

Comparative Study Of Apprenticeship Fashion And Vocational Fashion Education In Ghana

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Abstract

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine apprenticeship fashion training and vocational fashion education in Ghana, with particular attention to their structural organization, instructional practices, similarities, differences, and socio-economic relevance. Data were collected through interviews, direct observations, and questionnaires administered to forty participants, comprising apprentices from four fashion apprenticeship workshops and students from one vocational institution in Tarkwa. The findings indicate notable differences in entry requirements, training duration, instructional methods, and certification processes. Apprentices undergo continuous hands-on training throughout the week and primarily employ freehand cutting and flat sewing techniques, whereas vocational students combine classroom-based theoretical instruction with structured practical sessions that emphasize pattern drafting alongside flat and round sewing methods. Despite these differences, both systems share common assessment practices, organize exhibitions to showcase creative output, and do not provide financial remuneration during training. The study concludes that apprenticeship and vocational fashion education play complementary roles in Ghana's skills development framework by promoting self-employment, reducing unemployment, and supporting socio-economic development. The study recommends strengthened collaboration between apprenticeship workshops and vocational institutions to enhance curriculum relevance, innovation, and skills transfer.

Keywords: Apprenticeship training; Vocational education; Fashion education; Skills development; Ghana

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I. Introduction

Apprenticeship is a contractual arrangement between a master craftsperson and an apprentice through which occupational skills are acquired via supervised practical training over a specified period (Uwameiye & Iyamu, 2010). As a form of workplace learning, apprenticeship emphasizes experiential and on-the-job skill development. Wheatley (1976) similarly conceptualizes apprenticeship as an employer-led responsibility for training workers to meet occupational demands without direct government intervention.

In Ghana, apprenticeship training is deeply embedded in the informal sector and is often formalized through agreements involving the apprentice, parents or guardians, and the master craftsperson. Traditionally, apprenticeship has served as a critical pathway for skills transmission, particularly in craft-based occupations such as tailoring and dressmaking (Helpem, 2006). Contrary to the misconception that apprenticeship is suitable only for individuals with limited academic achievement, effective apprenticeship training requires discipline, cognitive engagement, observation, and sustained commitment.

Recognising the economic importance of apprenticeship training, the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET), in collaboration with the Ghana Skills Development Initiative (GSDI), has introduced reforms aimed at integrating workplace learning with structured classroom instruction. This hybrid approach seeks to improve training quality, relevance, and employability outcomes.

Vocational fashion education, delivered within formal institutional settings, is designed to equip learners with occupational competencies through a combination of theoretical instruction and structured practical training. Graduates are prepared for employment and self-employment within the fashion and garment industry. Given that both apprenticeship and vocational systems target similar occupational outcomes, a comparative examination of apprenticeship fashion and vocational fashion education is necessary.

This study therefore, examines the similarities and differences between apprenticeship fashion and vocational fashion education in Ghana, analyzes instructional methods and training processes, and highlights their socio-economic contributions.

II. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. The target population consisted of selected fashion apprenticeship workshops and a vocational institution in Tarkwa, Ghana. A sample size of forty (40) participants was selected, comprising twenty (20) fashion apprentices drawn from four apprenticeship workshops and twenty (20) students from one vocational institution.

A random sampling technique was adopted to ensure equitable representation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and questionnaires, with informed consent obtained from all participants. The collected data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns, similarities, and differences between the two training systems.

III. Results And Discussion

Entry Requirements

Entry into vocational fashion education requires candidates to present Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results, complete admission procedures, and pay annual school fees. Students are also required to provide personal sewing machines due to limited institutional resources. In contrast, entry into apprenticeship fashion training is largely open and based on the payment of a one-time training fee, which varies depending on the year of entry. Apprentices typically make no additional payments until completion, aside from a final freeing fee at graduation.

Additional Training Materials

Vocational students provide general institutional items listed in school prospectuses, such as cleaning tools and furniture, which serve the entire school community. Apprentices, however, are required to supply personal sewing tools and materials directly for use in the workshop, including scissors, needles, threads, measuring tapes, rulers, and tailor's chalk.

Nature of First-Year Training

Apprentices commence training with basic sewing tasks such as straight stitching, hemming, fastening buttons, and the production of simple garments, including children's clothing. Freehand cutting techniques are introduced at an early stage. Vocational students, by contrast, are introduced to pattern drafting, garment construction, embroidery, beadwork, leather accessories, and related theoretical coursework. Overall, vocational students experience a broader and more structured curriculum during their first year of training.

Duration and Organization of Practical Training

Apprentices engage in practical training from Monday to Friday and, in some cases, on weekends. Vocational students devote most of the week to theoretical instruction and participate in practical lessons once per week in accordance with institutional timetables.

Benefits and Welfare

Apprentices occasionally receive days off, particularly during periods of intensive workload. Vocational students benefit from officially recognized public holidays. Neither apprentices nor vocational students receive salaries or financial compensation during training.

Rules, Regulations, and Assessment

Vocational institutions enforce formal rules related to safety, cleanliness, and studio discipline. Apprenticeship workshops emphasize punctuality, respect, obedience, and discipline. Assessment practices in both systems focus on practical competence, including neatness, fastening, fitting, dart placement, and overall finishing. Vocational students undergo continuous assessment and external examinations, while apprentices are assessed primarily through final practical and oral examinations accredited by the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI).

Instructional Methods and Production Techniques

Vocational fashion education employs a combination of lectures, demonstrations, and supervised practical sessions as indicated in Table 1. Apprenticeship training relies predominantly on demonstration and hands-on practice as indicated in Table 2. Observational findings indicate that vocational students primarily use

pattern drafting alongside flat and round sewing methods, whereas apprentices depend largely on freehand cutting and flat sewing techniques as shown in Figure 1a, b.

Table 1 Instructional Methods and Production Techniques (Vocational fashion education)

Methods	Frequency	Percentage
Practical method only	7	35%
Lecture method only	2	10%
Demonstrating method only	1	5%
Practical, lecture and demonstrating method	3	15%
Practical and demonstrating method	5	25%
Lectures and practical method	2	10%
Total	20	100%

Source: field work, 2025

Table 2 Instructional Methods and Production Techniques (Apprenticeship fashion training)

Methods	Frequency	Percentage
Practical method	4	33.3%
Demonstrating method	2	16.7%
Lecture and practical method	3	25.0%
Practical and demonstrating	2	16.7%
Lecture, practical and demonstrating	1	8.3%
Total	12	100%

Source: field work, 2025



Figure 1- Vocational student drafting pattern

Source: field work, 2025

Socio-Economic Contribution

Both apprenticeship and vocational fashion education contribute significantly to Ghana's socio-economic development by promoting self-employment, reducing unemployment, and supporting small-scale enterprise development. Graduates from both systems establish businesses, generate income, and contribute to national revenue through taxation.

Summary

Entry into vocational fashion education requires candidates to present Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results, complete admission procedures, and pay annual school fees. In contrast, entry into apprenticeship fashion training is largely open and based on the payment of a one-time training fee.

Apprentices engage in continuous practical training throughout the week, while vocational students attend structured practical sessions once per week alongside theoretical instruction. Apprentices rely primarily on freehand cutting and flat sewing methods, whereas vocational students are trained in pattern drafting and both flat and round sewing techniques.

IV. Conclusion And Recommendations

The study concludes that apprenticeship fashion training and vocational fashion education are distinct yet complementary systems within Ghana's skills development framework. Vocational fashion education operates within a formal curriculum structure and provides certification pathways that enable progression to tertiary education. Apprenticeship fashion training emphasizes experiential learning and primarily supports self-employment through NVTI-accredited certification.

To strengthen both systems, the study recommends structured collaboration between apprenticeship workshops and vocational institutions through joint training sessions, workshops, and curriculum exchange. Government support is also required to equip vocational institutions with adequate tools and to expand instructional capacity. In addition, periodic seminars, exhibitions, and skills competitions involving both apprentices and vocational students are recommended to promote innovation, mutual learning, and industry relevance.

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