

Geography Education at the Crossroads - Opportunities and Challenges of Teaching and Learning of Geography at Kwame Nkrumah University, Kabwe, Central Zambia: Finalist Students' Voices

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Abstract: This study to a larger extent, investigates factors influencing low enrollment in the discipline of Geography and explores opportunities for sustaining the discipline in Zambian Higher Institutions of learning. The main research question is: What are the underlying factors contributing to the consistently recorded low numbers pursuing Geography discipline as their major at KNU? Using an interpretivist paradigm of the qualitative approach and a case study design, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight (8) Kwame Nkrumah University (KNU) final-year Geography students. The study was anchored on the constructivist theory. Findings reveal that students' disinterest in studying Geography stems from (i) weak pedagogical foundation at secondary school level, (ii) complex abstract concepts, (iii) poor lecturer engagement (unattractive course delivery, (iv) teacher absenteeism. Others include (v) limited practical exposure. However, the discipline's interdisciplinary nature, career opportunities, and KNU's institutional reputation offer pathways for revival. The study recommends improved teaching practices, enriched pedagogy, enhanced resources, improved in service teacher training, targeted pipeline initiatives and secondary-tertiary pipeline strengthening to reposition Geography as a viable academic choice. While KNU's reputation and career pathways in Geography present opportunities, urgent reforms in teaching methods and secondary school preparation are needed.

Keywords: Enrollment decline, Geography, Geography education, Student perceptions, Secondary-tertiary pipeline.

1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this study is to share some insights with a reader on the significance of aspiring to study Geography. For various reasons, Geography discipline does not seem to be a preferred course or subject to be pursued by both students, and learners at all levels of education ladder, hence the title, Geography education at cross roads. Given a choice, Geography cannot easily be considered as someone's study area. To qualify this disinterest, in 2020, at KNU, 418 (167 female and 251 male) students entered to study as face-to-face (F-2-F) students at KNU. Out of this number, only twenty-three (23) majored in Geography, and 395 pursued other disciplines. If Geography discipline is attached with high level importance as depicted under this study, one would expect it to have a higher figure, even beyond fifty (50) candidates, but the opposite is true. Even if we were to consider enrollment levels for Open and Distance Learning as well as postgraduate students, the numbers are still on the lower side as compared to other disciplines like Civic Education, and English Language to mention a few.

Emphasising the importance of the discipline Geography it is well noted that it anchors both natural and social scientists (Bayir, Cakici, & Ertas, 2014). As a matter of fact, it is one of the few disciplines, if not the only one, that is concerned with understanding why and how both physical and cultural phenomena differ from place to place on the surface of the earth (Mundende, Mubita Milupi and Kalimaposo (2023); Mubita, Mundende, Milupi, Kalimaposo (2023), Mundende, Mubita, Kalimaposo, Haambokoma, Milupi, Sikayomya (2022); Kariuku, 2020). It is a discipline with various career opportunities for those who may wish to become teachers, pilots, meteorologists, geologists, environmentalists, cartographers, and many more.

1.1. Context: KNU was opened its doors to the public in 1967, as Kwame Nkrumah Teachers' Training College. In 1971, Dr. Kenneth David Kaunda, the first Republican President of Zambia, renamed the college as Kwame Nkrumah Teacher's College in recognition and honor of the Country of Ghana's founding President, the late Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. KNU is well known for training thousands of the country's best teachers (Gondwe, Mate & Mubita, 2024). Its mission statement is to "deliver quality education, research, and consultancy that is responsive to the changing needs and values of the local, national, and international communities". The institution has since diversified by introducing non-teaching training programmes, such as business studies and health sciences.

The discipline under discussion, as already alluded to, is taken by both undergraduate and postgraduate candidates at KNU. Besides the Geography core courses that are offered to fourth year (Finalists), students are subjected to Geography electives. In this case, they have a combination to pick their electives from, namely (*Rural Geography & Urban Geography*); (*BioGeography & Environmental Management*); (*Migration and Refugees & Settlement and Planning*); (*Environmental Hazards and Disasters, and Geography of Health and Development*). This study was anchored on the voices of Eight (8) students whose combination was (G 251: Environmental Hazards and Disasters, and G 452: Medical Geography or Geography of Health and Development. This is the group of 2020 intake full time students, the researchers concentrated on as participants in this study. This group was homogeneously purposively chosen for this study, with one major reason being that the combination these students took especially with G 452, from the name of the course, gave an impression of medical concepts, yet, the opposite was true, and students wanted to explore the content of this course. Further, it had a unique combination of one male and seven females. Lastly, out of 23 students who majored in Geography, this combination had the highest number, eight (08). At KNU, during the first registration process, students select their major field of study and their minor combinations. The student progresses with the major/minor combination for the next three years. At the end of three years, each candidate decides whether to proceed with their registered major or they go for their minor (which may become their major, should they change). For example, the student might with permission, switch their major for their minor, and their minor for their major. Simply put, if the registered combination is Geography (major) and Religious Studies (minor), the candidate at the beginning of his/her fourth year (Final Year) may consider to take Religious Studies as his/her major and Geography remains a minor. This means that, the candidate will have no more Geography courses to take during his/her fourth year, reason being that, a minor course is dropped at the end of year three, unless the candidate failed it and it becomes a repeat course (thus, proceed and repeat end comment).

There could be various factors and challenges that may lead to such a decision of switching subject major for the subject minor and vice versa, and such may include consistent poor performance in their proposed major course, in this case, Geography, and consistent better performance in their preferred minor course. In addition, some students take Geography as a filler course knowing that they would drop it at the end of their three years of their study (Mundende et al., 2023); (Mundende, 2015); (Mundende, Mubita, Milupi and Kalimaposo (2023). The questions begging answers could be why out of 418 (167 females and 251 males) students who entered to study at KNU in 2020 and to finish in 2024, only 23 students majored in Geography? Do these figures speak well for Geography as a discipline? One may further argue that, but there were those who minored in Geography up to Year 3 of their study, doesn't that number count as part of geographers to be considered? In as much as those who minored in Geography could be counted, they are not fully backed to handle Geography, at higher level(s), that is, at senior secondary level or at high school level, because they miss out Year 4 courses which are exclusively for majors only, and are key to teaching Geography with confidence. Such courses include but not limited to; 'Advanced Geography Teaching Methods; Selected topics in Teaching Geography; Research Project course, to name but a few, including those highlighted electives, which are to some extent, cross cutting courses, and topical in nature.

Against this context, enrollment numbers under discussion (that is. 23) do not reflect the discipline's versatility or demand. This pattern rocks Geography education, in that the discipline that should prepare a learner how to teach Geography courses that are housed in Geography discipline, are low. This low enrolment levels if not curbed may put the discipline at cross roads. Some drastic measures should be put in place to change candidate's perception of the discipline which seems to be at variance with what the discipline houses, by its definition and prospects. The challenge should be traced back to

secondary schools where Geography may not be effectively taught or prioritised to attract or compel the would-be Geography majors when they qualify to pursue tertiary level education (Mundende, 2015). Apparently, this picture, is not only attributed to KNU, but to many higher institutions of learning in Zambia. One of the researchers for this article, remembers teaching one (1) student in a Geography course at one higher institution of learning before he came to Kwame Nkrumah University. There are questions of importance to be considered, and such include, 'Is the teaching of Geography at KNU itself a deterrent?' 'Is Geography future certain or it may be absorbed or swallowed by other related disciplines like environmental studies or social studies or indeed life science?' and, 'What should be done to attract many more prospective candidates to pursue Geography as their major?'

Geography is one of the courses that is taught at KNU at both Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels. It is housed in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS). The discipline covers spatial, economic, political and utility values in institutions of learning such as KNU, and other organisations. By definition, it is not tied to one definition. For this context, two definitions would suffice, and that is, 'Geography is a 'bridge between natural sciences and social sciences (Tsallis, 2023 & Sala, 2009), with particular emphasis on studying the conditions required to support human life. Being considered as a bridge, those in the natural sciences and social sciences alike, in so many ways are dependent on concepts of this Geography, whose original meaning is the study of the earth (Doe & Lee, 2018). Second, Geography is the study of the 'earth as home of mankind' (Husain, 2018 & Hartshorne, 1939). The global disinterest in taking Geography as a preferred course both at secondary and tertiary institutions of learning, does not exclude KNU. This paper explores the challenges and opportunities affecting the discipline's sustainability at KNU. It further draws connections between student attitudes, pedagogical gaps, and systemic weaknesses inherited from secondary schooling. In as much as there may be no standard in terms of the minimum number of students to major in Geography, 23 is such a minimal number standing on the premise of the historical scope and nature of the subject, and how many secondary schools' learners are in the country who may need Geography teachers to teach them, even at senior level. As statistics stand, Zambian government via the Ministry of Education (MoE) has 11, 484 Primary Schools and 2,023 Secondary Schools. This being the position, MoE needs a lot of teachers, even in Geography discipline to service learners at different levels.

1.1.1. Importance of Geography and its Prospects

Geography is a cornerstone of education that bridges the natural and social sciences. It equips learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that enable them to understand the physical landscapes, human societies, and the interactions between them, world-wide. The discipline is not only about maps and places but also about cultivating critical thinking, global awareness, and problem-solving abilities. (Mundende, 2015, and Murphy (2007). Geography integrates physical and human dimensions, enabling learners to see connections between environmental processes and societal development, creating a holistic understanding of global systems (Murphy, 2007). Geography education encourages students to analyse complex issues such as climate change, urbanisation, and resource distribution. This nurtures critical thinking and equips learners with problem-solving skills applicable across disciplines (Lambert & Morgan, 2010).

By studying Geography, learners gain insights into diverse cultures, traditions, and perspectives. This promotes empathy, tolerance, and cooperation in an increasingly interconnected world (Lambert and Reiss 2013). Geography equips students with spatial skills such as map reading, data interpretation, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). These skills are essential for careers in urban planning, environmental management, and navigation. Geography education prepares learners to address pressing global challenges, including climate change, migration, and sustainable development. It empowers them to make informed decisions as responsible global citizens (Brooks & Butt, 2018).

1.1.2. Challenges Faced in the Teaching and Learning Geography

One of the most persistent challenges is the lack of adequate teaching resources such as maps, atlases, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). In many schools, especially in developing countries, Geography is taught without modern tools, which limits students' ability to grasp spatial concepts. According to Simfukwe (2023), Geography teachers in Zambia reported insufficient teaching aids and outdated materials, making it difficult to deliver effective lessons.

Globally and in sub-Saharan Africa, Geography faces challenges linked to how it is taught. Sarita and Maki-Kwayi (2021) observed in South Africa that many Geography teachers lacked content knowledge and effective pedagogy, which reduced learner engagement. Similar findings were noted in Zambia by Lako and Mubita (2021), who highlighted that Geography teachers in Serenje lacked access to literature, time, and training to integrate practical learning.

Mundende et al. (2023) further argued that Geography in Zambian secondary schools suffers from teacher absenteeism, lack of teaching aids, and absence of fieldwork. Consequently, learners enter university with limited exposure and interest in the subject. Geography often covers a wide range of topics, from physical processes like plate tectonics to human issues such as migration and globalisation. This breadth overwhelms students and teachers, leading to superficial coverage rather than deep understanding. Kaya (2018) highlights that teachers struggle with balancing the extensive curriculum while ensuring meaningful learning, which reduces the effectiveness of Geography education.

The other challenge is that students/learners sometimes perceive Geography as a subject focused only on memorising maps and locations, which reduces motivation. This misconception undermines the discipline's relevance to real-world issues such as climate change and urban planning. Nursofiani and Jamaludin (2024) argue that one of the biggest challenges in 21st-century Geography education is changing students' attitudes and making the subject more engaging and applicable to everyday life.

The other challenge is that many Geography teachers lack specialised training in modern pedagogical approaches and technologies such as GIS. Without continuous professional development, teachers may rely on outdated methods that fail to engage students. Kaya (2018) found that teachers often face difficulties in adopting innovative teaching strategies due to limited training opportunities, which hinders effective Geography instruction. While digital tools like GIS and remote sensing are revolutionising Geography, many schools lack access to these technologies. Even when available, teachers may not be adequately trained to use them effectively. Simfukwe (2023) notes that the absence of ICT integration in Geography classrooms in Zambia remains a major barrier to modernising the subject.

Poor assessment and evaluation systems: existing assessment methods may not effectively measure practical skills, spatial reasoning, and critical analysis, leading to a gap between learning outcomes and real-world Geographic competencies (Sarita and Maki – Kwayi, 2021).

Limited Student-Centered and Interactive Pedagogical Approaches: most times traditional lecture-based teaching methods dominate, resulting in low student engagement and reduced opportunities for active learning and critical thinking on the side of Geography students (Nursofiani and Jamaludin 2024; Mundende, 2015).

1.2. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Constructivist Theory by John Dewey. Dewey mooted this theory around 1890s and with time this theory has gained its influence in education, with emphasis on experiential learning and provision of democratic classrooms. Learners can experience learning if they are given an opportunity to construct their own ideas and this is only possible if the tutor, lecturer or faculty provides a conducive democratic classroom. Researchers adopted this theory based on the fact that students who come to KNU would rather select other disciplines to either major in or study and not Geography. This is probably could have been attributed to the fact that at learners at secondary school level or high school level who took Geography were not given democratic environment where they could have experienced experiential learning, thus lost interest along the way. As they qualified for tertiary level, they would have already lost interest in studying Geography.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Globally, KNU inclusive, some lecturers/learners do not enjoy functioning Geography laboratories (Sarita, 2021). Others, including teachers, find Geography to be a boring subject or course. As for KNU this trend of small numbers majoring in Geography has been consistent for some time now. The questions of concern worth investigating are, 'What is the future of Geography discipline at KNU should the numbers of those taking it as major continue dropping?' Why do many learners prefer to pursue Geography as a minor and not as a major at KNU? Are secondary schools adequately preparing learners to pursue Geography at tertiary level?

Depending on the responses given to these and many more related questions, not captured here, Geography education stands at crossroads of uncertainties, marginalisation and extinction if nothing counteracts the current trend. Further, without quick interventions, Geography may be absorbed by more “marketable” disciplines, thus ending its distinct presence at KNU. Should that happen, many would be Geographers to continue promoting the relationship between humanity and the environment may be lost to the destruction of the earth as home of humanity.

2. METHODOLOGY

The researchers applied the interpretivist paradigm of the qualitative approach. Qualitative approach was applied because the researcher needed to get the feelings, voices, and details of why a few students majored in Geography at KNU. The researchers did not use pragmatist paradigm which is exclusive of the Mixed Methods Approach containing both quantitative and qualitative approaches respectively. Further, the researchers did not use positivist paradigm because he was not in the quantitative approach. Interpretivist paradigm is suitable for this study because, the researchers needed to give detail interpretation of the findings. The target population was all the 23 students who majored in Geography. The sample size was eight (8) candidates whose electives were G 251 and G 252. The reason for this sample size was that this was the largest number amongst those who finally majored in Geography at Year 4. A case study design was preferred for this study. This sample size is justified as it falls within the range of 4 to 12 participants recommended for a homogenous group of experts (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). In addition, many researchers suggest that a minimum of 5 to 30 and a practical maximum limit of 30 to 60 participants is sufficient to reach saturation and attain the desired results. For instance, Guest *et al.*, (2006) propose that saturation can be achieved with a relatively small number of participants, typically between 6 and 8. This sample size therefore, was adequate for collecting rich and in-depth information in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the study topic. This study was purely qualitative, so determining the sample size is flexible and often contingent on the study's specific goals, methodology, and context. There is no strict rule for minimum or maximum sample size.

Though the findings of this study may not be generalised, being qualitative, and looking at the sample size used, lessons learnt from the study could be shared with various higher institutions that may be experiencing similar successes, challenges, and opportunities. Homogeneous purposive sampling was applied to choose the participants, in this context, all the eight (8) students were chosen. Heterogeneous, expert, critical or any other type could not be used because the study dealt with the same students with a lot of attributes, common among them which included their being together from Year 1, and taking the same electives in their final year.

A standardised semi - structured interview guide was used to collect primary data from all the eight (8) participants. This research tool was preferred as one of the non - probability tool because all participants were subjected to the same type of questions which made it easier to compare and contrast their responses. As for secondary data, Open Education Resources (OERs) which included Journal Articles and eBooks were reviewed. To ensure trustworthiness, the researchers applied credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability principles which included but not limited to member checking of the responses participants gave, the quality assurance of the research instruments by subjecting them to some academic members of staff. Being a qualitative study based on a few participants, the findings cannot be generalised but other institutions of learning may gain some lessons which they can apply in their institutions- Pseudonyms were used to keep the participant's privacy. For instance, (P 1) in this study implies, the participant labelled number 1. The researchers exercised maximum confidentiality and anonymity of their participants, by assuring them that, they would not divulge their submission to any other person. They encouraged participants them to honestly answer the questions but did not coerce them. The findings were categorised and summarised.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following themes were generated:

- **Abstract Concepts: Majority:** 7 out of 8 participants found it hard to grasp some concepts in some topics such as cartography and spatial analysis. One participant said that ‘some concepts in Geography are hard to understand (P 2).

- **Lecturer Issues:** Absenteeism, delayed assignments, and inconsistent grading demotivated learners. One participant observed that 'some of the lecturers were not available even for 3 weeks or a month but when they came back, they gave us tests on what they did not teach. They also conducted lectures which could last as long as 3 hours' non – stop (P 5).
- **Pedagogical Gaps:** All the participants indicated that Geography content delivery was often lecture-heavy with minimal student engagement or fieldwork. This led a good number of students not assimilate what was needed for them to assimilate.
- **Limited Support Materials:** Lack of Geography laboratories, maps, and other support materials made the course not to be experiential in nature. Though lecturers concerned used their initiative from Year 1 to Year 4, limited support in material form was a real struggle. One participant said, 'I heard about certain equipment or gadgets but I never saw them (P 5).

The study was administered to eight (8) candidates, and 7 (87.5%) were females. There was no biasness involved in the selection of participants because all the eight (8) candidates who took Geography as their major, and selected G 251 & G 252 combination as their electives, were included in the study.

The researchers wanted to know why the participants chose KNU as their preferred institution of higher learning. All the participants affirmed that they preferred KNU because of its quality education and the excellent reputation attached to the institution. They indicated that KNU produced competent graduates. One participant stated that he chose KNU "because Nkrumah is known for teaching for excellence and they produce students who are competent (P1)." Another one said, "I was told KNU is one of the best institutions in Zambia, and I have proven, it is" (P 2). Additionally, another candidate said, "KNU is a government institution" (P 8).

Further, researchers wanted to know whether participants enjoyed their stay at KNU. The majority, 7 (87.5%) of the participants stated that they enjoyed being students at KNU for four years (2020 - 2024) for the following reasons: "Because I have managed to meet all my expectations" (P 7), "I have learnt things I did not know that concern a teacher"(P 4). The one who said "NO", said, "I did not enjoy my stay because of the issue of bullying first year students as they report at the university. It was irritating and brought disturbances to some students" (P 8). This participant could have been traumatised for the rest of the years that she spent at the university, though bullying was no longer practiced at KNU.

The researchers asked participants to list the challenges they encountered while learning Geography for the past four years at KNU. Out of the eight (8) student participants, the majority, 7 (87.5 %) who faced challenges gave the following reasons:

- (i) It was difficult to understand some geographical concepts in some courses: One participant who faced some challenges said, 'some concepts in Geography are hard to understand' (P 2). This point is acknowledged by Sarita (2021), who cited that Geography had abstract and complex concepts, making the understanding of the discipline not too easy to understand.
- (ii) The delivery of some courses: One student had this to say, 'The way research in Geography is taught is to some degree, different from the way it is taught in courses like Civic Education, yet both or all of them are teaching basic research. In the process, we get confused as students' (P.5)
- (iii) Some lecturers were stingy in awarding marks. All the participants lamented that some lecturers despite much efforts one put in, they were mean with awarding marks, at times even when you had written similar points as students.
- (iv) Another participant observed that 'some of the lecturers were not available, close to one month, but when they appear, they give a test, or they lecture for more than 3 hours non -stop' (P 5). This finding is consistent with the works of Sarita (2021) and Mundende (2015) who said that, Geography subject had incompetent and demotivated teachers, making it difficult for students to excel.

Participant (P1) who did not experience challenges attributed it to good and experienced lecturers. There are various factors that contribute to better performance by learners, and such include; good and experienced instructors/teachers/tutors/lecturers who understand learner profile and could be at hand to provide the best learning environment that would not leave any learner behind (Mundende and Namafe, 2020). To some extent, poor or low performance by some learners is attributed to the way they are

handled by their lecturers or teachers. These findings are consistent with the works of Tanyanyiwa and Madoli (2021); Aun, Adaga, Ajala, Odunayo and Adaaku (2020), and Mundende (2015) who said that a tutor's or teacher's absenteeism from class wasted learner's resources, thus the need to employ dedicated tutors who would care about the quality of tutorials they offered. In addition, the findings show that graded assignments (Continuous Assignments – CA) were not given to students before the beginning of the examination session but a day or so before the examination day, worse scenarios not even given. The findings concerning instructional materials and not having committed teachers or lecturers are consistent with the works of Mundende and Namafe (2020), Mubita, Kalimaposo, Mundende, Sikayomya, Milupi (2022), and Mundende (2015), that learners should be given quick feedback for them to adjust in their academic performance.

Asked if there were some Geography courses they would have avoided taking if given options, the majority, 6 (75 %) said there were no such courses and the minority, 2 (25 %), said there were some courses they would have avoided. Those who said there were no courses they could have avoided argued that: "Every course in Geography had its own purpose for them; all the courses were interesting, and every course in Geography could be applied in their daily lives." One candidate said that, "Because it helped me to comprehend reasonable things I was avoiding" (P,5). Another one said, "All the courses are interesting, it is just a matter of trying harder" (P 2). The other one had this to say, "Because all the courses were just ok" (P 3). These findings resonate well with the constructivist' theory by John Dewey, who advocated for experiential learning and democratic classrooms.

The learners who faced challenges cited lack of seriousness by some lecturers in delivering the content, unsystematic allocation of marks, complicated content at delivery time which made it hard to assimilate, even when the topic under discussion was not too hard to assimilate. Other issues were lecturers, giving excuses during delivery of the content, but exerting pressure on students towards the examination period. Other reasons included that some lecturers were not serious in delivering content (P 6) and that some lecturers made easy courses appear very difficult (P 8). This created poor relationship between the lecturers and students in various forms which was detrimental to the learning experience of students in Geography department. It may be possible that students consulted and communicated among themselves which programme to pursue in the higher institution of learning and which lecturers to avoid given an opportunity, especially on electives. Senior students usually become 'ambassadors' of good or bad will because they would either encourage or discourage their juniors to avoid certain elective combinations due to the 'problematic' lecturer(s) or courses.

Being qualified, is one thing but being a good communicator, as an instructor, tutor, or teacher is another. Being present in class, is one thing, and delivering to the satisfaction of every student, is another thing. It calls therefore, for qualified, trained and committed teachers to always motivate their learners and attract them to their programmes or courses if they have to remain relevant in the institution (Mundende, 2015). It is also true that some students do not put up their best to see themselves through. They feel lecturers should do everything for them and award them marks as long as they write something. Some Learners do not have a fighting spirit to demonstrate their mastery, and such students become a burden especially in large classes. This kind of attitude from them is against the tenets of Constructivist Theory by John Dewey that promotes experiential learning. This therefore, calls for both students and their lecturers to put in their best for better output.

Positive experiences with particular lecturers revealed that teaching style mattered. Where instruction was relatable, participatory, and relevant, students reported increased engagement and performance. Thus, while systemic reforms are needed, individual lecturer efforts can shift perceptions. Furthermore, due to non-commitment of some lecturers, peer influence plays a role, and as alluded to, senior students often dissuade juniors from choosing certain programmes as well as elective combinations based on perceived lecturer difficulty, reinforcing negative cycles. Unless Geography is rebranded both at secondary and tertiary levels, its relevance will remain hidden behind more visible, well-resourced disciplines. Consequently, the subject remains marginalised and at crossroads bound for extinction if no quick interventions. Researchers sought to establish the courses students enjoyed learning for their past four years. The following six (6) Geography courses were indicated as such enjoyed by students during their four (4) years of study. It is possible that G 452 (GEO 4262); G 4172 and G 451 (G 4251) were listed because they were still current in their minds (they were courses the students took last).

Students also listed year-one courses (G 1111; 1210); year-two courses (GEO 2010; GEO 2410) and a year-three course (G 330), as being their favourites, too.

All participants, advanced the following reasons why the students enjoyed the classes. The reasons revolved around the lecturers: They commended lecturers involved in those courses for being very welcoming; they were knowledgeable to the satisfaction of participants; they were very supportive; they prepared participants to protect their physical environment, and broadened their world views. These findings are consistent with the theory that anchors this study, Constructivist Theory, by John Dewey who promoted experiential learning and democratic classrooms.

Arising from the findings and discussions the researchers do not wholly put blame on KNU lecturers for the fact that as students come to the institution, they could have already chosen their course combinations from Secondary Schools. Choosing of what a prospective candidate would take at a tertiary institution should take is initiated at a Secondary or high School level. The role of Secondary School teachers at Secondary Schools is very crucial to determine what their learners would pick up at a tertiary institution. If Geography or any subject is not taught with interest, Mundende (2015); Mundende et al., (2020) envisage that learners as they enter a tertiary institution may not pick Geography either as a major or a minor, even when they would have had Geography, at Secondary School level. Perhaps even as they enter the tertiary institution, the love for Geography may not be there because they could have lost their interest already. If due diligence is not done at a Secondary School, it would demand a lot of effort for tertiary lecturers/tutors to attract many, more so to compel those who go for Geography as a minor to change their mind and major in the subject. The researchers believe that the learners can learn even difficult courses if the course is interesting, delivered in a manner that can make it understandable, and put pressure on learners. The disinterest in pursuing Geography at tertiary level, may not be wholly attributed to KNU in this context, but at the strength of Secondary School, background. The question that may be asked is, what else should be done to teachers of Geography at secondary school level? There is no doubt, most Secondary School teachers are well trained, to the level of doctoral qualification (Mundende, 2015). It calls for the higher institutions of learning, therefore, to collaborate with Secondary Schools to resolve this teaching and learning challenge.

As regards abstract concepts, which were difficult to assimilate, this is in agreement with the works of Sarita (2021), who acknowledged that Geography had abstract and complex concepts., and that contributed to failure by learners to like the subject. There is a need therefore, for tutors/lecturers/instructors to simplify abstract concepts to the level of students. It may even help to use models or tangible objects, where possible to explain such abstract concepts.

Findings Concerning the lecturer's issue, absenteeism and their other misconduct activates are consistent with the works of Sarita (2021) and Mundende (2015) who said that Geography subject had incompetent and demotivated teachers, making it difficult for learners to excel. The teaching of Geography, needs dedicated and committed tutors who should be present as and when they were supposed to be in class.

It could therefore be said that the low enrollment in Geography stems from a combination of inherited disinterest and tertiary-level challenges. As Kariuku (2020) observed in East Africa, student course choices were significantly shaped by prior experiences and the perceived utility of a subject. In this study, students viewed Geography as useful but inaccessible due to abstract content and poor teaching. Researchers believe that choosing a career does not only depend on the lecturers, but on the learners as well, who should also shoulder the experience.

4. OPPORTUNITIES TO STUDY AT KWAME NKURUMAH UNIVERSITY.

As regards possible opportunities to study at KNU, all participants recorded the following as possible opportunities to study at KNU:

- **KNU University's strong reputation:** Most participants chose KNU for its quality and government affiliation.
- **Geography career prospects:** Fields such as environmental management, Geographic Information System (GIS), teaching, meteorology to name but a few, offer pathways.

- **Potential for fieldwork and lab-based courses:** Reinforcing active learning and practical engagement may boost retention, and KNU Geography Department takes students for field excursions, where they end up writing project reports.
- **Qualified lecturers:** Some lecturers who are knowledgeable and supportive can attract and retain students, and KNU has such lecturers.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

Geography at KNU, and potentially across Zambia, is at crossroads. Teaching is an art and a science. It could be true that challenges would be found in various higher institutions of learning programmes/courses, but there are opportunities too. If riding on the concept of economies of scale is to go by, Department of Geography Programmes at KNU could be shelved, because they do not attract many students, probably due to the challenges presented and discussed. Opportunities which include the name of the University, the employability of Geography course combinations, competent qualified Geography lecturers/instructors, to name but a few, could be factors to ride on to encourage many prospective candidates to have Geography as their preference ready to major in it. A common view was that the perceived poor Geography teaching in secondary schools diminished their early interest. Some lecturers at KNU tried to revive that interest, but often the effort come too late. All efforts though, should be exerted so that experiential learning takes place. This may not only need Lecturers in higher institutions of learning, but this begins at Secondary Schools, from where students choose their career pathways. By implication, how Geography is taught or delivered at a secondary school, may largely influence the choice of pursuing Geography as a major at higher institutions of learning, like KNU.

Without targeted reforms, the discipline risks further marginalisation. However, the findings of this study point to clear opportunities: students are willing to engage with Geography when it is taught well, linked to real-world issues, and resourced adequately. A coordinated strategy across secondary and higher education is essential to revitalise student interest and ensure the future of Geography at KNU and beyond. Secondary school quality: Poor Geography teaching in schools undermines interest. Some of the challenges included; lack of teaching materials by most schools, inadequate or lack of field trips, and lack of active pedagogy. Others are abstract concepts where students report Geography content as overly theoretical and hard to grasp without hands-on tools, Instructor reliability where lecturer absenteeism and unfair grading practices breed disengagement, some reported skipping classes for weeks, arbitrary grading, and unavailability. Last but not the least, institutional pipeline weakness, where the blame may not be completely be shouldered by tertiary instructors but by secondary or high schools who could have exhibited pipeline collapses that early. In most instances tertiary lecturers face an unattractive recruitment base, because some of the students who may register for Geography may not have even taken Geography at high levels.

5.2. Recommendations

Due to various findings from the eight (8) candidates, this study recommends that:

- The Department of Geography should conduct Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes to equip members on how to effectively and efficiently relate with students
- Due to the few students that pursue Geography at KNU, the Department of Geography should conduct purpose driven orientation campaigns and talks to attract beginners to do Geography, during the orientation.
- Because of institutional pipeline weakness, KNU Geography Department staff should visit local Secondary Schools to learn from teachers of Geography about their experiences with learners taking Geography
- Due to disinterest in pursuing Geography at KNU, The Department of Geography should improve tertiary instruction via continuous lecturer training, learner-centered methods, and better student-lecturer relationships.

- Due to lack of collaboration between the Department of Geography, and Secondary Schools, the KNU Geography Department staff, in liason with Geography Section in Secondary Schools should introduce early outreach programmes to promote Geography careers to high school students.
- Because the observed consistent of low enrollements in Geography at KNU, the Department of Geography should track enrollment trends and student feedback annually to guide timely curriculum and staffing adjustments. The department should further establish placement records beginning with Central Province. This is to establish how those who did Geography as their major are fairing in various industries.
- Due to observed Secondary School Strengthen secondary-level Geography teaching through in-service training, map literacy workshops, and increased use of fieldwork and ICT.
- Improve teaching delivery at KNU: adopt learner-centered pedagogy, ensure lecturer availability, integrate practical modules and continuous assessments.
- Promote Geography career pathways to secondary students via outreach events, alumni mentorship, and subject fairs.
- Due to lack of Geography resources, the KNU Geography Department should ensure to be innovative in establishing functional Geography labs, write Geography textbooks, prepare Charts and procure maps, and source funding for field-trips or field excursions.

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