

**PERCEPTION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION CAREER BY STUDENTS OF SCHOOL OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, EBONYI STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION IKWO, SOUTH EASTERN NIGERIA.**

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**Abstract**

*The aim of this study is to identify the perception of the vocational education career by students of school of vocational education of Ebonyi state College of Education Ikwo in Ebonyi state of Nigeria. A survey design was adopted for this study. A sample size of one hundred and fifty respondents was randomly selected from the students of the three different departments of school of VOCED. Primary data were collected from the respondents with the aid of structured questionnaire. Data obtained were analysed using a 4-point rating scale, multiple regression analysis and F- test statistical tools. The results of this study showed that the respondents regarded the vocational education career as non-prestigious, unattractive, unfulfilling, poorly remunerated, of poor quality, practiced in rural areas, has poor recognition, full of uncertainties, and receives poor government funding. It was strongly recommended that government at all levels should pay priority attention to vocational education so as to promote its careers and offer job-shadowing opportunities to make it popular and more attractive.*

**Introduction**

Perception refers to an individual's current appraisal of an object or programme. Vocational education as a career is fraught with negative perceptions and dearth of information and awareness (Baker, 2013). Infact, students' enrolment in the vocational education programmes are declining as it is perceived to be neither prestigious nor lucrative. The vocational education career is considered unfulfilling, drudgerious, dusty, poorly remunerated and best suited to non-academic people. In Egypt, the public universities are reported to be bursting out with students except for students of agriculture and related courses (Carter, 2008). In Nigeria, despite the enormous prospects offered by the vocational education career, enrolment in agriculture related programmes is one of the lowest (Jackson & William, 2010). The perception a person has towards a job as the ideal job affect the career choice one makes (Ferry, 2006). It is worthy of note that the career path someone chooses is not simply a matching process but rather it is a decision said to be conditioned by other influencing factors in the environment one lives.

Kerin (2012) maintained that guidance enables each individual to understand his abilities and interests to develop them relate them to life goals and finally reach a state of complete and mature self guidance as a desirable citizen of a democratic social order. Students' perception of vocational education as a career may be positive or negative depending on the way they perceive the rewards attached to job when one eventually graduates. In other words, the reward systems available to the vocational education career go a long way to determine how students perceive it. Incentive system in any career is a means of sustaining the worker and those who intend to join the profession. It is a motivating factor that influences the attitude of the worker and worker to be on the job.

Rukuni (2012) makes a distinction between occupational prestige and occupational status as he defines occupational prestige as "the public perception of the relative position of an occupation in a hierarchy of occupations" and occupational status as "the category to which knowledgeable groups of people (civil-servants, politicians social scientists, educationists) "allocate a given occupation. Prestige therefore reflects the sum total of income, education and working conditions or environments. Citizens must earn a living in order to meet the basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, clothing and many other needs. As such, there would be an interaction involving work roles and other life roles over a person's life span thereby informing one of the essentials of a career. Career is a pattern of work related experiences, such as job position, job duties or activities, work related decisions and subjective interpretations of work related events, such as work aspirations, expectations, values, needs, and feelings about particular work experiences, that spans the course of person's life (Green Hans, Callanan and God-Shalk, 2000). Agriculture is one of the world's oldest vocations (that is career/job/profession).

Baseline data on enrolments, in the school of VOCED show that people wanting to study vocational education especially at the undergraduate level has been on the decrease. The same trend has also been observed in the school of vocational education and related faculties of other higher institutions in Nigeria. Several writers have

commented about the prevalent derogatory attitudes towards vocational education career and its attendant low prestige in Nigeria (Floyd, 2009).

Unfortunately, most of these people form the backbone of vocational education and are change agents in Nigeria by virtue of their training. In spite of this, little or no effort has made to ascertain the perceptions of VOCED students toward vocational education career so as to provide those involved in the promotion of vocational education with motivational incentives. Until, the factors responsible for the unwillingness of most Nigerians to enter into vocational education career are identified and resolved, vocational education career development efforts will continue to end in futility. This research therefore, seeks answers to the following questions: (i). How do students of school of VOCED (and by extension, youths) perceive vocational education career? (ii). What are the factors that influenced their perception of VOCED?

### Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to analyze the perception of vocational education career by students of school of vocational education,

Ebonyi State College of Education Ikwo. The specific objectives of the study include to: (i) analyze school of VOCED students' perception of the career; and (ii) determine the factors that influence the perception of vocational education career by students of VOCED EBSCOEI.

### Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>)

The determinant factors do not have significant influence on students' of school of VOCED, EBSCOEI perception of vocational education career.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Sample size and Sampling

The study adopted a survey design. The study area is School of Vocational Education, Ebonyi State College of Education Ikwo. Ikwo is one of the thirteen local government areas in Ebonyi state. Ebonyi state is one of the south-eastern states in Nigeria. Its capital and largest city is Abakaliki. The state lies between latitudes 7<sup>0</sup>30'N and 8<sup>0</sup>30'N and longitudes 5<sup>0</sup>40'E and 6<sup>0</sup>45'E respectively. The state has borders with Cross River, Benue and Abia States (Ebonyi State Ministry of Lands and Survey, 2016).



Fig. 1: Map of Ebonyi State

Ebonyi State with a population of 2, 173, 501 people has an estimated total land area of 5,

735km<sup>2</sup> most of which is fertile and arable (National Population Commission, 2006). Two main reasons

dominate the climate of the state. These are dry season which begins late November to early April and the rainy season which lasts from late April to October. The topographically is level land with scattered hills, valleys and rocky setting fit for tourism.

The people of Ebonyi state are predominantly farmers. The presence of large arable lands, rivers and streams have made farming very attractive amongst the people. The famous Abakaliki rice is cultivated throughout the state. Currently, the State has 13 local government areas. The Ebonyi State Agricultural Development Programme (EBADEP) divided the state into three agricultural zones namely, Ebonyi North, Ebonyi South and Ebonyi Central Agricultural zones.

The school of VOCED is made up of three different departments namely: Agricultural Education, Business Education and Fine/Applied Arts Education. The population of the study is 432 students which comprises of all the regular students in the school of VOCED. Simple random sampling technique was used to select one hundred and fifty (150) students from the three departments in the school of VOCED and sample proportional to size of department.

Primary data were used for this study. The instrument for data collection is the structured questionnaire. Primary data were gathered using structured questionnaire that was administered to the

randomly selected students of the various departments.

### Data Analysis

Data collected for this study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Objective (i) was analyzed using a four point rating scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree with scores of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively for positive statements and reverse order for negative statements used to measure respondents' perceptions. Responses were summed and the mean and standard deviation calculated. Based on mean and standard deviation of the respondents, perception was categorized into favorable and unfavorable perception. Objectives (ii) was analysed using multiple regression analysis while F-test was used to test the influence of socio-economic characteristics of the respondents on their perception of the vocational education career.

### Results and Discussion

#### Perception of the vocational education career

Students perception of VOCED as a career may be positive or negative depending on the way they perceive the rewards attached to job when one eventually graduate. In other words, the reward systems available to the agricultural profession so a long way to determine how students perceive it. This is shown in table 1 below.

**Table 1: Mean Rating of Respondents by their perception of the vocational education career**

S/N	Item statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
A	Vocational education career is not prestigious.	3.62	1.50	Accept
B	It is unfulfilling and full of drudgeries.	3.12	1.08	Accept
C	VOCED has no attractive employment opportunities.	3.41	1.32	Accept
D	VOCED has poor remuneration.	3.20	1.10	Accept
E	VOCED programmes have poor quality and relevance.	3.11	1.15	Accept
F	It is practiced in rural areas, with lack of basic amenities	3.55	1.48	Accept
G	There is poor recognition for those in VOCED career	3.79	1.68	Accept
H	There is uncertainty in VOCED as a career	2.80	1.21	Accept
I	There is poor funding of VOCED by the government	3.61	1.36	Accept
J	VOCED offers no job satisfaction	2.21	1.01	Reject

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Data in table 1 above show the ten (10) item statements specified on the rating of the VOCED students by their perception of the vocational education career. Following the outcome of data analyzed in table 1 above, the respondents unanimously agreed that the vocational education career is not prestigious; it is unfulfilling and full of drudgeries; the profession lacks attractive opportunities for employment; has no mouth watering area of remuneration; its programmes are poor in quality and relevance; agriculture is practiced in rural areas without basic amenities with poor recognition of people in the profession; the profession is full of risks and uncertainties as well of poor funding by the government at all levels. The position of the respondents are shown in table 1 as nine out of the ten item statements specified in the table had mean values of above 2.50. Only item statement J in the table had a mean of 2.21 which is below 2.50 which is the cut-off point. Thus, the respondents did not actually agree to the proposition

that the vocational education career has no job security. The above result is in agreement with the findings of Pratley (2014) who observed that vocational education is generally looked down upon in Nigeria hence the youths have no inclination to associate themselves with the profession. The item statements in the table had a standard deviation range of 1.01 to 1.68 indicating that the respondents were close to each other in their responses to the items specified and were not too far from the mean values.

#### Determinants of Factors Influencing Students' of School of VOCED, EBSCOEI Perception of Vocational Education Career

A multiple regression analysis was used to analyse determinants of factors influencing students of school of VOCED, EBSCOEI perception of the vocational education career. Summary of the result is presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Analysis of Determinants of Factors Influencing Students' of School of VOCED, EBSCOEI Perception of Vocational Education Career**

Variables	Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	t-value	Sig.
(Constant)	4.557	0.151	30.158	*
Locality raised	0.379	0.107	3.551	*
Parent occupation	-0.049	0.073	-0.666	*
Financial status	-0.283	0.52	-5.442	*
Current academic status	0.058	0.073	0.797	NS
Level of study	-0.197	0.070	-2.800	*
Age	0.007	0.010	0.658	NS
Gender	-0.236	0.105	-2.251	**
Marital status	-0.349	0.120	-2.912	*
R	0.840 or 84.0%			
R <sup>2</sup>	0.706 or 70.6%			
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.692 or 69.2%			
F-ratio	52.026			
Std. Error of the est.	0.30494			

Source: Field Survey, 2017

\*, and \*\* indicates significance at 1%, and 5% respectively.

NS signifies not significant.

The result of analysis as presented in Table 2 shows that the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) was 0.706 or 70.6%, which signifies that 70.6% of the total variation observed in the dependent variable (perception of VOCED career) was sufficiently explained by the combine effects in the independent variables included in the regression model. The F-statistics was high enough (52.026) and the low value of standard error of the estimate (0.30494) attest to the good fit of the model. The overall model was statistically significant (P < 0.05), implying that determinant factors exert significant influence on the students' perception of the VOCED career.

**Locality raised:** The coefficient of locality raised was positively signed and statistically significant at

1% level of probability. This suggests that the locality where students of school of VOCED were raised positively influence their perception of the profession. In other words, the environment contributes to the students' perception of VOCED and related career.. Considering the fact that most of the students were raised in the rural area where agricultural activities are the major occupation of the inhabitants. Thus, the high significant level implies that locality raised is an important determinant of factor influencing students' perception of the VOCED career. This conforms to the a priori expectation.

**Parents' Occupation:** This shows negative coefficient but statistically significant at 1%. This

implies that parents' occupation affects students' perception of the VOCED career. It is common to see some parents insisting on choosing a particular career for their children because they consider such occupation as having high success prospect while others guide their children to choose career. Parents also serve as role model for their children; hence, children tend to insist on following the career path of their parents because of the success of their parents in such occupation. In a nutshell, the result confirms that parents' occupation is a determinant factor that influences students' perception of a particular profession. This is in line with the a priori expectation.

**Financial status:** The coefficient of financial status was negatively signed but statistically significant at 1% level of probability. This implies that the tendency that students will have positive perception about VOCED career would diminish with higher financial status. In other words, financial status is inversely related to students' perception of VOCED and related profession. Students from more financial stable background will have negative perception of vocational education career and versa visa.

**Level of Study:** The level of study showed positive coefficient and statistical significant at 1% level of probability. This means that the higher the students' level of study, the better their perception of the VOCED career. This may be due to the knowledge they acquire about the profession as they advance higher. This knowledge widens their understanding of the subject matter and enhances their perception of the VOCED career. Hence, level of study is a determinant factor that positively influences students of school of VOCED perception of vocational education.

**Gender:** Gender had negative coefficient but statistically significant at 5%. This means that gender composition of the students affect their perception of the profession. In other words, the perception of male may differ from that of female. However, the significance level implies that gender is an important determinant factor that influences students; perception of the VOCED career which is in conformity with the a priori expectation was met.

**Marital status:** The coefficient of marital status was negatively signed but statistically significant at 1%. This implies that if the students take into marriage, their perception of VOCED will be negatively affected. This is contrary to the a priori expectation because married couples will tend to weigh options of taking up career in vocational education to boost their income generation for upkeep of their spouses. In other words, they ought to have positive perception of the profession.

The final regression equation is stated as:

$$Y = 4.557 + 0.379x_1 - 0.049x_2 - 0.283x_3 + 0.058x_4 + 0.197x_5 - (0.151)^* (0.107)^* (0.073)^* (0.520)^* (0.073)^{NS} (0.070)^*$$

$$0.236x_6 + 0.349x_7 + et (0.010)^{NS} (0.120)^*$$

### Hypothesis Testing

The null hypothesis which states that the determinant factors do not have significant influence on students' of school of VOCED, EBSCOEI perception of the vocational education career was tested at 0.05 level of significance using F-test as shown:

$$F\text{-cal} = \frac{R^2 (N-K)}{1-R^2 (k-1)}$$

$$R^2 = 0.706$$

$$N = 150$$

$$K = 9$$

$$F\text{-cal} = \frac{0.706 (150 - 9)}{1 - 0.706 (9 - 1)} = \frac{99.546}{2.352}$$

$$F\text{-cal} = 42.33$$

$$F\text{- Critical} = v_1 = k-1 = 9-1 = 8$$

$$v_2 = N-K = 150 - 9 = 141$$

$$F\text{- tab} = 2.02$$

**Decision:** If  $F\text{-cal} > F\text{-tab}$  reject the null hypothesis, otherwise accept. The test shows that  $F\text{-cal} (42.33) > F\text{-tab} (2.02)$ . Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative accepted that the determinant factors have significant influence on students' of school of VOCED, EBSCOEI perception of the vocational education career.

### Conclusion

Findings from this research show that majority of the respondents have negative perception towards the VOCED career. Most of them would have preferred to study courses like Chemistry Education, Biology Education, Physics Education, Computer Sciences Education or Health and Physical Education as these were mainly their first choice courses. The findings also revealed that most of the respondents view the VOCED career as unattractive and unfulfilling. These findings tend to support certain inferences about vocational education and related professions. The fact that entrepreneurship education is hard work is no secret anywhere in the world. It is not surprising that the respondents expressed this belief in no uncertain terms. Floyd (2012) indicated that this situation can be changed by sound economic planning by appropriately educated and dedicated government personnel. A desire to help develop Nigerian vocational education career was the most important factor in the students' decision to study VOCED.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the research findings: (i). Vocational education should be given priority so as to promote its careers and offer job-shadowing opportunities to make it popular and more attractive.

(ii). Admission of students should be based on course of choice so as to sustain students' interest and encourage effective academic performance.

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