

The social perception of technical and vocational education and training in Ethiopia: a critical review

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Abstract

This paper explores some of the low social perceptions of vocational education and training in Ethiopia using current literatures related to vocational education and training. In addition to a broad review of the academic literature, official reports, statistics and policy documents concerning issues of TVET also used from recognized institutions. The finding shows that current vocational education and training is unable to meet the current demands of the labor market, due to the general perception of vocational education and training as an inferior option vis-à-vis the tertiary education. Vocational education tends to be marginalized as a low-status track for poor academic achiever and early figures on the return to vocational education show that they are associated with a lower return than secondary education.

Ethiopia, Low social status, TVET

1. Introduction

According to Maclean, Wilson et al. (2009), TVET is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the world of work to increase opportunities for productive work, sustainable livelihoods, personal empowerment and socioeconomic development in knowledge economies. The African Union Strategy to Revitalize TVET in Africa (2007) recognizes the importance of TVET is to train the skilled and entrepreneurial workforce that Africa needs to create wealth and emerge out of poverty. The purpose of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is to equip people with the technical and professional skills needed for socio-economic and industrial development of the country.

Psacharopoulos, (1997) noted that vocational education solves multiple and conflicting objectives, among these are: (a) *Youth unemployment*. Vocational education and training take the youth off the streets, and at the same time equip them with skills that could be used later in the labor market. The reason is not all young people find immediate employment as soon as they graduate from school or a training program. (b) *Instilling technological knowledge*. Based on the British Industrial Revolution, followed up by Germany and Japan in this century, it is a common belief that economic progress heavily depends on technological knowhow. (c) *Academically less able students*. The provision of vocational education and training enable considerable number of students who 'are not able' to advance through the school system, especially the academic stream of secondary education. Hence, the provision of vocational education to them would allegedly equip them with something useful to do later in life. (d) *Lack of middle level technicians*. Vocational education and training provides skills in short supply (especially middle level technicians). Psacharopoulos (1997) noted that, there is no country in the world where a number of specialties are not in 'scarce' supply (e.g. plumbers and nurses). (e) *Poverty among urban dwellers*. The provision of vocational education and training would give useful skills to the unemployed and make them find productive employment and thus raise their income. (f) *Economic globalization*. The development of economic globalization also has implications on the nature of vocational education received by the labor force.

Likewise, the overall objective of the National TVET Strategy in Ethiopia is not different with what Psacharopoulos described. According to TVET strategy (2008) the modified TVET objective is to create a competent, motivated, adaptable and innovative workforce that contribute to poverty reduction and social and economic development through facilitating demand-driven, high quality technical and vocational education and training. However, the vocational secondary or technical post-secondary programs, which provided technical and vocational education and training (TVET) unable to meet the current demands of the labor market, and due to the general perception of TVET as an inferior option vis-à-vis the tertiary education (Bardak 2006). TVET tends to be marginalized as a low-status track for poor academic achiever and early figures on the return to vocational education show that they are associated with a lower return than secondary education (Heynemann 1997). Psacharopoulos (1997) also stressed that neither the expansion of vocational education and training has solved the youth unemployment problem,

nor have less academically able students been persuaded to abandon their striving to follow academic courses and enter the university, let alone has urban poverty been mitigated.

Most recently, unpublished PhD dissertation by Ezekiel Bangalu (2015) entitled “comparative analysis of technical and vocational education and training policy in selected African countries; South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria, concludes that the system has a very poor track record and suffers from lack of recognition, under-funding, poor public perception of the sector, lack of adequate learning facilities and lack of qualified staff and inadequate training. Ezekiel noted that the technical and vocational education and training sector is obstructed by numerous challenges, which include under-funding, inadequate teaching and learning facilities, and poor governance.

Therefore, this article, review the current negative perception of TVET for dropouts students in Ethiopia in general and in Addis Ababa in particular.

- Why does TVET have a low social perception as a last resort?
- What alternative policy intervention is implemented by government to enhance low social perception?
- What are the ways forward?

In so doing, this article reviewed available literature and documents related to TVET. In addition to a broad review of the academic literature, as well as literature produced by non-academic institutions, official reports, statistics and policy documents concerning numbers and issues of TVET also used from recognized institutions. The current status of low social status perception in Ethiopia and alternative options to enhance the negative perceptions has been considered.

The TVET system and Its Administration (A glimpse)

UNESCO and the International Labor Organization (2001) defined TVET as “aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupants in various sectors of economic and social life” (UNESCO and ILO, 2001). In addition to technical knowledge and aptitude, increasing emphasis is on “softer” skills – communication, negotiation and teamwork. TVET is dispensed in public and private educational

establishments, or other forms of formal or informal instruction aimed at granting all segments of the society access to life-long learning resources. UNESCO (2001) distinguished technical and vocational education using the following characteristic: (1) an integral part of general education; (2) a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work; (3) an aspect of lifelong learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship; (4) an instrument for promoting environmentally sound sustainable development.

UNISCO (1965) classified the history of Ethiopia education in to three main eras. They are (1) the traditional, which extends from very early in the nation's history; (2) the classical (pre-Italian occupation), covering the period from the last quarter of the nineteenth century until 1935; and (3) the modern (post-liberation) covering developments since 1941. The beginning of TVET in Ethiopia in the formal educational system dates back to the founding of the 1st technical school of Addis Ababa in 1941 (UNISCO, 1962).

The current government carried out three reform programs designed to reform the education sector in Ethiopia since 1994. The first phase was the 1994 education and training policy (ESDP I covers the years 1997 to 2000). The second phase was input based curriculum (ESDP II covers the years 2001 to 2005) and the third phase is outcome based curriculum (ESDP III covers the year 2006 to 2010) (MOE, 2006).

According to the engineering capacity building program (ecbp, 2006) about 35 million people of the Ethiopian work force are characterized by low skill levels and very low average educational attainment. About 10% of the urban population has post-secondary school education. Thus, 75% of the workforce is concentrated in low skill employment sectors such as commerce, services and elementary occupations. Less than half of the urban workforce is engaged in wage employment. A significant portion of the urban workforce works for unpaid family business. Above 40% are self-employed in the informal economy, most of which live on the edge of poverty.

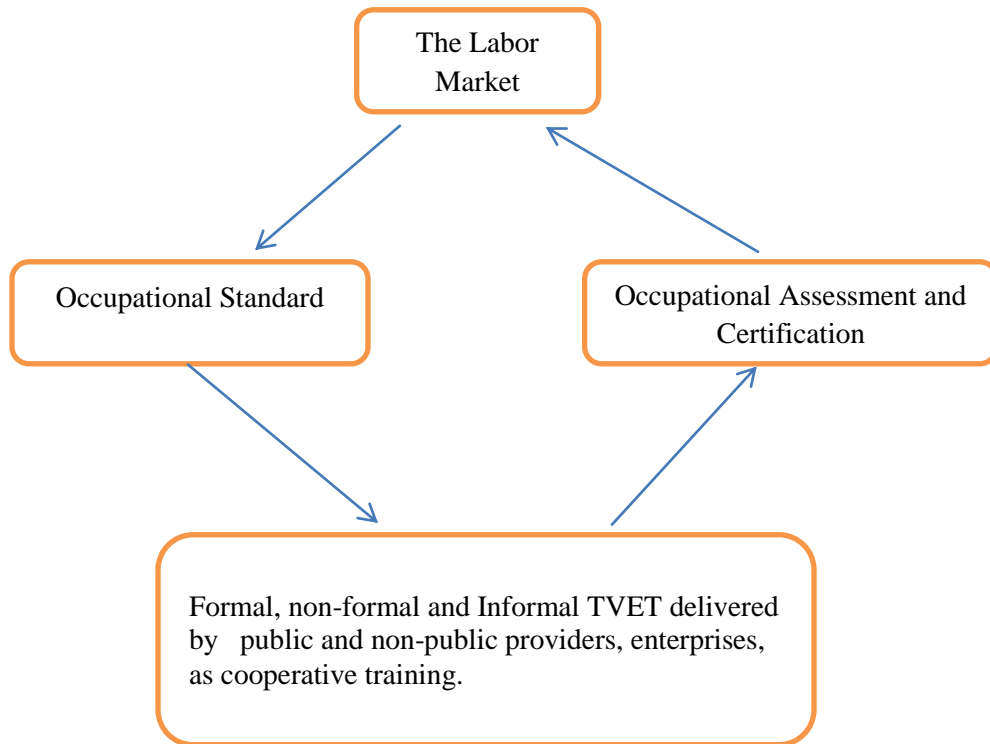
The current Ethiopian TVET administration is decentralized government system in which the federal authorities will be responsible for national policy formulation and all statutory functions at national level (i.e. system of occupational standards, assessment, certification, drawing accreditation rules and other), the system of TVET teacher/instructor training and further

training, as well as coordination, advice to authorities at lower levels and implementation of selective support instruments the implementing actors (TVET Strategy, 2008).

On the other hand the strategy noted that the responsibility for implementation of the new TVET system rests with the state authorities and delegate progressively functions to lower levels as appropriate (TVET Strategy, 2008). Accordingly, the state TVET authorities will plan, coordinate, support and supervise the TVET provision in their respective Regions, secure funding for the public TVET institutions in the regions, develop support mechanisms for non-public TVET supply and implement the statutory functions on behalf of the Federal TVET Agency. The strategy stress that the state authorities will capacitate zonal and woreda TVET Offices and the TVET Councils at lower levels and delegate functions proportionate to their respective capacities.

Currently, Ethiopia follows outcome based TVET system in which the competences needed in the labour market will become the final benchmark of teaching, training and learning. The outcome based system is based on national occupational standard and national occupational assessment. Accordingly, the National Occupational Standards define the outcome of all training and learning expected by the labour market, and will form the benchmark of all quality management within the TVET system, whereas, the national occupational assessment certify a person competence in a TVET relevant occupational standard.

The Outcome Based TVET System



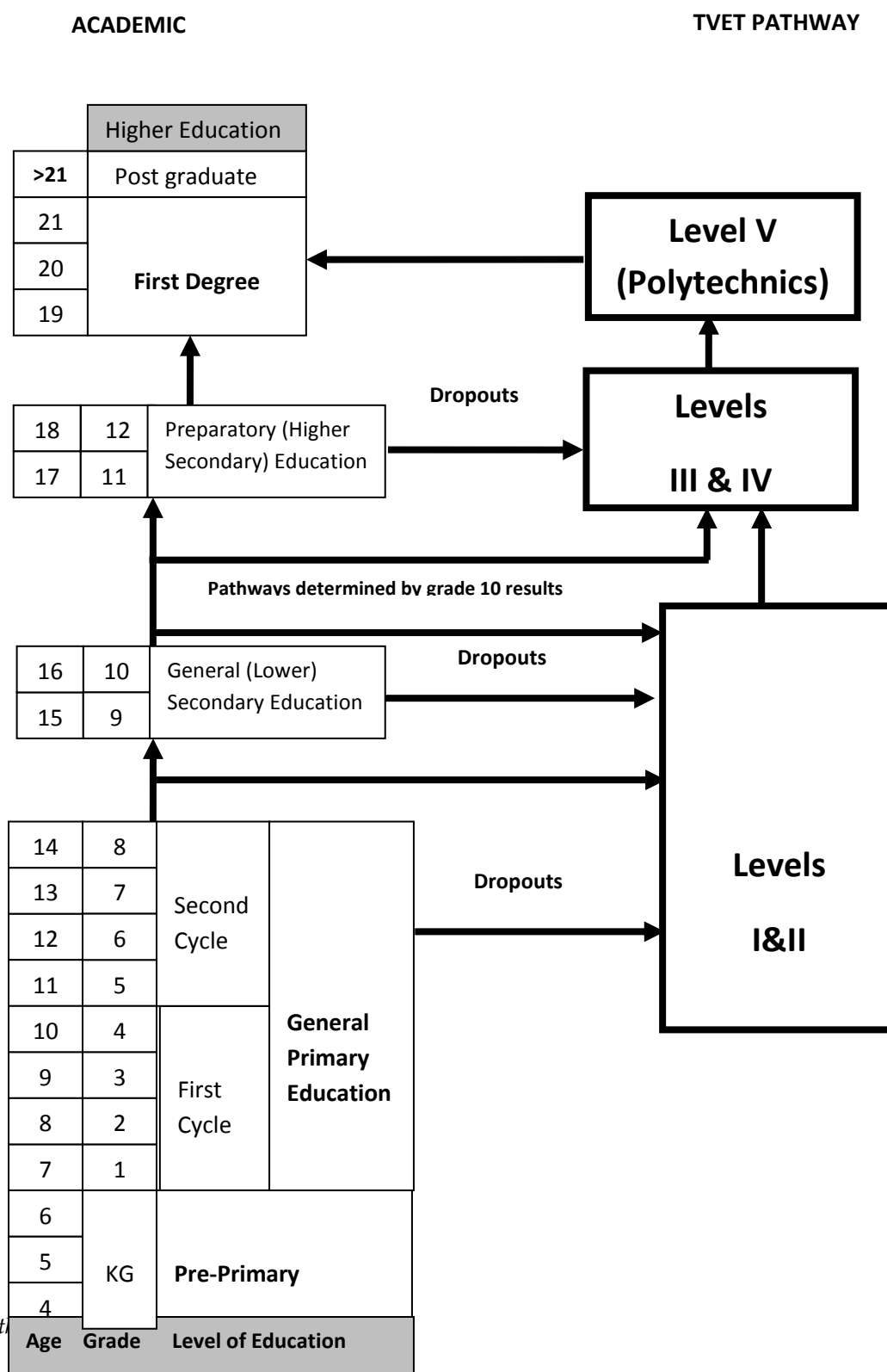
Source: MoE, National Technical & Vocational Education and Training Strategy 22 August 2008 / 2nd Edition p 25. (Modified by the author)

TVET in Ethiopia is delivered by both government and private providers, which include for-profit institutions and non-profit, NGO and Church-based institutions.

Low social status perception of TVET in Ethiopia

Mwangi and Makworo (2012) noted that secondary school graduates, who “fail” to join university, will end up in Technical Training Institutions. Thus, the tag “fail to join University” becomes a condemnation of the Technical Institute graduates. Hence, these graduates develop a poor self-image and lack self-confidence, consequently their performance at places of work is poor. The Ethiopian TVET programs are for those students who have failed to achieve the Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (EGSECE) scores for admission to preparatory program.

Figure 1: The Current Structure of the Ethiopian Education and Training System (source the Educakns Foundation, 2009)



Students entering TVET after the Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination which means after completing grade 10, have three options open to them, depending on the score received in the national exam: (1) one year training(10+1); 2 year training (10+2), or three year training (10+3). Students who complete three years of training after grade 10 are considered to have completed first year of college level education and can join universities to complete their undergraduate degree. The students that attain level 4 in TVET can continue to higher education, hence, level 4 TVET is considered by some as the alternative route to get to the university. The modified TVET system consists of the occupational standard that has been re-categorized into five levels. These are: Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, Level 4 and Level 5 packages.

Few studies have been conducted in Ethiopia on low social status perception of technical and vocational education and training. According to a mapping study by Edukans Foundation, (2012) concludes that TVET has been given an insignificant attention and low status from the public of Ethiopia. The study stress that there is act of discouraging and shrinking instead of encouraging, improving and inspiring the development of arts and crafts in the country takes the first place. Likewise, Teklehaimanot (2002) associate the low status of TVET with Ethiopia culture whereby artisans and blacksmiths have been considered not only as low caste people but as sinners in the social life of the society as well (Teklehaimanot, 2002).

Besides, the government strategic plan (2006) also noted one of the challenges of TVET is the negative perceptions and attitudes towards *TVET*. The strategy stressed that the primary cause of disregard for TVET in Ethiopia is partly the result of perceiving TVET as education for youth with low academic abilities. This perception equates academic education with intelligence and TVET with lack of intelligence; consequently imposing a negative impact on results. Choosing TVET is perceived as limiting one's educational attainment, which in turn reduces lifetime upward mobility because subsequent career paths in Ethiopia depend on the initial choice of education path and of course this was what was happening to date. The strategy also observes the current state of TVET output does not support increased competitiveness of the graduates in the labour market or self-employment. The education capacity-building program in Ethiopia (ecbp, 2007) also indicate that the perception of TVET as a second-class education results in low

recruitment to TVET and poor prospects in the labor market, for graduates from TVET-based colleges.

More recently, Kazue Demachi (2017) sought to examine the impacts of TVET on employability of youth urban in Ethiopia. Their study first tried to examine whether family has effect on employability of worker, by controlling the family background, whereby they treat school difference as exogenous. And, secondly, to examine respondents perceptions towards TVET as low status and last opportunity. They stressed that their second objective is based on Ethiopian context where opportunities for higher general education is limited, as other African countries Oketch (2007), those who lost chance to proceed to upper secondary may see TVET as the last opportunity of additional education, regardless of lower social perception of TVET. They concludes that TVET is seen as the last resort of educational path for those who was denied to proceed to further education, especially those who failed to enter upper secondary schools and females.

Conclusion Remark

The problems regarding the quality of the TVET and TVET system are manifold and largely rooted in the centralized management by the government without the involvement of social partners and insufficient funding not based on performance. Increasing the linkage between skills provided and demanded by the private sector is considered a significant problem (Bardak 2006).

WubetKifle (2008) also summarized the main problems facing the current TVET programs: the range of occupational areas, trades, skills and knowledge covered by available training programs is very limited; girls and women are underrepresented in training programs, which is also due to the fact that existing provision mainly addresses typical male skills and occupations; and training provision for operating micro and small entrepreneurs and people in employment hardly exists.

It was noted in TVET strategy (2008) that TVET suffers from a relatively poor public image and associated with low status job, low salary and lack of personal development opportunities, partly due to the low quality of previous TVET programmes that did not allow TVET graduates to successfully compete in the labor market. TVET is generally perceived as a place of last resort for those students who failed to get into higher education. The strategy stress that authorities should work together with their stakeholders, especially with business organizations and invest

in public awareness campaigns to make the involved stakeholders and the general public aware that the TVET system is now on its way to facilitate high quality TVET programmes. The occupational qualifications also required to depend on the needs of the labor market, involve all stakeholders and improved personal career advancement. The government strategy stressed that specifically stakeholders are needed to play a major role in the TVET system to improve low status perception of TVET. The following figure shows stakeholders involvement and their roles in the TVET system.

Fig 3: Stakeholders and their Roles

Stakeholders	Stakeholders role
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers (both private and public); • The business sector; • Trade unions and professional associations; • Public and private TVET providers; • Civil society and NGOs; • People (represented by association) • Teachers/Instructors • Trainees and their families • Public Authorities in charge of TVET (Education, Capacity building, agriculture, trade and industry, labor and social affairs, health, youth and sports) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy development and policy drafting and reviewing through participation in relevant bodies and panels; • Financing through contributing resources to the TVET system; • Quality assurance through active involvement in the setting of occupational standards and conducting occupational assessment; • TVET delivery through the provision of training to their own staff, offering internships to trainees and providing apprenticeship training; • Monitoring and evaluation through participation in TVET councils at federal and state levels and taking over key roles on the Management Boards of TVET institutions.

Source: TVET strategy (2008, p 18)

However, there is no evidence that shows the contribution of these stakeholders in improving low perception of towards TVET. Recent studies revealed that there has been a gross mismatch

between the demand for and the supply of middle level skilled labor force Addis Ababa (Edukans Foundation, 2012). The mismatch problem has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Quantitatively there is a wide spread unemployment among the TVET graduates on the one hand, while there is also a wide market vacancy for TVET graduates. The occupational assessment result that disclosed many lacking to fulfill the required minimum competence is a vivid evidence for the prevalence of the qualitative mismatch (Edukans Foundation, 2012)

Generally, formal vocational education and training have a difficult standing in Sub-Saharan African countries, (Garcia and Fares 2008c; Guarcello, Lyon and Rosati 2008).The difficulties with the promotion of technical and vocational education and training can be attributed to a number of issues (Oketch,2007).

1. **limited acceptance** by young people and their families as benefits to be expected from vocational training in terms of access to jobs, better pay or job promotion are far from obvious in the African context so that participation in **general education is preferred**;
 - a. Existing vocational training programs are often perceived as an unattractive option leading to dead-end jobs.
 - b. It is therefore only seen as an inferior alternative to general secondary schooling, which provides significant returns (Garcia and Fares 2008) and progression to higher education which could in part lead to better jobs, also in white collar occupations, even if this involves major additional financial effort.
2. The **high shares of informality** in economic activities and employment lower the potential for productivity increases, technological innovation and formal job creation. Stronger employer demand for better skilled workers in more productive activities would generate stronger incentives for participation in formal vocational training; but given existing firms and jobs, traditional apprenticeships after primary education seem sufficient to get access to employment.
3. In general, there is only **limited institutional support** on behalf of policy makers, governments and ministerial agencies, which would have to invest more into vocational training at schools (and in cooperation with business). Expanding general education (which has its merits) tends to crowd out vocational education.

Therefore it is imperative to reduce the negative and low status perception towards TVET, from students, parents and the society using different strategies and alternative policies. Thus, stakeholder's involvement should be realized and empowered to influence the society perception of TVET as a last resort education. Because of rhetoric agendas of stakeholder's involvement, there is also a need to assess the real existence of the so called stakeholders in the TVET system. Besides, providing relevant labor market training and with valuable practical knowledge is essential in order to change the negative perceptions towards TVET. Finally, establishing links between employers and school-based vocational education, which is under current modernization in some countries is paramount to bring employers and TVET graduates together, e.g. via regular internships.

Further research

Since this article is based on available literatures, future research needs to be conducted that includes students (trainees), instructors (teachers), families, college officials and the community at large to reduce the low social perception of TVET and underpin the economic development of the country.

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