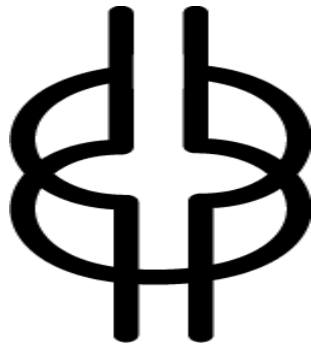


Ghana Journal of Education: Issues and Practice (*GJE*)



NYANSAPO – "Wisdom Knot"

Symbol of wisdom, ingenuity, intelligence and patience

Perception of JHS Students and Parents about Technical and Vocational Education in Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana

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Abstract

Despite the numerous benefits of technical vocational education and training (TVET), most students and parents still prefer the traditional academic education. This study investigated the views of students and parents about TVET in Cape Coast metropolis of Ghana. The study employed cross-sectional descriptive quantitative survey approach. A total of 395 questionnaire forms were recovered (out of 570), making a return rate of 69 %. Of these, 242 were administered to students (132 from public schools and 110 from private schools) and 153 were administered to parents. The respondents were selected through stratified random sampling technique. The data were analysed using percentages, mean and standard deviation as well as t-test of independent samples. The results of this study revealed divergent views: findings indicated that the JHS students' response generally indicated negative perception towards TVET, while their parents' response generally indicated positive perception of TVET. The study finally offered some recommendations that can enhance the outlook of TVET programmes in the minds of younger people and parents.

Key words: Technical Vocational Education and training, JHS Students, Parents, Ghana.

Introduction

Several developing countries including Ghana have recognized the need to prepare young people for various levels of socio-economic development with knowledge and skills which reflect the full range of human difference, interest, abilities, and needs. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is a means-to-an-end that may address the challenges of poverty, unemployment, low technological progress and slow national development. Studies indicate that TVET, if well positioned could play multidimensional roles of

stimulating economic growth, wealth creation, and empowering the citizenry through skills enhancement. TVET greatly improves efficiency and leads to brilliant innovation, increases government revenue on taxes and makes a country a haven for investment. TVET also serves as an instrument for curbing social exclusion, youth restiveness, eliminating youth unemployment, and for addressing social crises that threaten the political and economic stability of a nation (Kemevor & Kassah, 2015; Laing, 2013; Akplu & Amankrah, 2008). Indeed, it is reported that many of the high performing economies in the world have sizable proportion of their youth enrolled in TVET programmes (Ankomah, 2016).

In Ghana, technical and vocational education and training are delivered at three levels: Basic Education, Second-Cycle and Tertiary Education levels. At the Basic Education level, technical education starts from Junior High School while vocational education starts from the Primary School (1-6) and it is termed Creative Arts (Kemevor & Kassah, 2015).

At the Second-Cycle level, Ghana uses a combination of two approaches to organise vocational technical education:

- There is a parallel approach where vocational technical institutions exist alongside the senior high school system. Graduates from the basic level can enter the technical institutes or the senior high schools.
- The core curriculum approach is also used in the conventional senior high school system. For those who enter the senior high school after the basic level education, there exist a core curriculum and a cluster of elective subjects, which could be vocational technical in nature. Any student interested in a career in vocational technical could select at least three elective subjects in any particular vocational technical field, which the individual will have to study in addition to the four core liberal subjects (Boateng, 2012).

Technical and vocational education at the tertiary level is organised within post-secondary institutions or tertiary institutions. This is the highest level of technical and vocational education in the country. Universities, polytechnics/technical universities, and other post-secondary training institutions provide it.

Despite the benefits and prospects of TVET, there are a lot of issues confronting its successful implementation in Ghana. Atchoarena and Delluc (2001), and Amedorme and Fiagbe (2013) highlight the following challenges confronting technical and vocational education in Ghana:

- lack of facilities and materials for training students,
- inadequate technical teachers or facilitators,
- limited number of training institutions for technical teachers
- difficulty in career progression.
- mismatch between acquired skills and market needs,
- negative public attitudes and perceptions regarding technical and vocational education and training.

However, to partly address these problems, the government of Ghana, through an Act of Parliament in 2006, established a Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET) which has an overall responsibility for skills development and co-ordination and overseeing of all aspects of technical and vocational education and training in the country. Also, the Government has taken the decision to align and bring all public TVET institutions in the country under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Education. This is to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of policies and as well address pertinent challenges that confront TVET in Ghana.

Also, in an effort to enhance the status and attractiveness of TVET in Ghana, eight of the ten polytechnics in Ghana were upgraded to technical universities in the year 2016. The move was to strengthen the capacity of the polytechnic institutions to fulfill their role in industrial, technological and economic development. It was also to re-engineer their training programmes for greater relevance and higher quality. Finally, the move was to raise their status and attractiveness as higher institutions of choice for senior secondary/technical school leavers.

Addressing the issue of career progression that may hinder the progression of technical and vocational graduates, the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET) of the Ministry of Education has now added English language, mathematics, science and social studies to technical students' curriculum so they can be admitted into degree and HND programmes direct. The trade area is conducted by the Technical Examination Unit of the Ghana Education

Service whilst the core subject is examined by NABPTEX. With this combination, graduates of technical institutes who have a minimum of six (6) credit passes in three electives (trade areas) and three core subjects: English, mathematics, integrated science or social studies are eligible to pursue degree programmes at university. However, those who have a minimum of six (6) passes in three electives (trade areas) and three core subjects are admitted into HND programmes at the polytechnic/technical universities. These interventions are aimed at making TVET in Ghana more pliable to meet national goals and aspirations as well as local and global demands.

Despite various efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Education and a number of related agencies to promote and inform the public on the benefits and importance of TVET in Ghana, most students and parents still prefer the academic education rather than the technical and vocational education. For instance, Global Education Monitory (GEM) (UNESCO, 2016) reports that only one percent of the students' population below the age of 25 years in Ghana is enrolled in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Similarly, Okae-Adjei (2017) highlights low enrolment of students in technical and vocational programmes in Ghanaian polytechnics/technical universities and called for urgent attention to save the affected departments from collapse. Also, a survey of public TVET teachers reveals that none of the respondents wanted their own children to study TVET programmes (Anamuah-Mensah, 2004).

Graduate unemployment in Ghana has increased in recent years because most of the graduates do not have employable skills (Laing, 2013; Ali, 2015). These evidence show that TVET has been left to the periphery and its significance has not really been embraced in Ghana. As a consequence, streetism and its attended social vices such as stealing, drug abuse and prostitution are on the increase. This situation, undoubtedly, poses economic and security threats to the nation (Yarquah & Baafi-Frimpong, 2012). It is against this background that this study sought to investigate students' and parents' perception of TVET. Currently, there is paucity of research on perceptions of JHS students and parents about TVET in Ghana.

The Perception of TVET

Perception is defined as an idea, image or believe or view one has as a result of how one sees or understands something (Hornby, 2000). Conroy (1998) asserts that knowledge of student perceptions and aspirations plays an important role in education planning process. Therefore, it is vitally important that educational leaders gain understanding of Junior high school students' and their parents' perceptions of TVET education in order to design marketable programmes that satisfy students and parents aspirations.

The international context provides few studies on basic school students' perceptions of technical and vocational education. Studies suggest that basic school students perceive TVET as education designed for students from poor families. For instance, research by Ozioma (2011) on students' perception about TVET reveals that students view technical and vocational education as education designed for students from poor socio-economic background. Also, basic school students are skeptical about the job potential of TVET. In his study about the views of students (aged 11-17) towards TVET in rural Zimbabwe, Katsande (2016) indicates that the students were sceptical about the role of TVET in securing employment.

Contrary to the findings of the authors above, Awang, Sail, Alavi, and Ishmail (2011) in analyzing the perceptions of public form four secondary school students and apprentices of private institutes in Malaysia on image and loyalty towards TVET, indicate that secondary school students and apprentices recognise that TVET are accessible to all secondary school students including religious stream, low academic interest, low learning abilities and flexible entry requirements. Both groups were optimistic that TVET produces graduates with high future career and job potentials, highly employable and earned at par with other academic qualifications. Both groups also disagree that TVET students are of low quality, tend to be juvenile delinquents, problematic, and have low academic interest in furthering their study to advance or tertiary level.

In their study to determine parental perception of the education of their adolescent children of youths aged fifteen years in Greece involving 200 parents, Saiti and Mitrosili (2005) find that most of the parents in question (86.0%) encourage their children to follow general secondary education rather than technical education. Only a small

percentage of respondents (14.0%) advise their children to follow technical education. They further indicate that typically the socio-economic background of parents of a child determines the type of career one chooses to do; and that, the higher the parents' higher occupational background, the more positive their attitude towards academic education. Their study further reveals that parental preference of general education to technical and vocational education is attributed to four factors: technical education usually limits the opportunities for career development; it prevents children from continuing in higher education; it only offers children with low quality knowledge; and children who produce good school grades have the opportunity to continue their studies in higher education. Recent empirical survey by Raimi and Akhuemonkhan (2014) on parents' perception of technical and vocational education in Nigeria reveals that a total of 53.4% parents describe TVET as an educational option designed for students who cannot cope with the rigour of conventional education system, 43.4% note that brilliant students should not take-up TVET programmes and 40.6% perceive TVET as inferior education designed for students from poor families.

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to explore JHS students' and their parents' perceptions about TVET in Ghana. Thus, the study was set out specifically to address the following research questions and null hypotheses:

Research Questions

- How do Ghanaian Public JHS Students' perceive technical and vocational education?
- How do Ghanaian Private JHS Students' perceive technical and vocational education?
- What perceptions do parents of Ghanaian JHS students have of technical and vocational education?

Hypotheses

- There is no significant difference in the perceptions public and private school students have of TVET.

- There is no significant difference in the perceptions junior high school students and their parents have of TVET.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used cross-sectional descriptive survey method to explore JHS students' and their parents' perceptions of TVET. The population for the study comprised all the JHS 2 students in all the Government and Private owned junior high schools and their parents in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. The JHS 3 students had completed at the time of the sampling. Hence, JHS 2 students were chosen because it was perceived that they have been exposed to the study of some of the vocational/technical subjects more than the JHS1 students. There are 99 junior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. Of these, 61 are public schools whilst 38 are private schools. The stratified sampling technique was used to randomly select 10 schools out of the 99 schools, from above average, average and below average performing schools in the Cape Coast metropolis of Ghana, ensuring that both public school and private school types are represented (five of the 61 public schools and another five of the 38 private schools). In all, 570 research participants consisting of 285 students (155 from public school; 130 from private school) and their parents numbering 285 formed the sample for the study.

Instrument

Structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire consisted of two parts (parents and students). The questionnaire used a four-point, Likert-type scale where the respondents had to choose from strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The items were also categorized as Access/Entry qualification, Quality of Curriculum, Qualification Recognition, Career and Job potential, Social Skills and Social Values. The items were adapted based on the framework devised by Awang et al., (2011) to investigate students' loyalty towards TVET in Malaysia and were

modified for use taking into account the Ghanaian context and culture. The questionnaire was given to two senior lecturers at University of Cape Coast in Ghana to evaluate the validity of the items. The few items that were not clear were revised. The instruments were pilot tested in one public school to ensure that they elicited valid responses. The reliability of the instrument was established using cronbach's coefficient alpha (Table 1). The Cronbach's alpha value for all constructs ranges between 0.78 and 0.88. All the values were above the value of 0.70, thus demonstrating that the scales are consistent and reliable (Pallant, 2013).

Table 1: Reliability tests for students' perception towards TVET scales

Scale	Items	Cronbach Alpha
Access/Entry qualification (EQ)	4	0.880
Quality of Curriculum (QC)	4	0.857
Recognition of qualification (RQ)	4	0.824
Career and Job potential (C&JP)	5	0.848
Social Skills and Soft Skills (SV &SS)	4	0.784

Definitions of Terms

Entry qualification (EQ): this dimension reflected students' and parents' perceptions about the level or standard of entry requirements for technical vocational educational and training courses and the type and quality of students' that are enrolled.

Quality of curriculum (QC): this dimension reflected perceptions of the curriculum content and its applicability to contemporary society's needs.

Recognition of qualification (RQ): this dimension reflected students and parents' perceptions of the status of a degree gained in TVET amongst employers and higher education providers, both in country and overseas.

Career and job potential (C&JP): this dimension reflected students and parents' perceptions of the employment potential following graduation from a TVET school.

Social skills (SS1): this dimension reflected perceptions about the degree of social skills that TVET graduates hold that are valued not only in skilled workers but also in society.

Soft skills (SS2): this dimension reflected perceptions about how effective TVET is at equipping graduates with the soft skills that facilitate effective interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was done in the Cape Coast Metropolis by the author with the help of three trained research assistants. Permission was sought from the metropolitan education service and also at the level of the school to conduct the research during school hours. The permission was granted at both levels. In each of the schools, the research project was explained to the participants and their ascent was sought, while the consent of parent was also sought before the commencement of the data collection. Some of the questionnaire forms were completed in the presence of the researcher and his team, whilst the others including that of the parents were collected later by the author.

A total of 395 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved (out of the 570), making a return rate of 69 %. Two hundred and forty-two were from students (132 from public schools and 110 from private schools) and 153 from parents.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentages, means and standard deviations). Independent samples t-test was used to determine whether there was significant difference in perception between students in public schools and students in private schools; and also between parents and students. The questionnaire was a four-point, Likert-type scale with 4 standing for strongly agree, 3 for agree, 2 for disagree and 1 for strongly disagree.

Results

The results are presented as follows:

Table 2 shows the overall means and standard deviations of the respondents for each of the various aspects of perceptions that were studied. The findings indicate that both public and private JHS participants have positive perception of TVET access/entry qualification [public (M=2.92, SD=0.66; private (M=2.82, SD=0.77)],

and quality of TVET curriculum [public (M=2.74, SD=0.80; private (M=2.71, SD=0.75)]. Also, both students' groups had negative perception towards TVET qualification recognition [public (M=2.32, SD=0.77; private (M=2.29, SD=0.75)], career and job potential of TVET [public (M=2.40, SD=0.80; private (M=2.34, SD=0.81)], social skills and soft skills [public (M=2.47, SD=0.80; private (M=2.38, SD=0.84)]. The means of public JHS participants were however, higher than the private JHS participants. The findings further show that with the exception of social and soft skills in TVET (M=2.22, SD=0.84), the JHS parents participants held a positive perception of TVET access/entry qualification (M=2.94, SD=0.80), quality of TVET curriculum (M=2.92, SD=0.72), TVET qualification recognition (M=2.77, SD=0.76), career and job potential of TVET (M=2.61, SD=0.67).

Table 2: Overall Scale Means and Standard deviation on TVET Perception based upon school-type and their Parents

Scale	Public Sch. Students (132)		Private Sch. Students (110)		Parents (153)	
	Mean (out of 4)	Std	Mean	Std	Mean	Std
Access/Entry Qualification	2.92	0.66	2.82	0.77	2.94	0.80
Quality of Curriculum	2.74	0.80	2.71	0.75	2.92	0.72
Recognition of Qualification	2.32	0.77	2.29	0.75	2.77	0.76
Career and Job Potential	2.40	0.80	2.34	0.81	2.61	0.67
Social Skills and Soft Skills	2.47	0.80	2.38	0.84	2.22	0.84

Note: A mean score of 2.5 or higher indicates positive perceptions; a mean of 2.4 or lower indicates a negative perception about TVET education.

Table 3 shows the result of the independent samples t-test on public JHS students and private JHS students' perceptions of TVET. The analysis revealed no significant mean difference between the perceptions of the public JHS students (M = 2.57, SD = 0.77) and the private JHS students (M = 2.51, SD = 0.78), ($t = 246 \text{ df} = 1.92, p > 0.05$).

This result suggests that students' perception about TVET from both public and private JHS were quite similar.

Table 3: Independent samples t-test on Public JHS students and Private JHS students' perception of TVET

	N	df	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Public JHS	132	246	2.57	0.77	1.92	0.146
Private JHS	110		2.51	0.78		

Table 4 shows the result of the independent samples t-test on JHS students and parents perception of TVET. The analysis revealed a significant mean difference ($t_{262, df} = 2.89, p = 0 < 0.05$). The JHS parents' perception of TVET was better ($M = 2.69; SD = 0.76$) than that of the students ($M = 2.54, SD = 0.78$). This finding suggests that, generally, parents studied were found to have strong beliefs in favour of TVET. It is hoped that this positive perception could influence the perception of the students with time.

Table 4: Independent samples t-test on JHS students and Parents perception of TVET

	N	df	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Public JHS	242	262	2.54	0.78	2.89	0.041
Private JHS	153		2.69	0.76		

Discussion

Findings of how student participants and their parents perceived technical and vocational education are discussed based on access/entry qualification, and quality of curriculum, recognition of qualification, career and job potential, as well as social and soft skills of TVET.

Both public and private JHS students and their parents held similar view about TVET access/entry qualification and quality of curriculum. The respondents generally perceived that TVET has flexible entry requirements and easily accessible to all junior high school students including religious, ethnic, physical challenge, rural, urban, low and high learning abilities. Impliedly, all the respondents perceived that TVET is accessible to students of diverse learning abilities, religious and socio-economic background. Also, they viewed

TVET as an alternative educational choice, practically oriented that provides specific job skills needed for career. They were also optimistic that TVET produces creative and innovative graduates. These findings indicate that all the three groups held positive perception of TVET access/entry requirements, quality of curriculum and social values. This finding is consistent with the reported study of Awang et al., (2011).

All the three groups in the study were however, of the view that TVET did not provide combination of academic and skill training. They also perceived that TVET did not equip students with ICT skills, and soft skills that facilitate effective interpersonal relationships in the workplace such as communicative skills, leadership skills, managerial skills and administrative skills. They were also of the view that TVET students did not usually aspire to higher education level. This outcome is hardly surprising because historically and culturally, TVET in Ghana had been focused on skilled training only, such as carpentry, mechanics, brick laying, cooking and sewing trades without the inclusion of academic subjects such as English, literature, mathematics, social studies, physics, chemistry, and biology for examination to get a place at university. However, to make TVET more responsive to the national goals and aspirations as well as local and global demands, the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET) of the Ministry of Education has added English language, mathematics, science and social studies to technical students' curriculum so they can be admitted into degree and HND programmes direct. With this combination, technical institute's graduates who have a minimum of six (6) credit passes in three electives (trade areas) and three core subjects: English, mathematics, integrated science or social studies are eligible to pursue degree related programmes at the University. However, those who have a minimum of six (6) passes in three electives (trade areas) and three core subjects are admitted into HND programmes at polytechnic/technical universities. It is plausible that many young people and their parents are not aware of this restructuring, perhaps due to inadequate public information/education.

On career and job potential, both public and private JHS participants and their parents were confident that TVET produces high skilled graduates for the nation. However, both student groups disagreed that TVET leads to professions that are highly demanded on the labour market, leads to jobs that are well paid, and enable people to

continue with university studies. They also disagreed that TVET is recognised by private and public companies, as well as higher institutions in Ghana and overseas. They were also of the opinion that TVET is socially not prestigious and its graduate did not earn on par with other academic qualifications. This finding is partly consistent with the reported study of Katsande (2016); but does not support the findings of Awang et al., (2011). This difference in perception may probably be due to the fact that the needs and wishes of the students in the two geographical environments were dissimilar due to differences in political, socio-cultural and the level of development prevailing in the respondents' environments.

Contrary to previous studies that parents generally despise technical and vocational education (Raimi & Akhuemonkhan, 2014), the JHS parents studied held positive perception of TVET. This emerging opinion of parents may be attributable to the high graduate unemployment in Ghana in recent years because most of the graduates do not have employable skills (Laing, 2013; Ali, 2015)

In general, this result suggests that the JHS participants held negative perception of TVET qualification recognition, and career and job potential while their parents held positive perception. This might be attributable to the fact that the parents in the study perhaps are more informed or better exposed to TVET qualification recognition and career and job potential than the students. It is also probable that the JHS participants had not been exposed adequately to the prospects of TVET, even though these prospects had been highlighted explicitly in their basic design and technology curriculum. The findings further showed that there was no significant difference in the mean perception of public and private JHS participants. This suggests that the JHS students' perceptions of TVET were quite similar. The public and private JHS participants carried similar view probably because their needs and wishes were similar. Other reason for the similarity of views between public and private students was that the same curriculum is used in both categories of schools. This possibly accounts for the similarity in their perception of TVET.

The inferential statistics also showed differences in perception between the JHS students and of their parents. The parents held a higher positive perception of TVET than the JHS participants. The differences

in opinion could be attributed to the fact that the parents are better exposed to the relevance of TVET than the students.

Conclusion

From the findings, it can be concluded that both public and private JHS participants held a positive perception of TVET access/entry qualification, and quality of TVET curriculum. Both students' groups held negative perception towards TVET qualification recognition, career and job potential, and soft skills of TVET. With the exception of social and soft skills in TVET, the JHS parents studied held positive perception of TVET access/entry qualification, quality of TVET curriculum, TVET qualification recognition, and career and job potential of TVET.

The findings further showed that there was no significant difference in the mean perception of public and private JHS participants. However, there was a significant difference in opinion between the JHS students and of their parents. In general, the parents studied recognised the relevance of TVET in the Ghanaian society than the JHS participants. The influential role of parents on students' perception is very strong (Saiti & Mitrosili, 2005); thus, parents' positive perception of the relevance of TVET could have influence on the students' perception of TVET with time.

Implications and Practice

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that TVET may not have received adequate attention among the students' participants in the Cape Coast metropolis of Ghana. It is therefore important that awareness drive targeting students is strongly advocated. As prescribed by Dzeto (2014), COTVET and Ministry of Education must promote a massive social marketing campaigns such as the provision of awareness weeks, exhibitions and open days by TVET institutions for school children and their parents to visit training institutions, workshops and industries to familiarize themselves with the sort of training offered in those institutions as well as the opportunities for people with such trainings. Hopefully this could expose the students to the advantages technical and vocational programmes have over other programmes; particularly in the area of self-employment and self-actualization and also enhance the outlook of TVET institutions in the minds of younger

people who may eventually become trainees of such institutions. It will also be important to run programmes in the electronic media showing the benefits of technical and vocational training, and its importance to development and wealth creation.

Limitations and Further Studies

This study was limited to JHS students and their parents in the Cape Coast metropolis only; thus, its generalisation to other students and parents outside the metropolis may not be appropriate. Further study in this area could be carried out in other regions; and also look at the perspectives of other stakeholders such as teachers, managers of TVET institutions and employers.

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Appendix A

Scale	Public Sch. Students (132)		Private Sch. Students (110)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Access/Entry Qualification				
TVET is very accessible to all students	3.37	0.685	3.26	0.825
TVET has low and flexible entry requirement	3.28	0.556	3.12	0.782
TVET students have high learning ability	2.58	0.749	2.52	0.824
TVET students aspire to higher education level	2.46	0.640	2.35	0.656
Quality of Curriculum				
TVET is an alternative educational choice	3.08	0.743	2.68	0.854
TVET provides combination of academic and skills	2.42	0.827	2.34	0.748
TVET is more practical oriented.	2.78	0.816	2.95	0.584
TVET provides specific job skills	2.68	0.881	2.86	0.824
Recognition of Qualification				
TVET is recognised by both private and public companies	2.44	0.815	2.37	0.726
TVET graduate earn on par with other academic qualification	2.29	0.741	2.13	0.824
TVET is recognized by Ghanaian universities and overseas higher institutions	2.30	0.704	2.48	0.764
TVET is socially prestigious	2.24	0.802	2.16	0.691
Career and Job Potential				
TVET produces high skilled graduates for the nation	2.68	0.743	2.64	0.807
TVET leads to professions that are highly demanded on the labour market.	2.36	0.540	2.45	0.816
TVET leads to jobs that are highly well paid	2.13	0.682	2.05	0.890
TVET enable people to continue with university studies	2.25	0.784	2.02	0.788
TVET graduate are highly employable	2.56	0.652	2.52	0.745
Social Skills and Soft Skills				
TVET produces creative and innovative graduates	2.65	0.775	2.58	0.876
TVET is able to inculcate communicative skills in students	2.42	0.865	2.38	0.785
TVET is able to inculcate and produce students with ICT skills	2.38	0.786	2.32	0.884
TVET is able to inculcate leadership and administrative skills in students	2.44	0.784	2.23	0.836