



## Assessing the role of Co-curricular programs in improving vocational skills in the Tertiary level among the Volta region schools

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### **ABSTRAK**

This study assesses the effect of co-curricular programs towards promoting Visual Arts and Home Economics instruction in four tertiary institutions within the Volta Region of Ghana: Ho Technical University, Evangelical Presbyterian University College, Akatsi College of Education, and St. Francis College of Education. Utilizing a descriptive survey design, 171 participants (150 students, 15 lecturers, and 6 coordinators of programs) were surveyed using questionnaires and interviewed. Findings indicate widespread student participation in co-curricular training that is largely focused on the development of general skills and not vocational practice. Limited resources and poor industry linkage prevent the development of practical skills. Suggested solutions are the inclusion of more vocation-specific training, stronger industry partnership, and resource investment to develop students' vocational readiness and employability.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In an era marked by rapid technological advancement, internationalisation, and shifting labour market demands, institutions of higher learning find themselves under increasing pressure to prepare their graduates not only with intellectual skills but with relevant and transferable skills as well (Suleman, 2018). Co-curricular activities have therefore come to be widely accepted as an integral part of holistic education. Díaz and Moreno (2019) said the activities give students valuable platforms to find and develop their interests, talents, and skills beyond the scope of the regular curriculum. Through structured activities such as student clubs, workshops, competitions, and community projects, students acquire soft skills such as communication, leadership, problem-solving, time management, and teamwork skills that are relevant in today's era of complication and competition. Co-curricular activities are grounded on holistic student development. Abdela (2023) is sure to say that co-curricular programs aim to enhance the mental, physical, spiritual, and social development of students as well as imbue them with good values and a healthy lifestyle. Through engagement in non-academic activities related to their own and future career interests, students are empowered to think creatively, act responsibly, and apply knowledge to real, practical contexts. Further, Smith (2021) highlights that co-curricular activity has been linked with enhanced academic attainment, enhanced



employability, and all-round youth development. Those are skills that are increasingly important to new graduates facing uncertain labour markets.

In vocational education and home economics, the function of co-curricular programs is even clearer. These subjects, which emphasise experiential learning and problem-solving in actual situations, benefit significantly from experience-based practice and experiential learning opportunities on co-curricular forums (Mittal & Bansal, 2024). Activities such as culinary demonstrations, fashion shows, technical skill exhibitions, student enterprise, and peer training assist students in relating theory to action. This convergence not only complements school study but also fosters a sense of responsibility, creativity, and entrepreneurship in students.

In Ghana's Volta Region, there have been significant efforts by institutions such as Ho Technical University, the University of Health and Allied Sciences, and Evangelical Presbyterian University College to integrate co-curricular life for students. The aim here is to find out to what extent these programs serve to help develop vocational skills and the advancement of home economics education. With the socio-economic challenges of the region, including youth unemployment and under-industrialisation, co-curricular programs' ability to develop employment skills and self-sufficiency is a concern that warrants immediate scholarly and policy attention.

This study, in this case, tries to assess the importance of co-curricular activities towards promoting visual arts and home economics at the tertiary level among institutions in the Volta Region. It seeks to identify how the activities contribute to the experiential learning of the students, their employability, and skill gaps in key vocational areas. Through an examination of existing practices, challenges, and opportunities, the research will highlight how co-curricular activity can be utilised to the fullest to address the evolving educational and economic demands of the region.

## Literature Review

### Co-Curriculum

Co-curricular and extracurricular activities play a crucial role in developing vocational skills and enhancing students' overall development in higher education. These activities improve social skills, self-discipline, communication, and self-confidence, which are essential for success in the corporate world (Trivedi, & Srivastava, 2022). They also contribute to the development of talent, creativity, and students' potential. In technical and vocational education, co-curricular activities can be used to implement green skills, promoting sustainable industrial practices (Yapin, Suhadi, & Esa, 2017). The integration of these activities with curriculum helps prepare students for evolving industry practices and skills, as mandated by the New Education Policy 2020 (Mishra & Aithal, 2023). Furthermore, vocational and technical education plays a significant role in improving the national economy for sustainable development, with curriculum based on labor market needs (Suleiman & Magaji, 2020). Overall, extracurricular and co-curricular activities contribute to confidence-building and the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Mishra & Aithal, 2023).

Co-curricular or extracurricular activities represent an essential form of education that takes place outside the traditional classroom setting (Singh, 2017). These activities serve as a platform for students to gain non-academic skills that are vital for personal and professional development. Through participation in co-curricular programs, students are nurtured spiritually and emotionally, and are equipped with critical soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, time management, and self-confidence. Such engagement not only contributes to the development of essential life skills but also promotes a healthy and balanced lifestyle (Singh & Agarwal, 2024).

Furthermore, co-curricular activities foster positive social interactions among students, creating opportunities for collaboration, cultural exchange, and integration across diverse backgrounds. According to Penno (2025), involvement in extracurricular pursuits strengthens interpersonal relationships and helps inculcate values such as discipline, hard work, independence,

respect for authority, and civic responsibility. These values play a significant role in shaping responsible, law-abiding, and productive citizens. Beyond personal growth, co-curricular involvement has long-term implications for students' career prospects (Mishra & Aithal, 2023). By improving communication skills, adaptability, and a sense of initiative, these programs prepare students for the demands of the workforce and increase their employability. In this regard, co-curricular activities act as a bridge between academic knowledge and the practical, social, and professional competencies required in real-world environments.

#### **TVET and economic development**

The economies in a number of countries have been undergoing rapid transformation in the last two decades (Yan, 2025). The most important characteristics include: (a) technological innovations, (b) intensified competition in the world market, and (c) demographic trends. These changes created new demands for more adaptable, multi-skilled and creative labour (Li, 2024). To meet these demands, it is necessary to reduce the gap between academic and vocational education and strengthen the co-operation between the education authorities and employment organizations as well as industries. (Ogondiek, 2024). Even until the end of the twentieth century, in certain countries vocational education was considered appropriate for lower social classes and professions like automobile mechanics, plumbers, electricians and other similar professions.

However, the advent of globalization has demanded more specialized labour markets higher levels of skills, and diversified vocational education. For years, there has been a growing awareness that general education is often too academic and does not prepare young people adequately for the world of work (Teichler, 2019). Undoubtedly, as compared to general education, vocational education and training has a closer and more direct link with economic and professional development. Sequel to this growth, organizations and enterprises are required to respond in a strategic manner to the changes which take place in order to benefit from the economic growth. They have to take drastic measures to upgrade their structures and operations and adapt the qualifications of their employees to the new challenges.

Under the pressure of policy makers, administrators and educators in TVET numerous universities are increasingly including in their curriculum courses such as management, management information systems, marketing and finance in an attempt to upgrade the qualifications of the workforce and provide knowledge-based and skills –based instruction (Mthabela, 2024). This movement intended to redeem the failure of traditional vocational education and/or training courses to have an immediate impact on industry or the economic growth in general. Whereas long discussions, researches and educational reforms are the concern of educationists in view of globalization, an element that has been overlooked so far is the influence of this system on the extent of poverty in many countries. In fact, while the process of globalization possesses an enormous potential capacity to accelerate economic growth and development, the depth of poverty found in many parts of the developing world is still unacceptably high (Itiefue, 2022). It seems that to achieve the correct skill-mix for poverty reduction and economic growth, all levels of education and training need to be supported to bring about the kinds of expected development outcomes associated with education. (Palmer, 2006). It is accepted that the realities of globalization have resulted in a common perception that “knowledge societies”, those that constantly develop new ideas, technologies, methods, products and services are crucial for future prosperity (Forstorp & Mellström, 2018).

#### **Curriculum and Vocational Education and Training**

To cope with the globalization demands, upgraded vocational education and training should not be considered a panacea. There are two basic factors which will determine whether nations will be able to prosper from globalization. First, how each nation responds to globalization demands at the national level and, second, how they act to shape international rules and processes for a more

open trading system. (U.N. World Public Sector Report, (2001). Additionally, there are strategies which will support the attempts both of individuals and nations to benefit from the merits of globalization: (a) market expansion, (b) the inter-dependency of worldwide economies, (c) global operations, (d) workforce mobility, (e) a global marketplace (IBM Globalization Team, 2008). As it is, to develop and manage a global organization implies developing and managing people who can think, lead, and act from a global perspective, and who must possess a global mind as well as global skills (Sobratee & Bodhanya, 2018).

The resultant variable of all these is a structured vocational programme based on an appropriate design of vocational courses curriculum. Vocational Education and Training Systems are important elements of countries' economic development strategies. Improving the skills and knowledge of the workforce is crucial for achieving or maintaining economic competitiveness, especially in a context of progressing globalization. Thus, the role of vocational education and training is regarded as key to economic development (Gyimah, 2020; Grosman & Naanda, 2006). As a result, training habits have to change for both organizations and their employees (Gyimah, 2020). Besides, TVET has to be reformed in order to improve the skills supply and adapt them to the skills demand. Such reforms can be effective only if TVET courses are designed and developed on the basis of a proper vocational curriculum. In general, curriculum is the pathway to the development of professional knowledge and skills which facilitate the flow from theory to practice. The obvious advantages of a vocational curriculum are: (a) It provides instruction for many different fields that require technical skills rather than academic knowledge, (b) it allows students to focus solely on training for a career and (c) a major advantage is that it provides flexible programmes available from a variety of sources (Barnett, 2014). According to UNESCO (2009), curriculum can be defined as the organization of learning sequences with a view to producing specific, intended learning outcomes, whereas curriculum development is a set of practices aimed at introducing planned changes in search of better achievements (Okojie, Bastas, & Miralay, 2022).

#### **Co-Curricular Activities and Vocational Education and Training (VET)**

Vocational Education and Training (VET) focuses on equipping learners with practical skills and technical competencies necessary for specific trades and professions (Gadling & Bhosale, 2025). Traditionally, VET emphasizes hands-on learning, real-world application, and industry-aligned instruction. However, the inclusion of co-curricular activities in vocational education has become increasingly important in enhancing both the scope and impact of vocational training programs.

Co-curricular activities complement formal VET instruction by fostering the development of soft skills, which are often overlooked in technical curricula but are essential for workplace success (Nawaz, Javed, & Akhter, 2024). These include communication, problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, and adaptability. Students engaged in vocational disciplines who participate in co-curricular activities such as student clubs, technical competitions, skill expos, entrepreneurship programs, and community-based projects are provided with environments where they can apply technical knowledge in creative, collaborative, and entrepreneurial settings.

Such integration helps bridge the gap between classroom learning and the demands of the labor market (Jackson & Rowe, 2023; Vogel, 2015). In fields such as home economics, for example, students may participate in cooking contests, fashion shows, or interior design showcases as part of their co-curricular involvement. These events not only sharpen their technical abilities but also build confidence, creativity, and client-facing skills. These attributes are critical for starting a business or working in service-oriented sectors.

Furthermore, co-curricular activities encourage innovation and enterprise development. VET students who engage in entrepreneurial clubs or campus businesses often gain first-hand experience in marketing, budgeting, customer relations, and business management (Nawaz, Javed, & Akhter,

2024). This practical exposure prepares them for self-employment and entrepreneurship, which are particularly valuable in regions with limited formal employment opportunities, such as parts of the Volta Region in Ghana.

Research has also shown that co-curricular engagement in VET enhances student motivation and retention, particularly when learning is contextualized and connected to real-life applications (Karim, 2024). When students see the relevance of their skills outside the classroom, they are more likely to stay committed to their training and pursue career pathways aligned with their interests and strengths. In summary, co-curricular activities serve as a powerful extension of vocational education by enriching students' learning experiences, expanding their skill sets, and increasing their employability. When strategically implemented alongside technical curricula, these activities play a crucial role in developing competent, confident, and career-ready graduates.

## METHODS

This study adopts a descriptive survey design to assess the role of co-curricular programs in enhancing Visual Arts and Home Economics Education at tertiary institutions in the Volta Region of Ghana. The design is suitable for collecting detailed information from a wide range of respondents, allowing for the analysis of the current impact of co-curricular programs on students' vocational skill development. The target population includes students, faculty members, and co-curricular program coordinators from four selected institutions: Ho Technical University, Evangelical Presbyterian University College (EPUC), Akatsi College of Education (AKATSICO), and St. Francis College of Education (FRANCO). A purposive sampling technique was used to select these institutions, and stratified random sampling ensured diverse representation across academic levels and departments. The sample consists of 150 students, 15 faculty members, and 6 co-curricular program coordinators. Data collection combined both quantitative and qualitative methods. Questionnaires were administered to students and faculty to gather data on participation levels and perceived benefits. Interviews with program coordinators provided qualitative insights into the implementation and impact of co-curricular activities. Data analysis included descriptive statistics for the quantitative data and thematic content analysis for the qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of co-curricular programs' role in vocational education. Ethical approval was obtained from institutional review boards, and participants' confidentiality and voluntary participation were ensured throughout the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Participation Levels in Co-Curricular Activities (Students, N = 150)

Table 1: Participation Levels in Co-Curricular Activities

Items	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Do you participate in any co-curricular activities?	Yes	120	80.0%
	No	30	20.0%
2. How frequently do you participate in these activities? (N = 120)	Daily	10	8.3%
	Weekly	40	33.3%
	Monthly	45	37.5%
	Occasionally	25	20.8%
3. What type(s) of co-curricular activities are you involved in? (Multiple responses allowed)	Clubs	60	50.0%
	Workshops	40	33.3%
	Internships	20	16.7%
	Competitions	25	20.8%

**Source: Field Data (2025)**

**Note:** Percentages for question 3 may exceed 100% because students were allowed to choose more than one activity type.

The data shows that a majority of students (80%) participate in co-curricular activities, reflecting strong engagement with extra-academic opportunities outside formal classroom instruction. This level of participation suggests that institutions in the Volta Region are providing platforms that successfully attract student involvement. Frequency of participation further highlights this engagement. Among the 120 students involved, more than 70% participate at least monthly (37.5%) or weekly (33.3%), with a smaller group (8.3%) engaging daily. This regularity implies that many students see value in these activities as part of their learning or personal development routines. Regarding the types of co-curricular activities, the majority of students are involved in clubs (50%) and workshops (33.3%), which typically focus on personal growth, leadership, and skill-building in a structured but often non-vocational context. In contrast, internships (16.7%) and competitions (20.8%), which are more closely linked to vocational skill development and practical experience, engage a smaller proportion of students.

This pattern suggests that although participation rates are high, the nature of co-curricular engagement leans more toward general skills and personal development rather than directly vocational activities (Barnett, 2014). The relatively low participation in internships may indicate a gap in hands-on vocational training opportunities offered through co-curricular channels.

**Vocational Relevance of Co-Curricular Activities (N = 150 Students)**

Table 2: Vocational Relevance of Co-Curricular Activities

Items	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
1. To what extent do co-curricular activities involve hands-on training or technical skill development?	Not at all 30 (20.0%)	To a small extent 55 (36.7%)	To a moderate extent 40 (26.7%)	To a great extent 15 (10.0%)	Completely 10 (6.6%)
2. Do co-curricular activities relate directly to your field of vocational study?	Yes 40 (26.7%)	No 75 (50.0%)	Not sure 35 (23.3%)	—	—
3. How often do co-curricular activities simulate real-world vocational tasks or environments?	Never 28 (18.7%)	Rarely 48 (32.0%)	Sometimes 45 (30.0%)	Often 20 (13.3%)	Always 9 (6.0%)
4. Have you been exposed to tools/equipment relevant to your vocational field during these activities?	Yes, regularly 15 (10.0%)	Occasionally 35 (23.3%)	Rarely 55 (36.7%)	Never 45 (30.0%)	—

**Source: Field Data (2025)**

The data indicates that while co-curricular activities are available to students, their vocational relevance is limited. Only a small fraction of students (16.6%) report that these activities involve hands-on training or technical skill development to a great extent or completely. In contrast, a majority (56.7%) indicate little to no practical or technical involvement, suggesting that most co-curricular programs are not designed to develop the specific vocational skills students require. Responses regarding whether co-curricular activities relate directly to students' vocational fields reveal a significant disconnect. Half of the students responded “No,” and another 23.3% were unsure if the activities align with their vocational studies. Only 26.7% affirmed a direct relationship, indicating that the content and focus of co-curricular engagements are often not tailored to students' professional disciplines.

Moreover, more than half of the respondents (50.7%) stated that these activities “Never” or “Rarely” simulate real-world vocational tasks or environments. This lack of experiential learning reduces opportunities for students to apply classroom knowledge in practical contexts, which is essential in vocational training.

Exposure to relevant tools or equipment, a key component of vocational education, is also minimal. Only 10% of students reported regular access, while a combined 66.7% stated they rarely or never had such exposure during co-curricular activities. Without interaction with industry-standard tools, students are limited in their ability to fully develop or demonstrate vocational competencies.

Taken together, these findings suggest that although co-curricular activities are available and attract student participation, they are largely non-vocational in nature (Barnett, 2014). The emphasis is on general skills rather than specialized training, which limits students’ readiness for their chosen trades (Chan, 2020). This underscores the need for institutions to restructure co-curricular programs to better integrate hands-on, field-specific vocational experiences.

**Perceived Benefits of Co-Curricular Activities (Students, N = 150)**

Table 3: Vocational Relevance of Co-Curricular Activities

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Co-curricular activities improve my practical vocational skills.	50 (33.3%)	60 (40.0%)	20 (13.3%)	15 (10.0%)	5 (3.3%)
These activities improve my employability.	55 (36.7%)	58 (38.7%)	18 (12.0%)	13 (8.7%)	6 (4.0%)
These activities increase my confidence in applying technical knowledge.	48 (32.0%)	63 (42.0%)	22 (14.7%)	12 (8.0%)	5 (3.3%)
Co-curricular activities help bridge the gap between theory and practice.	52 (34.7%)	59 (39.3%)	21 (14.0%)	13 (8.7%)	5 (3.3%)

**Source: Field Data (2025)**

Students generally perceive co-curricular activities as beneficial to their vocational and professional development. A large majority, over 70%, either strongly agree or agree that these activities improve practical vocational skills, enhance employability, increase confidence in applying technical knowledge, and help bridge the gap between theory and practice. These findings suggest that students value the role of co-curricular programs in supporting their overall growth and readiness for the workforce.

However, a notable minority of students are neutral or disagree with these benefits. This variation may reflect differences in the quality, relevance, or accessibility of co-curricular offerings across institutions or programs. It also aligns with earlier findings that, while co-curricular activities are widely available, they may not consistently provide hands-on, vocationally focused experiences.

In summary, although students acknowledge the positive impact of co-curricular activities on skills and employability, these benefits appear to be linked more closely to general personal and professional development than to direct vocational training. This points to an opportunity for institutions to strengthen these programs by incorporating targeted, vocationally relevant components that more effectively prepare students for their specific career paths (Jackson & Rowe, 2023).

**Faculty Perceptions of Co-Curricular Activities (N = 15)**

Table 4: Perceptions of Co-Curricular Activities

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Co-curricular activities complement vocational education.	6 (40%)	5 (33.3%)	3 (20%)	1 (6.7%)	0 (0%)
2. These activities improve students' practical vocational skills.	5 (33.3%)	6 (40%)	3 (20%)	1 (6.7%)	0 (0%)

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3. Co-curricular activities help bridge the gap between theory and practice.	7 (46.7%)	4 (26.7%)	3 (20%)	1 (6.7%)	0 (0%)
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**Source: Field Data (2025)**

The faculty responses indicate a generally positive view of co-curricular activities and their role in vocational education. A majority of faculty members agree that co-curricular activities complement vocational education, with 40% strongly agreeing and an additional 33.3% agreeing. This suggests that most faculty recognize these activities as valuable supplements to formal instruction. Similarly, faculty perceptions about the impact of co-curricular activities on students' practical vocational skills are also favorable. Seventy-three percent of respondents either strongly agree or agree that these activities improve students' practical skills, highlighting faculty confidence in the hands-on benefits of co-curricular engagement. Moreover, more than 70% of faculty members believe that co-curricular activities help bridge the gap between theory and practice, with nearly half strongly agreeing. This view underscores the faculty's recognition of the importance of experiential learning opportunities outside the classroom in enhancing vocational education. While most responses are positive, there is a small minority of faculty who remain neutral or disagree, suggesting some variation in experiences or perspectives on the effectiveness and implementation of co-curricular programs. Overall, faculty perceptions align with the idea that co-curricular activities play a supportive and complementary role in vocational training, though there may be room to increase consistency and impact (Wildman, 2024).

**Interviews on implementation and impact of co-curricular activities (program coordinators)**

The interviews with program coordinators offered valuable qualitative insights into the nature and impact of co-curricular activities. Many coordinators emphasized that these programs primarily foster soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, and communication. For example, one coordinator noted,

*“Our co-curricular clubs and workshops mainly focus on developing students' interpersonal skills and confidence rather than specific technical skills.”*

This reflects a common theme that while students grow personally, the activities do not sufficiently address hands-on vocational training. Resource limitations were frequently mentioned as a key challenge. A coordinator explained,

*“We often lack the specialized tools and equipment necessary to provide meaningful practical experiences outside the classroom.”*

This lack of resources restricts the design of activities that simulate real-world vocational environments, limiting students' exposure to industry-standard practices. The coordinators also highlighted limited industry collaboration as a barrier. One remarked, *“Stronger partnerships with local businesses would allow us to offer internships or apprenticeships, which are critical for vocational learning but are currently difficult to organize.”* Such partnerships are essential for bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Despite these challenges, coordinators acknowledged positive outcomes. As one stated, *“Students often leave co-curricular programs with improved confidence and teamwork abilities, which indirectly support their vocational readiness.”*

However, they stressed the importance of integrating co-curricular activities more closely with formal vocational curricula to enhance their relevance and impact. Overall, the examples provided by coordinators illustrate the dual role of co-curricular activities in supporting student development while revealing significant opportunities to better align them with vocational education goals.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of students' participation in co-curricular activities, their vocational relevance, perceived benefits, and faculty as well as coordinator perspectives. Taken together, the results reveal a nuanced picture in which co-curricular activities are widely accessed and positively perceived, yet insufficiently aligned with vocational skill development.

The high level of student participation in co-curricular activities (80%) indicates strong engagement beyond formal classroom instruction. This suggests that institutions have successfully created platforms that attract student involvement and that students recognize the value of such activities for their personal and academic growth. Frequent participation—weekly or monthly for most students—further supports the idea that co-curricular engagement has become an embedded part of students' educational experience. This finding aligns with Astin's theory of student involvement, which emphasizes that learning and development increase with the quantity and quality of student engagement in educational activities (Astin, 1999).

However, the nature of participation reveals a critical limitation. The dominance of clubs and workshops over internships and competitions suggests that co-curricular engagement is oriented more toward general personal development than toward vocationally specific skill acquisition. While leadership, communication, and teamwork are essential competencies, vocational education requires structured opportunities for hands-on practice and real-world application (Barnett, 2014). The relatively low participation in internships reflects a missed opportunity to expose students to authentic workplace environments, which are central to effective vocational preparation.

This limitation is further reinforced by students' perceptions of vocational relevance. The majority of respondents reported minimal hands-on training, weak alignment with their vocational fields, and rare exposure to real-world vocational tasks or industry-standard tools. According to experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), meaningful learning—particularly in vocational contexts—occurs when learners actively engage in concrete experiences and reflective practice. The lack of such experiences in co-curricular activities reduces their capacity to function as an extension of vocational training.

Interestingly, despite these shortcomings, students largely perceive co-curricular activities as beneficial. Most respondents agreed that these activities improve employability, confidence, and the ability to bridge theory and practice. This apparent contradiction suggests that students value co-curricular activities primarily for their contribution to soft skills rather than technical mastery. Previous studies have shown that soft skills significantly enhance employability, even when technical skills are underdeveloped (Jackson & Rowe, 2023). Thus, students' positive perceptions may reflect indirect vocational benefits rather than direct skill acquisition.

Faculty perceptions largely align with student views, as most instructors believe that co-curricular activities complement vocational education and help bridge theory and practice. This agreement underscores a shared recognition of the potential value of co-curricular programs. However, the presence of neutral and dissenting responses among faculty suggests uneven implementation and varying effectiveness across programs. This variability supports Chan's (2020) argument that co-curricular activities only contribute meaningfully to vocational outcomes when they are intentionally designed to align with curricular goals.

Qualitative insights from program coordinators provide critical context for understanding these gaps. Coordinators consistently emphasized that co-curricular activities are designed primarily to foster soft skills, largely due to constraints such as limited resources, lack of specialized equipment, and weak industry partnerships. These findings echo Wildman's (2024) assertion that institutional capacity and external collaboration are decisive factors in determining the vocational impact of co-

curricular initiatives. Without access to industry-standard tools or workplace settings, co-curricular programs struggle to simulate authentic vocational environments.

Nevertheless, coordinators acknowledged that co-curricular activities contribute positively to students' confidence, teamwork, and communication skills—attributes that indirectly support vocational readiness. This dual role highlights a key implication of the study: co-curricular activities are effective as complementary developmental spaces but remain underutilized as vehicles for vocational skill formation. Stronger integration with formal curricula and partnerships with industry stakeholders could transform these activities into more powerful instruments for vocational learning.

In summary, the discussion reveals a clear imbalance between high participation and limited vocational relevance in co-curricular activities. While students and faculty recognize their value for personal and professional development, the lack of hands-on, field-specific experiences constrains their contribution to vocational competence. These findings underscore the need for institutional reforms that reposition co-curricular activities as strategically aligned extensions of vocational education, capable of bridging the persistent gap between theory and practice.

## CONCLUSION

The study found that while co-curricular activities at tertiary institutions in the Volta Region enjoy high student participation and are valued for personal and professional development, they largely lack a strong vocational focus. Most activities emphasize general skills rather than hands-on, field-specific training, with limited exposure to real-world tasks and relevant tools. Faculty and students recognize some benefits, but resource constraints and weak industry links hinder practical skill development. To better support vocational education, institutions should enhance co-curricular programs by integrating more practical, vocationally relevant experiences and fostering stronger industry partnerships. This will improve students' readiness for the workforce and align co-curricular activities more closely with vocational goals. The study recommends a. Incorporating Hands-On Vocational Training: Co-curricular programs should be redesigned to include practical, skill-based activities directly related to students' vocational fields to enhance technical competence. b. Forging Stronger Industry Partnerships: Institutions must collaborate with local businesses to provide internships and apprenticeships that offer real-world vocational experience and bridge the gap between theory and practice. c. Investing in Resources and Facilities: Adequate tools, equipment, and learning spaces are essential to support effective vocational training within co-curricular activities and should be prioritized by institutions.

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