



## Vocational Interest, Skills, and Counselling as Correlates of Unemployed Graduates' Readiness to Enter Low-Paying Occupations in Delta State of Nigeria



P. I. Tibi <sup>a</sup>

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### Abstract

There is a high level of unemployment amongst National Youth Service Corps-discharged graduates of universities and polytechnics in Nigeria, especially in Delta State. This necessitated guiding these graduates to take to low-skill, low-paying jobs, as an alternative to redundancy and the attendant indulgence in anti-social behavior. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between vocational interest, skills possessed and vocational guidance techniques, and unemployed graduates' readiness to enter into low-skill occupations. A research hypothesis was formulated for the correlational design study. Three instruments: the Modified Bakare Vocational Interest inventory (MB VII), the vocational skills possessed inventory (VSPI), and the vocational guidance techniques (counseling) were used. The study population comprised of all unemployed NYSC-discharged graduates in Delta State. Purposive sampling was used to select two Local Government Areas (LGA's) from each of the three Senatorial Districts of Delta State (Six LGA's). Random sampling was used to obtain two hundred and forty respondents from the six LGAs. Data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. Results indicated that vocational interest, skills possessed and counseling had significant relationships with unemployed graduate's readiness to enter low-skill occupations. They were all predictors of entry into low-skill jobs except counseling. It was recommended that skill training, counseling and identification of vocational interests should be intensified to reduce unemployment amongst graduates.

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### Corresponding author:

P. I. Tibi,

Department of Educational Foundation, University of Delta Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria.

Email address: [pauline.tibi@unidel.edu.ng](mailto:pauline.tibi@unidel.edu.ng)

<sup>a</sup> Department of Educational Foundation, University of Delta Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria

## 1 Introduction

The army of unemployed National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) — discharged graduates roaming the streets or cocooned in their family homes are damning testimony to the nearly hopeless situation of Nigerian youths. In 2013, over eighty-three thousand Nigerian graduates registered with the Graduate Internship Scheme (SUREP, 2014). Out of this, only one thousand graduates serve as interns at the Legal Aid Council, while thousand, five hundred interns are on the Presidential Committee on Land Reform. This confirms that the government's efforts in addressing the unemployment malaise are grossly inadequate. [Megbo & Ahaotu \(2015\)](#), noted that the analysis of labor statistics indicates that the unemployment rate for Nigerian university graduates may be around 25 percent and that their prospects for employment have worsened over time. In addition, the percentage of graduates going into the public sector has fallen drastically. They further stated: that the following messages conveyed by the managers of a survey firm clearly captured the subject of our discussion through the following assertions:

- University graduates are poorly trained and are unproductive on the job.
- Graduate skills have steadily deteriorated over the past decade.
- Shortcomings are particularly severe in oral and written communication, and in applied technical skills.

In Delta State the youth unemployment challenge is compounded by high graduate turn-out annually, occasioned by the existence of a three-campus state university, four HND-awarding polytechnics, two degree-awarding colleges of education in affiliation with Delta State University, the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, and two private universities. In their job search, these teeming unemployed graduates are unwilling to engage in skill-based, low-paying jobs; rather they show preference for jobs linked to their areas of specialization at HND and degree levels. This is in spite of the fact that Okonjo-Iweala, the coordinating Minister of the Nigerian Economy had declared in 2013 that over 80% of Nigerian graduates are unemployable because of inadequate training in the disciplines ([Schultz et al., 2004](#); [Mortimer et al., 2002](#); [Salisbury, 2014](#)).

In view of this high level of graduate unemployment, it became expedient to look in the direction of low-skill occupations for their employment. The Strong interest inventory is used in career assessment — to give insight into a person's interest, so that they may have less difficulty in deciding on an appropriate career choice for themselves. The Reading-free Vocational Interest Inventory — 2 provides t-scores, percentiles, and ratings for eleven areas of interest including automobile, building trades, clerical, animal care, food service, patient care, horticulture, personal service, laundry service, and materials handling. Thus, vocational interest is very critical to career choice. According to [Wu \(2000\)](#), a considerable proportion of students choose professional and management vocations and students with higher levels of vocational aspiration or interest usually proceed to prepare themselves for higher careers. It was equally believed that while developing educationally, these graduates may have acquired vocational skills in their specialized or other areas, which could be deployed in low-paying jobs in the face of massive unemployment. Thus, learners acquire useful and usable skills for job placement or occupations through vocational education ([Tibi, 2012](#)).

Proper assessment of skills possessed by graduates would help determine their readiness to adjust to low-paying jobs. Furthermore, counseling could be used to re-orientate graduates to engage in low-paying, skill-based vocations, in the absence of employment commensurate with their education. [Egbochuku \(2000\)](#), noted that behavior is the result of socialization, thus to effect a change in behavior, the process of re-learning the social setting (group) requires counseling by a professional such as the use of cognitive restructuring. [Egbochuku & Alika \(2008\)](#), found that there is a significant relationship between counseling, vocational interest, and socio-economic status on the re-entry of girls into school.

The purpose of this study was therefore to investigate the relationship between the vocational interest of graduates, skills possessed by them, and guidance techniques offered to the graduates by professional counselors and unemployed graduates' readiness to enter low-paying occupations.

### *Research hypothesis*

To establish a research paradigm for this study, a hypothesis was proposed as follows: There is no significant relationship between vocational interest, skills possessed, and counseling on unemployed graduates' readiness to enter low-skill occupations in Delta State.

## 2 Materials and Methods

This correlational study investigated the extent of the relationship between the independent variables (vocational interest, skills possessed, and counseling) and the dependent variable (unemployed graduates' readiness to enter low-paying jobs) in Delta State. The study employed the survey methods to elicit responses from the subjects. The instruments used for the study were (i) the Modified Bakare Vocational Interest Inventory (MBVII), (ii) the Vocational Skills Possessed Inventory (VSPI), and the Vocational Guidance Techniques employed by professional counselors. The two questionnaires (MBVII) and (VSPI) were developed and validated by using counseling and vocational teacher educators respectively, while vocational guidance techniques were employed with the assistance of professional counselors. The population of the study comprised all unemployed, NYSC-discharged graduates in Delta State. A purposive sampling technique was used to select two local government areas (LGAs) from each of the three senatorial districts (Delta North, Delta Central, and Delta South) of Delta State. A random sampling technique was used to select two hundred and forty respondents from the six selected LGAs, who effectively responded to the questionnaires and were also subjected to vocational counseling. Data obtained were analyzed using multiple regression analysis.

## 3 Results and Discussions

Multiple regression analysis was employed in analyzing data collected, at the alpha level of significance of 0.05. The hypothesis which stated that there was no significant relationship between vocational interest, skills possessed, and counseling, on unemployed graduates' readiness to enter low-skill, low-paying occupations in Delta State, was tested. (See table 1 below).

Table 1  
Regression analysis of vocational interest, skills possessed, and counseling on unemployed graduates' readiness to enter into low-skill, low-paying occupations in Delta State

ANOVA					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance
1. Regression	1566.620	3	522.207	2.724	.280
Residual	383.380	2	191.690		
Total	1950.000	5			
1. Regression	1950.000	5	390.00		
Residual	.000	0			
Total	1950.000	5			
Excluded Variables					
Model	Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Colliner it $\gamma$ Statistics
1. VOCINT	.101 <sup>a</sup>	.136	.914	.134	.347
SKILLS	.226 <sup>a</sup>	.454	.729	.413	.657
COUNSEL	-.687 <sup>a</sup>	-5.784	-.109	-.985	.404
2. VOCINT	b				.000

Predictors in the Model (Constant), COUNSEL, VOCINT, SKILLS Predictors in the Model (Constant), COUNSEL, VOCINT, SKILLS, Dependent Variable: NYSC discharged unemployed graduates.

According to Table 1 above, the combined effect of the three independent variables made up for F factor (i.e. F=2.724), for readiness to enter low-paying occupations by unemployed graduates. Table I revealed the following: the beta weight of vocational interest was .101; skills possessed were .226 and counseling accounted for - .687. To show how significant the predictive power of each independent variable was, student t-statistics was used and tested at 0.05 level of confidence and the outcomes were as follows: vocational interest .136, skills possessed .454, and counseling -5.784. These showed that the three independent variables had significant relationships with unemployed graduates' readiness to enter low-skill, low-paying occupations, although counseling was negatively significant (Kramer & Kramer, 2020; Alias et al., 2013; Wu, 2011). Thus, vocational interest, skills possessed and counseling when combined were good predictors of unemployed graduates' readiness to enter low-paying occupations, with an F-value of 2.724. Considered

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separately, while vocational interest and skills possessed t-values of .136 and .454 respectively were positively significant and served as good predictors of unemployed graduates' readiness to enter low-paying occupations, counseling with a t-value of -5.784 impacted negatively on the dependent variable. Following this above, the hypothesis which stated that there was no significant relationship between vocational interest, skills possessed, and counseling on unemployed graduates' readiness to enter low-skill occupations was rejected. This meant that there was a significant positive relationship between vocational interests and skills possessed on unemployed graduates' readiness to enter low-skill occupations in the Delta State of Nigeria (Feldmann, 2009; Ljupco & Jasminka, 2017; Herianto, 2017).

Since the results of data analysis alone showed that there was a significant relationship between vocational interest, skills possessed, and counseling on unemployed, NYSC-discharged graduates' readiness to enter low-skill occupations, it could be assumed that the three independent variables would be critical in addressing the issue of the high level of unemployment among graduates in Delta State. As earlier stated, vocational interest is very critical to a successful career choice. Wu (2000), noted that students with higher levels of vocational aspiration or interest usually proceeded to prepare themselves for higher careers. Where higher vocational aspiration could not engender attainment of higher careers, because of other socio-economic indices, then a downward adjustment to low-skill, low-paying jobs could help lower unemployment levels. As stated by Tibi (2012), in the course of normal educational growth, learners acquire vocational skills through informal, non-formal, and formal vocational education which could become useful in future job placements in the absence of appropriate career opportunities. Proper identification of skills possessed by unemployed graduates could help in engaging them in low-paying jobs until the economic situation improves. Although in this study, counseling negatively affected the dependent variable, Egbochuku (2000), stated that behavior is the result of socialization, thus, to effect a change in behavior, the process of re-learning the social setting(group) required counseling by a professional, such as the use of cognitive restructuring. For graduates who had set their eyes on high-level careers to adjust to low-skill, low-paying jobs, they need to be counseled by professionals or vocational career choices, in order to make ends meet. Egbochuku & Alike (2008), also found that there was a significant relationship between counseling, vocational interest, and socioeconomic status on the re-entry of girls into school. Socialization and counselling could therefore make people change their career directions if they are exposed to appropriate paradigms. Thus, unemployment rates could be reduced among graduates try identifying their vocational interests, determining the skills they have, and linking these with counseling strategies, to make the subjects enter low-skill careers, even with their college degrees and higher diplomas. This study envisaged a situation whereby NYSC-discharged, unemployed graduates, when subjected to the assessment of the skills they possessed and exposed to counseling strategies, might become amenable to enter into low-skill, low-paying jobs, from which they could build future careers (Berings et al., 2004; Belot & Van Ours, 2001; Virtanen et al., 2013).

## 4 Conclusion

The challenges of graduate unemployment have necessitated the quest for workable solutions to mitigate the malaise in Delta State. Parameters like vocational interest, skills possessed by unemployed graduates, and administration of counseling strategy were assessed as predictors of unemployed graduates' readiness to take up low-skill, low-paying jobs as stopgaps or as platforms for launching into higher careers. While the combined effects of the three variables resulted in a positive significant prediction of the dependent variable, it was found that vocational interest and skills possessed were individually positive predictors. Thus, vocational interest, skills possessed, and exposure to counseling were deemed useful tools in making unemployed graduates enter occupations lower than their levels of higher education prepared them for, but are useful in the absence of professional jobs.

It was therefore recommended that the determination of graduates' vocational interests, assessment of 'their skills and occupational preparation as well as the adoption of effective counseling techniques, especially re-learning the social setting, should be employed in changing unemployed graduates' mindset about the occupations. Moreover, expert counselors should mount intensive career guidance talks alongside vocational training for unemployed graduates to enable them to fit into such low-paying occupations.

### *Conflict of interest statement*

The author declared that he has no competing interests.

*Statement of authorship*

The author has a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author has approved the final article.

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