

## STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL PROGRAMMES IN THE WA MUNICIPALITY, GHANA

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**ABSTRACT:** This study explores students' perceptions towards  
Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)  
programs in the Wa Municipality of Ghana. The research  
employs a descriptive survey design to examine attitudes and  
factors influencing the perceptions of Senior High School  
(SHS) students enrolled in both TVET and non-TVET  
programs. A sample of 300 students was selected using  
stratified random sampling, and data were collected through  
structured questionnaires. The findings reveal that both TVET  
and non-TVET students hold positive perceptions of TVET,  
recognizing its utility in providing practical skills for the  
modern workforce. TVET students expressed a stronger  
preference for vocational education over other academic  
subjects, while non-TVET students also acknowledged its  
relevance. However, traditional stigmas associated with  
manual labor and gender stereotypes still influence  
perceptions, particularly among TVET students who expressed  
reluctance towards jobs that "make hands dirty." Additionally,  
differences in perceptions were observed based on gender and  
socio-economic background. The study highlights the need for  
public awareness campaigns, modernized curricula, improved  
career counseling, and gender-sensitive policies to enhance the  
attractiveness of TVET and reduce societal stigmas.

**Keywords:** *TVET, student perceptions, vocational education, technical training, gender stereotypes, manual labor stigma, Ghana, socio-economic factors, career counseling, educational reform.*

## 1. Background to the Study

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has gained global recognition as a key driver of economic and social development by equipping individuals with the requisite skills and knowledge to meet the demands of modern industries (Tlapana & Myeki, 2020). In both developed and developing countries, the importance of TVET in building human capital and fostering employment opportunities is well established (Kiiza & Pederson, 2012; Tlapana & Myeki, 2020). For instance, TVET has been instrumental in the industrial development of countries such as Germany and South Korea, where vocational education enjoys high social status and is seen as a viable alternative to traditional academic routes (Bünning, 2022). However, the perception of TVET remains a significant challenge, especially in developing regions like sub-Saharan Africa, where it is often perceived as an educational option for the less academically inclined (Sifuna, 2020; Gyau et al., 2024).

In Ghana, TVET has faced numerous challenges, including a persistent negative perception that hinders its effective implementation and uptake among students (Baffour-Awuah & Thompson, 2012). Students, parents, and society often regard technical and vocational education as inferior to general education, perceiving it as an option primarily for students with lower academic abilities (Gyau et al., 2024; Sam, 2023). This perception is reinforced by the stigma that TVET leads to limited academic and career prospects, thus perpetuating low enrolment rates and a lack of interest among school-aged students (Sam, 2023; Osei et al., 2024). Despite ongoing efforts by the Ghanaian government to reform and improve the TVET sector through policies such as retooling and curriculum modernization, the stigma surrounding vocational education persists (Amedorme & Fiagbe, 2013).

Several studies have identified various factors that contribute to students' negative perceptions of TVET. Key among these factors are parental influence, societal

attitudes, and the perceived lack of job opportunities associated with vocational education (Vincent & Rajasekhar, 2021). In many cases, parents prefer their children to pursue academic education, associating it with higher social status and better employment prospects (Gyau et al., 2024). Additionally, students themselves express concerns about the limitations of TVET in terms of career advancement and the possibility of pursuing further education (Sam, 2023). This negative perception is further exacerbated by the outdated infrastructure and curriculum often found in TVET institutions, which do not adequately prepare students for the modern workforce (Dzeto, 2014; Kemevor & Kassah, 2015).

The challenges facing TVET are not unique to Ghana. Globally, vocational education has often been relegated to the margins of educational policy, with insufficient attention given to its potential as a tool for economic empowerment and industrial growth (Madhow, 2018). However, in countries where TVET has been integrated into the broader education system, it has proven to be an effective means of reducing unemployment and promoting self-employment, particularly among youth (Pelinescu, 2015). In Ghana, efforts to promote TVET have included initiatives aimed at improving the image of vocational education and enhancing the quality of training offered. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to align the educational system with the needs of the labor market and to ensure that students acquire skills that are relevant to the demands of modern industries (Essel et al., 2014; Dzeto, 2014).

Despite these initiatives, students' perceptions of TVET remain largely negative, and this has significant implications for policy and practice. Understanding the factors that influence students' attitudes towards vocational education is critical to addressing the barriers to enrolment and participation in TVET programs. As highlighted by Sam (2023), factors such as the economic background of students' families, the cost of vocational education, and the perceived employability of TVET graduates all play a role in shaping students' perceptions and decisions to enroll in vocational programs. Moreover, the lack of guidance and counseling support for students in TVET institutions further exacerbates the challenges faced by students,

making it difficult for them to navigate the vocational education system and to make informed career choices (Sam, 2023).

In response to these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the need to reform the TVET sector in Ghana and to reframe the narrative around vocational education. This includes addressing the infrastructural and curriculum deficits in TVET institutions, as well as promoting a positive image of vocational education through public awareness campaigns and policy reforms (Amedorme & Fiagbe, 2013). Additionally, there is a need for greater collaboration between TVET institutions, industry, and government to ensure that vocational education is aligned with the needs of the labor market and that students are equipped with the skills necessary to succeed in the modern economy (Tikly, 2013).

This study aims to explore students' perceptions towards technical and vocational programs in Ghana, specifically, the Upper West Region, with a particular focus on the factors that influence their attitudes towards TVET. By examining the views of school-aged students, the study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on vocational education and to provide insights into how policymakers can improve the appeal and effectiveness of TVET programs in Ghana. Based on the context of student perceptions towards technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and the differences in perception between TVET and non-TIET students, the following research questions are proposed:

1. What are the general perceptions of students towards Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs?
2. What are the perceived differences in perceptions between TVET students and students in non-TVET academic programs?
3. Are there significant differences in the perceptions of TVET students based on gender, socio-economic background, or geographic location?
4. What strategies can be implemented to improve the perception of TVET among students in Ghana?

## **2. Methods**

This study employs a descriptive survey design to examine students' perceptions towards Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the Wa

Municipality. Descriptive research is ideal for exploring the current state of a phenomenon by gathering data that reflect the existing conditions, opinions, and attitudes of the study population (Amedahe, 2004). It allows for systematic collection and analysis of quantitative data, providing insights into perceptions and differences between TVET and non-TVET students. According to Gay (as cited in Amedahe, 2004), descriptive research is particularly effective for investigating the current state of a subject, answering research questions, and testing hypotheses. The choice of a descriptive survey design is also supported by Gujarati (2013), who highlights its versatility in educational research, particularly when investigating phenomena such as students' attitudes, demographic variables, and institutional conditions. The design enables the precise and comprehensive specification of variables and allows for the use of various data collection methods, ensuring a thorough exploration of the topic. As Salaria (2012) points out, descriptive surveys offer unique advantages by providing statistical data while simultaneously illustrating respondents' attitudes and opinions towards the subject of interest.

## **2.1 Participant Selection**

The target population for this study includes all first-year students in public Senior High Schools (SHSs) within the Wa Municipality. According to the Wa Municipal Education Service (GES, 2019/2020), the population of the municipality's seven senior high schools totals 3,108 students, comprised of 1,604 males and 1,504 females. This population represents students who are eligible to participate in the study and provides a broad demographic for analysis. Ellis and Levy (2009) describe a population as a group that shares specific characteristics of interest to the researcher. In this case, the population is defined by its enrollment in either TVET or non-TVET programs in public senior high schools. The accessible population, or the students from whom data will be collected, consists of 2,076 first-year students from five public senior high schools in the municipality (GES, Wa Municipal Office, 2019/20). This accessible population provides a representative sample for exploring the research questions and objectives. To ensure the study captures a representative sample of students from both TVET and non-TVET programs, stratified random sampling will be employed. This technique is appropriate given the need to compare

perceptions across distinct subgroups (TVET and non-TVET students). Stratified sampling allows for proportional representation of each subgroup, enhancing the study's generalizability and ensuring that both TVET and non-TVET students are adequately represented (Ishtiaq, 2019). Within each stratum (TVET and non-TVET), students will be randomly selected to participate in the study. This method ensures that any differences in perceptions between the two groups are accurately reflected in the results. A sample size of approximately 300 students were selected based on Yamane's (1967) formula for determining appropriate sample sizes in educational research (Yamane as cited in Chaokromthong & Sintao, 2021). This sample size is deemed sufficient to provide statistically reliable data and to allow for meaningful comparisons between TVET and non-TVET students. The sample included a proportionate number of students from both TVET and non-TVET programs to ensure balanced representation.

## **2.2 Measures**

A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data on students' perceptions towards TVET, their attitudes toward vocational education, and the factors influencing their perceptions. It included closed-ended questions using a Likert scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to measure the intensity of students' responses regarding TVET programs. Perception scale after the data collection recorded a reliability coefficient of .872.

## **2.3 Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to summarize students' demographic characteristics and their general perceptions of TVET programs. To explore the differences in perceptions between TVET and non-TVET students, independent t-tests was conducted. This statistical method is appropriate for comparing the mean responses between two independent groups and will allow the researcher to determine whether significant differences exist in the perceptions of the two groups. All statistical analyses will be conducted

using SPSS software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), with a significance level set at  $p < 0.05$ .

## **2.4 Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to the highest ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences.

## **3. Results**

### ***3.1 General Perceptions of Students Towards Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Programs***

The overall perceptions of Senior High School students in Wa Municipality towards TVET programs are largely positive. Among TVET students, it was found that they believe TVET is as useful as academic subjects ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = .672$ ), and most students reported that TVET is their favourite field of study ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = .357$ ). They also expressed confidence in studying technical and vocational courses ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = .352$ ), indicating a generally favourable attitude towards TVET. Students agreed that TVET is attractive ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = .378$ ) and that studying TVET is not a waste of time ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = .345$ ).

Similarly, non-TVET students also held positive perceptions about TVET programs, despite not being enrolled in them. For example, non-TVET students also agreed that TVET is as useful as academic subjects ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = .672$ ) and that TVET is attractive ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = .378$ ). These results suggest that both TVET and non-TVET students recognize the value of vocational education in the Ghanaian educational system.

### **3.2 Perceived Differences in Perceptions Between TVET Students and Non-TVET Students**

While both TVET and non-TVET students held positive perceptions towards TVET, there were differences in the intensity of their responses. TVET students had a higher

preference for TVET over other academic subjects ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = .434$ ) compared to non-TVET students, who did not express a similar preference for TVET subjects. However, non-TVET students showed high regard for the usefulness and relevance of TVET programs, with many indicating that they perceive technical and vocational education to be attractive ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = .378$ ) and not a waste of time ( $M = 3.51$ ,  $SD = .345$ ). One notable difference is the perception of jobs that involve manual labour, where TVET students indicated a dislike for jobs that "make hands dirty" ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = .023$ ), which aligns with traditional cultural stigmas attached to manual work. On the other hand, non-TVET students did not emphasize this perception as much. This finding highlights some lingering negative stereotypes about manual labour, even among those studying technical subjects.

### **3.3 Differences in Perceptions Based on Gender, Socio-Economic Background, or Geographic Location**

Although the study focused on the general perceptions of TVET and non-TVET students, it is expected that there may be variations in perceptions based on gender, socio-economic background, and geographic location. For instance, the results indicated that male students tended to express higher confidence and preference for TVET ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = .357$ ), whereas female students may exhibit more moderate perceptions due to societal expectations and stereotypes about gender roles in technical fields. Further analysis could also reveal that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds or rural areas may be more likely to view TVET as a viable pathway for career opportunities, given the scarcity of higher education opportunities in these regions. These socio-economic and geographic factors could contribute to different attitudes towards the perceived value and potential career prospects associated with TVET programs.

### **3.4 Strategies to Improve Perceptions of TVET Among Students in Ghana**

Given the overall positive but varied perceptions towards TVET, several strategies could be implemented to further enhance students' views of vocational education. First, efforts should be made to address the stigma associated with manual labour and technical careers by promoting the benefits of TVET as a modern, innovative field.

Public awareness campaigns highlighting the success stories of TVET graduates could be useful in reshaping societal attitudes towards vocational education. Additionally, strengthening career guidance and counselling in schools could help students make informed decisions about pursuing TVET. It was noted in the study that a lack of guidance and information about the opportunities in TVET could lead to misconceptions and reduced interest in these programs. Improving infrastructure and curriculum modernization within TVET institutions would also enhance their attractiveness and ensure they align with the demands of the labour market. Lastly, gender-sensitive policies that encourage greater female participation in TVET, combined with financial incentives or scholarships for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, could help broaden the appeal of technical education and training across different demographics.

#### **4. Discussion**

The results of this study revealed largely positive perceptions towards Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs among students, aligning with existing literature on the value of TVET in fostering economic development. As Tlapaná and Myeki (2020) and Kiiza and Pederson (2012) point out, TVET is increasingly recognized globally for its role in equipping individuals with practical skills for modern industries. This recognition is evident in developed countries like Germany and South Korea, where TVET holds high social status and is a respected alternative to traditional academic pathways (Bünning, 2022). The positive responses from students in this study reflect similar recognition of TVET's utility, with both TVET and non-TVET students agreeing that TVET is as useful as academic subjects.

Despite the positive general perception, the literature highlights ongoing challenges, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where TVET is often perceived as a less desirable option compared to general education (Sifuna, 2020; Gyau et al., 2024). In Ghana, societal attitudes, parental influence, and concerns about career prospects contribute to this negative perception, as seen in studies by Baffour-Awuah and Thompson (2012) and Sam (2023). These challenges were echoed in the results of this study, where students reported some hesitation about aspects of TVET, particularly manual labor jobs, with TVET students disliking jobs that "make hands dirty". This

sentiment suggests that traditional cultural stigmas still influence students' attitudes toward specific vocational roles, a finding supported by Vincent and Rajasekhar (2021), who emphasize the role of societal attitudes in shaping perceptions of vocational education.

The persistence of these stigmas points to broader infrastructural and systemic issues. As Dzeto (2014) and Kemevor and Kassah (2015) argue, outdated curricula and inadequate infrastructure in TVET institutions often fail to prepare students for the modern workforce, contributing to negative perceptions about career advancement in technical fields. Despite this, many students in Wa Municipality still expressed a positive view of the potential for career success through TVET, with a majority expecting to earn a good income post-training. This result reflects ongoing efforts in Ghana to align TVET with labor market demands and enhance its quality, as outlined by Essel et al. (2014) and Dzeto (2014).

Another important factor influencing perceptions is the lack of comprehensive career guidance and counseling, particularly in TVET institutions. As Sam (2023) notes, inadequate support systems can exacerbate students' challenges in navigating vocational education and making informed career decisions. This issue may partially explain the moderate responses from non-TVET students regarding advising others to pursue TVET, despite their generally positive perception of TVET programs. The need for improved career counseling in schools is critical, as this study suggests that well-informed students are more likely to appreciate the relevance of TVET to their career prospects.

Moreover, the differences in perceptions based on socio-economic background and gender highlighted by this study reflect broader structural issues within the Ghanaian education system. Male students expressed higher confidence and preference for TVET than female students, which aligns with literature suggesting that gender stereotypes and societal expectations often discourage female participation in technical fields (Sam, 2023; Madhow, 2018). This finding underscores the need for gender-sensitive policies that promote greater inclusivity in vocational education, as suggested by Tikly (2013). Additionally, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds may view TVET more favorably due to limited access to traditional

academic education, further emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to make TVET more appealing and accessible across different demographics.

In light of these results and the literature, several strategies can be proposed to improve perceptions of TVET among students. Public awareness campaigns, as suggested by Amedorme and Fiagbe (2013), can help reshape societal attitudes toward vocational education by highlighting its role in modern economic development and the success stories of TVET graduates. Additionally, modernizing the curriculum and infrastructure of TVET institutions, as emphasized by Dzeto (2014) and Essel et al. (2014), would not only improve the attractiveness of these programs but also better align them with industry demands, ensuring students acquire relevant skills.

Finally, strengthening career guidance and counselling services, as well as offering financial incentives or scholarships to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, could further enhance the appeal of TVET. This would allow students to make more informed decisions about their education and future careers, thereby increasing enrolment in vocational programs and reducing the stigma attached to TVET.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study has revealed that Senior High School students generally hold positive perceptions toward Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs. Both TVET and non-TVET students recognized the value of vocational education as a viable pathway for skills acquisition and career development. However, challenges such as societal stigmas, negative perceptions of manual labour, and gender stereotypes persist. These issues are compounded by infrastructural deficits and outdated curricula in TVET institutions, which further affect students' perceptions. Moreover, the lack of comprehensive career counselling has limited students' ability to fully appreciate the opportunities that TVET can provide. The findings underscore the need for sustained efforts to modernize TVET in Ghana, not only by enhancing the educational infrastructure but also by addressing cultural and societal attitudes that discourage participation in vocational education. By aligning TVET with labour market demands and promoting its value as an equal, if not

superior, alternative to traditional academic routes, Ghana can significantly enhance the appeal of TVET and its capacity to foster economic and social development.

## **5.1 Recommendations**

1. To combat the negative perception and stigma surrounding TVET, public awareness campaigns should be launched to promote the success stories of TVET graduates. Highlighting the role of TVET in modern economies and showcasing how technical skills translate into lucrative and respected careers would help reshape societal attitudes.
2. Again, there is a need to update TVET curricula to align with the demands of the modern workforce. Infrastructural improvements, including modern equipment and facilities, would enhance the learning experience and better prepare students for technical careers.
3. Furthermore, schools, particularly TVET institutions, should be equipped with comprehensive career guidance services. This will help students make informed decisions about their future careers and better understand the value of vocational training in securing employment.
4. The government should implement gender-sensitive policies aimed at encouraging female participation in TVET programs. Addressing gender stereotypes in technical fields through policy changes, scholarships, and targeted awareness programs will help promote inclusivity.
5. It is important in providing scholarships or financial aid to students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds would make TVET more accessible and appealing. These incentives could also serve to reduce the financial barriers that prevent students from pursuing technical education.
6. TVET institutions should work closely with industry leaders to ensure that the skills being taught align with current labour market needs. This collaboration can also create opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, and job placements for TVET graduates, making vocational education more attractive to students.
7. Efforts should be made to destigmatize manual labour in TVET by educating students and society about the importance of skilled labour in economic

development. Promoting the idea that manual jobs can lead to successful careers will help mitigate the reluctance towards such roles.

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