

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

**Graduate Employability as a Function of Career Decision in the Amhara State TVET System**

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**Abstract**

*The purpose of this research was examining the state of TVET students' choice of occupation as potential factors of their employability. To that end, quantitative data was collected from 361 teachers and 361 students in six TVET colleges through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Eight teachers and nine students selected through purposive sampling method were also involved in independently conducted focus group interview. Instead of employability and match of an occupation to talents and economic implications, level of occupational prestige, desire for higher qualification levels as well as resemblance to role models usually dictated the occupational choices of most TVET students. Besides, most students had negative perceptions for TVET. In contrast to the high attention paid by the government for self-employment, in addition, most students preferred paid employment to self-employment. At the same time, the TVET system is plagued by unemployment. Consequently, considering TVET as one of the solutions to the development challenges in the study area is certain to suffer from lack of employability if problems related to occupational choice are not adequately dealt with. This calls for vigorous vocational counseling practices by deploying competent and experienced counselors that ascertain the market orientation of students' career decisions.*

**Key Words:** *career decision, employability, occupational choice, self-employment, counseling.*

**BACKGROUND**

The contributions of technical and society is an established fact (Chepkemei, vocational education and training (TVET) Watindi, Cheron, Ng'isirei, & Rono, 2012). for the civilization and development of

Accordingly, TVET has emerged as one of the most important solutions for human resource development problems (Afeti, 2014). According to Afeti and King and Palmer (2007; 2010) it is because by generating new jobs and prosperity TVET builds competent workforce and stimulates and sustains socio-economic development. For promoting social mobility and cohesion among people, according to these authorities, TVET need be employable (relevant and quality). Amedorme and Fiagbe (2013) and Krishnan and Shaorshadze (2013), therefore, propose TVET to target on enhancing employment and making the labor market function more effectively and efficiently.

Half a century ago, however, Foster (1965) argued that the match between policy goals and the conceptions and aspirations of students is very essential to ensure the employability of graduates. In spite of honorable and magnificent goals that governments in African countries design to alleviate the problems of unemployment and poverty through TVET, according to him, their goals succeed rarely because the actual perceptions or attitudes and interests of young people may not match with that of the policy goals. Other notable authors (e.g. Castro, 1992; Jones-Hendrickson, 2014; Lauglo, 2010; Psacharopoulos, 1997) also agree on his idea. According to these authors, diverting the attitudes and perceptions of young school leavers to fit their conceptions and aspirations with that of the policy goals is an essential ground to secure employability in TVET. Hartshorn and Sear (2005), similarly, point out that besides labor market factors the interest and inspiration of graduates for work determine their employability. Psacharopoulos (1986) particularly stresses that developing countries are unlikely to address their TVET goals as far as the inherent contradiction between the preferences of students and the education

and training they deliver are not addressed effectively. TVET that does not match well with and unable to create real access to the labor market, however, seldom generates employability. That is because such TVET lacks to win the conviction and inspiration of potential trainees. In this respect, Lyngdoh (2004) contests, TVET by itself may not generate jobs.

For all authorities mentioned above the question over TVET today ponders around its employability. For them, employability is the entirety of TVET and it is affected by different factors, one of which is attributable to the career choice of students. Career choice is one of the vital elements in guaranteeing employability from the personal characteristic perspective of potential trainees. According to McMahon and Watson (2005), however, the choices of occupations and subsequent career paths to follow are traumatic for most prospective trainees. Other notable research results (e.g. McMahon & Watson 2005; Watson, McMahon, Foxcroft, & Els, 2010), in the same vein, verify that most students newly enrolling to TVET across the world are often in a difficulty of career choice because choosing an occupation that fits their personal talents and aspirations highly determines the fate of their future lives.

Consequently, everybody newly arriving to training institutions and going through the practice of career choice is usually subjected to different influences (Watson, McMahon, Foxcroft, & Els, 2010). Such influences are ascribed to personal characteristics, environmental factors, and socio-economic factors. Salami (1999) who conducted a study on the career choice of Nigerian youth underlined that due to inadequate vocational counseling services as well as problems emanating from ignorance, inexperience, peer pressure, parents and teachers, or prestige attributed

to certain occupations misguided many students in their occupational choices. Kniveton (2004), and Salami (2006) supplement that family, school culture, personal characteristics, and peers influence the occupational choices of students. Other several research reports (e.g. Guerra & Braungart-Rieker, 1999; Kniveton, 2004; Otto, 2000; Salami, 2006; Small & McClean, 2002), highly attribute the occupational choice and career aspiration of children to the influence of their parents. They asserted that students are often reluctant to decide and pursue education and training in a specific occupation without the approval or support of their parents. In a similar vein, Bojuwoye and Mbanjwa (2006), Hairston (2000), Mau and Bikos (2000), and Perkins and Peterson (2005) pinpointed that parents are the most important benchmarks (or reference points) in the occupational choice and career development of most TVET college students.

The research findings and opinions regarding the specific family characteristics that influence the career choices of their sons and daughter, however, vary and sometimes conflict to each other. Hossler and Stage (1992), for example, pin down that only the educational level of parents influence the occupational choice of their children whereas Trice (1991) included parental occupation as another major factor in this respect. Mau and Bikos (2000), moreover, proposed level of parental education and income as the factors that play major roles in the occupational choice and aspirations of their children. Boatwright, Ching, and Parr (1992) in contrast argued that each of these family related variables play insignificant roles on the occupational choice and aspirations of students. Bartlett (2009), Castro (1992), and Winch (2013), on the other hand, emphasized that most students give much weight for the social prestige (social

capital) of an occupation during their occupational choice. Castro (1992), for instance, states that in the occupational choice of students "... status and prestige are as important, if not more so, than economic returns" (p. 147). Nevertheless, although most studies agree that the occupational choices and career aspirations of students are highly influenced by the expectations or aspirations of their parents, Shumba and Naong (2012) contend that all the factors described have their own roles in hampering the match of TVET with work place requirements.

Watts (2013) notes that the deficiency in the service of vocational counseling (VC) is the major reason behind career decision problems among TVET students. That is because VC plays pivotal roles in identifying and fine-tuning the interests, talents, and aspirations of potential trainees of TVET. Watts, however, argues that VC is challenged by various problems. First, most segment of the society including potential trainees underestimate TVET and this preoccupies students' feelings and has been forcing them towards other alternatives, even at times white-collar jobs are more difficult to find and deliver less earnings. Second, counselors themselves may lead potential trainees to wrong decisions by failing to provide the right and timely counseling services and guiding toward wrong occupations that ultimately expose them for unemployment. Thirdly, parents whose decision may not take the intrinsic interests and potential of their daughters and sons into consideration may lead towards wrong occupational choice and eventual unemployment. Fourth, the influence of peers or colleagues can mislead the occupational choice of the youth. In general, TVET investment accompanied by weak VC likely yields low returns because it involves trainees who are ill informed and consequently made

decisions that mismatch with their interests, capabilities, and aspirations.

### **Problem Statement**

The theoretical and empirical observations discussed above, in general, reveal that the career decisions of students are one of the major factors that can be ascribed for influencing TVET employability. An examination of the state of those factors in the context of Ethiopia is worthwhile because the TVET system has long been prone to stereotyping, lack of relevance, and unemployment (MoE, 2008; 2010; Teklehaimanot, 2002). According to the possible data obtained, there were about 659 public TVET institutions in 2014 in Ethiopia out of which 89 (13.5%) were found in the State of Amhara, a state that shares about 15% of the size of the country (about 157,162 square kilometers wide) and more than 25% (about 25 million) of the population (MoE, 2016). In those institutions, at the same time, there were about 273,601 trainees in aggregate out of which 63,294 (23.13%) were in the current study area. Fundamentally, the TVET system is guided by a strategy designed by MoE in 2008 that gave due emphasis for an outcome-based delivery system. According to the strategy (MoE, 2008), outcome-based is to mean identifying and benchmarking competences demanded by the market for providing training as well as reliance on dependable VC as early as pre-TVET level so that the target population can choose the right career path for livelihoods.

Despite a due policy emphasis provided for TVET expansion (Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 1994) and strengthening of career guidance to match individual aspirations of trainees with the training delivered and labor market prospects (MoE, 2008; 2010), documentary examination reveal that the problem of graduate unemployment is not only so

pervasive but also not yet paid with adequate attention (TVET Bureau, 2002 E. C). Even though the strategy (MoE, 2008) emphasizes on the delivery of VC starting at pre-TVET level to effectively polish and fine-tune the conceptions of potential trainees and attract their aspiration towards TVET, a wide range of evidences reveal persistent graduate unemployment. How much the practice of VC has been materialized is subject to investigation not only because the employability of graduates is much below the required but the topic has never been dealt ever before in the study area as well.

In relation to career decision the challenges potential trainees face during their occupational choice may incorporate different components. To ease the collection, analysis and interpretation of data, this study has divided them into three interrelated themes: the conceptions and aspirations of students towards TVET; employment choices of students; and the benchmarks students refer during their occupational choices. Potentially, all of these affect the employability of graduates as a result of which understanding the status of these variables can help to deduce their potential effect on the employability of graduates. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to investigate the state of career decision as a potential factor influencing the employability of TVET graduates in the State of Amhara in Ethiopia. The following three basic questions guided the study:

1. What do students and teachers feel about the aspiration of students regarding TVET?
2. What does the employment choice of students look like in the study area?
3. What are the antecedent points of references for the occupational choice by students?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

This study examined the career decisions of students as possible factors of graduate employability. It employed the cross-sectional descriptive survey design (Gray, 2004) in complement with the phenomenological method. The phenomenological research method helped to complement the survey method with the intention of illuminating participants' experiences of career decision making. By employing this approach it has been attempted to put aside preconceptions and to understand a phenomenon of interest through interview transcripts (Patton, 2002). The mixed method was sought to create better understanding over the problem under investigation than either the quantitative or the qualitative approach alone (Creswell, 2012). The quantitative data of a survey approach assisted in elucidating an overall picture of a study whereas the more fine-grained information achieved through interviews or documentary examination help to garner a more exhaustive data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Among the different mixed methods, the explanatory sequential design (QUAN- Qual model) was followed because this model is possibly not only the most popular model in educational research but also the one that actually demonstrates while one filling the data gaps of the other (Creswell, 2012). Accordingly, first quantitative data were collected and analyzed based on what the qualitative data required were determined and gathered.

### **Sampling and Sample Size**

Since one of the purposes of the mixed methods design is data triangulation, Creswell (2012) and Patton (2002) recommend that the mixed methods sampling design is so essential for studies that seek to triangulate their data. That is, both the information-rich and the representative sampling paradigms are

essential in such designs. Among about 79 public TVET colleges organized into ten clusters, accordingly, six colleges were involved in this study through a two-stage sampling procedure. According to Creswell (2012) and Dattalo (2008), this was because extracting participants through a mere probability sampling technique from a hierarchically structured population environment may nest some segments of the population unnecessarily and affect the relevance of the conclusion thereafter. To this effect, primarily, Bahir Dar and Injibara polytechnic colleges were drawn through a simple random sampling technique. Then four satellite colleges (Merawi and Durbete from the former and Dangila and Addis Kidam TVET colleges from the latter cluster centers respective) were selected through the simple random sampling method.

Teachers and the students were drawn through a mixture of stratified and then simple random sampling techniques to address occupational diversity. Among 3,749 teachers and 65,704 students (TVET Bureau, 2008 E. C.) 384 were drawn and filled out the questionnaires from each group (teachers and students) out of which 361 questionnaires of each were found legible for analysis. The sample size was intentionally so large to avoid the risks of losing questionnaires due to different problems (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

To minimize the sampling error that stems from the disproportionality of population size (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009), 96 teachers and 96 students filled out the questionnaires from the cluster centers whereas 48 teachers and 48 students did it from the four satellite colleges. Among them eight teachers and nine students that were more assertive and conversant were selected through purposive sampling technique and interviewed independently.

The collection of qualitative data from teachers and the students was, however, limited only to Bahir Dar Polytechnic College because conducting an in-depth interview in the six study colleges was unnecessarily time taking and laborious.

### **Instruments**

Primary data for this study has been collected through self-prepared instruments (questionnaires, one-to-one interviews, and focus group interviews) all of which were conducted after translation into Amharic for enhancing communication. A multiple data collection (data triangulation) method was applied to refine personal perceptions further and tap the advantages of data triangulation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Five level attitude scales (1 = very low to 5 = very high) were designed for all the sub-scales of the questionnaires. Three packages of items were administered: nine items emphasizing on students' conceptions and aspirations for TVET; seven items on the benchmarks students refer for their occupational choice; and six items focusing on the employment choices of students. Students were involved in all the three packages whereas teachers filled out only the first two packages on which they are expected to have adequate information.

The questionnaires were piloted at Debre-Birhan Polytechnic College, which has a similar setting with those included in the study, to ascertain reliability and validity factors. This by itself can inform the suitability of the instrument to assure the

criterion validity. The comments secured from TVET teachers and experts also approved both the content and construct validity of the instruments. Although the questionnaires have demonstrated good internal consistency and homogeneity among the sub-scales in each package, some items were excluded based on the feedbacks from the participants and on the inter-item correlations indicated by the pilot data analysis. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach Alpha) of the sub-scales in each package after improvement were 0.764, 0.791, and 0.777 respectively. Similarly, alpha values were 0.645, 0.946, and 0.617 consecutively after the questionnaires were fully implemented. All these values were considered suitable for the purpose of the current study because, according to Creswell (2012) and Larson-Hall (2010),  $\alpha = 0.60$  is the lowest acceptable value for a questionnaire with items less than 20 in number.

**Examination of Assumptions:** Before getting on to the actual data analysis, the data were checked for whether they meet the required assumptions. Besides the implementation of a random sampling technique, to that effect, the sample sizes of the two participant groups were made appropriate and comparable. Scale reliability (alpha coefficient) of each of the variables considered by the study were also examined and screened out, which can be credited for verifying assumptions. What is left is to check the normality of score distribution and avoid errors resulting from outliers, often identified by looking at skewness and kurtosis ratios.

**Table 1.** Scale Reliability, Skewness and Kurtosis Ratios of Items after Data Collection

Participants	Variables	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha	Skewness	Kurtosis
Students (N = 361)	Employment choice of students	6	.645	-.015	-.492
Teachers & Students (N = 722)	Student perception and aspiration	9	.946	-.168	-.174
	Student benchmarks	7	.617	-.118	-.421

According to Table 1, despite the slightly positive or negative skewnesses in each of the variables, the values (neglecting the negative signs) of skewness and kurtosis for all the items utilized are in an acceptable range of normality. That is because normality is not violated as far as the absolute value of skewness ratio is below 2.0 according to Larson-Hall (2010) or even below 3.0 according to other more liberal interpretations (e.g. Blaikie, 2003; Kline, 2005). Similarly, Kline (2005) suggests that a kurtosis level below 10 does not indicate a significant departure from normality and hence is it utilized as a cut point in this study. As illustrated by Table 1, the scores of both skewness and kurtosis for all the items were within the acceptable range of values, which approves that the values are suitable enough to avoid the effects of outliers and implement the envisaged parametric test in the study.

### Data Analysis

A thematic data analysis that implemented the descriptive (mean and standard deviation) and inferential (between group and within group *t*-test) statistics was manipulated by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-20) computer software. Five percent ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) level of significance was applied to determine whether groups of scores are significantly different because it is often a conventional standard degree of significance for educational and behavioral studies (Creswell, 2012; Gay, Mills, &

Airasian, 2009). *Cohn's d* has also been implemented to measure effect sizes index (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). To help refine (triangulate or complement) the quantitative data results qualitative data gathered through interview guides and documentary examination was undertaken through exploratory thematic analysis by embedding in the quantitative data. In line with Creswell (2012), the qualitative data were helpful to substantiate and tie up the loose ends of the quantitative data. Finally, the entire data was discussed (interpreted) through the integration of the two data types, by embedding the qualitative data under the quantitative ones.

## RESULTS

### Student Perception and Aspiration

The intention in this section is to examine whether students are with positive perceptions and aspirations for TVET in general and for their respective occupations in particular. Nine items were set to that end. Although the mean score of students is higher than that of teachers, the composite mean scores of both teachers ( $M = 30.98$ ,  $SD = 4.46$ ) and students ( $M = 36.45$ ,  $SD = 5.07$ ) are greater than the expected mean score (which is 27). As can be seen from Table 1 the mean score difference between the two groups is, however, strong ( $t = -15.290$ ,  $df = 693.942$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $d = -1.20$ ). This indicates that even though teachers and students feel that the perceptions and aspirations of students are favorable for

TVET and its utilities in all parameters described by the items, the perception of students for the improvement of their

conception and aspiration towards TVET is more optimistic than do teachers sense it.

**Table 2:** Independent t-test between Teachers & Students on Student Perception for TVET

Variable	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					Cohn's d
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	
					(2-tailed)			
Perception and aspiration of students	10.460	.001	-	709	.000	-5.477	.358	-1.20
			15.309		.000			
			-	693.942	.000	-5.477	.358	

The FGI conducted with both teachers and students substantiated the abovementioned findings. Among nine interviewees involved in the FGI, six students have disclosed that before they joined BDPC they had negative perceptions for TVET. One interviewee (SP6), for instance, noted the following: "I perceived TVET inferior to academic education and dumping ground for less achieving students." Now, nonetheless, he described that most of the students including himself recognize TVET as a profession that can generate as much earnings as possible despite the challenges it is trapped by the absence of qualified teachers and material resources. Another interviewee (SP5) who had never thought that TVET might be a valuable education has reported that she is now happy for joining it although she similarly worries about the lingering problem of teacher competence. The other one (SP8) disliked TVET not because he had a wrong perception but because he had no adequate information to guide his decision. That is, TVET graduates in his village are often unemployed and wander from place to place looking for jobs. He, however, joined TVET not only due to failure to join preparatory school but also pushed by his family. He reported that he was convinced to join because his family keenly advised

him that it was not because they were TVET graduates that the youth in his neighborhood were unemployed rather it was because they did not possess skills demanded in the labor market with the required competences. Just like those mentioned by SP5, now he has developed an optimistic perception for TVET.

Only two students had positive perceptions for TVET before they joined it. Among them one (SP1) has stated that he joined TVET with his own interest and the advice of his father despite he has scored 3.4 grade point average in his 10<sup>th</sup> grade national exam and the consequent possibility he had to go to preparatory schooling. The other one (SP2) has replied that he has a strong inclination for TVET as of childhood although he has bitterly complained quality problems and its consequence on his fate. This participant, besides, blamed the college for utilizing a rigid tracking method based on grade 10<sup>th</sup> grade point to assign him in an occupation that was not his priority. Another interviewee (SP3), on the other hand, reported that she had neither positive nor negative perception for TVET but joined it simply because she wanted to keep herself busy when she failed to join preparatory schooling. Now this girl is so happy on TVET but just like her

colleagues, she is highly dismayed by the weaknesses of teachers. According to her, she and most her colleagues are comfortable with TVET but are highly anxious for their fate because of weak training delivery process due to problem of material scarcity and teacher competence. Teachers involved in the FGI more or less agree with students regarding the perceptions and aspirations of the latter towards TVET. Nevertheless, they comment that while selecting an occupation most students give priority for qualification levels than the employability and match of an occupation to their talents. Students also verified this during the interview. One student (SP6), for instance, has reported that he always regrets for joining an occupation that he does not want by considering only the chance that the occupation gave him to join a higher qualification level. Otherwise, both students and teachers agree that currently the perception and aspiration of most students is promising for realizing the goals set in relation to TVET in the region.

**Employment Choices of Students**

According to the descriptive results of quantitative data, the mean scores on the employment choice of students portray that government and non-government (NGO) organizations are their prior choices of employment by the students (see Table 2).

Accordingly, although self-employment is the priority of the TVET strategy and the government, students in contrast give priority for paid employment to self-employment. That means, employment alternatives that included employment in private company or enterprise, self-employment, employment in family firm, and establishing or joining cooperative enterprises came in the minds of students when employment opportunities in government organizations and NGOs failed.

A cross-tabulation was also conducted to have a clearer picture on the influence of parental background on the employment choice of their sons and daughters. Educational background and job type of students’ parents were emphasized in this respect because literature so far reviewed has pinpointed the two variables for playing significant roles on the career choice of students. The results of data cross-tabulation, therefore, denoted that students from parents of all educational and job types inclined towards paid employment than self-employment. This shows that neither educational backgrounds nor types of jobs parents are engaged make significant differences on the career choices of students.

**Table 3:** Comparison of Employment Choices by Students

Statistic	Government employment	Employment in NGO	Employment in private company	Self-employment	Join family firm	Join cooperative enterprises
Mean	3.57	3.56	2.81	2.93	2.37	2.51
Std. Deviation	0.899	0.899	0.963	1.363	0.932	1.106

The findings regarding the intention of employment choice by the students described so far also coincide with the experiences of their predecessors. Table 3

synthesizes the past five years’ tracer study results of TVET Bureau (2004 E. C.; 2005 E. C.; 2006 E. C.). Despite the bureau has targeted to improve self-employment step-

by-step and bring up the number of self-employed graduates to 56% by 2008 E. C., the tracer study results inform that an overwhelming majority of the graduates preferred paid employment to self-employment. Among the graduates of 2003 who have job opportunities (36.1%), for instance, a sum of 30.6% (about 84.8% of totally employed) have been engaged on paid employment whereas only an

aggregate of 5.5% (15.2% of the total) were self-employed. Further calculation of the data reveals almost a similar trend for the remaining years. Throughout the years indicated, moreover, employment in government organizations exceeded all the rest employment opportunities. This unveils that the traditional government employment syndrome persists in the study area.

**Table 4:** Employment Situation of Graduates by Sector throughout the GTP Years

Year	Number of Graduates	Employment Situation of Graduates						
		Paid Employment				Self-Employed		Total Employment Rate
		Government organizations	NGOs	Private companies	Not Specified	Personal Enterprises	Cooperative Enterprises	
2003	31276	19.1%	1.8%	9.1%	0.6%	3.3%	2.2%	36.1%
2004	24222	22.8%	14.5%	2.4%	-	6.8%	5.5%	52.0%
2005	18927	26.0%	3.0%	16.0%	2.0%	11.0%	9.0%	67.0%
2006	18410	13.3%	2.4%	12.8%	2.4%	4.4%	3.3%	38.6%

**Source:** *Tracer studies of 2004 E.C. through 2006 E.C. and TVET Bureau report of 2008 E.C.*

The table also demonstrates that establishment of private and cooperative enterprises did not show consistent and adequate improvements in spite of a little but oscillating progress throughout the years in focus (2003 to 2006 in E. C.). The data, in addition, indicate a tendency that graduates are inclined towards self-employment than establishing cooperative enterprises. As a whole, it is understandable from the table that the government rhetoric and slogan of enhancing self-employment and expanding cooperative enterprises is still far from effective materialization and bringing attitudinal changes in this respect seem to be taking longer.

### Occupational Choice by Students

The intention of dealing on benchmarks of students during their occupational choice is with the intention of examining whether the yardstick they utilize as reference points enhances their employability. Seven subscales (see Table 4) were utilized and the mean scores of teachers and students compared and contrasted to that end. As regards the dependence on cost-benefit analysis and fitness of an occupation to personal talents during occupational choice, to start with, the mean scores of students were 4.34 and 3.90 (with SDs 1.00 and 1.39) consecutively. This infers that most students feel that they utilize those factors during their occupational decision because their mean scores are high enough to say so in view of the five labeled Likert scaled instrument. The mean scores of teachers on those points were, however, 2.77 and 2.61 (with SD = 1.24 and 1.27) consecutively, both of which are low in size. As can be seen from Table 5, the t-test values on the two points show strong and moderate differences between the two groups respectively ( $t = -18.659$ ,  $df = 690.356$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -1.40$  and  $t = -10.386$ ,  $df = 719$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.77$ ). In contrast to students, accordingly, teachers

sense that fewer students dwell on cost-benefit analysis and fitness to personal talents in choosing occupations for training.

The other more binding factor in the occupational choice of students is VC. The responses of both teachers and students with respect to VC service are not different from their responses to the previous two factors. That is, a less proportion of teachers ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) know that most students depend on VC to choose an occupation whereas the majority of the students ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ) feel that each of them often depended on VC in their occupational choice. The *t*-test for independent samples at this point indicates modest difference between the two groups ( $t = -6.256$ ,  $df = 689.419$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $d = -0.46$ ). Whether students depend on peer influence while choosing an occupation is another factor where a notable difference was observed on the views of teachers and students. That is, while the majority of teachers ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) perceive that most students are dictated by peer influences on their occupational choice, it is the minority ( $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ) of the students who agree on the existence of peer influence in occupational choice. The *t*-test result between the two groups revealed a moderate difference ( $t = 9.561$ ,  $df = 653.240$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.72$ ).

With respect to parental advice the finding of the current study reveal as most students do not refer their parents during their occupational choice, unlike various research findings that showed parents as one of the major benchmarks by students for their occupational choice. The mean scores for both teachers ( $M = 2.71$  and  $SD = 1.13$ ) and students ( $M = 2.61$  and  $SD = 1.64$ ) were low and at the same time the mean score difference was very weak ( $t = -.968$ ,  $df = 639.52$ ,  $p = 0.033$ ,  $d = 0.09$ ). This implies that students do not rely on parental advices for their occupational decision.

**Table 5:** Independent Samples t-test between Teachers and Students on Student Benchmarks for Choosing an Occupation

Variables	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					Cohn's <i>d</i>
	<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	
Cost-benefit analysis	70.545	.000	-18.659	720	.000	-1.565	.084	-1.40
			-18.659	690.356	.000	-1.565	.084	
Fitness to personal talents	1.783	.182	-10.386	719	.000	-1.031	.099	-0.77
			-10.387	714.233	.000	-1.031	.099	
Vocational counseling	20.784	.000	-6.254	717	.000	-.617	.099	-0.46
			-6.256	689.419	.000	-.617	.099	
Peer influence	114.700	.000	9.561	720	.000	.950	.099	0.72
			9.561	653.240	.000	.950	.099	
Parental advices	166.838	.000	.968	719	.033	.102	.105	0.09
			.968	639.520	.033	.102	.105	
Social prestige of the occupation	16.428	.000	-2.290	719	.022	-.235	.103	-0.17
			-2.291	696.358	.022	-.235	.103	
Role models influence	74.292	.000	-2.184	720	.029	-.224	.103	0.16
			-2.184	673.868	.029	-.224	.103	

The reputation and respect that someone seeks to earn was also one of the focal points of this study as a yardstick to indicate occupational choice among students. Calculation of the mean scores of both groups on reputation of an occupation indicated that students highly depend on occupational prestige during their occupational choice. The mean scores of teachers and students were 3.16 (SD = 1.24) and 3.40 (SD = 1.50) respectively. The *t*-test for independent samples between the two groups also indicated a very weak difference ( $t = -2.291$ ,  $df = 696.358$ ,  $p = .022$ ,  $d = -0.17$ ). A similar result was obtained regarding the influence of role models in the occupational choice of students. The computation of the mean scores for both teachers and students on this factor indicated that students highly depended on role models during their occupational choice because the mean scores for teachers was 3.04 (SD = 1.19) whereas that of the students was 3.26 (SD = 1.55). The *t*-test for independent samples between the two groups also depicted a very weak differences ( $t = -2.184$ ,  $df = 673.868$ ,  $p = 0.029$ ,  $d = 0.16$ ). This implies that occupational prestige and the role models students refer highly attribute the occupational and career choice of TVET students in the study area. Not only that, this result also refutes their claim of dependence on cost-benefit analysis and fitness of an occupation to their personal talents.

## DISCUSSION

### Perceptions and Aspirations of Students

The results of this study on the perception and aspiration of students for TVET revealed that students are favorable for TVET and its utilities in all the yardsticks described, even though the positive perceptions of students were confirmed to have developed after they joined TVET. In

spite of their dismay on the lack of competent teachers and scarcity of material supply for the training, in general, all the students involved in the FGI have confirmed that they are happy for joining TVET. Most of the teachers involved in the FGI, similarly, agreed with students regarding the perceptions and aspirations of most students towards TVET. In line with King and Palmer (2010) and Oketch (2007) the majority of students involved in the current study did not reflect a negative view for TVET, which Foster (1965), Jones-Hendrickson (2014), Lauglo (2010), Psacharopoulos (1986) used to ascribe to them. That is, the aspirations of most students did antagonize neither with government policies and strategies nor the advocacies of many scholars of the field given that the deteriorating quality problems may probably divert student perceptions back to old views that stereotype TVET with derogatory remarks. The negative perception that had been held by the six participants among the students, therefore, implies a poor practice of VC that not only Hansen (2006), and Watts (2013) but also MoE (2008) strongly suggested to be delivered as early as pre-TVET level. The finding, particularly, has a discordant relationship with MoE (2010) that underpins the need for an early orientation of school leavers through qualified and competent counselors.

In contrast to Castro (1992), too, instead of status and prestige factors, economic returns are increasingly dictating the decisions of students towards TVET in the study area. That is because, unlike old times, students did not underestimate TVET as far as it is employable and hence just developed positive perceptions for it, given that most students still outweigh qualification levels than the employability and match of an occupation to their talents during their occupational choice. In

contrast to the reports of Bartlett (2009) and Winch (2013), furthermore, the traditional view that dignified white-collar occupations and prejudiced TVET as a low status and unattractive occupation is being eroded from the mentality of most trainees. The pathway for vertical mobility (towards higher education) that has long been considered as another detriment for TVET attractiveness is alleviated by the TVET strategy (MoE, 2008) and hence may have played its own roles in attracting student interests. In general, unless lack of market orientation and problems of quality have discouraged the interest of potential trainees towards TVET, problems related to perception and aspirations are improving steadily. Therefore, it seems that the perceptions and aspirations of student no more impede efforts applied to realize the overall contributions of TVET in development and poverty alleviation.

#### **Employment Choice of Students**

Regarding their employment choice, government and NGO employments are the priority choices for most of them. That means, the concerns of Foster (1965), Jones-Hendrickson (2014), Lauglo (2010), Psacharopoulos (1986) about the incompatibility between government intentions and career choices of student still persisted in the study area. That is, despite the government intends to enhance self-employment, more and more students rather prefer paid employment to self-employment. Similarly, although it matched with Boatwright, Ching, and Parr (1992) who argued that family related variables have insignificant roles on the career choice and aspirations of students the current finding contrasted with the majority research reports (e.g. Bojuwoye & Mbanjwa, 2006; Guerra & Braungart-Rieker, 1999; Hairston 2000, Kniveton, 2004; Otto, 2000; Perkins & Peterson, 2005; Salami, 2006; Small & McClean, 2002) that demonstrated the pivotal roles

parents play in the career decision of their children. Unlike the suggestions of Hossler and Stage (1992), Mau and Bikos (2000) and Trice (1991), too, neither the level of educational nor the type of job or income of parents did influence the employment choice of the current students. In the context of the current study area, as a whole, parents are no more one of the most commonly consulted and influential sources of career information and advice irrespective of their level of education and type of job they are engaged.

#### **Occupational Choices of Students**

This is the third theme considered by the study to gauge the career decision of students as a potential function to their employability. Quite mixed results are obtained in this respect. With respect to dependence of students on cost-benefit analysis and fitness of an occupation to their personal talents most students feel that they dwell on both cost-benefit analysis and fitness to personal talents whereas teachers believe that fewer students consider those factors during their occupational choices. Teachers' perception, however, seems an argument that is more plausible because graduate unemployment may not have been such a widespread problem had students depended on cost-benefit analysis and fitness of an occupation to their personal talents during their occupational choice. In relation to this many notable sources (e.g. Hansen, 2006; Kagaari, 2007; MoE, 2010; Salami, 1999; Watts, 2013) contest that such defects stem from problems in the practice of VC. Despite the contradiction between the views of teachers and students with respect to dependence on VC, whereby a higher proportion of teachers condemn students for not to depend on VC which the majority of students denied, the interview report that confirms non-professional and inexperienced teachers shoulder the counseling service is an evidence for the

claim. No matter potential trainees have relied on it or not the counseling service provided under such situations is poor and worthless. Therefore, students may have relied on VC just as they have claimed but it did not benefit them effectively because the service was irrelevant and worthless for them.

The concern of Salami (1999; 2006) that emphasized on the deficiency of exploiting VC in developing countries has, therefore, been rightly persisted in the context of the current study area. That is the goals set by policy makers to enhance TVET employability through proper counseling service did materialize rarely because the personnel assigned to the task of VC are neither professionals nor experienced and competent. Accordingly, high rate of graduate unemployment is meant lack of delivering relevant and quality VC to enable prospective students identify their capabilities and talents not only to eventually arrive at proper decisions on their occupational choices but to utilize their knowledge and skills for their livelihoods as well.

With respect to peer influence on occupational choice, however, a notable difference was observed between teachers and students. While most teachers perceive that students are dictated by peer influences on their occupational choice, most students responded the reverse. In line with the various sources of literature reviewed (e.g. Gasskov, 2007; Kniveton, 2004; Salami, 2006; Watson, McMahon, Foxcroft, & Els, 2010; Watts, 2013) the possible explanation for the problem is that peer (colleague) influence has likely played a misleading role in the occupational choice of many students. That means, TVET employability in this area is more likely attributable to occupational choice because, on the one hand, there is a problem of employability and students benchmark

peers and role models than VC for their occupational choice on the other. Had the VC delivered been appropriate and students have relied more on it than on peer influences TVET employability may not have been a problem in the study area. That is why Psacharopoulos (1986) asserts that the inherent contradiction between the preferences of students and the education and training they acquire often inhibits most developing countries from addressing their TVET goals.

Other than peer effect, different research reports inform that parental advice is also a central factor in affecting student perceptions and their aspirations in relation to TVET. In contrast to several research reports (e.g. Bojuwoye & Mbanjwa, 2006; Hairston, 2000; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Perkins & Peterson, 2005) who proposed that parents are the most important benchmarks in the occupational choice of their sons and daughters the current study unveiled less student dependence on their parents. The parental background of students is the possible explanation attributable to the finding because most of students' parents involved in the study were illiterate and engaged on farming activities. Under the context of the study area, most such parents likely have no adequate knowledge or information to deliver their sons or daughters with valuable advice for occupational choice. A father engaged on farming activity, for instance, may not have the information or knowledge to render his son or daughter with adequate advice about occupations other than agriculture. Whatsoever reasons are there behind, this finding is so welcoming because, in contrast to the concerns of Watts (2013), it heralds low parental intervention that might possibly be worthless for potential trainees when viewed from the context of the current study area.

As regards the influence of reputation and esteem or social prestige that someone seeks to earn from a specific occupation, the findings of the current study demonstrated that this factor plays a significant role on the occupational choice of students. The effect of role models also played similar roles on the occupational choice of the students. Most teachers and the students agreed on both points. Just like the suggestions of Bartlett (2009), Castro (1992), and Winch (2013), accordingly, most students in the current study area give much weight for the social value or prestige (social capital) of an occupation and role models in their occupational choice. The concerns of Gasskov (2007) whereby the earning and prestige of an occupation dictate the occupational choice of students is, therefore, vividly realized in the study area. In aggregate it implies that there is a deficiency in the VC service to persuade potential enrollees to join employable occupations.

### CONCLUSIONS

Although the majority of students involved in the study did not reflect the negative views for TVET ascribed to them by many scholars, yet most of them preferred paid employment to self-employment. Reluctance to rely on VC while choosing an occupation for acquiring skills by most students coupled with poor counseling service has disabled the market orientation of their occupational choice with a possible consequence of unemployment. The findings also provide evidence that instead of VC influences from peers, occupational prestige as well as role models they refer were important factors that determined the career decisions of the youth in the study area. Consequently, graduate unemployment in TVET is a wide problem in the area under investigation. This not only reveals the persistence of career decision problem by the students, which has been argued by different scholars as far

back as half a century ago, but also denotes that government efforts of enhancing self-employment and graduate employability are far from materialization.

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