), this breeds biases and perpetuates segregation in the employment process.

Furthermore, our results demonstrate that the use of formal job search methods may be less effective across biographic characteristics in the current study. For example, Huffman and Torres (2001) showed that formal job search methods may be ineffective for gender equality in such employment outcomes as earnings. In fact, studies show that formal job search methods have little impact on job search, especially among minority groups (Huffman & Torres, 2001) and in more restricted labour markets (Nyarko et al., 2014). Reasons that might account for high dependence on the informal methods for employment in Ghana is high unemployment and the paucity of labour



market information. For example, research shows that when unemployment is high, competition for every vacancy is tougher and personal networks become more important for job seekers (Håkansson & Tovatt, 2017). In addition, the higher reliance of job seekers on relatives and friends for alerts of job openings (Nyarko et al., 2014), as well as using them as intermediaries for successful employment especially in the formal sector may account for the larger utilisation of informal search. Even though previous research argues vigorously regarding which method (either formal or informal) is the most effective to find a job, the onus lies on the employer to select from an equally qualified pool of job applicants. For this reason, job seekers are encouraged to utilize the myriad job search strategies (both formal and informal) regardless of their biographic characteristics, during the employment process.

### **Implications for practice and career development**

The results of the study obviously have clear implications for policy formulation and implementation for training interventions for job seekers. Our findings show that both job search methods contribute to obtaining employment, with informal methods being the most effective. Informal job search methods, which reflect job seekers activation and use of social ties, human capital or networks including talking to acquaintances, friends, and relatives mean that job seekers need to work on the quality and strength of their social ties. This implication has been perfectly captured by researchers:

*'Within an acceptable range of needed abilities, there are many people with financial and human capital, comparable to your own. Whatever you bring to the production task, there are other people who could do the same job – perhaps not as well in every detail, but probably as well within the tolerance of people for whom the job is done. Criteria other than financial and human capital are used to narrow the pool down to the individual who gets the opportunity. Those other criteria are social capital. New life is given to the proverb which says success is determined less by what you know than by whom you know' (Burt 1992, p.10; cited in Smith, 2000 p. 511).*

This revelation in the Ghanaian employment terrain beckons all employment agencies; private and public to constitute a system of educational programmes geared toward enlightening job seekers on the ramifications of social capital in their hunts for employment. Additionally, insofar as there exist great benefits for job seekers with broader social networks, there is also an urgent need regarding multiple use of job search strategies. Saks and Ashforth (1997) posit that the use of multiple job search methods is particularly relevant to the individual's perception of employment and a good fit. Career counsellors need to run workshops and seminars for job seekers on the availability of job search strategies and how to combine them in the employment hunt. Since current employers require potential employees to be adaptive in their work roles (Affum-Osei, Adom Asante, Kwarteng Forkouh, & Abdul-Nasiru, 2019), career development practitioners should design intervention programmes, which will identify the strengths and weaknesses of job seekers and avail the relevant strategies that will stimulate their job search intensity. For example, the intervention could be based on the job seekers' biographic characteristics, which could assist them to locate the relevant type of job search strategies to use to secure their preferred jobs.

### **Limitations and conclusion**

Although our findings are consistent with previous research and provide practical implications for job seekers and career consultants, we do not believe that our findings are impervious to possible limitations. First, we depended on self-report measures to assess job search methods, indicating that social desirability may have affected them. However, we minimised such biases, by clearly stating the items on the survey and also assuring the participants that their responses are confidential, anonymous, and will be used for research purposes only. We, therefore, do not believe this has been a major issue in the study. Second, the participants in the study were employees who reported the methods

they used during their job search processes. Although other studies have used these retrospective self-report measures in assessing job search behaviour (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Taggar & Kuron, 2016), they may lead to potential biases in participants' responses. Therefore, future research could employ longitudinal methods to examine job search methods (i.e., informal and formal) and which of them are more effective for successful employment and post-employment quality, among job seekers in Ghana. Third, this study is exploratory research and the participants in our sample were Ghanaians. Therefore, caution must be taken when interpreting and generalising the findings. Taken together, despite the restricted labour market, engaging in effective job search behaviour may be beneficial for job seekers. Research which examines the impact of non-economic factors on job search is limited in Ghana, thus, future research could go further to address this issue pointed out in this research.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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