
DEVELOPING A BUSINESS FRAMEWORK FOR ESTABLISHING A COURIER SERVICE IN NORTHERN GHANA.

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Abstract

Courier services have become essential in the 21st century, providing a reliable means of sending and receiving parcels and messages an evolution of practices that date back to pre-historic times. Despite this growing necessity, the Northern sector of Ghana lacks a well-established courier service provider, largely due to the unique settlement patterns in the region. This paper presents a business conceptual framework for establishing courier firms in Northern Ghana. The framework outlines practical methodologies for setting up a reliable and efficient courier service capable of handling parcel delivery and collection within the region and beyond. To develop this framework, a field survey was conducted to gather data on the current methods used by residents to send and receive parcels or messages, as well as their level of satisfaction with these methods. Insights from the survey informed the proposed layout and operational strategies for a successful courier service. Key elements of the proposed framework include steps for launching a courier business, factors influencing delivery efficiency, and the integration of IT tools to forecast service demand and enhance operations. This paper is intended to guide entrepreneurs and business groups interested in launching courier services in Northern Ghana, while also contributing to academic research in the field.

Keywords: E-business, Courier Service, Companies, Delivery, Conceptual Framework.**INTRODUCTION**

The primary mandate of a Courier Service (CS) is to ensure the delivery of messages, parcels, packages, and related items to clients. Key attributes that define any CS delivery system include speed, security, tracking capabilities, and service specialisation. According to Oxford Economic Forecasting (2005), courier service providers operate within an organised framework designed to guarantee safety and operational reliability. The CS delivery platform is recognised globally as one of the fastest and most dependable on-demand, door-to-door, and integrated transportation solutions. It offers worldwide coverage with full end-to-end tracking and control, ensuring that delivery times are generally faster than other modern transportation options.

In Ghana, courier and postal operations are regulated by the Postal and Courier Service Regulatory Commission (PCSRC), a statutory body established by Act 649 of Parliament. Section 10 of Act 649 stipulates that courier services may only operate under a licence issued by the PCSRC. Prior research (Karlson, Smith, Meyers, Robertson, & Czerwinski, 2008; Agu, Nwoye, & Ogbuokiri, 2015; Chauhan, Singh, Jain, & Kumar, 2010; Kunali, Desale, Hanswani, & Kardile, 2014; Micheal, 2014) highlights the distinctive features of CS that set

it apart from conventional mail services. These include door-to-door delivery, tracking and tracing technology, enhanced security, faster speed, proof-of-delivery signatures, and personalised services, among others.

In Ghana's northern regions Northern, North-East, Savanna, Upper East, and Upper West businesses often procure goods from the southern part of the country or nearby courier hubs. However, delivering these goods to end customers remains challenging. Individuals also engage in online shopping and parcel exchanges, yet safe and timely delivery is sometimes hindered by geographical constraints and scattered settlement patterns. Consequently, some recipients face significant difficulties in both sending and receiving packages. Addressing these issues requires a well-designed blueprint for prospective courier service entrepreneurs, aimed at ensuring secure and timely delivery of goods, parcels, and mail. Developing a practical and efficient conceptual framework for courier services is essential to achieving this goal. Effective service delivery is crucial to overcoming the identified challenges, and this paper seeks to propose a workable and sustainable framework for the sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Wikipedia ("Courier", 2019), the concept of courier-like services has existed for as long as human society itself. In earlier times, talking drums were used to mimic verbal communication patterns, becoming a distinctive element of drum language and contributing significantly to the history of courier services. Historical accounts and oral traditions reveal that messages in ancient societies were primarily transmitted through three means: (i) the beating of drums, (ii) the blowing of horns, and (iii) human messengers. In later periods, trained pigeons were also used to transport written messages. Foot messengers often had to run long distances to deliver letters or parcels. As Small (2012) notes, during the Middle Ages, royal courts maintained messengers who were paid slightly higher than common labourers due to the importance of their role in disseminating information. However, this manual delivery method was limited in efficiency, as one messenger could only serve one user at a time, leading to underutilisation of human and material resources. This limitation underscored the need for significant innovation in the courier service (CS) industry.

In the modern era, courier service providers exhibit distinct characteristics that set them apart. The US-ASEAN Business Council on Global Market (Council, 2005) identifies three key features:

1. **Close custodial control** – Modern CS providers employ customised information systems with robust security measures, ensuring strong operational oversight and reducing the risk of loss or damage to goods in transit.
2. **Door-to-door delivery** – This involves integrating various modes of transport into a single, streamlined delivery system. It provides customers with the convenience of receiving their goods at home without the need for complex transportation arrangements.
3. **Track and trace technology** – This enables both shippers and recipients to monitor the exact location and movement of goods in real time, allowing them to estimate delivery or arrival times.

The largest global CS provider, United Parcel Service (UPS), delivers over 12 million packages worldwide each day (Wikipedia, "Courier", 2019). Other major international

operators include Federal Express (FedEx) and DHL, both of which began operations in the 1970s.

In Ghana, these multinational firms operate alongside several local courier service providers, including:

Skynet Express Limited – Established in 2007 as a limited liability company, offering parcel delivery and cargo haulage services nationwide.

Eagle Express Limited – Founded in 2008 and licensed by the PCSRC, it is a recognised logistics provider serving industries such as banking, manufacturing, and e-commerce.

Quality Courier Service (QCS) – With over seven years in the industry, QCS has developed a mobile application to enhance service convenience for its corporate and individual clients.

Relay Express Limited – Licensed in 2008, Relay Express serves private organisations, government institutions, and individuals, with offices in Osu, Tema, and Spintex in the Greater Accra Region.

Fong Express – Established on May 1, 2015, with a focus on making goods movement more time- and cost-efficient for customers.

The central role of all these providers is to ensure the safe dispatch of parcels to recipients while generating delivery reports that confirm successful transactions between senders and receivers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS Courier Service and Customer Preferences

Findings from the field survey revealed that the Upper East Region (Bolgaa) has no officially recognised local courier service operators. However, some businesses provide courier-like services, such as offering customers free delivery of purchased products, as well as catering services that deliver orders to clients. The survey further indicated that foreign courier operators are the most recognised and utilised among respondents, while awareness of courier services in general is low. Specifically, thirty-five (35) respondents—representing 70% of the total sample—had no prior knowledge of courier services. Of this group, twenty-three (23) were male (46% of total respondents) and twelve (12) were female (24% of total respondents). During the survey, these individuals were educated on the concept and operations of courier services. Following this awareness session, they expressed interest in engaging with courier operators, noting that such services could be beneficial to them, particularly since they currently send and receive parcels through Ghana Post. In contrast, fifteen (15) respondents, accounting for 30% of the sample, were already familiar with courier services and had used them in the past. This group comprised nine (9) males (18% of total respondents) and six (6) females (12% of total respondents). The breakdown of foreign courier service companies used by respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents among Different Courier Companies

COMPANY	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
DHL	6	3	9	60.00%
UPS	2		2	13.33%
FedEx	1	2	3	20.00%
Others		1	1	6.67%
TOTAL	9	6	15	100%
PERCENTAGE	60%	40%	100%	

Table 1 presents the rate at which the respondents use courier services. From the survey nine (9) out of fifteen (15) respondents representing 60 per cent order their services from DHL. Three (3) of the respondents which represent 20 per cent order from FedEx which is the second most used courier company from our survey. UPS, on the other hand, had two (2) of the respondents representing 13.33 per cent of the total respondents patronizing their service and however, the remaining 6.67 per cent of total respondents was for others which were one (1) respondent who specifies that it was Metro Mass Transit Limited.

Evaluating Customer Satisfaction

The study also attempted to rate the level of the respondents' satisfaction of the level of services the courier service providers offer to their respective customers (see Figure 1). Admittedly, services are intangible due to the fact that they stand for performances and not physical objects. Therefore, the exact qualifications for performances cannot be the same as that for physical goods. In other words, in all probability, services cannot be counted, measured directly or tested ahead for quality assurance. In contrast to physical goods, which operate independent of the environment, the performance of services can be subjected to environmental changes, which necessitate adaptations to deliver the service. The intangibility of services makes it difficult for service providers and beneficiaries to evaluate service quality and how well the providers have performed. Figure 1 is a bar chart representing how exceptional, good, satisfactory or poor the services the courier service providers offer to the respondents.

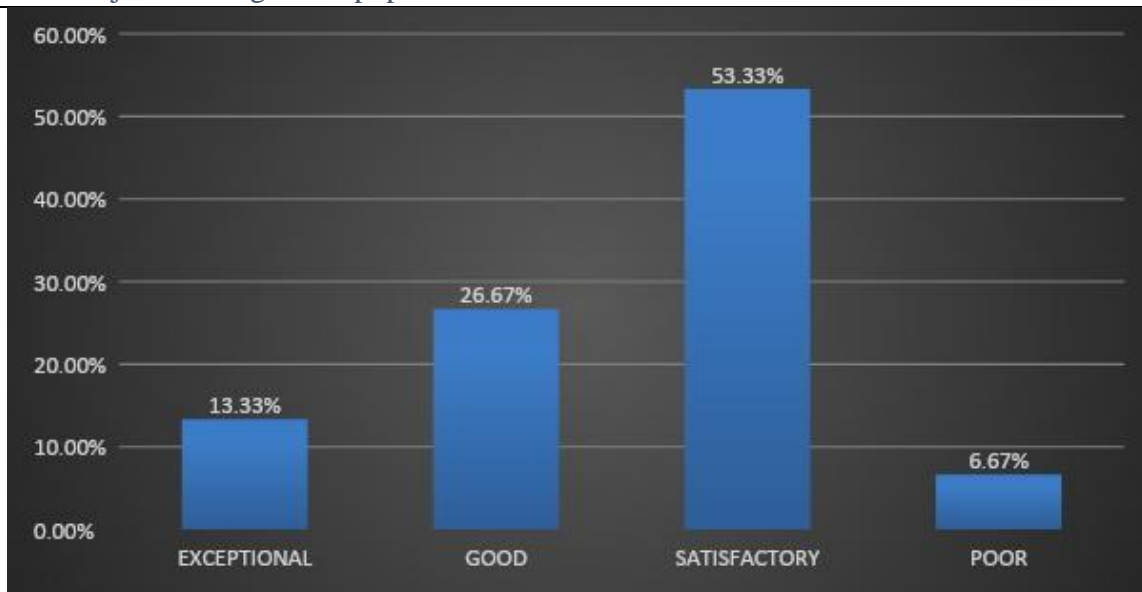


Figure 1: Level of satisfaction of foreign courier services

From the results, two (2) of the respondents' rates that the level of the service provided to them was exceptional which represent 13.33 per cent of the total respondent. Also, four (4) of the respondents rated the level of services to be good which was 26.67 per cent. Eight (8) of them rated the service to be satisfactory representing 53.33 per cent of the total respondent. Only one (1) of the respondents rated the level of service to be poor which represent the remaining 6.67 per cent of the total respondent. Additionally, 53.33 per cent shows that most of the service provided by courier service operators is satisfactory.

The data collected shows that some customers face a delay in the delivery time. Since most of the parcels come from the south, the customer supposed to receive his or her package within two (2) days but at times it takes three (3) to four (4) days to get to the customer. Some also face little damage in the package. In terms of accident, they do not get the package at all. During the survey, some of the respondents think courier service plays a significant role in their socio-economic life. This clearly shows that courier service saves time and also money. Money in terms of the transportations a customer will pay just to get their parcels which cannot be compared to the charges paid to a courier company for delivery. In terms of time, the use to pick up the parcel by the customer can be used to achieve a different thing.

Courier Companies and Ghana Post

In the questionnaires administered, there was a portion for courier service companies and the researchers did not get any of the courier companies to fill. Therefore, the researchers proceeded to Ghana Post for an interview with some of the employees and they had the opportunity to interview one of them in the Upper East Region, Navrongo to be precise. From the interview, it became evident that there is no single courier service company office located in the Upper East Region but DHL has an office in the Northern Region (Tamale) and also DHL has agents in Upper West Region (Wa) and Upper East Region (Bolgatanga) who help in delivering their packages. He added that, although these companies have brought some level of competitiveness in the Courier and Postal ecosystem, their presence also came along with

an enhanced and effective service delivery into the Ghanaian market. Moreover, Ghana Post and DHL have partnered each other, giving Ghana Post a facelift in its service delivery outside the country. This partnership has brought along some great benefits between the two Postal/Courier companies. For example, DHL depends on Ghana Post to deliver the packages to locations in Ghana that DHL has no office or agents. Likewise, Ghana Post falls on DHL to deliver their packages in abroad. This mutual relation is benefiting the two companies greatly. Therefore, most of the DHL packages delivered in the Upper East Region were delivered by Ghana Post. Ghana Post also partners JUMIA Ghana which is an online shop to deliver to customers who shop on JUMIA. The researcher asked whether Ghana Post operates on the door-to-door delivery and he stated that:

"We do not deliver to the doorsteps of all our customers, but most of them are called to come to pick up their packages or mails from the office whether it is DHL, EMS or JUMIA. The customers are also asked to sign before picking up or receiving their package. When we receive mails or packages for institutions such University for Development Studies, Navrongo Senior High School, and the likes, we dispatch them to their doorsteps". Finally, on the effect of the door-to-door delivery, he indicated that the cost involved was the reason why they do not deliver and also, they have few motorcycles to dispatch the packages. He, however, recommended that it is a good idea to establish a courier service company to help enhance delivery services.

Starting a Courier Business

A Courier Business involves the use of appropriate means in transporting packages or services from one location to the other for a fee. Starting a courier business can be a good business venture for one to go into, but it comes along with some logistics and practical considerations. Thus, there are some necessary equipment and information that should be taken into consideration (Ghauri, Grønhaug & Strange, 2020). One can start this courier business with some little effort, funds, and time. The following under listed should be greatly considered when one is considering going into a courier business in Ghana:

i. Name and Register the Business: Having a name for your courier business is the first step one needs to make. The name should be unique, simple, well representative to your business vision and mission and smart for people to easily relate with. After getting a unique name for your business, you need to set up a legal entity for the business. Sole Proprietorship is the appropriate legal entity for a single owner business. For partnership business, the Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) is the ideal option to go for. In registering your courier business and checking whether your business name is taken or not, you have to go to the Postal and Courier Service Regulatory Commission (PCSRC), this is the authoritative resource of information with regards to business registration and its related issues in Ghana.

ii. Ensure the Business: It is appropriate to have your courier business insured with the appropriate insurance cover to protect the business against accident and other challenges associated with business. Thus, it is necessary to ensure the courier vehicle and cargo and other liabilities as well. An insured courier service provider is very essential for building trust with customers and therefore, should be an early necessity for building a successful courier business. Businesses and individuals will avoid dealing with courier service providers that

don't have an insurance cover. With issues relating to your courier business insurance, you will need to contact a local insurance broker to understand the nitty gritty that goes with business insurance in Ghana.

iii. Have a Means of Transport: The hallmark of the courier service industry is the prompt and secured transfer of packages from the originating location to its final destination per the request of a client. This makes them the preferred means of unaccompanied items by a wide variety of people. Key to this industry is the transportation infrastructure. The role of the transport system and its associated features cannot be under-emphasized here. The mode of transport, the channel and drivers play a crucial role in ensuring that the express delivery service remains true to its name and keep customers satisfied at all times. There are three main transport modes; these are motorcycles, salon cars and vans/trucks. Motorcycles are a result of the time and nature of packages you want to transport. With an average size of 45 litres, the tail box of the motorcycle can transport small packages and letters. Also, the motorcycles save time, makes you deliver quickly and there's no traffic. The motorcycles cut the travel times significantly since it is usually not held up in traffic like the vans and cars. With your financial strength, you can also use vans or salon cars. Many couriers in Ghana first choose motorcycles before thinking of vehicles because they give the fastest means of transportation. The right means of transportation is necessary for more efficient and safe delivery of packages. It will save and reduce the pain of carrying the items. Thus, a potential courier service provider should spend some money and time to get most of these abovementioned materials during the early days of the courier business. The type of means of transport that you need will also depend on the type of parcels and packages that you will be delivery to for your customers.

Figure 2 shows the means of transport used by some courier operators. A and B are motorcycles with a carrier at the back and dispatchers going to deliver which are ideal for delivery of the lightweight item. D and C are Branded salon car and mini truck of DHL Ghana and E is branded vehicles of UPS Ghana, which are ideal for delivery of large volumes of the load to any point of interest.

iv. Packages: The service area of the courier business and types of packages you intend to work with should well be decided on right from the beginning. The core component of any courier service provider is packages and how to deliver packages from one location to other. Thus, in starting a starting a courier company in the northern part of Ghana, you need to do market survey to have a first-hand information on the service area and the types of packages you would want to deliver. Also, there are specific regulations on certain types of packages. You may need specific certification to carry or handle certain packages such as medical goods and industrial chemicals.

v. The Modes of Flow of Courier Services: Locating clients is an important component in the delivery process of goods and services to owners (Francis, 2014; Aranko, 2013). In order to gain competitive advantage, one needs to ensure high security and certainty of delivery by leveraging on appropriate transport technology within the courier industry ecosystem. The advancement in technology over the years has therefore offered courier service providers more convenient and secured ways of delivering parcels. The main modes

of locating clients include the use of phone calls, landmark directions, maps, GPS systems and verbal enquiries. Their use in locating clients are not mutually exclusive but can be combined to yield efficient results (Lin, Choy, Ho, Lam, Pang, & Chin, 2014).

vi. Recruiting of Employees: Once you have established the business, you need to recruit employees. The number of employees you will need depends on the size of the business. First and foremost, you will need to employ human resources personnel or manager who will help to employ the other department of workers or administrative workers. These workers must fall under the levels of management with the necessary expertise for the day-to-day running of the business or organization. The number of levels in management should increase proportionately with the size of the business and workforce (Revere, 2004). The level of management also determines the chain of command, and the level of authority and status that can be exerted by a given managerial position. Typically, the levels of management can be stratified as shown in Figure 3:

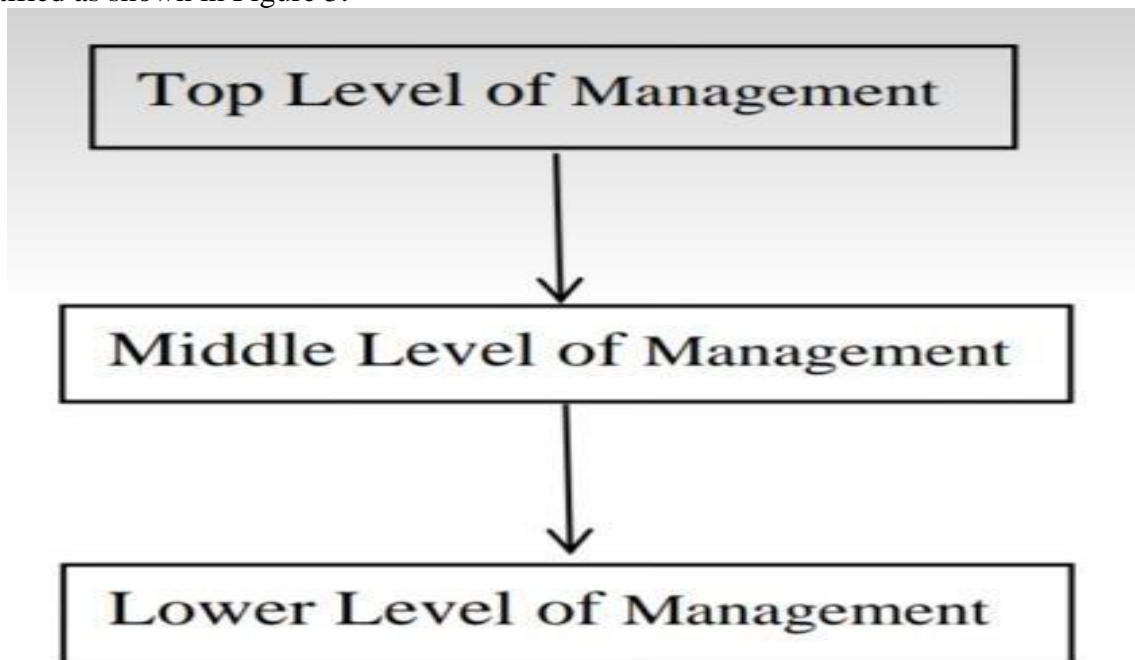


Figure 3: The Structure of a Typical Management System

a. **Top Level of Management:** The board of directors, chief executive or managing director are/is located at this level. The top-level management is the ultimate source of authority of the organization and thus, manages the goals and policies for the company. This level is therefore, in charge of the day-to-day planning and coordination of the company.

b. **Middle Level of Management:** This level of management is responsible to the toplevel management for the functioning of their various departments. This level normal consists of the branch managers and departmental managers (the accountant, the human resource manager). This management level spends more time to organize and direct the operations of the company. Ideally, there should be only one layer of management in small companies. However, in big business, there may be a need for senior and junior middle-level managements.

c. **The lower level of Management:** This level of management is also known as the supervisory or operative level of management. It consists of supervisors, courier dispatchers (drivers), sorting team, section officers etc. In other words, they are concerned with the direction and controlling the function of management. You must prefer drivers who have worked for many years in the town or have stayed in the city for longer periods. Such persons are likely to be very familiar with the town terrain. Knowing different parts of the community seems to be an essential requisite for the position as a driver. This helps the operator to reduce long periods of searching for clients and helps reduce delivery times thereby cutting down the cost of calling clients for long periods asking for directions and cutting down on fuel cost. Finding drivers with good qualifications and license improve the growth of the business. You will need to conduct some training with new employees. The business will need to have its standards and ethics which should guide its operation. It is important to have a thought-out training policy and it is also necessary to spend some time going ideas on how to best to instruct your employees using the prevailing best market practices in the courier business ecosystem.

vii. **Customer Details:** One of the necessary elements of the courier service is customer information. Before the courier service provider can send the item or parcel to the customer, the relevant information about the sender and receiver are needed. Therefore, when orders are placed, as the company, one must take the details of the customer such as the name, telephone or mobile number, the region, town, area and the house number of the receiver, if possible, street name. This information will help to delivery quickly. Dispatch officers have to let the client sign to confirm that the package is delivered and to the right client. And the signed documents are sent by the dispatching officer to the office for recording keeping. If any of the details are taking wrongly, the dispatcher will face problems delivering the package. Therefore, operators must depend heavily on the contact details of clients and the provision of a correct phone number of recipients of items by senders to help ease the difficulties of locating destination points. By this way, they can deliver packages to their destination.

viii. **The profitability of Courier Business:** Courier business is a profit-oriented business. Since every delivery made comes with a fee, it important to have a price list for distance covered. The distance covered is considered because it will help to determine the fuel consumed and it is the most profitable way to charge customers. Also considering monthly expenses and other factors, you need to consider how much the fairs cost for example the fair from Bolga to Navrongo so that you do not charge less or too much over for customers to patronize the service. The more the deliveries, the more profitable the business becomes; therefore, discount can also be given on certain days to maintain the customers and gain more customers as well. You should get the help of a qualified account or hire one to help you with the day-to-day financial operation of the company. He will advise the company on how much it to charge clients for their services, looking at the suburb, the type of parcels been delivered, amongst other factors to make enough profit to maintain the business. Also consider the mode of payments such as whether to accept cash, mobile money, e-zwich or credit cards to help to receive your fee for delivery.

Marketing the Company: Marketing is the commercial processes involved in promoting, selling and distributing a product or service. You have look for your clients and customers for

your courier business. You can achieve this through the writing of proposals and sending them to restaurants, banks, supermarkets and other places. The use of word of mouth can also be a great source of advertisement for these kinds of businesses. Also, conducting a float with your employees wearing uniforms and giving out flyers is can be an efficient way to market the company. Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and the like can be leveraged on by you, family and friends to help market your courier business. A business page is created on each of these social media platforms and should be well managed by dedicated personnel employed for that purpose. These platforms can cheaply be used to prospect and market your courier business to other businesses that need a courier dispatcher. By prospecting to know more about their service and how you can be of help to them will help provide tailor-made services to these clients. Online marketing and advertising on the radio can also be a cheap and effective way to sell your courier business. Google Ad words and Facebook have easy to use self-serve platforms. These platforms can be used to target customers based on their demographic, interest, season, etc. You can also make use of Craigslist to post free ads so that people will know about your local courier business (Wikipedia, "Craigslist", 2019).

Factors to Ensure Effective Courier Service

- i. **Customer Service and Fast delivery:** Through higher efficiency and specialization, courier dispatchers must be able to deliver products more quickly, often guaranteeing a specific date and even time block. The best courier service is focused on pleasing its customers. The company should provide top-level service and be consistent every single time (Ho, Teik, Tiffany, Kok & Teh, 2012; Azeta, Ogunlana, & Ezech, 2010; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). Best customer practices are very important in running a courier service. Treat all customers very well. Know that it's your job to get the delivery to its destination safely and on time.
- ii. **Reliability:** Courier Company should be reliable because people, institutions and other businesses will entrust their daily routine to the courier business expecting to save time and money. The best courier service is the most reliable. They understand the critical business issues to worry about and getting items safely delivered. The best courier service would not make clients wonder about the treatment and safety of their items; it should give the clients peace of mind to be able to send them out and know they are in good hands (Gulc, 2017).
- iii. **Trust:** A successful or effective courier service is not only reliable but should be trusted. Things may go wrong along the line, but be very honest and forthright about it and try not to let that problem persist or be part of your service (Nectac, 2011; Stickdorn & Schneider, 2010).
- iv. **Professionalism:** The hallmark of any courier service is professionalism. Your brand must stand out due to the professional nature of your company. Thus, all the workers within the company should be uniformed, polite and have customer service as a top priority. They should drive clean, well-kept vehicles and motorbikes. For, professionalism is of the utmost importance because people, institutions and another business look at it critically when choosing courier service (Osang, 2017; Stickdorn & Schneider, 2010).

- v. **Transparency:** Additionally, an effective courier service actively communicates with clients when appropriate. Whether the departure encounter traffic delays, the company mistyped address, notify clients that their delivery has been completed; clear communication is essential.
- vi. **Ease of Use:** The courier service whether it is an online service or “manual system”, should be easy to access and use. It should be an easy-to-use order system for all categories of persons. Whether customers like ordering online, by mobile phone or calling Dispatch directly with their order details, the best courier service will have multiple options available to its clients. Additionally, an excellent courier will allow customers to track their delivery during the entire process and will send email notifications upon completion. The best courier service seamlessly fits into their client’s workflow.
- vii. **Enough Manpower:** Effective courier service can accommodate delivery needs even on the busiest days. The company can leverage on AI tools or solutions to able to predict peak hours and days to optimize its manpower and other resources used. This will help the company to know that business doesn’t stop only at the closing time and therefore should be available to customers after hours and on weekends to ensure that client’s packages get to where they need to go.

Illustration of Conceptual Framework of an Individual Delivery Process

Just as E-businesses call for courier services, individuals and other companies also use a courier for their errands, Figure 4 depicts the flow of operation of an individual or company. When a customer phoned or calls for service and he or she has registered the details are retrieved, to locate the customer for the next operation, if the customer is not registered, proceed to collect customer details easily locate the customer. Courier is now ready to go out for delivery and must ensure that any verbal instructions given regarding any specific parcel have been understood, accepted and recorded.

On reaching the recipient area, if the street and house addressing system is not working, the recipient should be either phoned to make direct delivery or parcels are placed at a temporal location for later collection. The temporal location can be lorry station, post office, school, or any other well-known place in the recipient area that can be easily identified. When the addressing system is working in the recipient area and the final destination is located, some self-checks can be conducted to identify the consignee. If the destination is invalid then courier should call the customer or the company to check for errors to relocate recipient otherwise return parcel. Obtain a photo identity and note the type of identity on the delivery sheet, handover the parcel and have the consignee sign on the delivery sheet.

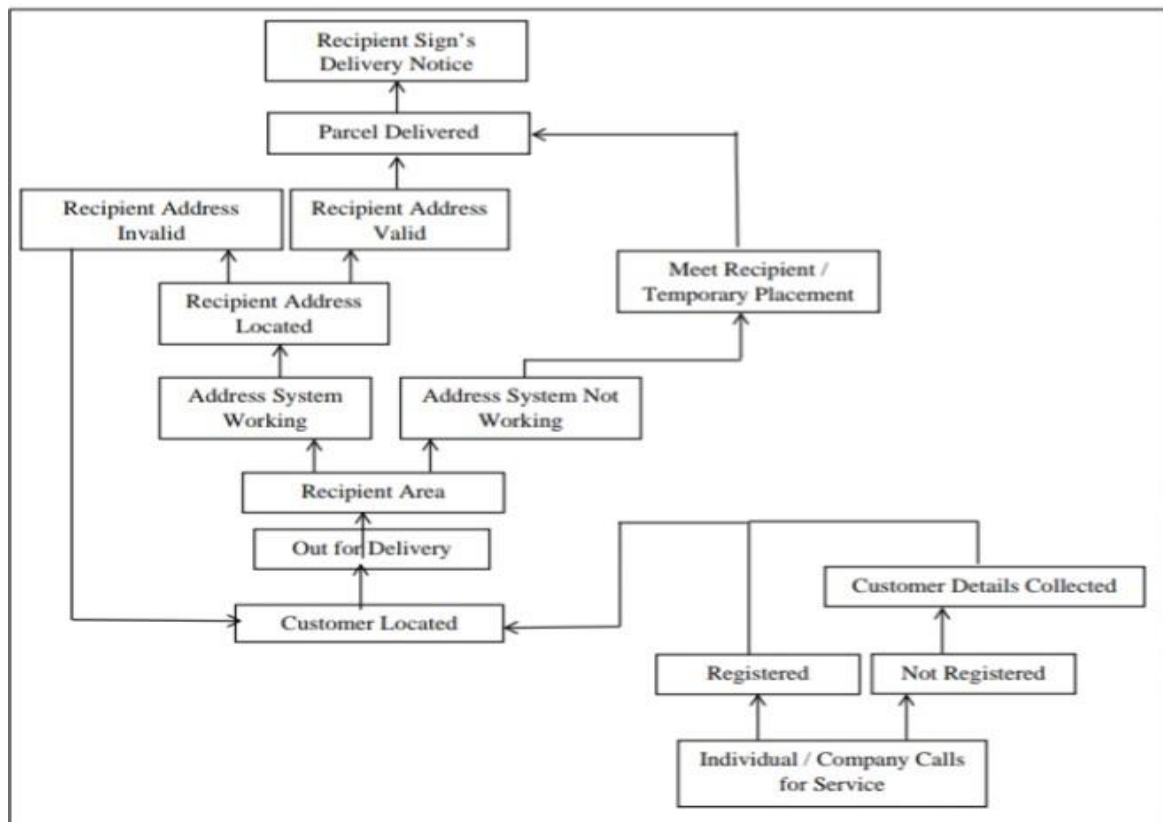


Figure 4: Illustration of a conceptual framework of an individual delivery process

CONCLUSION

The need for courier services delivery in towns all over the northern sector is seen as a vital component of broad economic development plans. Thus, the contribution of the courier service industry to socio-economic development cannot be overemphasized. The establishment of courier companies in the Northern sector of Ghana, especially in developing towns will open up opportunities for employment. As an instrument of national cohesion, it serves as the main connector between towns and villages, moving packages to every corner of the country, and contributing towards the territorial consolidation of states under construction. Additionally, as a service agency, it also facilitates trade and commerce. The paper, therefore, outlined in a comprehensive manner, the various methodologies and tools needed for establishing a functional courier service in the northern part of Ghana. The conceptual framework presented in the paper could serve as a blueprint to individuals who wish to set up a courier service company and will help them survive in the establishment of the business by avoiding the potential barriers that lead to the negative impact of services provided.

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