



OCCUPATIONAL PREFERENCE OF VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Amid increasing students' enrollment in Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) vocational technical education (VTE) programmes in colleges of education (COEs), there is shortage of vocational technical teachers in basic education schools across Nigeria. Understanding the occupational preference of students, their career destination, and reasons for the preference could assist in addressing the shortage of vocational teachers, including how to support students' transition from school to work. The study aimed at investigating occupational preference of students, reveal reasons, which shape their preference and differences in preference in relation to their specialization. The participants were final year (N=499) vocational technical teacher education students in South-South, Nigeria. The sample size was 222 students. The research data was collected using researchers' constructed questionnaire. This instrument had a reliability index of 0.85. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that students' preferences for teaching were shaped by non-monetary motivational factors such as job security, love for teaching, and working with people. Abundant job opportunities in teaching, which are easy to access and flexible working hours that provide opportunities to engage in other economic activities further explained students' preference for teaching. Students' preferences for teaching was not influenced by their areas of specialization. Regarding the vocational technical student teachers' occupational preferences, the general findings when compared with literature show a shift from industry to teaching. The students' preference for teaching suggests their willingness to go into teaching. Given employment opportunities, the students are ready to take-up teaching as an occupation of choice, and perhaps make it their life career and subsequently address the shortage of vocational technical teachers in basic education schools.

KEY WORDS: Occupational preference, vocational technical teacher education, Nigeria Certificate in Education, College of Education.

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INTRODUCTION

Preparing Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) vocational technical teacher education students for a seamless school-to-work transition to achieve productive livelihood in the society is a key career task in the lives of adolescents in Colleges of Education (COEs). The transition presents complexities making the phase crucial in the lives of students as they move from more known, predictable school environment, and more clearly defined path-ways into new open, less controlled and less certain and predictable terrain (Schoon & Heckhausen, 2019). Depending on the level of preparation and guidance provided, the phase can positively or negatively affect students' future occupational attainment in adulthood. This transition covers the period between completion of education, the entry into full-time employment and establishing oneself in an occupation (Lee, Mclean & Pavlona, 2017). It could be a smooth transition leading to a satisfying career in the chosen occupation. It could also constitute a most turbulent phase with various attempts to establish oneself in the labour market, and in the process moving in and out of jobs, education and training (Schoon & Heckhausen, 2019). Whichever, the transition requires students to make a number of important decisions. Such a decision open to vocational technical education students in colleges of education may include, whether to continue with further education in the occupations or pedagogy and what kind of occupation (teaching, paid employment in industry or self-employment) to choose. The decision on the kind of occupation to choose bothers on occupational preference.

Occupational preference refers to aspects or types of work that people report preferring. It reflects the attractiveness of one occupational alternative over another. In this study, occupational preference represents Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) vocational technical education students' choice among the three occupational alternatives (teaching, paid employment in industry and self-employment) implicit in the curricula (National Commission for Colleges of Education, NCCE, 1996; and Eboh, 2000). According to Mano-Negrin (2001) cited in Brown and Holis (2013) occupational preferences underpin educational and occupational choice, professional specialization and career of university students. The relationship between occupational preference and career explains why students' preferences and choices of occupation must be realistic (Armstrong & Crombie, 2000). Realistic occupational preferences according Korkmaza (2015) and Brown and Holis (2013) are shaped by the school curriculum; explaining why curriculum designers balance contents with students' occupational choices.

The NCE vocational technical teacher education programmes are sub-degree professional courses. The programmes are run in Colleges of Education. Prospective students specialize in agriculture, business, home economics and technical education, among other specialties and graduate after three years of professional, occupational and academic studies. The goal is to prepare graduates with the right attitudes, knowledge and professional competence for teaching in basic education schools. To realize this goal, training activities are carried out to the extent that students graduate as both professional vocational technical teachers and competent trade persons able to teach pre-vocational agriculture, business studies, home economics and basic technology in basic education schools. Beyond the classroom, training activities in the occupations prepare students for jobs and careers in industry and commerce as paid or self-employed workers (Okeke,

1992; Uwadie, 1992 & Igboke, 2000). Thus, depending on students' occupational preference and career aspiration, they could choose to pursue careers in teaching, industry and commerce as paid or self-employed workers.

The NCE vocational technical education curricula are designed to provide professional and occupational needs of students for employment in teaching and industry. The programmes contain components of real work in the occupations and professional studies in vocational technical teacher education. By the stipulations of NCCE (2012) minimum standards, students pass a minimum of 64 credit hours in the occupational areas, 36 credits in professional studies (including 6 hours for teaching practice) and 18 credits in general education to graduate. Laboratories equipped with current tools and equipment of the occupations provide job-related training environment for students' hands-on experiences. Twelve weeks supervised teaching internship in basic education schools and four months industrial training in relevant industries bridge the professional and occupational gaps between school and industry.

Literature evidences (Igboke, 2000; Eboh, 2000, and NCCE, 1996) indicated that the NCE vocational technical education curricula in technical, business and home economics and business education are adequate for preparing students for self-employment in business. On Technical education, Ukoha (2019) found the curriculum contents to be inadequate in equipping students with entrepreneurial competencies for establishing and managing a small business enterprise. Such inadequacies could tend to limit occupational aspirations of technical education students in self-employment. Granted, the NCE vocational technical education programmes train students for jobs in either teaching, paid employment in industry or self-employment. Nonetheless, the preference of one occupation over others are explained by several factors. Korkmaza (2015) classified the factors into intrinsic (example, gender, personality factors, abilities, expectations, perceptions and motivational influences) and extrinsic (cultural background, school curricula, teachers' attitudes and support from school subjects, parental attitudes and values and societal perception towards occupations).

Some factors of students' occupational preferences as salary, prestige, mobility, fringe benefits, opportunity etc. are related to occupational characteristics (Ezeji, 2002). Others such as interest, ability, aptitude, sex, attitudes, occupation of parents, socio-economic background and motivation are determined by students' characteristics. Curriculum and types of course or specialty could also determine a student's occupational preferences (Ozdemir & Hacifiazlioglu, 2008). By implication, variations in students' preferences may exist due to peculiarity of courses and hidden objectives of each programme. These factors collectively or solely guide vocational technical education students' occupational choice and preferences for careers in teaching, paid employment in the industry or self-employment.

According to Hof and Leiser (2013) most students take to teaching because of plenty of job opportunities in teaching, parental and peer group influence and love for teaching. Others prefer it because they love teaching and working with people (Balyer & Ozcan, 2014). Hitherto, vocationally trained teachers according to UNESCO/ UNEVOC (2019) and Okeke (1992) detest teaching and prefer work in industries and self-



employment because the profession demands so much from teachers and gives so little in financial reward. Similarly, lack of professional respect, recognition and poor remuneration discourage students from becoming teachers (Adaeze, 2011). Audu & Egharevba (2016) reported that economic rewards, prestige and status, a sense of pride and accomplishment and better working conditions attract education students in universities and COEs to the industry and private enterprises instead of teaching.

Despite the seemingly general students' apathy towards careers in teaching (Lawal, 2012), teaching currently does not seem to guarantee ready employment for vocational technical education graduates. Aina (1991) noted that state governments made returns to the National Council on Education that several vocational and technically trained teachers remained unemployed due to lack of fund to pay salaries. Such circumstances could compel students to seek alternative career paths outside teaching. Similarly, slow rate of industrialization, low capacity utilization and downsizing of workforce in manufacturing industries (Owasaye & Odigbo, 2004 cited in Manabete & Umar, 2018) limit employment of vocationally trained graduates. Furthermore, a consideration for a satisfying career in self-employment may be hampered by lack of entrepreneurial skill and ready capital for vocational education graduates to set-up small business enterprises (Manabete & Umar, 2018).

Based on the forgone, NCE vocational technical education could need professional guidance in making realistic occupational choices to transit seamlessly from school to work. Providing such vocational guidance service requires counselors to be conversant with student's occupational preferences and reasons for the choices. Thus, occupational preferences of NCE vocational technical education students could be important for policy formulation and provision of career guidance. Findings of the study would also be significant in addressing the prevalent issue of shortage of vocational technical teachers in basic education schools across the country. It would guide in admitting only students who would genuinely want to make teaching their life career.

Statement of problem

The image of technical vocational education and training as education of last resort in Nigeria also affects vocational technical teacher education. The prevailing poor image, underestimation and great lack of incentives provided for vocational technical teachers compel great number of teachers to prefer employment and careers outside teaching (UNESCO/UNEVOC, 2019). The effect is continuous shortage of vocational technical teachers in basic education schools in Nigeria (UNESCO, 2000). Amidst, the prevalent shortages, there had been evident increase (33, 782 in 2001/2002 to 49, 247 in (2005/2006) student's enrollment in faculties of education in universities and colleges of education to study education (Federal Ministry Education, 2011). In what seems to be an apparent explanation for the increase, Audu and Egharevba (2016) reported that most students in COEs are there because they did not score the required mark in the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination to secure admission to their preferred courses in universities and COEs. Nonetheless, the increase relative to students' apathy towards career in teaching raises questions such as; has the students' perceived apathy towards careers in teaching changed? Are the students genuinely interested in teaching to consider taking up teaching as an occupation of choice and life career? Or yet, still



study education as a stepping stone to considered lucrative occupations? Revealing the occupational preference of NCE vocational technical education students in COEs and the reasons for the preference could provide answers to the questions.

Purpose of the study

The study was designed to:

1. Determine the occupational preference of NCE vocational technical education students in South-South, Nigeria.
2. Determine the reasons, which accounted for the occupational preference of NCE vocational technical education students in South-South, Nigeria.
3. Determine differences in occupational preferences in relation to students' field of specialization.

Research Questions

Two research questions were addressed by the study.

1. What is the occupational preference of NCE vocational technical educational students in South-South, Nigeria?
2. What reasons accounted for the occupational preference of NCE vocational technical education students in South-South, Nigeria?

Hypothesis

The study tested one null-hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Frequency ranks of occupational preference of NCE vocational technical education students in South-South, Nigeria would not significantly differ by students' field of specialization.

METHODOLOGY

The design of the study was descriptive survey research design. Kerlinger (1986) described survey research as a useful tool for educational fact-finding as we can learn a great deal about school system through sampling and without contacting every member of the population. This design was appropriate in the study because the investigation involved finding out and describing the occupational preference of students from a representative of population. The study was conducted in South-South, Nigeria. There are six states in the zone, namely Delta, Rivers, Edo, Balyelsa and Akwa Ibom. The population of the study was 499 NCE Year III (2016/17) vocational technical education students specializing in agriculture, business, home economics and technical education in the three federal colleges of education (FCE(T), Omoku, Rivers state; FCE (T), Asaba, Delta State; and FCE, Obudu, Cross River State. Federal College of Education, Obudu is a conventional college of education. By policy guideline (NCCE, 2012 and 1996), the college is not permitted to run technical education programmes. Federal Colleges of Education (Technical), Omoku and Asaba are

specialized vocational technical teacher colleges of education. They offer programmes in all aspects of vocational technical teacher education. The distribution of the population by institution and students' areas of specialization were: FCE, Obudu (158): Agriculture 28, Business 108, Home Economics 22; FCE(T), Asaba (181): Agriculture 37; Business 68; Home Economics 46; Technical 30; FCE(T), Omoku (160): Agriculture 30, Business 74, Home Economics 20, Technical 36.

The sample size was 222. It was determined using Taro Yammane's formula at 0.05 margin error. Proportionate random sampling method, based on the number of students enrolled in each area of specialization, was used to determine the number of students selected in each area. The sample distribution was as shown: FCE Obudu (71): Agriculture 13, Business 48; Home Economics 10; FCE(T), Asaba (80): Agriculture 16, Business 30, Home Economics 20, Technical 30; and FCE(T),

Omoku (71): Agriculture 13, Business 33, Home Economics 9, Technical 16. The three federal colleges of education were selected because they are owned, funded, accredited and supervised by the Federal government of Nigeria through the National Commission for College of Education. The choice of NCE III students for the investigation was because they were about to graduate and enter the workforce. Thus, they were adjudged capable of making considered occupational choices based on their preferences.

The research data were collected using a 22-item Students' Occupational Preference Questionnaire (SOPQ) developed by the researchers through review of literature. The SOPQ had three sections, A, B and C. Section A had three items addressing research question one. The items were the three occupations (teaching, paid employment in industry and self-employment) adjudged implicit in the curricula. The occupations were identified from literature and objectives of the various NCE vocational technical education programmes as specified in the NCCE (2012) and (1996) minimum standards curricula for NCE vocational technical education. Respondents ranked the occupations according to their preferences on a scale of 1, 2 and 3 to answer research question one. The 19 items in sections B (11) and C (8) of the instrument were on the reasons that could account for the students' occupational preferences to answer research question two. The respondents rated their responses on a five-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1).

The instrument was face-validated by three experts in the College of Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (2) and the Federal College of Education, Obudu (1). Subsequently, the instrument was modified and trial tested at the Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, Imo State. Seventy-one (71) NCE III (2016/2017) students of agriculture (15), business (20), home economics (19) and technical education (17) participated in the pilot study. Using the Cronbach-Alpha formula, an internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.85 (Section A-0.81, Section B-0.89, and Section C-0.86) was established for the instrument. Data were collected by the researchers with the assistance of research assistants. The research assistants were lecturers in the three COEs. They were contacted through phone call to solicit for their cooperation in administering copies of the instrument. Thereafter, 222 copies of the instrument were mailed to the assistants by public postal service. Distribution of mailed copies of the instrument to the research

assistants were according to the sample sizes by institution and students' field of specialization. Completed copies were returned by post.

Inferential and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data collected with the questionnaire. Research question one was answered using descriptive statistics of frequency count and simple percentage. Ranks were assigned to the frequency counts and the calculated percentage scores to determine students' occupational preference by areas of specialization. Research question two was answered by interpreting the Mean. The Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree were assigned summated scores of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 to calculate item mean scores. Calculated item mean scores were interpreted as agree (means 3.50 and above) and disagree (means less than 3.50) to determine reasons for students occupational preference. Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (and its Chi-Square transformation) was used to test the null-hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

What is the occupational preference of NCE vocational technical education students in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 1: Frequency Counts, Percentage Scores and Ranks of Occupational Preference of NCE Vocational Technical Education Students

S/N	Occupation	Agricultural Education (N=42)			Business Education (N=111)			Home EconEdu (N=39)			Technical Education (N=39)			Group Rank (N=222)		
		F	%	R	F	%	R	F	%	R	F	%	R	F	%	R
1	Teaching	27	64	1	83	75	1	18	46	1	22	73	1	15	72	1
2	Paid employment in industry	9	22	2	19	17	2	3	8	3	6	20	2	38	17	2
3	Self-employment	6	14	3	9	8	3	18	46	1	2	7	3	25	11	3

Note: F-frequency, R-Rank

Table 1 showed that the occupational preferences of majority of NCE vocational technical education students specializing in agricultural science, business, home economics and technical education, in order of rank, were teaching, 1; paid employment in industry, 2; and self-employment, 3. This showed that teaching is the most preferred occupation of the students both on single group and on collective basis. By implication, the students preferred career in teaching than paid employment in industry and self-employment. Table 1 also showed that home economics students were split in their occupational preferences. Whereas some of the

students (46%) ranked teaching 1, another 46% also ranked self-employment, 1. This means that home economics students preferred careers in teaching and self-employment to paid employment in industry.

Research Question 2

What reasons accounted for the occupational preference of NCE vocational technical education students in South-South, Nigeria

Table 2: Mean Scores of Students on Reasons for Choosing Teaching as Preferred Occupation to Paid Employment in Industry and Self-employment

S/N	Reasons	Areas of specialization					Remarks
		AGE (N=42) \bar{X}	BED (N=111) \bar{X}	HOMEC (N=18) \bar{X}	TECH (N=30) \bar{X}	GROUP (N=219) \bar{X}	
1	Desire to apply learned pedagogy and skills to practice.	2.08	3.15	2.26	2.08	2.39	Disagree
2	Teaching is prestigious and a noble profession.	3.09	3.37	2.87	2.97	3.08	Disagree
3	Teaching provides job security as it is pensionable	3.91	4.31	3.87	3.72	3.95	Agree
4	Desire to take after my parents who are teachers.	2.13	2.50	2.56	3.21	2.60	Disagree
5	Teaching provides high economic reward in salary and allowances.	3.08	3.15	3.26	3.08	3.14	Disagree
6	Teaching provides flexible working hours.	4.35	4.25	4.75	4.14	4.37	Agree
7	There are lot of job opportunities in teaching.	3.58	3.72	3.65	3.67	3.66	Agree
8	Love to work with people.	4.37	4.54	4.17	4.28	4.34	Agree
9	There are opportunities to engage in other economic activities in teaching.	3.81	3.88	3.87	3.74	3.83	Agree
10	Teaching jobs are easy to access.	4.58	4.11	4.34	4.39	4.36	Agree
11	Teaching is best suited for women.	2.56	3.23	2.87	3.34	3.02	Disagree

AGE -Agricultural Science Education; BED - Business Education; TECH -Technical Education; HOMEC - Home Economic Education.

The students in Table 2 above rated items 3, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 agree with mean scores greater than 3.50. Thus, job security, flexible working hours, lots of job opportunities, love to work with people, opportunities to engage in other economic activities and easy access jobs in teaching were the reasons that accounted for the students' preference for teaching. The students were unanimous in their reasons, despite their different areas of specialization.

Table 3: Mean Scores of Home Economics Students on Reasons for Choosing Self-employment as a Preferred Occupation to Teaching and Paid Employment in Industry

S/N	Reasons	Mean (N = 18)	Remark
1	The NCE home economics programme adequately prepares one for self-employment.	4.21	Agree
2	Self-employment provides occupational fulfillment and self-accomplishment.	4.13	Agree
3	Self-employment assures financial independence.	3.71	Agree
4	Self-employment makes someone master of their own business.	3.72	Agree
5	It is more prestigious to be self-employed.	4.00	Agree
6	Desire to after my parents and continue the family line of business.	2.67	Disagree
7	Desire to be like my friends and relations who are self-employed.	2.83	Disagree
8	Self-employment guarantees better financial rewards and stability.	4.29	Agree

Home economics students who chose self-employment as their preferred occupation identified six reasons to justify their preference. The reasons as evident in items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8 were that the home economic curriculum adequately prepared them for self-employment; occupational fulfillment and self-accomplishment; financial independence and to be masters of their own business. Others were the guarantee of financial stability and prestige associated with self-employment.

Table 4: Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W) Analysis of Differences Among Occupational Preferences of NCE Vocational Technical Education Students

S/N	Occupation	AGE	BED	HOMECEC	TECH	Sum of Ranks	D	D ²
1	Teaching	1	1	1	1	4	3.67	13.47
2	Working in industry	2	2	3	2	9	-1.33	1.77
3	Self-employment	3	3	1	3	10	-2.33	5.43
						<u>23</u>		<u>20.65</u>

W = 0.65; Chi-square = k (N-1) w = 5.16, df = 3, Table Chi-square = 5.99

The calculated *w* value of 0.65 indicated moderately high agreement among the students in their occupational preference. The calculated Chi-Square value of 5.16 is less than the table Chi-Square value of 5.99 at 3 degree of freedom. Thus, the null-hypothesis is accepted at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, occupational preference of NCE vocational technical education students did not differ by students' areas of specialization.

DISCUSSION

Data of Table 1 showed teaching was the occupational preference of NCE vocational technical education students specializing in agriculture, business, home economics and technical education. The students were unanimous in their preference for teaching. Both singly and collectively, they ranked it, 1, among the three occupational alternatives. Finding on the null-hypothesis in Table 4 confirmed students' collective agreement on teaching. The calculated *w* of 0.65 further showed moderately high agreement; and its Chi-square value of 5.16 was less than the table Chi-square of 5.99 at 3 degree of freedom indicating no significant difference in the occupational preference of the students at 0.05 level of significance. The observed no significant difference in the occupational preference of students in relation to areas of specialization was inconsistent with the finding of Ozdemir and Hacifizlioglu (2008) that course of study or specialty could result to differences in students' occupational preferences. Similarly, students' preference for teaching did not agree with past (Igboke, 2000 and Okeke 1992) and current (UNESCO/UNEVOC, 2019) reports on great number of vocational technical students preferring careers in industry and self-employment outside teaching.

Students' preference for teaching as found, threw-up surprises relative to popular literature evidences on vocational technical teacher education students' unwillingness to consider teaching as a career option. Popular negative factors such as poor prestige and sense of pride, and poor economic rewards as found in Table 2 which literatures (Adaeze, 2011; Audu and Egharevba, 2016; and UNESCO/UNEVOC, 2019) showed deter students from taking up jobs in teaching seemed inconsequential in students' preference for teaching. Rather, more endearing intangible factors as job security, love for teaching, and working with people explained students' preference for teaching in Table 2. These findings were consistent with earlier reports of

Ezeji (2001), Hof and Leiser (2013), and Balyzer and Ozcan (2013) that those factors attract students to careers in teaching.

Aware that teaching does not provide high economic rewards, the students preferred it because it provides flexible working hours with a window of opportunity to engage in other economic activities to earn extra income. The practice, nonetheless, among serving teachers is unethical. However, the practice provides palliative income measures for teacher's survival against the odds of poor and irregular payment of teachers' salaries in public basic education schools in Nigeria. Furthermore, availability of plenty job opportunities, which are easy to access also explained students' preference for teaching. As unfavourable as teachers' working conditions and poor remuneration could be, teaching service in public and private institutions seem to provide job opportunities to prospective teachers.

Reasons bothering on economic rewards and prestige explained home economics students' preference for self-employment along with teaching. Data of Table 4 showed that being masters of their own business coupled with occupational prestige, fulfillment and self-accomplishment arising from increased financial reward, independence and stability accounted for the students' preference for self-employment. These reasons confirmed Audu and Egharevba's (2016) report on those variables as potent drives of students to self-employment. Contrary to Manabete and Umar's (2018) finding that lack of entrepreneurial skills limit vocational technical education students from taking up careers in self-employment, the finding on item 1 in Table 3 suggested otherwise. Home economics students based on the item preferred self-employment because the curriculum adequately prepared them for careers in it. The students' reason to back-up their preference was in agreement with Eboh (2000) and NCCE (1996) reports on the adequacy of home economics curriculum in preparing students for self-employment. Besides being adequate, the curriculum would have been implemented effectively in the colleges to produce one of the intended outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite literature evidences that vocationally and technically trained teachers prefer careers outside teaching, the findings of the study showed the contrary. The NCE vocational technical education students in Federal Colleges of Education identified teaching as their occupational preference. The students' preference for teaching were irrespective of counterincentives as poor salaries and allowances, low prestige and ignoble social class of teachers which hitherto deter students from considering careers in teaching. Rather, endearing non-monetary motivational factors as job security, love for teaching, and working with people explained the students' choice of teaching. Considerations as abundant job opportunities, which are easy to access and flexible working hour providing opportunities for other economic activities further explained students' preference for teaching. Therefore, given employment opportunities, the students would be willing to make teaching their life career thereby addressing the shortage of vocational technical teachers in basic education schools.

Recommendations

1. The National Commission for Colleges of Education should review the NCE vocational technical education curriculum development, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and review process and strengthen the quality assurance mechanisms to remove all impediments to quality teacher training in the colleges of education. Doing so would guarantee adequate preparation of students to fit into their work roles as teachers on graduation.
2. Having chosen teaching as career alternative, students should be encouraged to enter and remain in teaching. Federal and state governments in Nigeria should remove impediments as poor salaries and allowances, poor working conditions, low prestige and social class associated with teaching to make it attractive like other occupations. This would encourage NCE vocational technical education graduates to enter and remain in teaching thereby mediating the shortage of VTE teachers in basic education schools.

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