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# A capability approach to understanding the role of informal apprenticeship in the human development of informal apprentices

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## ABSTRACT

Skills training in the informal economy, known as informal apprenticeship, caters to the skills needs of millions of young people in the Global South. While it predates the development of formal Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems, it was not until the 'discovery' of the informal economy in the 1970s that attention was drawn to this important system of training. Despite the importance of informal apprenticeship, it is striking that there has been a paucity of academic research on education and training and the informal economy this millennium. Whilst there have continued to be papers written by staff of international development agencies, academic accounts are now rare. This paper explores the role of informal apprenticeship in the human development of informal apprentices. It presents new data on informal apprenticeship and engages with earlier academic and international policy papers on informal apprenticeship, in an attempt to open new ways of theorising and understanding informal apprenticeship.

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## Introduction

Skills training in the informal economy, often known as informal apprenticeship, caters to the skills needs of millions of young people in the Global South. While it predates the development of formal Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems, it was not until the 'discovery' of the informal economy in the 1970s that attention was drawn to this important system of training.

In the international policy literature, three main reasons underpin the attention to informal apprenticeship. The first is the need to provide post-basic training opportunities for increased numbers of basic education graduates, to reduce youth unemployment. Second, in the context of a declining formal sector, especially in Africa, informal apprenticeship is seen as the primary medium of training for the informal economy, which makes up c.75% of non-

agricultural employment in Sub-Saharan Africa (Charmes 2021, 34). The third reason relates to its cost-effectiveness and accessibility to many youths as formal educational qualifications are not required to enrol.

Despite the importance of informal apprenticeship, it is striking that there has been a paucity of academic research on education and training and the informal economy this millennium. Whilst there have continued to be papers written by and for international development agencies (Johanson and Adams 2004; Haan 2006; Breyer 2007; Nübler, Hofmann, and Greiner 2009; ILO 2012; Axmann and Hoffmann 2013; Ryan 2015), academic accounts are now rare. Indeed, the 2021 *Research Handbook on Development and the Informal Economy* (Charmes 2021), for instance, has no chapter dedicated to the issue.

Very recently, there has been some movement from TVET and development authors who are questioning the efficacy of talking about TVET for the formal economy in the light of the lack of large-scale job opportunities, even in South Africa (e.g. Powell and McGrath 2019b; McGrath et al. 2020), and who are considering informal skills formation as part of a wider constellation of skills formation subsystems, but there is no new wave of informal apprenticeship research per se.

In the context of this emerging academic interest in informal apprenticeship, it is important to engage with earlier academic and international policy papers on informal apprenticeship in an attempt to open new ways of theorising and understanding informal apprenticeship. Theoretically, policy and academic dialogue on informal apprenticeship largely has been framed through human capital theory and neoliberal economic development accounts. Through this lens, informal apprenticeship is considered central to the productivity of the informal economy, economic competitiveness, poverty reduction and growth. However, the simplicity of the assumed relationship has been questioned by some without radically questioning these underpinnings. Palmer (2007) for example, argues that an enabling environment for the utilisation of skills is key for skills training to translate into productivity, poverty reduction and other labour market outcomes. While this qualification of the instrumental benefit of skills training is an important contribution to the literature, the framing of his work through the human capital theory leads to a narrow conceptualisation of the usefulness of skills training.

This paper contributes to the growing debate on the role of TVET in development by focusing on informal apprenticeship, which has largely been neglected in the literature of the new millennium. Drawing on the capability approach to conceptualise poverty, it asks: What freedoms are valued by informal apprentices and journeypersons<sup>1</sup>? Data is drawn from a sample of male and female participants in the automotive trade in Ghana.

Applying the capability approach to research on informal apprenticeship enriches our understanding of the human development of young people in the largest skills training system in Sub-Saharan Africa. Also, its normative

underpinning helps to challenge the widely accepted and reproduced categorisation of the strengths and weaknesses of informal apprenticeship. This constitutes an important theoretical and empirical contribution to the skills training literature.

The findings of this study support the evidence base for upgrading informal apprenticeship from the perspective of informal apprentices and journeypersons who are the primary agents of this system. It also provides a basis for further academic and policy debate on informal apprenticeship.

The rest of the paper is divided into five sections. The next section outlines the key features of the informal apprenticeship system and limitations in how these are perceived in the literature. This is followed by a discussion of the capability approach, the methodology, dimensions of capability and conclusions.

### **Informal apprenticeship and its features**

Across Africa, and the global South more broadly, the institution of informal apprenticeship necessarily varies across contexts. In what follows, the relatively developed and more highly structured West African model is what is being described.

Informal apprenticeship as a system of training is centred around production, with learning occurring through observation of and practice with knowledgeable practitioners. Learning is a gradual process where an apprentice is expected to first familiarise him/herself with the social context of learning, tools and equipment used in production, undertake peripheral tasks related to the craft or trade and then master substantive elements of the trade over time. Three key features of informal apprenticeship are its practical orientation, governance and financial arrangement. The sections below focus on the last two of these features and how they are conceived in the literature.

#### ***The governance of informal apprenticeship***

Informal apprenticeship is governed by informal institutions. Key aspects of this governance relate to the process of recruitment of informal apprentices, negotiation and payment of apprenticeship fees and the role of Informal Trade Associations (ITAs) in the regulation or maintenance of occupational standards, settlement of disputes, and facilitation of the self-employment of informal apprentices upon graduation (Fluitman and Oudin 1991; Haan 2006). Informal Trade Associations are relevant bodies in the governance of informal apprenticeship. Their formation and relevance can be traced to the pre-colonial period (Lloyd 1953; Osagie and Ikponmwoşa 2015).

The recognition of the relevance of informal apprenticeship by agencies and governments led to increased interest in preserving the role that trade

associations play in the governance of informal apprenticeship on the one hand, and in strengthening their capacity to play a greater role in informal apprenticeship. The latter was mostly advanced through international donor-funded skills programmes and projects.

In a comprehensive review of many initiatives to support ITAs in Sub-Saharan Africa, Haan (2006) reported that initiatives in this area included support for ITAs to develop statutes, internal rules, activities, training modules, monitoring systems among others. However, he suggested that, contrary to the role donors expected ITAs to play, ITAs were less efficient in maintaining quality standards in the trade. As informal apprenticeship is embedded in the informal economy, there has been limited state support and involvement in the regulation of training.

Skills gained in informal apprenticeship are not formally recognised. This has led to a fascination with credentialising informal apprenticeship learning through the recognition of prior learning and alignment with national qualifications frameworks, an approach strongly advocated by both ILO and UNESCO. Progress on this, however, has been very limited.

Informal apprenticeship is both informal learning and informal work. Concerns with wider informal sector issues of poor conditions of work, occupational safety and health practices, lack of security and low access to credit for businesses have also been brought to the informal apprenticeship debate. Whilst the limited involvement of the state often is seen to be the key strength of informal apprenticeship (King 1996; Johanson and Adams 2004; Palmer 2007, 2009; International Labour Organisation 2012), this is in tension with a policy drive towards formalisation driven by concerns about both taxation and workplace conditions.

### ***Financial arrangement in informal apprenticeship***

The financial arrangement in informal apprenticeship is private. Training is mainly financed by the family of apprentices, with contributions from Master Craftspersons (MCPs). In West Africa, payment for training mainly consists of 'commitment fees' paid before training and 'graduation fees' paid at the end of training (Breyer 2007). The commitment fee is intended to keep informal apprentices committed to the training. Payment is either monetary, in-kind or a combination of both. In-kind payment consists of items such as drinks and foodstuff. Monetary payments are very common in apprenticeship in urban areas compared to rural areas (Palmer 2007).

Payment of apprenticeship fees is flexible, and arrangements differ per country and trade. In an analysis of financial arrangement in Ghana, Breyer (2007) notes that the average amount of fees charged for the duration of training, which is usually between three to four years, is about US\$ 160 and the total amount of fees ranges from US\$ 22 to US\$ 616 (p. iii). Fees tend to be lower for apprenticeship in rural areas (Palmer 2007).

Informal apprentices are not wage earners, although in some cases they are provided with allowance by their masters. In Ghana, this is estimated to be between one third to two-thirds of the minimum wage (Breyer 2007). Breyer argues that usually the total amount of allowance provided to apprentices for the duration of their training exceeds the apprenticeship fees, thus making training beneficial to apprentices. This notwithstanding, it is widely reported that while some apprentices do receive allowances from their masters, these are usually inconsistent and depends on the financial state of the enterprises (Breyer 2007; Nübler, Hofmann, and Greiner 2009; Ryan 2015). Enterprise owners, therefore, require parents to bear the cost of feeding, transportation, health insurance, personal protective equipment, and trade tools.

In the literature, informal apprenticeship is considered cost-effective as the financial cost is shared between the master and the apprentice or their family (International Labour Organisation 2012). Given this, it is perceived to be accessible to the poor. As informal apprentices get equipped with a range of skills by the end of their training, Breyer (2007, 20) argues, from a human capital perspective, that this 'justifies that apprentices bear the costs of training'. Similar to the governance feature discussed earlier, the self-financing nature of informal apprenticeship is also seen to be a key strength of informal apprenticeship (Johanson and Adams 2004).

For a training system that caters to the needs of the poor and is promoted among disadvantaged youths, the self-financing feature of informal apprenticeship is not so easily justified from a social justice perspective. This is because it redirects attention from the lives that informal apprentices manage to lead and whether this financial arrangement provides them with the freedom to achieve what they find valuable. Drawing on the capability approach allows this examination to be made. The next section presents the capability approach as a useful theoretical framing for understanding the poverty reducing role of informal apprenticeship.

## **The capability approach**

The capability approach is an evaluative and normative framework of thought for judging social arrangements to the extent to which they expand individual freedoms to be and to do what they find valuable and have reason to value. It was developed by Amartya Sen and has been extended by various authors, notably Martha Nussbaum, Ingrid Robeyns, Severine Deneulin and Sabina Alkire.

As a normative framework of thought, the approach is underpinned by key concepts such as functionings and capability. Functionings describe the various beings and doings that are constitutive of a person's life. (Sen 1995, 39). Examples include being nourished, sheltered, being in training, being in good health, being respected etc. Functionings that a person manages to achieve

provide information about his well-being and constitute his achievements, whereas those that an individual has reason to value but not achieved are valued functionings. Capability refers to the 'alternative combinations of [valued] functionings the person can achieve, and from which he or she can choose one collection' (Sen 1993, 31). Capability is therefore the real freedom to achieve well-being or functionings.

In the past decade, an account of TVET for human development has emerged which draws on the normative concepts of the capability approach. Underpinning this account is a concern about the neoliberal employability focus of TVET on the one hand, and its failure to comprehend the experiences and valued functionings of students and graduates on the other (e.g. DeJaeghere and Baxter 2014; López Fogués 2016; Moodie, Wheelahan, and Lavigne 2018; Suart 2019; Hilal 2019; McGrath et al. 2020; Thorne 2020; DeJaeghere 2020).

The TVET for human development account challenges the growth paradigm within which TVET is situated and which defines its role in poverty reduction and development. In relation to the dominant orthodoxy, TVET's contribution lies in its human capital role, which is developing 'human qualities that can be employed as "capital" in production' (Sen 1997). Consequently, its poverty reduction role stems from the fact that skills utilisation leads to the generation of income and an escape from or reduction of income poverty. While these are very important, the capability approach offers a more radical view of poverty. For instance, Powell and McGrath (2019) develop six dimensions of poverty that shape the experiences of TVET learners in South Africa. These are (a) household income, (b) individual income, (c) single parent households, (d) highest parental educational attainment, (e) drugs and gangsterism, and (f) housing.

The approach highlights a broader role for TVET than the orthodoxy, including taking more seriously many aspects of the lives, education and work of TVET students and graduates that are either not known or adequately conceptualised in the dominant TVET orthodoxy which is underpinned by the human capital theory.

While the TVET for human development account has much to contribute to the literature on informal apprenticeship, it has not yet been applied to the study of informal apprenticeship. Apart from DeJaeghere, who applies the approach to non-formal training in East Africa, other applications have focused on formal TVET. As informal apprenticeship is the largest provider of training for the majority of youths in Sub-Saharan Africa, knowledge of the functionings and valued functionings of youth enrolled in informal apprenticeship is a significant contribution to the TVET and capability literature and the broader literature on informal apprenticeship.

Whilst a few studies focus on the experiences of informal apprentices in training, they are largely development agency-initiated and their theoretical and axiological underpinnings remain implicit. For example, Schraven et al.

(2013) explores the difficulties some youths encounter in accessing, completing, and transitioning from training to employment. Many of these difficulties stem from the lack of support from the state due to the assumption that MCPs and parents provide financial support to informal apprentices. Donkor (2012) identifies financial constraints, bullying and exploitation as some of the main reasons for the non-completion of apprenticeship. Ryan (2015) notes that the lack of employment support, social security, workplace safety and income insecurity are some of the problems that need addressing for apprenticeship to contribute to ILO's decent work agenda. This study moves the debate to a different level through its clear capabilities framing.

## Methodology

The data drawn upon for this paper was gathered through interviews with 37 participants in the automotive trade in Ghana. The automotive trade was chosen in order to compare the experiences of participants of different gender. This sample comprises of 17 informal apprentices, six journeypersons, 10 MCPs and four representatives of the Ghana National Association of Garages (GNAG). The Ghana National Association of Garages is the national association that represents the interest of craftspersons in the automotive trade. 5/17 of the apprentices were female; 5/6 journeyperson; and 3/10 MCPs (all of the GNAG officials were male). All the female apprentices, journeypersons and MCPs were engaged in auto-spraying while the males were in the mechanics sub-speciality. While the reason for the gendered occupational segregation is complex, the strenuous way in which mechanic repair is carried out in Ghana is one of the main explanatory factors. The data was gathered between 22<sup>nd</sup> June and 31 August 2018. The project was approved by the University of Nottingham's School of Education Ethics Committee.

Focused life story interviews were conducted with informal apprentices and journeypersons while semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from the MCPs and representatives of GNAG. The interviews were conducted in English, Twi and Fante. They were then transcribed into English and analysed. In presenting the findings, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants.

The participants were recruited from three mechanic clusters and other work sites in Kumasi (the capital of the Ashanti Region) and Accra, which is the capital city of Ghana and the Greater Accra Region. The three mechanic clusters are the Odawna and Ofankor Light Industrial area in Accra and Suame Magazine in Kumasi. Suame Magazine is one of the biggest automotive clusters in West Africa, with about 400,000 inhabitants. These comprise mechanics, apprentices, and journeypersons as well as spare parts dealers and petty traders. Odawna and the Ofankor light industrial areas are smaller in size and population. The mechanic workshops in the area are mainly wooden structures, roofed with

aluminium sheets. These are used for storing tools and equipment. Work is usually carried out in an open space where vehicles to be worked on are parked.

The automotive trade is one of the vibrant trades in Ghana. It mainly involves repair works, retrofitting and refurbishing of broken down or faulty vehicles. Within the automotive trade are sub-specialities namely welding and fabrication, mechanic (engine repairers), vehicle interior upholstery, vehicle electricians and automobile body straightening and spraying.

### ***Selection of dimensions of capability***

Dimensions of capability were developed from interview data from informal apprentices and journeypersons. The interview with the informal apprentices and journeypersons focused on the decision to enrol in informal apprenticeship, support in apprenticeship, structural arrangement in informal apprenticeship, plans after apprenticeship and external training opportunities.

In selecting dimensions of capability, the procedure used by Robeyns (2005) and Powell and McGrath (2019a) in selecting and presenting dimensions of capability was drawn upon. Following Powell and McGrath, dimensions of capabilities were first identified from the interviews undertaken with informal apprentices and journeypersons. This was needed to reflect the circumstances of informal apprentices and their contextual knowledge. The process involved analysing the data for well-being themes, which were marked as dimensions of capability. These themes were supplemented with thick descriptions of the experiences or achievements of the informal apprentices and journeypersons as well as their life goals. A summary of specific valued functionings from the descriptions is provided at the end of each dimension. The narratives were then supplemented with the extracts of MCPs and representatives of the GNAG and policy and academic texts.

All capabilities dimensions that were identified in the data were included, thereby achieving exhaustion as specified in Robeyns (2005) criteria. This meant that some dimensions of capabilities were representations of the freedoms of a few apprentices and journeypersons. This is nonetheless very important as they may reflect the capabilities of other informal apprentices or journeypersons who were not included in this study.

It is important to stress that the list of capabilities of informal apprentices is not definitive. It is based on data from a small number of informal apprentices and journeypersons in the automotive trade. Rather, it serves as a guide to investigate and focus discussion on the freedoms that informal apprentices and journeypersons have to achieve their valued functionings.

### **Dimensions of capability of informal apprentices and journeypersons in the automotive trade**

This section presents eight dimensions of capability that emerged in the data.

### ***Dimension of capability 1: basic requirements of life and training***

Enrolment in informal apprenticeship is an important achievement in the lives of young people. Beyond enrolment, there are basic needs that must be met for informal apprentices to live decently, learn, and complete their training successfully. Among these are food, shelter, transportation, and tools for training. Sen regards these basic needs as ‘centrally important functionings’ (Sen 1995, 44).

Most informal apprentices in this study expressed these basic needs as freedoms that are valued. For example, Kobby stated:

If you start an apprenticeship and you do not get anyone who can at least give you some chop money or support you to some level, you cannot, and you will quit. You cannot come and sit here hungry and lift all this heavy equipment. Even the walking in the sun that you will do ... so you cannot come and stay here with hunger like that.

Kobby’s statement indicates that being adequately nourished is important for staying in training and functioning effectively. The desire to have financial support in meeting one’s basic needs while in training is substantiated by Donkor (2012), Schraven et al. (2013) and Hardy et al. (2019) who report financial constraint as the major factor for the non-completion of training.

In addition to requirements for food, shelter, and transportation, all the informal apprentices mentioned they are required to acquire tools for their training. On the other hand, some of them had not been able to secure them due to financial constraints and the fear of theft. Concerning the former, Abena noted:

I am supposed to buy my tools, but I have not bought them yet. I was supposed to buy them before starting and buy the rest later but because of financial constraints, I have not bought them. But they [masters] have been asking us to bring it to help us to learn.

Difficulties acquiring tools for training were more of a concern to those in mechanics than those in auto-spraying. This is because fewer and less expensive tools are required for auto-spraying than in mechanics. Personal possession of trade tools helps one to develop essential values such as responsibility and independence. As a result, MCPs insist apprentices purchase their tools before training. In explaining the relevance of the tools, an official of the GNAG questioned: ‘If they don’t have their own tools how can they be acquainted with the work they are doing?’. Given his point, the defence of the self-financing feature of informal apprenticeship needs to be reconsidered in light of how that impacts on the ability of informal apprentices to obtain their trade tools and personal protective equipment while also meeting other basic needs.

### ***Dimension of capability 2: independence***

Informal apprenticeship is known for preparing youths for self-employment (Haan 2006). In this study, most of the informal apprentices and journeypersons

expressed the desire to be independent, to be self-employed. Only a few desired to be employed by others in the formal sector.

Independence for the apprentices and journeypersons means owning their workshop and having control over when and how they choose to deploy their skills. In addition, they value this for the respect it attracts in society, the opportunity to train others, be empowered and be able to maintain a family and work-life balance. For example, Paul expressed his value for independence as it 'shows maturity and attracts respect in society'. The female auto-sprayers also valued this greatly. Akuba, a journeywoman, noted:

... I want to help other people to take over if I am not there. If women can do this, then we need many of them. What a man can do, a woman can do as well. Why can't women do it? Look at the work I have done [points to a coach parked on the compound] and am doing now!

The females perceived being independent as empowering and wanted to be examples to other young women. Also, for the females, being independent was perceived as useful for work and family life balance. This is particularly the case where they own the means of capital as this affords them the flexibility to combine work with caring responsibilities. Unlike feminised trades such as catering and dressmaking where most people work from home and thus combine caring responsibilities with work, those in the automotive trade are not able to do this (Kusi-Mensah 2017). This is mainly due to the nature of work and place of practice. As a result, being independent, in the sense of owning a spraying oven and workshop and employing others is more valuable.

The desire to be self-employed as expressed by most of the informal apprentices and journeypersons is consistent with Peil's (1979) finding of the 'popularity of self-employment in West Africa' (p. 79). While Peil (1979) attributes this to society's value for it and its financial rewards, the narratives of informal apprentices and journeypersons in this study show that there is more to being independent than the financial rewards associated with it.

### ***Dimension of capability 3: increased demand for services of training enterprise***

Informal apprentices and journeypersons considered increased demand for the services of their training enterprise to be essential. They linked their training experience to the performance of their enterprise, as workshop production affects their opportunities to learn and to get an allowance. On the other hand, the demand for services in some informal micro-enterprises are often low and sometimes inconsistent.

In the excerpt below, Yoofi describes the effect of this on his learning experience.

In my first year, the work was very slow, and we didn't do much. In the second year more cars used to come here so I got to know a lot of things that I didn't know in my first year and my third year, the work is slow again so not much is done. It worries me that there isn't much work to be done ... It affects my tips and my learning.

Also, Timothy mentioned: 'Sometimes we don't get work to do which is not helpful because when it happens like that we are just here'. An MCP added: 'If we get work, that is helpful for the apprentices' learning. Without the job, there is nothing to be learnt'. These narratives point to the impact of demand for services on learning in informal apprenticeship.

Informal apprentices' concerns about the effects of the levels of production on their training raise issues about the sole reliance on learning through production, with no other mechanism for knowledge acquisition. This contributes to their desire for opportunities for further learning, as will be discussed shortly.

#### ***Dimension of capability 4: opportunities for formal recognition of skills***

Informal apprentices receive a certificate of testimonial from their master or respective trade association to acknowledge their successful completion of training. While this certificate can be used to access wage employment in the informal economy, it is not recognised formally. Lack of recognition of skills gained in informal apprenticeship impedes opportunities for further education, labour market mobility and access to credit from financial institutions (International Labour Organisation 2012). This was highlighted by an MCP who remarked: 'Even with the National Vocational Training Institute<sup>2</sup> (NVTI) certificate it is difficult to get a job, how much more a testimonial!'

There is policy preference by the Government of Ghana to harmonise and formalise all vocational education and training provision in the country through the adoption of a National TVET Qualifications Framework. Also, ILO has been instrumental in supporting countries to develop Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) systems to increase the employability of informal apprentices and their access to lifelong learning. However, Akoojee (2019) argues that the case for certification needs to be examined 'with the proviso of its utility in this sector' (p. 111). While it may not be directly relevant for work in the informal economy, some of the informal apprentices and journeypersons in this study acknowledged the importance of formal certification or recognition of skills. As a result, they value the freedom to have their skills recognised and to gain equal opportunities like their colleagues in the formal educational system. The excerpt below captures Yaw's view of the possibilities that this freedom engenders.

I will need a certificate to get a job in a company. I now have the proficiency 1 certificate from NVTI. Yes, so for example if I don't want to work in the informal sector again, I can go into the Army. So, with the skills and certificate, I can go on to do other

things or maybe do my masters to be an engineer. If I want to travel as well, it can help me acquire meaningful work.

For Yaw, the opportunity to begin a certification programme with NVTI is an important achievement as he reluctantly enrolled in apprenticeship upon the advice that he could still further his formal education while in informal apprenticeship. The desire of the apprentices and journeypersons to have their skills recognised sharply contrasts the findings of Bortei-Doku et al. (2011) that this is not a concern for informal apprentices. On the other hand, the findings presented in this section brings to the fore a question regarding 'how to enable informal apprentices to move into formal TVET certification systems if they so desire' (Bortei-Doku et al. 2011, 29). The main constraint for the majority of apprentices is the cost of pursuing formal education, through which one's skills can be formally recognised. Given the paucity of formal sector jobs in this area, the investment is hard to justify.

### ***Dimension of capability 5: opportunities for further learning within apprenticeship***

As mentioned earlier, learning in informal apprenticeship is structured around production and this helps apprentices to acquire hands-on experience. As the only means through which informal apprentices learn, it is constraining.

Informal apprentices expressed the desire to acquire further learning, particularly theoretical and safety and health instruction. This desire was linked to the inadequacy of the experiential nature of learning in informal apprenticeship. Many examples were cited about the challenges that are sometimes involved in correctly diagnosing and repairing vehicular problems in the first instance, without trial and error. For example, Kwame explained his worst moments as: 'when we get a return job. That is the person brings back the same problem'. The concerns of the apprentices echo McLaughlin's (1979) findings about the wayside mechanic made 40 years ago. He painstakingly notes:

It is in such situations that one begins to see signs of inefficient and inferior quality work from these artisans: the excessive amount of time spent trying to diagnose a fault or even the return of a vehicle to its owner without the fault being corrected; the creation of a completely new problem in the process of 'fixing' the old one ... (McLaughlin 1979, 203).

Difficulties resolving vehicular problems come at a cost to the customer, affects the productivity of artisans, quality service delivery and societal perceptions about them. While theoretical knowledge has a role to play, clients' practice of beating down service charges in the informal economy lead some artisans to undertake shoddy work. Concerning this, an MCP in auto-spraying shared his experience of work in the formal and informal economy as he highlighted that 'at Neoplan [formal enterprise] we painted three times with three coatings but here we don't

do it because the customers don't pay much. So . . . we do just one coating'. This coheres with King and McGrath's (2002) observation that demand is driven by price not quality and, together with market saturation, depresses skills levels.

The sub-standard practices of artisans help them to maintain a financially viable business as they balance the efforts spent on repair work with the expected reward. However, this negatively impacts the learning of informal apprentices, many of whom acquire their knowledge and skills solely in the informal workshop.

### ***Dimension of capability 6: occupational safety and health***

Most people who train and work in the informal economy do not enjoy this right to work under satisfactory, safe, and healthy conditions, as their counterparts in the formal economy. Statistics on occupational safety and health injuries and accidents are mainly available for the formal and not the informal economy. Informal apprentices in this study spoke about many occupational accidents and injuries and this informed their desire to achieve safety and health at the workplace. For example, Adwenpa, a second year apprentice, recalled an accident that nearly killed him on his second day at work as he worked on a car with some of his colleagues:

We had parked the car and I was under it. I could see the car slip, so I told those I was working with that the car is slipping. They said, oh it is because you are new that is why you see things that way. So, I said, let me get up and see and once I came out, the car came down, so they all thought I was under the car. They all rushed to use some wood to raise and support it. I shouted that I was out. They were all shocked and quiet and I was also shocked throughout the whole day. That day, I considered quitting the training.

Adwenpa sadly continued:

When you die you die what can be done? We don't have any forklift machine that can be used to lift the car to rescue you. The best is to scream for everyone to come and help. But by the time we finish, you can be dead and if not then we take you to the hospital . . .

Females in auto-spraying also had negative experiences to share regarding their safety and health at work. For example, Maame Efu narrated:

When I spray a car I cannot sleep, the lacquer gets into my body. It can affect my heart, kidney etc and for me when I spray one car, I can get heartburns, cough and feel very uncomfortable.

Most of the issues that were highlighted by the informal apprentices centre on the poor conditions in the informal workshop, lack of inspection by relevant stakeholders to ensure that safe working environment is provided for the informal apprentices and inadequate instruction on occupational safety and health. Occupational safety and health is an important functioning that need to be addressed to safeguard the well-being of informal apprentices.

### ***Dimension of capability 7: bodily integrity and respect***

While respect is a fundamental aspect of work and underpin healthy working relationships, unequal power relations between apprentices and masters and the disengagement of most families from the welfare of their children lead to verbal abuse and labour exploitation of informal apprentices. These issues were shared by the informal apprentices and journeypersons who participated in this study. The experiences however differed among male and female apprentices and journeypersons. Among the male apprentices, Adwenpa highlighted that it is worrying that ‘they [masters and customers] think those of us here are from poorer backgrounds who are learning here so they talk to us in a harsh way and insult us’. Similarly, Jojo mentioned: ‘They [masters] don’t respect us as apprentices, but in life everyone is important’. Oheneba also added that ‘we are all humans, yet when you [master] go home that is not how you treat your children’. Informal apprentices desire to be respected and be treated with dignity at work. It is important for apprenticeship to foster this freedom.

Among the female apprentices and journeypersons, there were very few incidents of verbal abuse, and these came from clients. For example, Akuba recalled that ‘some even say you should go and look for pepper to sell . . . They say how can you learn this as a woman?’. Similarly, Maame Efua mentioned that ‘some say why do you do this as a female?’. These remarks signal disrespect of the young women’s occupational choice and shows that more needs to be done to change gender perceptions about females in male-dominated trades. These notwithstanding, it is important to mention that progress has been made as many masters and parents positively support the decision of females to enrol in training.

### ***Dimension of capability 8: english proficiency***

English is the official language of Ghana. One’s level of English proficiency is determined, to a large extent, by one’s level of formal education, although there are other factors like ethnicity or family background that influences one’s proficiency (Blunch 2011). On the other hand, one’s level of education may not be a reflection of one’s English proficiency due to the quality of education.

This means that the majority of those entering the informal labour market before or after post-compulsory education, will have poor English proficiency and may not improve upon this unless there are opportunities for them to pursue adult literacy classes.

Few of the informal apprentices and journeypersons in this study expressed the desire to improve upon their written and spoken proficiency in English. Concerning this, Timothy narrated: ‘I am not able to read and write and if I get that opportunity I will learn’. He further stated:

It worries me that I didn't go to school as I may get to a point where I will need it as everything now is about pen and book. So, when I get someone who will teach me or a school I will go.

Timothy's statement that 'everything is about pen and book' shows the importance of English literacy as means to an end, but also as an end in itself. Being literate can enhance his business as he will be able to communicate with clients, increase his client base and keep proper records. Also, English literacy is useful for further learning as evident in the varied ways in which some of the informal apprentices supplement the knowledge they acquire in training. This was confirmed by MCP 2 who noted: 'if you are an auto apprentice, you have to know about ICT, read and understand ... auto computer is complex, and you need this to understand it'. Without written English proficiency, one will not be able to conduct internet searches and understand manuals. Lastly, this is relevant in a country where most external training and assessments in the formal institutions are conducted in English.

### Summary of dimensions of capability and valued functionings

Dimensions of Capabilities	Valued Functionings
(1) Basic Requirements of Life and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To satisfy basic needs like food, shelter, and transportation</li> <li>● To secure tools for training</li> </ul>
(1) Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To train others</li> <li>● To be role models and encourage females into the automotive trade</li> <li>● To have a family and work life balance</li> <li>● To own one's firm, expand and employ others</li> </ul>
(1) Increased Demand for Services of Enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To witness increment in levels of production in training enterprises</li> </ul>
(1) Opportunities for Formal Recognition of Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To have skills gained in informal apprenticeship recognised</li> </ul>
(1) Opportunities for Further Learning Within Apprenticeship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To acquire theoretical knowledge of the trade</li> <li>● To have theoretical training embedded in the structure of apprenticeship</li> <li>● To have access to learning resources for use in the absence of real tasks</li> </ul>
(1) Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To have tools and equipment that makes work easier and ensure safety at work.</li> <li>● To have health and safety rather than the job prioritised in assigned tasks</li> <li>● To have insurance against injuries and death at the workplace</li> <li>● To have safety and health measures enforced</li> <li>● To be safe from all the pollution and environmental risks to health caused by frequent burning, poor sanitation, and workplace practices</li> <li>● To have organised workshops and facilities like washrooms</li> <li>● To have bigger ovens to avoid the effects of spraying cars in the open</li> <li>● To have set times for resting, closing and leisure</li> <li>● To have a working culture that supports the use of PPE</li> <li>● To have a shed under which work can be done without being exposed to the vagaries of the weather.</li> </ul>

*(Continued)*

Dimensions of Capabilities	Valued Functionings
(1) Bodily Integrity and Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be free from verbal insults or abuses at work</li> <li>• To have one's occupational choice respected irrespective of gender</li> </ul>
(1) English Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be able to read and write in English</li> <li>• To be able to apply English literacy skills to record-keeping and good financial management</li> </ul>

## Conclusions

At the heart of the capability approach are the lives that people manage to lead and the freedoms they value to achieve different combinations of functionings. Evaluating aspects of well-being or poverty associated with informal apprenticeship in the space of achieved functionings reveal eight dimensions of capability of informal apprentices and journeypersons. These dimensions and associated valued functionings are not fixed and can be extended or amended in line with changes in the structures that enable or constrain them. While the capabilities are presented along different domains, they collectively represent the quality of life of informal apprentices and journeypersons. From a Critical Capabilities Account of Vocational Education and Training (CCA-VET) perspective, they provide further insights into what TVET already does and form the basis for further deliberation on how it can be transformed to support valued freedoms (McGrath et al. 2020). It is therefore important to view the dimensions of capability holistically. Four key messages that emerge from the findings and which this article makes are outlined below.

First, the findings show that the freedoms of informal apprentices and journeypersons emanate from the key features of the system. For example, it is from the self-regulatory nature of apprenticeship that one observes labour exploitation, maltreatment of apprentices, poor occupational safety and health and lack of recognition of skills. Drawing on the capability approach to theorise the poverty-reducing role of informal apprenticeship provides a normative basis for challenging the dominant position in the skills literature which touts these features as key strengths of the system (Johanson and Adams 2004; Palmer 2007). In view of this, care needs to be taken in celebrating the strengths of informal apprenticeship as it risks maintaining the status quo while constraining meaningful discussions about the capabilities of informal apprentices and how these can be expanded.

Also, while ITAs have been the main bodies responsible for the governance of informal apprenticeship, the findings concur with Haan's that they are less effective in maintaining the quality of training and, most importantly, supporting the valued functionings of informal apprentices and journeypersons. There are clearly limits to the functions of ITAs and further studies is needed to understand their shortcomings and how these are

linked to their institutional practices and their relationship with the state and parents. This will be useful in understanding how to support ITAs to play a stronger role in the expansion of the freedoms of informal apprentices and journeypersons.

Second, the dimensions of capability that emerge from informal apprenticeship in the Ghanaian context are similar to the capability lists developed in other formal TVET settings. Key among this is the desire of apprentices for opportunities for further learning (relating to theoretical knowledge), which is similar to the dimension 'upgrade skills and qualifications throughout life course' in Powell and McGrath's (2019b) list of VET capabilities in South Africa and Hilal's (2019) in Palestine. Given this, it can be argued that this is an important capability regardless of whether TVET is pursued in the formal or informal context.

About a quarter of this study's sample enrolled in informal apprenticeship because they could not continue with their upper secondary education due to financial constraints. On the other hand, they envisaged that pursuing further education in the formal education system would be possible through apprenticeship. In view of this, the opportunity to advance these aspirations is very important in improving the social standing of apprenticeship and making it a real alternative educational pathway for many young people. Financial constraints and other opportunity costs to pursuing further education in formal institutions need to be removed.

Within the human capital framing of apprenticeship, this dimension of capability is appreciated only from a productivity perspective. From a CCA-VET perspective, theoretical knowledge also improves one's capability for work and makes work more valuable (Bonvin and Farvaque 2006; Moodie, Wheelahan, and Lavigne 2018; McGrath et al. 2020). Findings presented here support the latter view in that informal apprentices seek knowledge of their trade to make sense of what they do and why they do it, rather than only observing and reproducing practices, a characteristic of learning in informal workshops. This is central to their vocational identity and self-esteem.

Third, drawing on the capability approach to understand the well-being of informal apprentices help to understand the influence of gender on capabilities. This was particularly evident in the second dimension of capability on independence and the seventh on bodily integrity and respect. Concerning independence, male apprentices and journeypersons are less concerned about reproductive roles and care responsibilities in planning for their transition from training to self-employment. On the other hand, this is an important consideration for females and a conversion factor necessary for them to translate training into further freedoms. This nuanced understanding is important in efforts to support females in male-dominated trades.

Finally, viewing poverty as capability deprivation reveals the various ways in which poverty is experienced in training. Through skills acquisition and the

enabling environment for the utilisation of skills, apprenticeship can enable people to escape income poverty and contribute to the reduction of youth unemployment. However, attention needs to be paid to all the dimensions of capabilities, especially those relating to decent work and living while in training, as highlighted by Ryan. Interrelations between all the dimensions of capability makes this important. Income is instrumental to some of the deprivations, however, focusing on capabilities, directs attention to other deprivations that are not income dependent. These are important in understanding other means, including institutional arrangements that are central to addressing these deprivations. In this article, suggestions of approaches to expand the freedoms identified are not made. Institutional arrangements that will help to expand the dimensions of capabilities would have to emerge from a democratic dialogue among the different stakeholders, notably the state, parents, informal apprentices and informal trade associations. Regarding the roles of the state and informal trade associations, it is important to note that neither can do without the other if a holistic approach is to be taken to address all the freedoms presented in this article.

## Notes

1. A journeyman refers to an individual who has completed an informal apprenticeship training and works independently on contract jobs, or alongside a master craftsman.
2. The National Vocational Training Institute is one of the public institutions in Ghana that offer vocational education courses and trade testing for craftsmen.

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