

ET Participation, Triggers, Perception and Aspiration

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Abstract

Students choose their line of study, among other things, depending on their perceived abilities, the demand of the subject they are going to study, the probability of successes as well as the job opportunity after completion of their studies. In this regard some factors trigger students' participation in different kinds of educational opportunities. Such factors affect students' participation, their perception and future aspiration in relation to educational stream they want to follow. In view of this, the study aims to provide information about TVET students' perception with regard to the program they are following.

Specifically, the study focuses on the following four areas:

- *The perceptions of students regarding TVET participation and the triggers that might lead to their TVET participation;*
- *The types and sources of information required and used by TVET students in deciding whether to participate or not;*
 - *Key influences of students' study and career decisions.*
- *The educational and employment outcomes expected by TVET students and;*

Introduction

Following the 1995 National Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia, Technical & Vocational Education Training (TVET) is being given alongside the college preparatory

program. TVET participation which was about 2 % of secondary students before the year 2002, has now reached its peak (MoE, 2002, MoE, 2005). The major objective of the

TVET program is to fulfil the critical manpower shortage of lower and mid-level skilled workforce (TGE, 1994; AACG, 2005).

A well designed and implemented TVET program indeed is one way of producing competent manpower, especially in countries like Ethiopia where the need for skilled manpower is evident.

While the above mentioned objective of TVET, by its intent, is more or less accepted by academicians, the attitude of students, parents and the community in general towards the program is not yet adequately known. Information on the perception of the different segments of the society about the program can contribute to the better understanding of the implementation problems as well as to the identification of optimal solutions. More importantly, knowing the attitudes and perceptions of students, who are the primary beneficiaries of the program, is of paramount importance in pinpointing major problem areas; and this may help in discovering new solutions that make the TVET an effective program. Such information also expands discussion of the issue beyond the academicians' circle, so that there is more opportunity for educators and policy makers to consider students' perceptions and aspirations.

In view of the above, this study attempts to give information about TVET program by considering the views of students. The main objective of the study is to provide information about current TVET students' attitude towards the program and the information they used when deciding to participate in TVET. Specifically, the study provides information and analysis on the perception of current TVET students regarding their participation in TVET and the triggers that might have led to this participation. The type and sources of information required and used, the educational and employment outcomes expected by students, and the key influencing factors of students' career decisions are also addressed in the study.

1. Methodology

The study was conducted on randomly selected 125 TVET students, who were studying at different departments of St. Mary's University College during the 2005/06 Academic Year.

Data related to the major objectives of the study was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire. The proportion of *10 + 1*, *10 +2* and *10 +3* students in the sample were 32 percent, 36 percent and 32 percent, respectively.

The sample was almost evenly divided by gender, with 57 males and 68 females. The age of the respondents varies from 17 to 31 with more than 60 percent of the respondents being between the age of 17 and 20. The data was analyzed using statistical techniques like percentages, frequency, mean values, standard deviation, and χ^2 analysis.

2. Triggers to TVET Participation

The core concept of this study is aimed at discovering motivation behind the decision to join TVET. To that end, the relevant survey question was 'How important were the following reasons when deciding whether to participate or not to participate in TVET program?' Respondents were asked to rate the reasons as 'very important', 'important', 'neither important nor unimportant', or 'unimportant'.

Different factors may trigger students to choose one particular educational path over a range of other choices. In this regard, 'failure/low result in the grade 10 National Exam' was reported as *very important* reason by the majority of students (64 %), and as *important* reason by 16 % of the respondents. This finding effectively rules out the possibility that these students are studying TVET by choice, indicating that TVET participation is basically a fall-back plan for those who failed to join the college preparatory program. Next to failure/low result in grade 10 National Exam, the fact that the TVET program is accredited by the government was rated by 60% and 10 % of students as *very important* and *important* reasons respectively.

This factor seems to be closely tied with the issue of future job opportunities, as accredited programs are expected to have a better job opportunity than those which are not. However, future job opportunity, which was expected to be one of the important factors for TVET participation, was rated as *very important* reason by only 12% of the students. This indicates that students do not choose TVET expecting good job opportunity upon completing of the studies.

Other important triggers reported by the respondents include *parental pressure* and *interesting subjects* (which probably applies to St Mary's University College, as none of the "blue collar" courses are given), which were identified as very important reasons by 54 % and 53 % of the respondents respectively.

On the other hand the practice of giving new students *career advice* on what particular stream to follow was found to be less important trigger factors which were reported as *very important* and *important* reasons by only 19 % and 12 % of the sample students, respectively.

Attempt was also made to see the existence of difference between both sexes and age groups with regard to the importance of the trigger factors mentioned above. However, no significant difference was observed for all factors except for *parental pressure* and *practical experience* in both respects .

When we disaggregate the above result by age group, *parental pressure* was viewed as the lowest important trigger (around 10 %) for students who are in the higher age group of 26 years and above. This particular group views *practical experience* as a more important trigger to TVET participation when compared with the lower age group. This is possibly due to the fact that attendees who are in this particular age group have already been actively employed for quite some time and consider the courses as a means to better their situation by acquiring practical experience from the program. The results for other factors are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Important Triggers to TVET Participation as Viewed by Students

TRIGGER FACTORS	VERY IMPORT ANT	IMPORT ANT	NEITHER IMPORTAN T NOR UNIMPORT ANT'	UNIMPORT ANT
Lower Achievement in the national grade 10 exam	64	16	11	9
Interesting subjects	53	20	10	17
Expected good job opportunity	12	32	25	31
Possibility of Continuing higher level academic training	40	19	31	10
Parental Pressure	54	24	12	10
Career Advice given at school	19	12	50	19
Recognized Certificate/Diploma	60	10	7	23

3. Students' Perception, Expected Educational Outcome and Employment Aspiration

The success of any teaching-learning process is highly affected by the initial interest of students towards the educational program. In this regard, after completion of grade 10, only 11% of all the respondents had wanted to join the TVET stream while the remaining 89% had wanted to enroll into the college preparatory program. This indicates the majority of current TVET students had initially joined the program against their wish. So, all things considered, how did the students feel when they first joined the program? The result showed that 86% of the students were disappointed, 9 % were happy, and 5 % were indifferent. These figures are made potent when one sees that the program was rated lower than college preparatory program by 77%, better by 7%, and on par by 16% of the sample students.

These facts leave nothing to the imagination as to how the program could be impaired at the onset when one considers most of the students didn't want to join the program, were not happy when they joined the program, and have rated the program lower than the alternative college preparatory program.

Further gender-disaggregated analysis shows that there is a difference in the ratings of the attitudes toward TVET, in that female students had a greater tendency than their male counterparts to perceive their TVET studies as equal or better opportunity when compared to the college preparatory programs.

A positive finding has also emerged from the study about the improvement of students' perception about the program. Things took a turn for the better for the majority (78%) of the students, who found their perception of TVET improved compared to the original expectations they had at the start of their TVET courses. However, the level of improvement was different for this group as 16 %, 57 % and 27 % of the students reported their perception has improved to great extent, to some extent and to a little extent respectively. Moreover, the findings of the study showed students' attitudes toward their TVET participation was found to be improving as the level of study progress from $10 + 1$ to $10 + 2$ and to $10 + 3$. This may indicate that an exaggerated negative attitude towards the program was probably caused by lack of adequate information and attitudes improve as students get to know more about the program during the course of their education.

In general, there could be several reasons for the observed students' negative attitude. Among these, the main ones could be related to future job opportunity, community's attitude and the possibility of academic and professional growth expected by following the program. With regard to professional expectation, most of the students (65%) don't expect to build their future career with the educational path they have started. As indicated in the previous section, most of the students join the program for reasons other than 'good job opportunity'. Students' attitude about the community's view about the TVET program can also have an effect on students' own attitude. By choice or otherwise, the students will have their expectations based on their own perception and that of the community's that they live in when they join the program.

In this regard the finding indicated that 68% of the students believe the society has a low esteem for TVET, while only 7% believe otherwise, with a quarter claiming that TVET is highly regarded by the society they live in.

The ultimate objective of TVET program is to equip students with different skills which would enable them to join the labor market (Wanna, 1998). The survey also sought information from respondents on educational destinations anticipated and employment outcomes expected by them. Questions were included in the questionnaire that aimed at glimpsing where students expect themselves to be after completing the program.

When asked their five-year plans after completion of their TVET program, 46% of the students wanted to get employment with what they have learned, while the remaining 54% would attend classes at a university or work and attend classes at the same time. This current TVET students' high aspiration to continue their tertiary level education is consistent with their initial wish to join college preparatory program. Even though 46 % of the students indicated that they want to join the labor force within five years time upon completion of their study, the majority (65 %) wouldn't expect their current education to serve them as the basis for their long term career.

When one talks about employment, there is an option of being self-employed or getting employed. In any case, of those who want to work, 15% opt for employment at private companies, 8% at government institutions, 46% at NGOs, and the remaining 31% wanted to take a shot at becoming entrepreneurs. A significant difference was observed between male and female students with regard to expected employment outcome. Even though, working in NGOs was the priority employment aspiration for both male and female students, males are more likely to expect joining the labor force within the next five years after graduation than their female friends.

4. Types and Sources of Information When Deciding about TVET Participation

The above described perception of students about the program may be affected by the level of information they have. This section tries to assess the different types of information students had and their sources when deciding about TVET participation. Different studies have emphasized the critical importance of acquiring relevant information about the alternative educational programs available, the future job opportunity as well as the competence required to follow different programs.

These and other information are important as that is what the decision regarding enrolment may be based upon. To find out how well informed students were when making the decision to enroll in TVET and from where they got information, the survey sought information from respondents on the types and sources of information they made use of and had access to when deciding about TVET participation.

The basic points addressed in this section therefore are: the level of importance of different types of information as perceived by prospective TVET students when deciding about TVET participation, the level of information prospective TVET students had, and the importance of different sources of information when deciding about TVET participation.

Respondents were also asked about the importance of different types of information that can be used to decide about TVET participation. The relevant survey question was 'How important was each of the following type of information when you were deciding whether or not to participate in TVET?'

Respondents were asked to answer the question with one of the following responses; 'Important', 'neither important nor unimportant', or 'unimportant'.

Table 2 shows that about 86 % of respondents viewed 'future job prospect' as the first important information required. This indicates that students perceive whatever they study must be worth the time, effort and cost required to complete it in terms of future returns. Next to this, 'Cost of TVET education' and 'Course content' were rated by 74 % and 70 % of students respectively as the second and third important information types required by respondents. Even though, information about TVET providing institutions were regarded as important information by some of the respondents (56 %), instructors' qualification was viewed as neither important nor unimportant by the majority (52%) of the respondents.

Table 2 : Important type of information in deciding TVET participation

INFORMATION WITH REGARD TO:	VERY IMPORTANT (% OF RESPONDENTS)	NETHER IMPORTANT NOR UNIMPORTANT (% OF RESPONDENTS)	UNIMPORTANT (% OF RESPONDENTS)
Course Content	70	22	8
Course Duration	43	38	19
TVET providing institution	56	36	8
Cost of TVET	74	18	8
Instructors' Qualification	32	52	15
Future Job Opportunity	86	14	0

The above information relates to the level of importance attached to the different types of information, but it cannot stand alone as valid unless considered along with the source. Respondents were also asked about the important sources of information that they had used when deciding to join TVET.

The relevant survey question was ‘how important is the following source of information when you were deciding whether or not to participate in TVET?’ The question was scaled by ‘important’, ‘neither important nor unimportant’, or ‘unimportant’.

Table 3 shows 67 % and 65 % of students viewed friends and family as major source of information respectively for their information requirement at the time of joining TVET. Next to these groups, TVET institutions were rated as important sources of information about the program by 54 % of the respondents. Almost one-fourth of the respondents viewed media as an important source of information, while a lower proportion voted for teachers instead.

Table 3: Source and Type of Information

	VERY IMPORTANT (% OF	NETHER IMPORTANT NOR	UNIMPORTANT (% OF
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SOURCE OF INFORMATION	RESPONDENTS)	UNIMPORTANT (% OF RESPONDENTS)	RESPONDENTS)
Family	65	13	22
Friends	67	11	22
Media	25	31	44
career counselors	3	51	46
teachers	12	29	59
TVET providing institutions	54	34	12

The survey also queried students on their views regarding those people who had an important influence on the attendees' decision to pursue a particular field of study. The question addressed in this section is: 'who were important in influencing study and career path decisions of the students?' The relevant survey question was 'How important have the following people been in influencing your study and career decision'

The majority of respondents regarded themselves as an important influence on decisions related to their own study and career. Apart from that, 'parents' were also named as important influencing factors, with the response of 77 % of students. Friends were seen as the third highly important influence. Only one in three respondents viewed 'teachers' as important influences on the decisions.

5. Concluding Remarks

Since students are the primary beneficiaries or victims of the TVET program implementation, it is appropriate and pertinent that their experience in TVET participation as well as their perception and attitudes are examined with intent to evaluate its weaknesses and look for areas of improvement. In view of this, the survey has considered randomly selected students who are participants of TVET program. Students' perceptions and views are based on their own experience as TVET students in a private institution- St. Mary's University College. The study provided empirical result about TVET students' views, perceptions, and attitudes on their TVET experience; and the following observations were made from the results of the study.

At the onset, it is worthwhile to note that what most students perceived to be their primary choice does not seem to correspond to their current TVET participation. There is a disparity between students' preference (i.e. joining college preparatory program)

and their current educational engagement in TVET program, for which a low score in the national exam was reported to be the most important factor that led students to join the program. Following this, the study indicated students' strongly held perception of TVET as an alternative, if one is unable to join the college preparatory program. Such negative attitude may have stemmed from the view that students held about the low esteem towards TVET within the society.

From the finding of the study it appears that the society may be providing less psychological support for the TVET students. This can show how lack of appropriate respect accorded for an educational program can make a real difference on students' academic experiences, and it can also show how students become so frustrated and discouraged by the societal view towards TVET.

Such attitude may affect students' interest for participation in the program, and may also have a repercussion on their performance.

Moreover, findings of the study showed the different types of information required by TVET students and their sources. In this regard the finding of the study showed that future job opportunity and cost of following TVET is the primary required information by students. Even though such information is better provided by formal institutions such as schools, students reported that informal contacts like family and friends as major sources of information.

The other point which can be noted from the finding of the study is related to the students' educational destinations anticipated and employment outcome expected. In this regard the fact that students wish to continue their tertiary level education after completion of their TVET program calls for appropriate consideration by those concerned for the issue of vertical permeability. Moreover, of those who want to join the labor force upon completion of their TVET studies, the majority want to get employment in governmental and non-governmental organizations. Even though this seems a bit different from government's expectation of students to be entrepreneurs, providing the needed financial and institutional support for those graduates who want to start their own businesses is another point that calls policy makers attention.

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