

Perceptions of Students and Parents on Catering Vocational Education: A Case Study in the Bono Region of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perceptions of students and parents in the Bono Region of Ghana regarding catering vocational education and investigates the factors that influence these perceptions. The study adopted a survey research design. Data was collected from 120 students and 120 parents through structured questionnaires. Data was analysed using SPSS v. 20. The findings reveal that students and parents have a generally positive view of catering vocational education, recognising it as a professional and comprehensive pathway that provides essential skills for employment. Passion for catering and the prospect of easy employment are key motivators for students pursuing vocational education, while concerns about the financial costs of the programme remain a significant barrier. Frantic efforts should be made at reducing the cost of catering vocational education by retooling vocational schools with tools and equipment to reduce the cost borne by students.

Keywords: Perception, Parents, Students, Catering Vocational Education, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

The role of effective education in helping social and economic progress cannot be overestimated; education advances functional and analytical strength and aids in opening up opportunities for individuals and groups to bring about greater access to labour markets and livelihoods (Bala and Singhal, 2019). Catering vocational education is an important aspect of the hospitality industry and is critical in equipping individuals with the necessary skills to provide high-quality food services. Training is key in helping people acquire knowledge and skills; as it allows such individuals to gain access to employment and avoid poverty (Tyagi *et al.*, 2021). Education in the 21st century must not only be viewed as a mechanism for improving the efficiency of individuals but also an effective tool for broadening and upgrading the overall quality of individuals and society at large. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) consist of enhancing individuals to develop skills relating to a variety of occupations (UNESCO (GC) 2015).

The field of technical and vocational education presents an intriguing opportunity to investigate economic and social issues. Sahin-Dikmen and Winch (2020) hold the view that the approach to vocational education can give insight into the peculiarities of a society. Clarke *et al.* (2022) posit that vocational education and training encompasses 'the myriad forms of learning that aim at participation in the worlds of work'. They further hold the view that vocational education involves the concepts of knowledge, learning, education, work, and employment, with the understanding that the field is dynamic (Clarke *et al.*, 2022). Vocational education is seen as one of the major routes to gaining access to the labour market.

The rationale as set by the TVED 2008 of the Ghana Education Service (GES) indicates that the study of catering

in the Technical and Vocational Institutes is intended to provide young persons with the requisite skills as a predisposition to technical pursuits at the advanced levels. Students who are not able to advance to tertiary levels can also be self-employed by putting into practice the skills and training acquired (Kusi-Mensah, 2019).

Despite the generally positive perceptions of catering vocational education among stakeholders, some challenges and issues need to be addressed. There is a mismatch between the skills and knowledge provided by vocational education and the needs of the hospitality industry (Schweri *et al.*, 2020). This results in a skills gap and difficulty in finding employment for graduates. Parents still hold the perception that vocational education is inferior to traditional academic education, which may discourage their children from pursuing catering vocational education (Ling, 2015). Most students and parents may not be aware of the diverse career opportunities available in the catering and hospitality industry, which may limit their interest in pursuing vocational education in catering. Addressing these issues and challenges can help to ensure that catering vocational education in the Bono Region meets the needs of stakeholders and prepares graduates for successful careers in the field. This study seeks to 1) evaluate perceptions of catering students and parents in the Bono region on catering vocational education; and 2) investigate the factors that influence students' and parents' perceptions of catering vocational education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceptions of students and parents on vocational education

Student perspectives of vocational education are frequently influenced by their experiences in the educational system and their desired careers. Vocational education, which equips students with the skills needed to enter the hospitality business, is typically seen by catering students as a hands-on, practical alternative to standard academic courses. Oketch (2017) asserts that vocational education, particularly in industries like catering, gives students a distinct chance to learn skills relevant to their chosen jobs while boosting their employability and independence. For a lot of students, obtaining a vocational education gives them an advantage in the cutthroat job market in addition to teaching them useful skills. Though opinions on catering vocational education could differ, some students have expressed worries about the stigma that society places on this type of training because it is frequently viewed as less respectable than academic degrees (Atchoarena and Delluc, 2020). Despite this, a lot of students studying catering still think highly of vocational training since it makes entrepreneurship and employment prospects clear.

The perceptions of parents on vocational education, especially in the field of catering, have a significant impact on the career decisions of their offspring. The economic sustainability of vocational education is a major factor in determining parents' support for it in many developing countries and locations, including the Bono Region of Ghana. Boateng and Boahin (2018) state that a large number of Ghanaian parents believe that academic education offers more financial stability and social mobility, making vocational education a lower priority. But as parents become more aware of the growing need for skilled labour in the hospitality sector, particularly in catering, this view is gradually shifting. According to Akyeampong (2017), parents who are better aware of the financial advantages of vocational education, such as its capacity to create their own business and increase employment availability, tend to see it more favourably. Given that parental support has a major impact on student performance and enrolment, this perspective change is essential to the continued expansion and development of vocational education.

The future of vocational education is greatly influenced by the interactions of parents, and catering students. The demand for vocational training is expected to rise when parents and students perceive it as a competitive alternative to regular education and as a means of obtaining meaningful work. Global technical and vocational education systems must grow and improve for all stakeholders to have a favourable impression of vocational education (UNESCO, 2019). Social attitudes, however, continue to provide difficulties because vocational education is frequently underestimated in contrast to academic career paths. Together, stakeholders can promote the value of vocational education in promoting employment, entrepreneurship, and economic growth in areas like Bono by addressing these misconceptions and raising awareness of its advantages, particularly in the catering sector.

Factors that influence students' and parents' perception of catering vocational education

Socioeconomic, cultural, educational, and personal variables are some of the categories in which factors that affect students' and parents' perceptions of catering vocational education may be placed (Mulondanome, 2017). A family's socioeconomic standing has a big impact on how they see vocational education. Vocational education is frequently viewed as a more accessible route to obtaining practical skills and jobs for students from lower-income backgrounds (UNESCO, 2019). In these homes, vocational training in catering may be seen by parents as a quick route to financial independence and a way to provide for their family. However, the perception of vocational education as less prestigious than academic pathways among middle-class and upper-class families may restrict the appeal of these programs (Oketch, 2017). Families that are suffering from financial restraints may find vocational education appealing due to its apparent cost-effectiveness and fast returns in many underdeveloped nations. A study by Stockfelt (2018) revealed that families with inadequate economic resources meant that the situation and the resources to sustain a constant educational experience were limited. Stockfelt further found that this condition has placed students at a disadvantage, which has limited their educational aspirations, and has admitted that low-income students are over-represented in education. The socioeconomic status of the family has a significant influence on students' perceptions of technical and vocational education, and this was confirmed by studies by Awang et al. (2019), Ozioma (2018), and Pimpa (2017). Their findings revealed that students have a perception that technical and vocational education is for students from low-income families.

Perceptions are greatly influenced by cultural attitudes toward vocational education, particularly in the field of catering. Vocational education is viewed as a "second-class" choice in some societies, and students who are thought to be intellectually unable frequently select it (Akyeampong, 2017). Many parents and children are discouraged from pursuing catering as a realistic career choice because of this reputation. Furthermore, these attitudes are influenced by conventional gender roles since, as noted by Boateng and Boahin (2018), catering is frequently connected to domestic duties, which may discourage male students from enrolling in such programs. Catering is seen in a gendered way that limits its appeal and perpetuates prejudices.

Perceptions are also greatly influenced by one's view of one's employability and job prospects upon completion of vocational school in catering. Students and parents may decide against pursuing catering as a profession if they believe it offers few job chances or low pay (Atchoarena and Delluc, 2020). However, catering education can be seen more favourably in places with a high tourism density and an increasing demand for culinary and hospitality services. This career path can be made even more appealing by the possibility of becoming an entrepreneur and launching a personal catering company.

The structure of the educational system, including the quality of vocational institutions and the level of support provided, affects perceptions. Inadequate facilities, limited resources, and poorly trained instructors in vocational schools can lead to negative perceptions of catering education (Doyle and Keane, 2019). Conversely, if vocational institutions are well-resourced and offer high-quality practical training with a clear path to employment, students and parents are more likely to view catering education positively. Moreover, programs that integrate internships or partnerships with the hospitality industry provide students with practical experience, enhancing the attractiveness of catering vocational education.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the Bono Region of Ghana. The Bono region is one of the 16 administrative regions of Ghana. Sunyani is the regional capital of the Bono region. According to the 2021 housing and population census, the Bono region has a population of approximately 1,208,649 people (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Table 1 below presents the schools used for the study.

A survey method of research design was adopted for the study. According to Creswell and Hirose (2019), a survey is a design in quantitative research in which investigators administer a questionnaire to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviours, or characteristics of the population. Specifically, a cross-sectional survey design in which the researcher collects data at one point in time was adopted for the study. This design has the advantage of measuring current attitudes or practices.

In this study, the population comprises all catering vocational students and their parents in the Bono Region of Ghana. Parents have a significant influence on the schools that their children choose; therefore, their opinions and experiences may have an impact on the TVET option (Hegna and Smette, 2017; Liz and Qiu, 2018). A total of 120 students and 120 parents were conveniently and purposively chosen, respectively, for the study. Data was collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaires used for the study had five (5) main parts and contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions. A 4-point Likert scale was used to measure the responses. The data was analysed using Statistical Package for Service Solution (SPSS v. 20). Descriptive statistics as well as inferential statistics were used in the analysis, and the results were presented in tables.

Table 1: Sample size by selected institutions in the Bono Region

Name of institution	Sample of students	Sample of parents	Location
Community Development Vocational/Technical Institute	30	30	Nsuatre
Twene Amanfo Vocational/Technical	30	30	Sunyani
Social Welfare Vocational Training Institute	30	30	Sunyani
Community Development Vocational/Technical Institute	30	30	Sunyani
Total	120	120	

Reliability results

A pilot study was conducted to pinpoint any flaws in the research instruments before subjecting them to final data collection. The reliability results, which are the Cronbach's alpha calculated for the variables listed in Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of internal consistency, indicating how closely related a set of items is as a group, which is often used to assess the reliability of survey instruments. A value of 0.6 and above shows satisfactory internal consistency reliability of the research instrument. From Table 1, the Cronbach's values were above 0.6, and the average value is 0.798, indicating that the instrument is reliable.

Items	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of response
Students from vocational education are seen as professionals	.725	20
Catering vocational education is broad	.814	20
Vocational education provides the skills needed to attain a job	.836	20
Catering is gender restrictive	.807	20
A variety of jobs await students who offer catering vocational education	.794	20
Catering is restrictive in terms of job placement	.759	20
Catering is very expensive	.986	20
Catering is an easy programme to pass	.817	20
Catering is for academically weak students	.652	20
Vocational education is for the physically challenged in society	.786	20
Average	.798	

RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

The socio-demographic characteristics considered in this study were gender, age, marital status, previous education, catering-related job experience, and relative having a catering background. The summarized results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Socio-Demographics of respondents

Demographics	Variables	Students		Parents	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Gender	Female	106	88.3	65	54.2
	Male	14	11.7	55	55.8
Age	16-20	40	33.3	-	-
	21-30	64	53.3	-	-
	31- 40	16	13.4	30	25.0
	41-50	-	-	38	43.3
	50 and above	-	-	24	31.7
Marital Status	Single	110	91.7	29	24.2
	Married	10	8.3	91	75.8
Education level	Basic			24	20.0
	SHS			32	26.7
	Tertiary			64	53.3
Catering-related job experience	Yes	33	27.5	56	46.7
	No	87	72.5	64	53.3
Relative having a catering background	Yes	36	30	-	-
	No	84	70	-	-

The demographic data presented in Table 3 provides insights into the characteristics of the respondents, both students and parents, involved in the study. The gender distribution shows that a significant majority of the students are female (88.3%), with only 11.7% male participants. In contrast, the gender distribution among parents is more balanced, with 54.2% female and 55.8% male. This suggests that catering vocational education may be more popular among female students, while parental involvement is relatively equal between genders.

In terms of age, most students fall within the 21-30 age group (53.3%), followed by 33.3% of students between 16-20 years old, indicating that most students are young adults. Among parents, the largest age group is 41-50 years (43.3%), followed by those aged 50 and above (31.7%), and 25% of parents fall within the 31-40 age range. Regarding marital status, many students are single (91.7%), while most parents are married (75.8%), reflecting the expected life stage differences between the two groups. Only 8.3% of the students are married, whereas 24.2% of parents are single.

Regarding educational level among the parents, 53.3% have attained tertiary education, 26.7% have completed SHS, and 20% have only basic education. This shows a relatively higher educational background for parents, which may influence their perception of vocational education.

For catering-related job experience, only 27.5% of students have prior experience in catering jobs, while 46.7% of parents have experience in the field. This indicates that parents may have more exposure to the catering industry, potentially influencing their perceptions of the field. Additionally, 30% of students have relatives with a catering background, and 70% do not have a catering background, which might affect their interest in catering vocational education.

Perception of the respondents on catering vocational education

The views that individuals hold about a phenomenon, to a greater extent, influence their reactions and actions towards the entity. Vocational students and their parents were asked to indicate their perception of vocational education.

Table 4: Perception of respondents on catering vocational education in the Bono Region

Perception	Students		Parents	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Students from vocational education are seen as professionals	1.66	0.80	1.74	0.81
Catering vocational education is broad	1.73	0.84	1.70	0.83
Vocational education provides the skills needed to attain a job	1.72	0.73	1.62	0.68
Catering is gender restrictive	3.18	1.08	3.29	1.09
A variety of jobs await students who offer catering vocational education	2.20	0.97	2.34	0.90
Catering is restrictive in terms of job placement	2.78	1.02	2.88	1.06
Catering is very expensive	1.54	0.86	1.44	0.76
Catering is an easy programme to pass	2.82	1.14	2.89	1.10
Catering is for academically weak students	3.48	1.10	3.28	1.18
Vocational education is for the physically challenged in society	2.65	1.04	3.30	1.14
Average mean	2.38		2.45	

Field Work (2020)

Scale: 1.0–1.49 =strongly agreed, 1.50–2.49= agreed, 2.50–3.49 = disagreed, 3.50–4.49 = strongly disagreed

The items on Table 4 recorded average means of 2.38 and 2.45 for students and parents respectively. This is an indication that on the whole, catering vocational students and parents in the Bono Region have a positive perception of catering vocational education. Both students (mean = 1.66) and parents (mean = 1.74) agree that students from vocational education are seen as professionals, indicating a positive perception of catering vocational education as a legitimate professional path. Similarly, both groups also agree that vocational education is broad, with close mean scores (students = 1.73, parents = 1.70), showing a shared belief in the comprehensiveness of catering education. Again, both students (mean = 1.72) and parents (mean = 1.62) agreed that vocational education provides the needed skills required to attain a job, highlighting a shared confidence in the practical value of vocational education for employment. Regarding the variety of job opportunities available to catering vocational graduates, students (mean = 2.20) and parents (mean = 2.34) agree, indicating optimism about employment prospects in the catering industry. Both students (mean = 1.54) and parents (mean = 1.44) agree that catering is expensive, suggesting that the financial costs associated with the programme are a common concern.

However, there is disagreement regarding whether catering is gender restrictive, as both students (mean = 3.18) and parents (mean = 3.29) do not strongly associate catering with gender limitations. In terms of the perception

that catering is an easy programme to pass, both students (mean = 2.82) and parents (mean = 2.89) disagree, indicating that they believe the programme requires effort and is not necessarily easy. There is also disagreement on the notion that catering is for academically weak students, with students (mean = 3.48) and parents (mean = 3.28) strongly rejecting this stereotype. Both students (mean = 2.65) and parents (mean = 3.30) disagree that hat catering vocational education is for the physically challenged in society.

Factors influencing the perception of students and parents on catering vocational education

Students and parents were to indicate the possible factors that could influence their perceptions of catering vocational as an option in the educational programme for students.

Table 5: Factors influencing the perception of respondents on catering vocational education

Factors	Students		Parents	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Students pursue catering because members of their family are into catering	2.70	1.10	2.80	1.12
Individuals with a passion for being caterers offer catering vocational education	1.68	0.69	1.59	0.72
Easy employment attainment is a motivation for most students who choose catering vocational education	1.74	0.70	1.88	0.69
Vocational education is readily available to academically weak students	3.20	0.93	3.24	1.04
Vocational education is cheap	3.44	0.76	3.69	1.11
Students choose vocational education because their friends are doing the same	3.12	0.77	3.20	0.97
Families of poor homes encourage their wards to do vocational education	2.73	1.14	3.70	0.88
Society/environment influences students to choose vocational education	2.54	1.04	3.65	1.06
Average mean	2.64		2.97	

Field Work (2020)

Scale: 1.0–1.49 =strongly agreed, 1.50–2.49= agreed, 2.50–3.49 = disagreed, 3.50–4.49 = strongly disagreed

From Table 5, both students (mean = 2.70) and parents (mean = 2.80) disagree that students pursue catering because members of their family are into catering. This implies that although family participation in the food industry could have some bearing, most students do not prioritise it when choosing catering vocational education. Both students (mean = 1.68) and parents (mean = 1.59) agree that individuals with a passion for being caterers offer catering vocational education. Again, both students (mean = 1.74) and parents (mean = 1.88) agree that easy employment attainment is a motivation for most students who choose catering vocational education. Additionally, both students (mean = 3.20) and parents (mean = 3.24) disagree that vocational education is readily available to academically weak students. This finding defies the conventional perception that vocational education, particularly catering, is predominantly for students who struggle academically. Students and parents disagree (mean = 3.44) and (mean = 3.69) that vocational education is cheap, respectively. These findings suggest that both groups are aware of the financial implications of receiving vocational training in catering. Regarding the statement that students choose vocational education because their friends are doing the same, both students (mean = 3.12) and parents (mean = 3.20) disagree. This implies that students' decisions to pursue catering vocational education are not much influenced by their peers. However, the students (mean = 2.73)

disagree, and parents (mean = 3.70) strongly disagree that families from poor homes encourage their wards to do vocational education. Finally, for the statement that society/environment influences students to choose vocational education, students (mean = 2.54) disagree, while parents (mean = 3.65) strongly disagree.

Regression analysis of factors influencing the perception of students on catering vocational education

Table 6: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.87	0.79	0.76	.226

Field Work (2020) **Dependent Variable:** Perception

From Table 6, the R-value was 0.87, indicating a strong positive correlation. This suggests that the independent variables (such as passion for catering and employment opportunities) are strongly related to the perception of catering vocational education. An R-squared value of 0.79 means that the independent variables explain 79% of the variation in perceptions of catering vocational education. This high R-squared value suggests that the model effectively explains the variation in perceptions.

Table 7: ANOVA

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Regression	12.34	7	1.763	12.29	.001
Residual	3.12	112	0.028		
Total	15.46	119			

Field Work (2020) **Dependent Variable:** Perception(P<0.05)

The ANOVA shows that the model is highly significant, with an F-statistic of 12.29 and a p-value of 0.001. This implies that the independent variables (such as passion and employment opportunities) significantly impact the dependent variable. The F statistic (F=12.29) was significant at a 95% confidence level (p-value < 0.05). This means that the model has predictive power.

Table 8: Associations between Sociodemographic Variables and Perceptions of Catering Vocational Education

Variable	Category	N	Mean	Percentage (%)	Chi-square	P-value
Gender	Female (Students)	83	1.66	88.3	101.18	0.0000
Age	16–30 (Students)	79	1.66	84.2	79.67	0.0000
	41–60 (Parents)	29	2.00	48.3	0.10	0.7515
Marital Status	Single (Students)	77	1.66	91.7	97.72	0.0000
Education Level	Tertiary (Parents)	32	2.00	53.3	0.21	0.6434

Field Work (2020)

The analysis reveals a significant relationship between gender and perception of catering vocational education (Chi-square =101.18, p = 0.000). This implies the female students had more favourable impressions of the host teacher than their male counterparts (88.3%, mean = 1.66). Comparably, age also significantly associated with perception ($\chi^2 = 79.67$, p = 0.000), such that students of 16–30 years presented strong positive perception (84.2%, mean = 1.66). This implies that the younger the respondents, the more they valued vocational education in catering. Marital status was also highly significantly correlated with the perception ($\chi^2 = 97.72$, p = 0.000). Single

students, comprising 91.7% of respondents in this group, gave positive perceptions (mean = 1.66), indicating that marital status may influence openness to or interest in vocational education. We can relate it to flexibility or life stage differences. Unlike educational level, perception was not significantly associated with educational level ($\chi^2 = 0.21$, $P = 0.6434$). Although at the tertiary educated parents there was 53.3% of the sample and a slightly higher mean (2.00), the difference was not statistically meaningful. This shows that in this sample, the extent of parental education does not strongly determine how catering vocational education is viewed.

Responses from the interview

Four sub-themes emerged from the interviews on the perception of catering vocational education. These sub-themes were: qualified teachers and availability of tools, structured apprenticeship training, financial barriers to access, and social perception of catering education.

Qualified Teachers and Availability of Tools

Participants pointed out that it was consistent, namely, that it had such well-trained, experienced catering teachers around, which hugely helped the learning experience. They observed that qualified instructors demonstrate high technique and become an example for those who want to become professionals. Its shortage, therefore, came out as a significant barrier towards acquiring skills, as some students complained that they had to share limited resources during practical lessons.

The interview response points to one of the major positive factors that impacted the participants' learning process: continuity and presence of well-trained, experienced catering teachers. This would indicate that the level of instruction was consistent and would be extremely important for skill-based disciplines like catering. Good tutors are not only knowledgeable about the technical aspect, but they also demonstrate professional behaviour and impose discipline as well as share industry insights that cannot easily be picked from books. Their reliability in teaching and mentorship could have contributed to an organised and accommodating learning setting. These views entrench the quantitative fact that employment of qualified teachers and supply of tools were assumed to be the most likely solutions to enhance catering vocational education.

Structured Apprenticeship Training

Interviewees stated clear favour for formalised, apprenticeship opportunities that were endorsed by governments. Many students and parents had revealed how informal apprenticeships were not consistent and had no element of quality control. Formal apprenticeships were considered necessary to fill the gap between the classroom theory and the real demands of work workplace. Participants noted that such programmes could offer real-life exposure and professional discipline, making one more employable.

This feeling highlights the significance of a formal framework in terms of ensuring the same standards of training, proper monitoring, and quality assurance. Structured apprenticeships are accompanied by predetermined curricula, trained supervisors, and standardised evaluation, thus giving the students more reliable and holistic learning. This structure can help to ensure that it creates opportunities for trainees to acquire skills and competencies in line with industry requirements. These findings are consistent with the quantitative data, presenting high support for apprentice training as an important factor in enhancing catering education.

Financial Barriers to Access

The participants reported frequently the cost of tuition, uniforms, ingredients, and equipment as key barriers to obtaining catering vocational education. Some parents narrated how they had to pull out their children because they could not afford it, while for others, talented students ended up doing menial jobs instead of furthering their training. There was a unanimous agreement that some of the solutions that could increase the enrolment and retention among low-income families were through lowering the cost or giving some form of financial aid.

The interview findings emphasise the high financial constraints that result in limited access to vocational catering

education. The cumulative cost of attending school, ranging from tuition, uniforms, ingredients, and equipment, was often cited by the participants as a key challenge. Such costs can be particularly onerous for low-income families, which makes it hard for students to enrol or graduate from their training. In practical disciplines such as catering, where there is hands-on practice and specialised apparatuses, the cost of consumables, which include foodstuffs and other cooking materials, incurs an ongoing cost on top of basic tuition. The accounts that parents provide regarding the removal of their children from training because they can no longer afford it illustrate how such economic barriers can disrupt educational paths and limit future job. This scenario is indicative of a larger problem of educational inequality wherein only the financially capable can access skill development programmes that, in most cases, are said to offer avenues to come out of poverty. These responses confirm the quantitative outcome that the cost of catering education can be a very likely strategy to enhance participation.

Social Perception of Catering Education

Many respondents witnessed that vocational catering is still considered a second-best career suitable for failures in the academic world. Students reported being stigmatised, judged, or labelled as choosing catering. Society's beliefs tended to assign failure to vocational studies. While, however, several participants also pointed out that this observation was changing, particularly with the advent of successful caterers and chefs that were gaining media presence.

The fact that vocational catering is generally perceived as a fallback for academically deficient students is a constant bias against technical and vocational education. Such perception demeans the skills and professional expertise that are called for in the catering world, and confirms the belief that success is mostly to be found in academic paths. Such a mindset may discourage the capable students from undertaking vocational training, not because of a lack of interest or talent, but because of the stigma attached to it. In turn, this continues a hierarchy in education, where the former is considered better than the latter, seeing academic achievement as better than practical skill acquisition. This is what the quantitative data suggests on a moderate agreement with the statement that the field of catering is perceived to be a sector for the academically weak.

DISCUSSION

The study reveals that students from vocational education are perceived as professionals, highlighting a growing societal shift in attitudes toward Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). This shift has significant policy implications, particularly for workforce development strategies in Ghana and other developing countries. The alignment with Boahin (2018) and UNESCO (2019) underscores the practical utility of vocational education in meeting labour market demands, especially in sectors like hospitality. As such, policy frameworks must recognize vocational education not as a fall-back option, but as a legitimate and essential component of national education strategies. Governments should consider integrating vocational curricula more deeply into mainstream education systems to enhance their prestige and expand access.

The perception among students and parents that catering education encompasses a broad skill set, spanning customer service, food safety, and entrepreneurship, suggests that vocational training is evolving to meet diverse industry needs. This supports Atchoarena and Delluc's (2020) call for a comprehensive vocational curriculum aligned with current market realities. From an educational standpoint, curriculum developers and institutions must ensure that training programs are continually updated to reflect the dynamic nature of the hospitality industry. This could include mandatory industry placements and interdisciplinary modules that foster technical and soft skills, thereby improving graduate employability and supporting lifelong learning.

Moreover, the study affirms that vocational education effectively equips students with market-relevant skills, echoing the findings of Awang et al. (2019) and the World Bank (2018). The consistent link between vocational training and employability highlights the urgent need for policies that support investment in training infrastructure and materials. Education planners must prioritize the development of industry-standard training facilities and public-private partnerships to provide students with real-world experiences. At the same time, stronger advocacy and public awareness campaigns could help reposition vocational education as a first-choice career path, especially in sectors with skill shortages.

The finding that catering vocational education offers diverse career pathways has both educational and economic implications. It suggests that such training can support youth employment and entrepreneurship in the growing MICE and hospitality sectors, as noted by Nain (2018). Policymakers must recognize this as an opportunity to link vocational training more directly with national development goals, including employment generation and tourism development. Additionally, the rejection of outdated views that vocational education is intended solely for physically challenged individuals signifies a progressive change in societal norms. Education stakeholders should harness this shift by expanding inclusive access and reframing public messaging around vocational education to further reduce stigma and boost enrolment.

Finally, the role of passion and perceived job accessibility in motivating students to pursue catering education points to a need for career guidance policies that align student interests with market demands. Educational institutions should implement structured career orientation programs to support informed decision-making among prospective students. Furthermore, the issue of high training costs, identified as a barrier to enrolment, calls for targeted financial interventions. Subsidies, grants, or cost-sharing schemes could be introduced to alleviate the burden on students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. Addressing the cost barrier while combating ignorance and low prestige will be vital to the sustainable growth of the TVET sector, as emphasized by Adams and Baddianaah (2023) and Adams et al. (2024).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research, parents and students in the Bono Region generally have positive perceptions of catering vocational education. They see it as a comprehensive and knowledgeable curriculum that equips students with the skills they need to obtain employment. Respondents agreed that catering vocational education is valuable, even with concerns over the accompanying costs, particularly when it comes to its practicality and employment opportunities. Stereotypes like the notion that the program is easy to use or that it only helps children who are struggling academically are vehemently rejected by both parents and students. Furthermore, a student's decision to pursue a catering education is more influenced by their interests and the possibility of finding employment than by peer pressure or familial influence.

Practical and theoretical implications

One of the most significant practical implications of the study is the need for financial aid programmes, such as grants or scholarships, to ease parents' and students' concerns about the high cost of catering vocational education. Since the cost of catering education is very expensive and serves as a barrier, targeted financial aid may boost the accessibility and attractiveness of vocational programmes to a larger student population, enabling them to pursue careers in catering without the weight of exorbitant cost.

This study theoretically refutes the conventional wisdom that students with poor academic standing should primarily pursue vocational education. The results indicate that, motivated by a desire for work, professionalism, and skill-based careers, catering vocational education is becoming more and more popular. This change in thinking is consistent with the development of a theoretical framework that views vocational education as a respectable and worthwhile substitute for conventional academic courses that should be given the same weight as other career development and educational ideas.

Conflict Of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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