



## Reducing Recidivism through Vocational Skills Training in Selected Ghanaian Prisons

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Recommended Citation: Boateng, C., Boateng, W., & Mensah, R. O. (2025). Reducing recidivism through vocational skills training in selected Ghanaian prisons. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, 2(1), 70-81.

<https://doi.org/10.51867/AQSSR.2.1.6>

### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the role of vocational training programmes in Ghanaian prisons as a mechanism for rehabilitation, reintegration, and recidivism reduction. The study employs the rehabilitation theory, and the Routine Activity Theory in informing the discussion. Utilising the descriptive research design, the research investigates the scope, challenges, and effectiveness of vocational skills training programmes within Ankaful and Nsawam Prisons. The study had individuals who experienced working in the prisons and participated in vocational skills training as the target population. Using purposive and convenient sampling methods, a total of 31 participants made up of prison officers, social welfare staff, ex-convicts, and inmates were sampled for the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research objectives. The interview data was analysed using the thematic approach to identify recurrent themes, patterns and insights. The findings revealed that systemic inadequacies, including insufficient resources, outdated equipment, and a lack of skilled trainers, undermine the potential of vocational training to achieve its rehabilitative goals. Disparities in programme implementation across facilities highlight significant gaps in uniformity and accessibility, while societal stigmatization further limits the reintegration of ex-offenders. The study concludes that vocational skill training holds promise as a rehabilitative tool though structural deficiencies and limited support constrain its impact. Recommendations include increasing budgetary allocations, modernizing training facilities and methodologies, and expanding programme scope.*

**Keywords:** Desistance, Ex-Convict, Inmate, Recidivism, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, Vocational Skills Training

### INTRODUCTION

Globally, criminal justice systems grapple with the challenge of recidivism, the cyclical pattern of offending and re-offending. Reducing the tendency for previously incarcerated individuals to re-offend remains a significant challenge to criminal justice systems worldwide. While incarceration remains a dominant approach, its effectiveness in achieving long-term desistance has been questioned (Duwe & Clark, 2011). Increasingly, attention has turned to rehabilitation and reintegration programmes that equip individuals with the tools and skills they need to successfully transition back into society (Levy et al., 2018). Vocational skills are a major element in these programmes. Equipping individuals with marketable skills and providing them with a supportive network can enhance their employability, social integration, and overall well-being, thereby reducing the likelihood of re-offending. As highlighted by Duwe and Clark (2011), focusing on increased vocational skills support during and after incarceration can contribute to lower recidivism rates.

Within the African context, and particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the challenges of recidivism and reintegration are often compounded by socioeconomic factors such as poverty, unemployment, and limited access to education and social services. Many individuals complicated in the criminal justice system come from disadvantaged backgrounds and without adequate support and opportunities, they may face significant barriers to successful reintegration (Kajawa & Johnson, 2023). Vocational skills training programmes can play a vital role in addressing these challenges by providing individuals with the means to achieve economic independence and social stability. However,

the effectiveness of these programmes can vary depending on the specific context and the quality of implementation (Kajawa & Johnson, 2023).

In Ghana, the criminal justice system has increasingly turned to rehabilitation strategies to address the issue of recidivism, with vocational skills training playing a pivotal role in facilitating reintegration (Akin, 2023). While research on desistance in Ghana is still developing, there is growing interest in understanding the factors that contribute to successful reintegration and the role of vocational skills training in this process. This echoes the findings in Akin (2023), which emphasizes the importance of educational practices especially vocational education within prisons, as a contributing factor to successful reintegration.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Ghana, like many post-colonial countries, continues to face significant challenges in its attempts to reform its jail systems due to the legacy of colonial criminal regimes. However, in recent decades, reformation and reintegration have gained significance. The Ghana Prisons Service 10-year Strategic Development Plan -2015-2025 notably mentions using vocational skill training programmes as a critical strategy for reducing recidivism and promoting successful reintegration (Ministry of Interior, 2015). This policy shift is as a result of a broader international movement that recognises the benefits of rehabilitation and the inmates' human rights. Therefore, Ghana's current policy on inmate reformation reflects a commitment to rehabilitation as a pathway to reducing recidivism and promoting public safety.

Despite efforts to introduce rehabilitative programmes, the Ghana prison service often struggles with overcrowding, inadequate resources, and a pervasive culture of violence. These challenges emphasise the need for comprehensive reforms that address not only the programmatic aspects of rehabilitation but also the systemic issues that undermine the humanity and dignity of incarcerated individuals.

Existing research reports suggest, that there is still a lack of thorough and publicly available data on Ghana's recidivism rates (Baffour, 2020; Meethal, 2014). This has been attributed to a lack of comprehensive data gathering, successful rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives, and a critical analysis of the institutional elements fostering the recidivism cycle. These revelations therefore call for the pressing need to expand the scope of research and adopt a more sensitive and contextually grounded approach for a richer understanding of the pathways to desistance in Ghana and develop more effective strategies to support individuals in their journey towards a crime-free life.

## 1.3 Research Objectives

The study's objectives were to:

- i. explore the state of Vocational Skills Training in Ghanaian prisons as a strategy to reduce recidivism
- ii. examine the perception of participants of vocational skills training;
- iii. explore participants' experiences regarding the benefits of vocational training;
- iv. examine the challenges with the implementation of vocational training programme within the Ghana Prison Service (GPS).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is underpinned by two main theories. Routine Activity Theory (RAT) and Rehabilitation Theory. These two frameworks provide valuable insights into understanding the impact of vocational skills training on prisoners' reintegration and desistance

#### 2.1.1 Routine Activity Theory (RAT)

RAT developed by Cohen and Felson, (1979) posits that crime occurs when three essential elements converge in time and space. These elements include a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. A motivated offender refers to an individual willing and able to commit a crime, often driven by specific circumstances rather than a constant state of motivation. A suitable target encompasses vulnerable individuals, valuable possessions, or easily accessible locations. Lastly, the absence of a capable guardian refers to the lack of a person or entity capable of preventing the crime, such as police officers, security systems, bystanders, or social norms. The theory emphasizes the role that everyday activities play in creating or removing opportunities for crime, rather than focusing on the characteristics of offenders. RAT provides valuable insights into how structured routines and support systems can reduce recidivism by minimizing opportunities for re-offending. The theory suggests that engaging formerly incarcerated individuals in constructive activities such as vocational training, for example, reduces their motivation to commit crimes. This is because the training provides them with the skills and the tools that equip them to secure legitimate employment. The employment schedules provide them with a purpose which then reduces their motivation to recommit crime. Again, the employment they find and the financial independence that comes with the employment reduce the appeal of engaging

in criminal activities to meet the same economic needs. Finally, the theory suggests that encouraging individuals to adopt structured positive daily routines such as attending work places them in environments with natural guardianship and therefore deter them from crime. RAT therefore aligns well with strategies for enhancing the reintegration of ex-convicts because it focuses on the environmental and situational factors that influence behaviour.

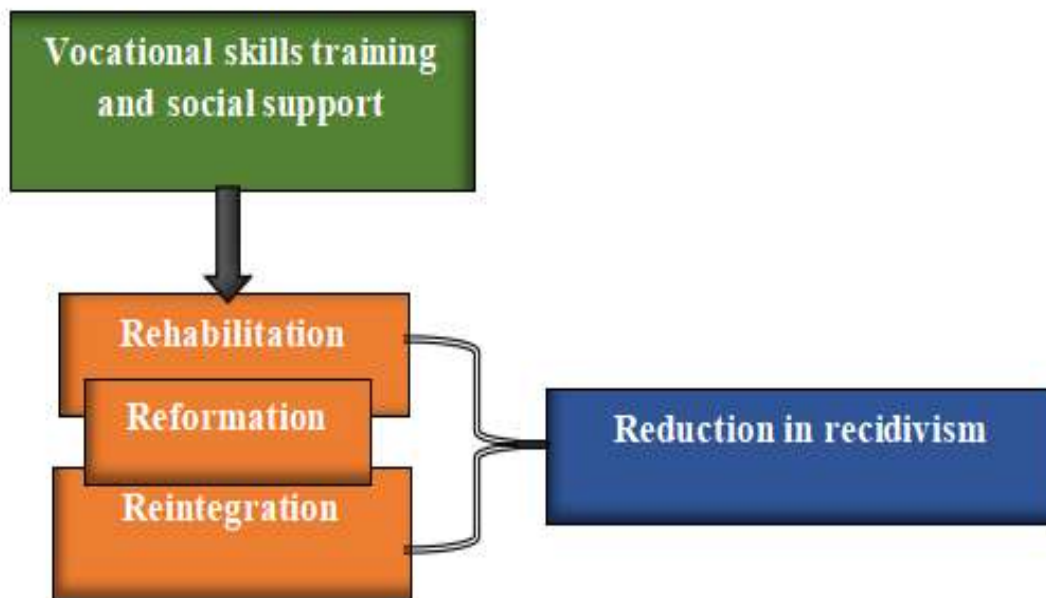
### 2.1.2 Rehabilitation Theory

Furthermore, the Rehabilitation Theory has evolved from the contributions of several individuals from diverse disciplines such as psychology, sociology, criminology, and penology. However, strong contemporary rehabilitation advocates such as Merton (1938), Ward (1957) and Maruna (1971) can be mentioned for their contributions to shaping the theory and practice of rehabilitation aimed at reducing recidivism and fostering successful reintegration into society. The theory is rooted in the idea that offenders can be reformed through targeted interventions that address the underlying causes of criminal behaviour (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

The key components of the Rehabilitation Theory include individualized assessment, targeted interventions, reintegration support, and restorative justice. Individualized assessment involves identifying specific needs and challenges of each offender, such as lack of education, economic stresses, substance abuse, or mental health issues; then through targeted interventions, provide tailored programmes and services to address these needs. The targeted programme could be vocational training, literacy, therapy, substance abuse treatment etc. The reintegration support is to assist the offenders in transitioning back into the community. Depending on the intervention, the support could be job placement, housing assistance, and ongoing support networks. Restorative justice involves repairing the harm caused by crime and engaging the victim, offender, and community in the healing process. The vocational skills training which focuses on equipping offenders with employable skills, boosting their economic prospects, and reducing their social isolation and financial motivations for crime, directly tackles these issues, therefore aligning with the theory’s principles (Andrews et.al 1990).

### 2.1.3 Conceptual Framework

The impact of vocational skills training on prisoners’ reintegration and desistance in Ghana is captured in the conceptual framework in Fig. 1. below.



**Figure 1**  
*Conceptual Framework on the Impact of Vocational Skills Training on Prisoners’ Reintegration and Desistance in Ghana*

Figure 1 above depicts vocational skills training that are essential for prisoner rehabilitation. Training equips inmates with practical skills, while support helps them prepare emotionally and socially for life after prison. Together, they lay the foundation for successful rehabilitation, which involves activities like training and resource provision, enabling inmates to gain useful skills and adopt positive behaviours. This process fosters reformation, steering inmates from crime towards productive societal roles. Reformation then transitions into reintegration, where inmates re-join their communities as contributors through jobs or entrepreneurship, supporting themselves and their families.

Ultimately, these efforts reduce recidivism by addressing criminal behaviours root causes and breaking the re-offending cycle, ensuring safer communities.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

### 2.2.1 The State of Recidivism in Africa

Recidivism remains a significant challenge across Africa according to recent studies conducted across the continent. Available research data indicates concerning trends in specific countries. For instance, in South Africa, recidivism rates are estimated to range between 55% and 95% (Schoeman, 2010). Again, in a qualitative study on the management of recidivism in South Africa, Samuels et al. (2024) estimated recidivism at a rate of 47% in South Africa.

Several factors have contributed to the high recidivism rates observed in African countries. These factors include ineffective rehabilitation programmes, resource constraints, overcrowded correctional facilities, and insufficient support for reintegration upon release. Schoeman (2010) argued that the type of rehabilitation available in South African prisons is not effective and is almost non-existent and stigma against ex-offenders hampers their reintegration into society, limiting their employment opportunities and social acceptance, thus, driving individuals back to reoffend.

The story of Ghana's prison system is not different from what pertains to other parts of Africa. In a study by Baffour (2021), she shed light on the internal dynamics of the Ghanaian prison system and its impact on recidivism. The study estimated the recidivism rate in Ghana at approximately 24%, indicating that nearly a quarter of ex-offenders relapse into criminal behaviour after release. The research again revealed that structural deficiencies, including perceived overcrowding and inadequate access to meaningful rehabilitation programmes, contributed to a challenging environment that hinders successful reintegration into society. The study further underscored the need for prison reform that prioritizes rehabilitation over punitive measures, providing inmates with opportunities for education, vocational training, and psycho-social support to address the root causes of criminal behaviour. Baffour (2021) also acknowledged the importance of strengthening vocational support networks for ex-offenders, recognizing that a supportive environment can provide stability, encouragement, and a sense of belonging essential for successful reintegration.

### 2.2.2 Vocational Training and Recidivism

The foundational idea of contemporary penology is reformation, which prioritises reintegration and rehabilitation over punitive tactics. As a fundamental component of this strategy, vocational skills training has come to light, to provide jailed people with the means of achieving desistance and a successful reintegration into society after release. Vocational skills training programmes have proven to be one of the most effective strategies for reducing recidivism and promoting successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018) identified vocational training as a cornerstone for reintegration. These programmes equip participants with employable skills that enhance their employability, a key factor in preventing re-offending. Studies have consistently shown a strong correlation between vocational education during incarceration and improved post-release employment outcomes, as well as significantly lower recidivism rates (Fazel & Wolf, 2023). For example, research from the University of Utah revealed that individuals who participated in vocational training had a recidivism rate of just 8.75%, compared to 26% among those who did not (University of Utah, 2022). This dramatic difference underscores the transformative impact of vocational training programmes. Vocational education is also found to play a crucial role in addressing the societal stigma associated with incarceration. Many formerly incarcerated individuals face significant barriers to employment due to negative perceptions and a lack of trust from potential employers. However, vocational training programmes that provide certification or formal qualifications help overcome these challenges, as employers are more likely to recognize and value the verified competencies of the ex-convicts (Bello, 2023). Additionally, vocational training programmes often incorporate components of soft skills such as financial literacy, effective communication, entrepreneurship, etc. These skills when acquired further empower individuals, and foster a sense of self-worth and confidence among programme participants, which is vital for the psychological well-being and motivation of ex-convicts to rebuild their lives.

Research also highlights the cost-effectiveness of vocational training as a recidivism reduction strategy. Compared to the costs of incarceration, investment in rehabilitation through skill development yields long-term benefits for both individuals and society, Fazel and Wolf (2015) asserted. Their research pointed out that communities benefit from reduced crime rates, lower incarceration costs, and the economic contributions of formerly incarcerated individuals who gain stable employment. This aligns with findings from a global review of recidivism rates, which suggest that providing incarcerated individuals with vocational training is a critical investment for achieving sustainable outcomes (Yukhnenko et al., 2023).

In addition to its economic and social benefits, vocational training programmes are found to foster a holistic approach to reintegration, especially, programmes that combine skill-building with mentorship, counselling, and peer support, creating an environment conducive to personal growth and resilience. Such comprehensive programmes



address not only the immediate employment needs of participants but also the underlying factors contributing to recidivism, such as substance abuse, trauma, and lack of social support (Newton et al., 2016).

These findings collectively demonstrate that vocational skills programmes are beneficial and essential for breaking the cycle of recidivism.

### 2.2.3 Ghana Prison Services' Reformation Strategy

Historically, prisons in Ghana, as in many parts of the world, primarily served as institutions of confinement and punishment. However, the Ghana Prisons Service Act of 1972 marked a significant shift by explicitly including "reformation and rehabilitation" as core functions of the prison system (GNA, 2022). The Ghana Prisons Service, established under the Prisons Service Act of 1972, outlines its core functions as ensuring prisoners' safe custody, welfare, reformation, and rehabilitation (GNA, 2022). This legislation lays the groundwork for a correctional system that acknowledges the importance of rehabilitation alongside punishment. The Ministry of the Interior, responsible for the country's internal security, emphasizes the need for "constructive engagements" and "social mobilization" to support the reintegration of ex-offenders (Ministry of the Interior, 2015). Recognizing that unemployment is a significant risk factor for recidivism, the government, in collaboration with NGOs and international organizations, has implemented various vocational training programmes to equip inmates with skills. Beyond agriculture, inmates can access training in various trades and crafts, including carpentry, masonry, tailoring, hairdressing and other practical skills that are in high demand, especially in the informal sector. By acquiring these skills, their employability is enhanced, and they can support themselves and their families post-release, reducing the likelihood of recidivism. (Ghana Prison Service, 2020).

Furthermore, vocational training not only enhances employability but also fosters self-esteem, a sense of purpose, and pro-social behaviour, all crucial factors in achieving desistance.

Through vocational training, reformation acknowledges each person's intrinsic dignity and capacity for change, as opposed to merely storing them in detention facilities. This strategy finds support in the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), which stresses the importance of providing prisoners with meaningful opportunities for education and vocational training to facilitate their reintegration into society (Schoeman, 2010).

A meta-analysis by Wilson et al. (2000) found that participation in prison-based vocational training programme was associated with a significant reduction in recidivism rates, highlighting the potential of such programmes in breaking the cycle of offending. Another study by Mensah & Gyamfua Akuoko (2023) on the triggers of recidivism in Ghanaian prisons found a strong correlation between vocational training participation and post-release employment, highlighting the potential of such programmes in breaking the cycle of recidivism.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Philosophy and Design

In alignment with the interpretive phenomenological research philosophy, this study employed the descriptive research design to explore the perceptions behind vocational skills training as a conduit for reducing recidivism in Ghana's prisons. The choice of interpretive phenomenology was to provide a deep understanding of the nuances and experiences of vocational skills training among inmates at Ankaful and Nsawam Prisons. The study also explored the experiences and perspectives of ex-convicts and social welfare staff. This philosophy emphasized the subjective experiences and interpretations of participants, aiming to uncover the underlying meanings and essence of their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Given the complexity of crime and its related cases, the interpretive phenomenological approach allows the researchers to delve into the subjective perspectives of inmates as well as facilitate the exploration of how the participants perceive vocational skills training, thus providing rich insights into their motivations, attitudes, and behaviours (Van Manen, 2014).

The use of a descriptive research design was to provide a detailed and comprehensive overview of the vocational skills training to systematically describe and analyse the phenomenon under investigation, without manipulating variables or imposing preconceived theories (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Neuman, 2014). Given the exploratory nature of the topic, a phenomenological research design was a suitable approach for studying the experiences and perceptions of inmates and prison officers. In a phenomenological research design, the focus is on understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of inmates, ex-convicts and officers who have been participants in vocational training programmes in the prison system. By focusing on the experiences and perceptions of these participants, this approach enabled us to capture the range and diversity of practices and behaviours that contribute to vocational skills training among prisoners (Yin, 2018).



### 3.2 Population and Sampling Design

The population of this study comprises prison officers, inmates, ex-convicts and staff from the Social Welfare Department. They were selected from Ankaful Maximum Security Prisons in the Central Region of Ghana and Nsawam Medium Security Prison in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Purposive sampling and convenient sampling techniques were used to select the individuals who had experienced working in the prisons and participated in vocational skills training. Purposive sampling allows researchers to intentionally select participants who possess first-hand knowledge and experience related to the research topic (Saunders, 2014). By purposively selecting prison officers, inmates and staff from the Department of Social Welfare who work in these two prisons (Ankaful Prisons and Nsawam Prisons) as primary participants for this study, the study reiterates that participants had a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and could provide in-depth insights into their perspectives, motivations, challenges, and practices.

The sample size in qualitative research is not determined by statistical power or significance levels but rather by the principles of data saturation. Data saturation is the point at which the researcher stops gathering data because the new data no longer contributes to new insights or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Therefore, sample size can vary depending on the research question, research design, and level of data saturation. However, a general guideline aims for a sample size of at least 10-30 participants for phenomenological studies to ensure that the data collected are sufficiently rich and varied (Marshall et al., 2013). The choice of a sample size for this study was therefore 31 participants; influenced by considerations of feasibility, depth of analysis, and data saturation. Data saturation occurred when no new themes or insights were emerging from additional interviews, indicating that a comprehensive understanding of the research topic had been reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

**Table 1**

*Below Highlights the Tabular Illustration of the Sampling Size*

Prison	Sample
Ankaful	
Prison Officers	6
Ex-convicts	2
Inmates	5
Social Welfare staff	2
Nsawam	
Prison Officers	5
Ex-convicts	2
Inmates	6
Social Welfare staff	3

Participants were strategically selected based on their experiences working with the prisons in these selected prisons. This selection was made for several reasons. By exploring the viewpoints of prison officers, this study sought to tap into the core decision-making process and aspects that contribute to vocational skills training in Ghanaian prisons. Prison officers and inmates were more likely to provide insights into vocational skills training in light of the routine activity theory and the rehabilitation theory. This sheds light on the motivations, and innovative ideas influencing their actions and strategies. The participants for the study were also identified through a process that aligned with the inclusion criteria set for the research. The inclusion criteria for participants focused on prison officers, inmates, ex-convicts and social welfare staff through their experiences working and serving in the prisons. This ensured that participants had relevant knowledge and experience to contribute to the study's objectives.

### 3.3 Data Collection Instruments and Strategy

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. This approach facilitated the exploration of diverse viewpoints while ensuring a focused discussion on the study's objectives. Researchers had a face-to-face interaction with participants. Potential participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their consent was obtained. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in Fante, Twi, and some in English Language.

The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed for analysis. The timeframe for the data collection was approximately 6 weeks. The provided transcribed texts in the result section below are considered reliable sources of data. The reliability is attributed to the careful transcription process of adhering to established transcription conventions and guidelines. Additionally, the accuracy and consistency of the transcribed content were cross-checked against the original audio recordings; further ensuring the reliability of the transcriptions. These transcriptions serve as the primary data source, representing the content and meaning of the interviews. To ensure the

rigour and trustworthiness of the study, several other measures were taken. Member checking, where participants were provided with summaries of their interviews to validate accuracy, was conducted. Peer debriefing and consultation were undertaken among researchers to ensure that there was accuracy in data interpretation. The study also aimed for saturation, ensuring that data collection continued until new insights ceased to emerge, enhancing the depth and comprehensiveness of the findings.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using NVivo version 14.0, a qualitative data analysis software. The analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, aiming to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights within the interview transcripts. The process involved multiple steps, starting with familiarization with the data through repeated readings of transcripts. Initial codes were then generated to identify meaningful units of text. These codes were subsequently organized into broader themes that encapsulated the rationale behind vocational skills training in Ghanaian prisons, perceptions and experiences and implications of the vocational skills training for attaining desistance in the context of the routine activity theory and the rehabilitation theory.

### 3.5 Ethical Approval Statement

Research of this nature required ethical approval to ensure that the rights of the participants would be well protected. Hence, the prison authority was first written to, to seek approval to involve prison officers in the study. The Ghana Prison Service (GPS) with strict prison security codes granted the research team the approval to pursue the process of gathering ground data from the prisons at designated time schedules. The team ensured holistic adherence to all the directives and instructions from the GPS.

Ethical considerations of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity were taken into account during the recruitment of participants. In light of ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, fictitious names in the form of pseudonyms were used to de-identify all study participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews. The purpose of the study, the procedures for data collection, and voluntary participation were explained to all participants. In addition, a statement relating to these details was provided at the beginning of the interview guide and was also explained orally to participants where necessary. The participants were also informed that their rights and consents were duly respected and protected. Thus, the anonymity of the participants and their occupational locations were assured through the use of numerical coding, which protects their privacy and identity. Furthermore, the participants were guaranteed confidentiality of the collected data and its use solely for academic purposes. Ethical approval was sought from the University of Cape Coast Institutional Review Board. Regarding informed consent, the ethical considerations were attached to the research instruments or interview guide and participants were required to fill them before proceeding to answer the questions.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 The State of Vocational Training in Prisons in Ghana

The first objective of the study was to gain an understanding of the state of vocational skills training in Ghanaian Prisons as a strategy to reduce recidivism. This included examining the availability, types, and quality of training offered in Ghanaian prisons.

On the issue of availability, the participants shared varying opinions. Some officers from both prisons shared this similar view,

*“the name vocational training is there but it’s not as effective as it has been heard. Nsawam is doing pretty well, Ankaful is also not doing bad but the rest of the prisons, have nothing going on there”.*

Some ex-convicts from the Ankaful Maximum security prisons had this to say,

*“This your topic is good because we need help a lot. There is a big problem in terms of vocational training at the prisons. Most of the inmates are willing to do something in terms of learning trade skills but not much is going on there. There are only a few training programmes and sessions”.*

Officers from Ankaful Maximum agreed to the lack of availability of vocational skills training programmes and expressed their opinion by saying,

*“Even though the policy exists in the service, there are no systems available in place to implement it effectively”.*

*“First of all, we do not have enough skilled trainers; there is no adequate in-service training, there is a lack of capacity-building training for the officers taking them through the programme, and also most of the inmates are not interested in the programmes we are running because of the mismatch in the skills of inmates”.*

*“I feel there should be needs assessment, in doing so then we are moving the policy forward”.*



Another Officer from Nsawam highlighted:

*“Vocational training cannot cater to the growing number of inmates we have and many of the tools and training materials are obsolete”.*

A prison officer from Ankaful lamented that only about 15% of inmates benefit from these programmes, leaving the majority of inmates excluded.

Social Welfare Staff were also interviewed at Nsawam and Ankaful prisons. The staff expressed several views on the state of vocational skills training at both Ankaful and Nsawam prisons. One Social Welfare staff at Nsawam had this to say,

*“Currently, Nsawam prison females are embarking on vocational training services such as baking and soap making, but that is all. Not many of them are involved; there are limited resources so not many inmates get the opportunity to participate. In summary, is not encouraging even though the concept is there. The reason is a lack of resources”.*

On the issue of the types of programmes available, the researchers observed that at both prisons there were training activities such as soap making, sewing, baking, tailoring, leather work, kente weaving, carpentry, masonry, charcoal production, vegetable production, cereal production and fish farming.

The researchers observed that at both prisons inmates are heavily involved in farming, where they cultivate food crops to support their feeding programme. However, none of the participants considered that as vocational training. When participants' attention was drawn to that many of them did not share in that perception. They reiterate the way and manner in which inmates are utilized on the farm, many of them do not perceive it as training, but rather use of them as farm hands.

Participants also shared diverse views about the quality of the vocational training programmes that go on in the prisons. Senior prison officers from the Nsawam medium security prison shared that the quality of training is good looking at the constraints they have.

One senior officer had this to say:

*“Oh, as for the training is good. Those who participate are usually happy with the skills they learn”.*

An ex-convict shared:

*“Before I went to prison I was a watch repairer. It was in prison I learnt how to repair phones. Now I do both, so I can say the training was good”.*

A Social Worker believed the quality of the training really depends on the programme in question and the resources availability.

*“Some of the programmes require very little resources. But if not then it is reduced to the very basic, which may not meet the standard required of artisans in the field”.*

The results of the study on the condition of vocational training in Ghanaian prisons showed that there are notable discrepancies between the actual application of vocational skills training programmes and the theoretical goals of rehabilitation.

These findings provided insight into systemic issues and reform prospects, and they are consistent with the body of current literature and the theoretical framework used in this investigation. The recurring theme from the findings is the inadequacy of vocational training programmes in Ghanaian prisons. This inadequacy is largely attributed to insufficient resources, outdated equipment, and a lack of skilled trainers. This aligns with Meethal (2014), who noted that under-funding and poor infrastructure undermine the quality and effectiveness of vocational programmes in Ghanaian Prisons. Such limitations are compounded by the number of inmates and the lack of a proper needs assessment conducted to inform skill sets that inmates prefer and want. These findings therefore underscore the need for needs-based training programmes to remove the mismatch between inmates' interests and the training programmes offered leading to low participation rates.

The findings also revealed disparities in the effectiveness of vocational training across different prisons. While Nsawam and Ankaful prisons appear to offer some level of vocational training, the situation in other prisons is dire, with little or no training taking place. This inconsistency undermines the goal of uniform rehabilitation standards across the correctional system. However, the unequal distribution of resources and training opportunities across prisons limits the potential of this intervention.

#### **4.2 The Perception of Participants of the Vocational Training Skill Programmes in Ghana's Prisons**

Participants' views were sought on the rationale and effectiveness of vocational skills training by the GPS. Prison officers from both Ankaful and Nsawam shared that some of the inmates are very brilliant and smart, and when given the right support can achieve desistance by developing their skills, and contributing to the development of their communities and the nation.

One senior officer from the Nsawam had this to share:

*“Our rationale is to engage and equip inmates. Even the Bible says the devil finds work for the idle hands. So the training is a way of engaging these inmates whilst at the prisons and also not wasting their time for just being there, learning something meaningful that will be useful to them is of great essence. In doing all these, these inmates when discharged one day can fend for themselves without being dependent”.*

Some ex-convicts from the Nsawam and Ankaful prisons shared similar thoughts:

*“The motive for learning a trade while in prison was to keep myself occupied with a job once I got out of prison. Since I got out, I have been working with the skills I learnt; keeping myself busy and earning a living”.*

Social welfare staff who were engaged also shared their views. These have been summarised as follows;

*“We need to take vocational skills support very seriously. It makes the ex-convict contribute something meaningful to the society and to their own personal development and standard of living”.*

The views shared by participants on the rationale of vocational training are consistent with Wilson et al. (2000), who found that vocational training is a critical determinant in reducing re-offending rates because it keeps inmates active, and ex-convicts busy. This also aligns with the assertions of Cullen (2013), that vocational training restores individuals to functional members of society through structured programmes that address their behaviour, skills, re-entry preparedness and eventually rehabilitation.

These perspectives resonate with the Rehabilitation Theory, which views crime as a result of social and personal deficits that can be addressed through targeted interventions. By equipping inmates with vocational skills, prisons play a rehabilitative role, transforming criminal tendencies into pro-social behaviours. Moreover, the Routine Activity Theory further supports this rationale by suggesting that structured activities, like vocational training, serve to reduce the opportunity for deviant behaviour by engaging inmates in productive endeavours.

#### **4.3 Experiences of Participants with the Vocational Training in Ankaful and Nsawam Prisons**

Participants were also asked to recount their experiences with the implementation of vocational training programme in the Prisons highlighting the benefits as well as the challenges.

One prison officer from Ankaful prison shared his experience by saying:

*“Inmates who secure jobs after serving their jail sentence, help in developmental projects that go on in their various communities with the skills they have acquired. With the experience I have as a Senior Prison Officer (SPO), I know that most of these inmates have some savings being done at the prisons by the hard labour jobs they do outside the prison premises as part of their jail term. After they have served their jail term and are leaving the prisons, their monies are given to them to serve as start-up capital for them. Those who do not take part in any vocational skill training at the prison, most times become criminal consultants”.*

The officer thus observed a positive community impact and the risks for those excluded from vocational training. Some ex-convicts from the Ankaful maximum and Nsawam medium security prisons had this to say about their experience;

*“we were used as labourers outside the prison premises and at times we played football; and other games in the yard. For vocational training, we cannot boastfully talk about it. It is not doing well in the prisons at all”.*

Again, a Social Welfare staff shared by way of experience:

*“Vocational skills training is useful because when these ex-convicts are out of prisons, they get some petty jobs to do which in the end help them to fit in the environment. The problem is that ex-convicts most times need additional training when they come out of the prisons because the prisons don’t do much in terms of vocational training. I suggest that organisations offering formal education in the prisons should add vocational training as well”.*

Furthermore, participants highlighted several challenges that hinder the effectiveness of vocational training programmes within the prison system. These included a lack of capacity-building for trainers, inadequate in-service training, and insufficient post-release support services. These findings are also consistent with Mensah & Gyamfua Akuoko's (2023) result which underscored the importance of adequate support systems to facilitate reintegration and reduce recidivism. The inadequacy of vocational training in Ghanaian prisons reflects a systemic issue rooted in the colonial legacy of the penal system, which historically emphasized punishment over rehabilitation (Ministry of Interior, 2015). Despite a policy shift towards reformation, the findings suggest that practical implementation has lagged behind theoretical intentions. Without these foundational supports, the potential of vocational training programmes to empower inmates and facilitate their reintegration into society will not be fully fulfilled.

Another key rationale identified in the findings is the potential of vocational training to promote economic independence. Both social welfare staff and prison officers highlighted that the vocational training programmes

empower ex-convicts to secure employment, thereby reducing their dependence on others. The emphasis on economic independence also addresses the broader societal issue of unemployment and enhances standards of living.

Another notable challenge identified by participants is convincing inmates to participate in vocational training. A senior officer from Ankaful noted that many inmates, preoccupied with their desire for freedom, resist involvement in these programmes. This according to correctional officers, highlights the psychological barriers to engagement, which may stem from the stigma associated with incarceration and a lack of immediate incentives. This observation is consistent with Gaum et al. (2006), who emphasized the need for tailored, motivational strategies to encourage inmate participation in rehabilitation programmes. Addressing this challenge requires integrating psychological support into vocational training programmes, ensuring that inmates recognize the long-term benefits of acquiring skills.

The findings further emphasized that vocational training is essential for reintegration, equipping inmates with the skills and confidence needed to reintegrate into their communities. Ex-convicts noted that these programmes provide them with the means to support themselves and their families, fostering a sense of responsibility and belonging. This again aligns with Mensah & Gyamfua Akuoko (2023) that vocational training is a critical component of successful reintegration, enabling ex-offenders to overcome societal stigmas and rebuild their lives.

However, the findings also point to systemic gaps that hinder the full realization of these benefits. The lack of resources, commitment from the government, and post-release support systems were frequently cited as barriers. Participants' testimonies revealed a range of experiences shaped by systemic challenges, individual perceptions, and the larger institutional context. This discussion places the findings within the theoretical framework and existing literature to shed light on the implications for prison rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. The investigation of vocational training experiences in Ankaful and Nsawam prisons offers nuanced insights into the shortcomings and strengths of these programmes.

Similarly, ex-convicts reported that their interests were neglected, as they were often assigned to labour outside prison premises rather than being included in skill-building initiatives. This disparity highlights a significant gap between policy intent and implementation, undermining the inclusive goals of vocational training programmes. This finding is consistent with Meethal (2014), who identified systemic barriers, such as inadequate resources and capacity, as key impediments to the effective implementation of prison training programmes.

Despite these limitations, the findings reveal the positive impact vocational training can have on those who participate in it. Social welfare staff and senior prison officers highlighted instances where ex-convicts secured employment, contributed to community development, and used savings accrued during incarceration to start businesses. These outcomes align with Wilson et al. (2000), who demonstrated the transformative potential of vocational training in reducing recidivism and enhancing post-release reintegration. The Rehabilitation Theory further supports these findings, suggesting that vocational training addresses criminogenic needs by equipping inmates with skills and opportunities that foster pro-social behaviours. Additionally, the Routine Activity Theory posits that engaging inmates in structured, meaningful activities reduces opportunities for deviant behaviour, both during incarceration and after release.

Most of the Prison Officers noted that ex-convicts often require additional training after their release to bridge gaps in their skills. This points to the need for continued care that extends beyond incarceration, integrating pre-release training with post-release support. These insights align with Mensah and Akuoko sarpong who argue that effective reintegration requires a holistic approach that combines vocational training with mentorship, job placement support, and community support. Without such systems, the potential benefits of vocational training risk being undermined by the challenges ex-convicts face in the labour market and society at large.

The findings also point to institutional challenges that hinder the effectiveness of vocational training programmes. Social welfare staff and prison officers highlighted resource constraints and outdated curriculum, equipment and methodology as key barriers.

## V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusions

It can be concluded that, while vocational training holds promise as a rehabilitative tool, its impact is constrained by structural deficiencies and limited support. Addressing these gaps requires targeted investment, standardization of programmes, and the inclusion of post-release support to ensure sustainable reintegration and desistance from crime.

### 5.2 Recommendations

There is therefore an urgent need for interventions to address the systemic challenges confronting vocational training in Ghanaian prisons. To this end, several policy and practical recommendations are proposed. On the policy front, the government must prioritize increased budgetary allocation for prison reforms. The Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, should channel resources into expanding vocational training across Prison



facilities in the country. Additionally, a comprehensive policy framework for vocational training in prisons should be developed for the Ghana Prisons Service (GPS) to use to standardize training programmes across all prisons and to align them with international guidelines such as the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, commonly referred to as the Nelson Mandela Rules. Another key policy recommendation involves integrating vocational training into national reintegration policies. The Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MOGCSP) and the Ghana Police Service (GPS) should collaborate to ensure that post-release vocational training and support are institutionalized as part of broader reintegration strategies. Also, to encourage private sector involvement, the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MOTI) should establish tax relief initiatives for employers and companies who would invest in prison training programmes or hire trained ex-offenders. Lastly, the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) and the GPS should adopt a data-driven approach to monitor the outcomes of vocational skills training programmes within the Service. This would provide insights for policy refinement and enhance accountability.

From a practical perspective, upgrading vocational training facilities is critical. The Ministry of the Interior and GPS, must collaborate with development partners like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the Netherlands Organisation for International Development Cooperation (SNV) etc, to provide support for the delivery of vocational programmes within the prisons. The GPS should collaborate with the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (CTVET) and Ghana TVET Service (GTVET) to run demand-driven vocational programmes and certify trainees per the Ghana National TVET Qualification Framework (NTVETQF). This will ensure that the programmes align with Ghana's economic and industrial needs and also, boost the employability of the participants when they are out of prison. The capacity of vocational trainers should be enhanced through regular workshops to ensure they are equipped with up-to-date skills and training methodologies. Again, to ensure higher participation the vocational training programmes should be needs-based, with the GPS conducting periodic assessments to align training with interests and aspirations. These recommendations, if implemented, would create a robust and effective vocational training ecosystem in Ghana's prisons, addressing systemic challenges and improving rehabilitation and reintegration outcomes.

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