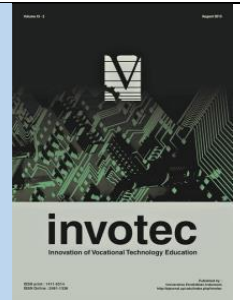




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PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS ON HURDLES IMPEDING STUDENTS' ENROLMENT IN TECHNICAL COLLEGES IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

Owo Offia Tugwell
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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Authors email:
tugwelloffia@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to ascertain the perception of teachers on hurdles impeding students' enrolment in technical colleges in Rivers State, Nigeria. Descriptive research design was adopted for this study having a population of 80 technical college teachers randomly selected from the five technical colleges in Rivers State. Two research questions guided the study. A 20-item questionnaire titled "Perception of Teachers on Low Students' Enrolment Questionnaire (PTLSEQ)" was used for data collection. The instrument was face and content validated by two experts in technical education from Rivers State University, Port Harcourt and one expert in measurement and evaluation from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was obtained as 0.89 via Cronbach's Alpha method. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data gathered from the respondents. The findings of the study revealed among others that poor public perception of vocational technical education, lack of motivation, inadequate infrastructure among others are responsible for low students' enrolment in technical colleges. From the findings, it was recommended among others that Government should adequately fund technical college programmes to attract prospective students as skills acquisition provides solution for unemployment prevalent in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Educational systems in all nations across the globe have issues. These issues could be peculiar to a given society or emerging problems in which the society has to fight and overcome in order to move forward economically. In Nigeria for instance, one of the problems affecting our educational system is the low enrolment of students in vocational and technological programmes. Vocational and technological programmes offer opportunities for young people to gain relevant skills and theoretical knowledge crucial to building a formidable vocational career upon graduation from technical colleges and other vocational institutions. Thus, the core of vocational education offered in Nigerian technical colleges is the training of students to acquire technological knowledge and skills

for societal development. Vocational education is directed towards the acquisition of lifelong skills, knowledge and attitude needed for societal transformation through entrepreneurship development for job creation. Such vocational skills can be acquired by means of vocational technical education (VTE). Vocational technical education according to Ojimba (2012) refers to a form of education aimed at preparing persons for employment in recognized occupations. Buttressing this assertion, Lawal (2010) described vocational and technical education as the type of education that prepares persons who could apply relevant practical skills to make positive impacts in the society. Furthermore, Jegede & Olamide (2013) regarded vocational and technical education as a vehicle for the development of marketable and entrepreneurial skills for the promotion of meaningful societal development. In the words of Dokubo & Dokubo (2013), a major component of vocational education is skills acquisition which distinguishes it from liberal arts. Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET), an aspect of education which according to Rilwanu (2017) is a password to any nation that wants to join the league of technologically developed nations. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as defined by UNESCO and enshrined in the National Policy of Education, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) is a comprehensive term referring to those aspect of 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 occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. TVET develops individuals' capability and capacity to design, produce and use technology products and systems, as well as to assess the appropriateness of technological action (Okoye & Okwelle, 2017). TVET ensures the provision of skills and knowledge which serve as tools for the socio-economic development of any nation (Goel, 2009). Consequently, Uwaifo (2009) posited that vocational technical education is the training of technically oriented personnel who are to be initiators, facilitators and implementers of technological programs for self-reliance and sustainability. In essence, vocational technical education is anchored on self-development through the acquisition of life-long skills, relevant knowledge and desirable attitudes for productive work. Vocational technical education is directed towards societal development since through it, people acquire skills with which they explore their environments and effectively utilize resources within such societies to champion meaningful development. Therefore, it is crucial for a developing country like Nigeria to utilize the skills offered by vocational and technical education programmes in schools and colleges as veritable tools for national transformation as stated in the goals of technical and vocational education. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) in the National Policy on Education (NPE), declared that the goals of technical and vocational education include:

- Providing trained manpower in applied science and technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels.
- Providing technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, commercial and economic development.

- Giving training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.

In Nigeria, one of the institutions established for skills development of students is technical college. Technical colleges are training institutions established to train secondary school students to acquire skills necessary for self-reliance. The National Board for Technical Education (2010) described technical colleges as institutions established with the aim of empowering students with vocational skills for self-sustainability. Technical colleges offer programs of instruction that are majorly skill-based. Some of the programmes offered in the five technical colleges include in Rivers State are: Electrical installation and maintenance work, fabrication and welding, motor vehicles mechanics works, furniture design and construction, catering craft practice, block laying, brick laying and concreting, computer studies, radio, television and electronics works, carpentry and joinery, agric implement mechanics, mechanical engineering craft practice, painting and decoration, plumbing and pipe fitting among others. Participating in these programmes inculcate the right work skills in the students for self-employment upon graduation. This helps to alleviate the conditions of living of the students as well as promoting national development. Therefore, improving enrolment into vocational technical education programmes of technical institutions appears to be very paramount if skills acquisition must thrive in Nigeria owing to our technological backwardness which we need to deal with at this critical moment. Thus, this study is aimed at determining the perception of teachers on hurdles impeding students' enrolment in technical colleges in Rivers State, Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

However, technical colleges in Nigeria suffer neglect by Government especially in the areas of skilled manpower, infrastructure, funding and societal criticism among others. According to Abudulahi (2016) and Okwelle (2010), low enrolment of students cripples the actualization of noble objectives of technical education in Nigeria. Similarly, Okwelle and Ibeneme (2008) posited that low students enrolment in technical education programmes pose a serious threat to the industrialization of Nigeria. In the same vein, Agwi & Puyate (2017) report that the bad effect of low enrolment of students in technical colleges is that it may cause the nation to take so long to become technologically-efficient. Also, Okwelle (2011) stated that many vocational institutions in Nigeria experience low enrolment of students into its programmes. To further support this assertion, Agwi (2016) reports that poor enrolment in technical vocational courses is the reason why the nation remains technologically backward. According to Ibeneme (2007), technical education is a planned program of learning experiences that allows for high academic standards, leadership, preparation for industry-defined work and advanced continuing education. Despite its proven value, Ibeneme further opined that Nigerians ignore technical education and this rejection affected students' enrolment in all technical programmes offered at different levels of education in Nigeria. The poor enrolment syndrome is not only peculiar to vocational programmes in universities but also a major

challenge in many technical colleges across Nigeria. Technical education which covers several trades such as metal works, mechanical/automotive works, electrical/electronics, building and woodwork is developed for the middle-class people. In a nutshell, for technical education in Nigeria to meet its cardinal objectives of training students to be self-reliant by inculcating in them adequate work skills, increase in students' enrolment is very essential.

3. Statement of the Problem

Technical colleges in Nigeria usually record a drop in the population of new students compared to number admitted in regular secondary schools. This is because vocational technical education in Nigeria is seen as education for the last resort, for people of low intelligent quotient and low achievers. Students' enrolment in technical colleges suffers setbacks as most parents prefer training wards in secondary grammar schools than in technical colleges (Durajaye et al., 2014). Buttressing this assertion, Okolocha (2006) posited that since the introduction of technical vocational education and training (TVET) in the Nigerian educational system, enrolment into TVET programmes in Nigeria has been very low. Furthermore, in a related development, Uzougwu (2014) reported that the total enrolment into TVET programmes in Nigeria was less than 5% in the year 2014. This observed problem of poor enrolment in technical college programmes in Rivers State informed the researcher's quest to carry out this study on "Perception of teachers on hurdles impeding students' enrolment in technical colleges in Rivers State, Nigeria".

4. Research Questions

The following two research questions guided the study:

- What are the constraints to students' enrolment in technical colleges in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- What are the remedies to low students' enrolment in technical colleges in Rivers State, Nigeria?

5. Methodology

Descriptive survey design was used in this study. A descriptive survey study is a type of study in which data from a large sample drawn from a given population were collected and certain features of the sample as they are at the time of the study and which are of interest to the researcher were described without altering any independent variable of the study (Nwankwo, 2016). The independent variables of the study are not manipulated in descriptive survey design rather they are reported as observed (Akaninwor, 2014). A population of 180 teachers out of which 80 formed the study sample was used in the study. The purposive sampling technique was chosen in line with the purpose of the study which is to determine the perception of teachers on hurdles impeding students' enrolment in

technical colleges in Rivers State. The selected teachers therefore were chosen based on the fact that they specialize in skill courses taught in technical colleges which include electrical installation and maintenance work, fabrication and welding, motor vehicles mechanics works, furniture design and construction, catering craft practice, block laying, brick laying and concreting, computer studies, radio, television and electronics works, carpentry and joinery, agric implement mechanics, mechanical engineering craft practice, painting and decoration, plumbing and pipe fitting among others as these were the core vocational areas of instruction in technical colleges. Students whose enrolments into technical colleges were observed to be very low are those admitted to study any of the skill-based courses offered in these colleges. The five technical colleges in Rivers State which were used for the study are Government Technical College, Port Harcourt, Government Technical College, Tombia, Government Technical College, Eleogu, Government Technical College, Ahoada and Government Craft Development Centre, Port Harcourt. Two research questions guided the study. The instrument used for data was a questionnaire titled "Perception of Teachers on Low Students' Enrolment Questionnaire (PTLSEQ)". The questionnaire was designed on a 5-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) corresponding to numerical values of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The questionnaire containing the various items was distributed to the targeted audience (technical teachers) in order to extract valuable research information. The respondents provided the required data on every item in the questionnaire. The instrument was face and content-validated by two experts in technical education from Rivers State University Port Harcourt and another expert in measurement and evaluation from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt respectively. Cronbach's Alpha method was used to test the reliability of the instrument after which a reliability coefficient of 0.89 was obtained. From the 80 copies of the instrument distributed to the respondents, 72 copies (20 from female and 52 from male teachers) were duly filled and retrieved from the respondents for data analysis. The research questions were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The decision is that any item in the questionnaire having a mean less than 3.00 is rejected while any item whose mean is 3.00 or above is accepted. Standard deviation values close or wide apart were used to determine the homogeneity in the perception of the teachers.

6. Results

Data collected in relation to each research objective were presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Constraints to students' enrolment in Technical Colleges in Rivers State, Nigeria

S/N	Item Statement	Female			Male		
		\bar{X}_1	SD1	Decision	\bar{X}_2	SD2	Decision
1.	Poor public perception and apathy to vocational technical education.	4.50	0.50	Agree	4.60	0.49	Agree
2.	Poor funding of vocational technical education programmes by government.	4.75	0.43	Agree	4.40	0.55	Agree
3.	Shortage of qualified technical instructors in technical colleges.	4.50	0.50	Agree	4.49	0.50	Agree
4.	Inadequate equipment and instructional materials in technical colleges.	4.25	0.43	Agree	4.70	0.46	Agree
5.	Lack of well equipped library for research work and projects in technical colleges.	4.50	0.50	Agree	4.43	0.49	Agree
6.	Frequent curriculum change in technical colleges.	4.28	0.43	Agree	4.89	0.46	Agree
7.	Inadequate technical workshops and laboratories in technical colleges.	4.50	0.50	Agree	4.74	0.44	Agree
8.	Inadequate power supply to workshops and laboratories in technical colleges.	4.75	0.43	Agree	4.56	0.50	Agree
9.	Inadequate inclusion of professionals in VTE curriculum planning of technical colleges.	4.25	0.43	Agree	4.66	0.47	Agree
10.	Poor motivation of students in technical colleges.	4.75	0.43	Agree	4.73	0.44	Agree
Grand mean and SD		4.50	0.46		4.62	0.48	

Table 1 revealed that both the female and male teachers in technical colleges agreed that these items constitute constraints to students' enrolment in technical colleges as seen from the mean values of both categories of respondents. The standard deviation values ranging from 0.43 to 0.55 show closeness in the responses of the respondents.

Table 2. Remedies to low students' enrolment in Technical Colleges in Rivers State, Nigeria

S/N	Item Statement	Female			Male		
		\bar{X}_1	SD1	Decision	\bar{X}_2	SD2	Decision
1.	Sustainable public relation programmes for technical colleges	4.75	0.51	Agree	4.70	0.46	Agree
2.	Adequate funding of technical college programmes.	4.50	0.54	Agree	4.51	0.50	Agree
3.	Engagement of skilled and competent instructors in technical colleges.	4.25	0.46	Agree	4.69	0.46	Agree
4.	Provision of modern training equipment in technical colleges.	4.75	0.43	Agree	4.67	0.47	Agree
5.	Provision of functional libraries in technical colleges.	4.75	0.47	Agree	4.63	0.48	Agree
6.	Provision of instructional materials in technical colleges.	4.50	0.50	Agree	4.46	0.50	Agree
7.	Provision of workshops in technical colleges.	4.25	0.43	Agree	4.76	0.43	Agree
8.	Provision of adequate power supply to technical college workshops and laboratories.	4.75	0.43	Agree	4.87	1.13	Agree
9.	Provision of functional laboratories for technical colleges.	4.50	0.53	Agree	4.61	0.49	Agree
10.	Award of scholarships to intelligent students of technical colleges.	4.75	0.43	Agree	4.84	0.36	Agree
Grand mean and SD		4.58	0.47		4.67	0.53	

Table 2 showed that both female and male teachers in technical colleges agreed that all the items are possible remedies to low enrolment of students in technical colleges in Rivers State as indicated by the mean values of all the items which are above the cut-off mean of 3.00. Standard deviation values ranging from 0.36 to 1.13 shows homogeneity in the responses of the respondents.

Table 1 shows that poor funding of technical vocational education by government, shortage of professionally trained instructors, inadequate training equipment, lack of modern instructional materials, poor library facilities, inadequate workshops and laboratories, epileptic power supply, poor public perception of technical vocational education programmes among others constitute constraints to students' enrolment in technical colleges in Rivers State. This finding was supported by Okeke & Eze (2010) who posited that poor funding is a major factor inhibiting effective implementation of vocational technical education programmes in Nigeria. Likewise, Habibu (2007) asserted that inadequate funding, lack of basic infrastructural facilities, inadequate power supply, inadequate qualified trainers, public misconception of the worth of vocational technical programmes are some of the factors militating against quality technical vocational education in Nigeria as such adversely affect enrolment. Similarly, Oranu (1990) stated that lack of physical facilities is a major problem of technical education in Nigeria and that this also affects enrolment of students into technical college programmes. Furthermore, Umunadi (2013), submitted that facilities such as classroom buildings,

equipment, tools and instructional materials are grossly inadequate in technical institutions for effective implementation of vocational and technical curriculum in technical colleges. This finding equally agrees with Oduma (2007) and Dokubo & Dokubo (2013), who posited that vocational technical education in Nigeria lacked infrastructures like laboratories and workshops. The Finding is also supported by Ibeneme (2007), who asserted that many administrators of VTE programmes at policy making level are not vocationally trained persons. Furthermore, the finding agrees with Okorie (2000), who posited that many machines in technical colleges are outdated and need replacement without which students learn theoretical principles without adequate practical knowledge. This also affects enrolment into technical colleges. Thus, when quality trainers are engaged, modern equipment provided, instructional materials supplied, workshops and laboratories become functional, motivational packages like scholarship provided for intelligent students, among others enrolment in technical colleges will naturally increase as the worth of these technical programmes will be visible to all.

Table 2 reveals that effective public relation programmes, adequate funding, employments of skilled professionals, provision of training facilities and equipment, provision of good library facility, provision of modern technical workshops and laboratories, steady power supply, and provision of scholarship to brilliant technical college students ways to improve students' enrolment in technical colleges in Rivers State, Nigeria. This finding agrees with Okolocha & Baba (2016), who submitted that Government should make vocational and technical education programmes more attractive by providing scholarship offers to brilliant students, making the acquisition of skills compulsory irrespective of areas of specialization in school. The finding corroborates Gove (2014) who posited that Government should provide basic infrastructural facilities like workshops and laboratories for effective skills acquisition in VTE institutions as this will boost enrolment of students in technical education. Again, this finding is in agreement with Agwi (2016); Okwelle & Ibeneme (2008); Okwori (2011) who identified strategies for enhancing students' enrolment in TVET programmes to include planning industrial visits/excursion for technical college students, providing scholarship to outstanding students and introducing public relation activities into school curriculum. Consequently, enrolment of students in technical colleges would be improved if the public through quality awareness are educated on the need for skills acquisition and the benefits derivable from such skills. Government needs to adequately fund technical programmes in technical colleges to make it attractive to the public for increase enrolment.

7. Discussion

Table 1 shows that poor funding of technical vocational education by government, shortage of professionally trained instructors, inadequate training equipment, lack of modern instructional materials, poor library facilities, inadequate workshops and laboratories, epileptic power supply, poor public perception of technical vocational education programmes among others constitute constraints

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educated on the need for skills acquisition and the benefits derivable from such skills. Government needs to adequately fund technical programmes in technical colleges to make it attractive to the public for increase enrolment.

8. Conclusion

Technical and vocational education as a veritable tool for the socio-economic and technological development of the society becomes effective when the public are meant to understand its essence and the need to embrace same for the acquisition of relevant work skills required for societal transformation. Thus, with quality vocational education, technical college students can create employment and thereby become self-reliant. As a result, there is need to boost students' enrolment in technical colleges in Nigeria.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Government should adequately fund all technical vocational education and training programmes in technical colleges to boost the overall efficiency and productivity.
- Government should engage skilled technical professionals in technical colleges in Nigeria as instructors and trainers for quality training of students.
- Government should provide scholarship to deserving brilliant students of technical colleges in Nigeria.
- Government should upgrade infrastructural facilities in technical colleges in Nigeria for increased skills acquisition for better enrolment.
- Government should put in place effective public relations system to create awareness of the need for skills acquisition via technical and vocational education for improved enrolment into technical colleges in Nigeria.

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