Bachelor of Science Programme in Development Studies (BIDS)

Benefits of the Vocational Education - Perceptions of the Young Female Students of a Vocational Training Center in Addis Ababa

Ulla-Kaisa Pihlaja
ABSTRACT

The importance of education in development is generally acknowledged, but in the discussions and practice, this usually includes only basic education. However, during recent years, the growing number of urban unemployed youth in cities of developing countries has raised the question of the role of vocational education and training (VET). Despite the increasing interest towards vocational education, it is still seen only as a tool for promoting national growth and employability, or through rights people have regarding education. This thesis instead is observing the benefits of VET within the theoretical framework of expanded capabilities. I conducted 10 interviews in a women’s vocational training center in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to find out how the students perceive the benefits of their training. As a result I came to a conclusion that female students expected their freedoms to expand after they got a proper profession. Rural-urban migration and population growth in Ethiopia have led to great contest over economic and social space in Addis Ababa. In a changing urban environment, enlarged capabilities bring professionally trained women better opportunities to cope compared to women of the same age who do not have similar educational backgrounds.

Key words: Ethiopia, vocational education and training (VET), capabilities approach, gender, changing urban space
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1. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world in several standards. For example, in the Human Development Index ranking (UNDP, 2013) Ethiopia was ranked 173 out of all 187 countries and almost a third (30.7%) of the population lives under the 1.25$ poverty line (World Bank, 2011). Although a large share of the population reside in rural areas, urbanization has increased the number of poor urban dwellers, similar to many other African countries. At the same time, the country’s overall 90 million population is growing at the annual rate of 2.6 (World Bank, 2012). Population pressure causes competition over space and resources especially among the poorly educated groups, such as youth and women. There is an abundance of cheap labour available for low-paid jobs, whilst a smaller share of the citizens have an established educational background and skills to find employment in the public sector, with a good salary. Unemployment, especially among youth, has reached alarming numbers and cities cannot offer decent housing for all. Both food prices and house rents are high in big cities like the capital Addis Ababa, and this deepens poverty. Vocational education and training (VET) can offer means to ease urban poverty and unemployment, but it needs new viewpoints to become a success. VET has been observed mainly in large sample macro studies and considering national economic development. Qualitative research is needed to offer more information from below.

This study explores the perceptions of the young female students of a VET institution in Addis Ababa about their education and the benefits they presume to gain with it. Since research on the pros and cons of vocational training in developing countries has largely neglected the perspectives of the students, making their voices heard stands at the core of this study. The objective of the thesis is to discover in which ways the female students expect to benefit from their vocational training in a changing urban environment. For example, what kind of new opportunities does the education offer them? I apply the capabilities approach of Amartya Sen and Martha C. Nussbaum to my own findings and intend to analyze if and how the women think their education is expanding their freedoms. The aspect of space and competition over it is also present; can a proper education and profession lead to competitive advantage in labour market and is this something the respondents see as being important? My methodology includes ten semi-structured interviews with the female students and a background mapping of the Ethiopian VET system and practices in this particular training center. The background information was collected through participant observation, group discussion with key informants and secondary sources.

The idea to make research relating to women’s vocational training in Ethiopia was directly linked with my internship. I had the opportunity to work at The Good Samaritan Training Center in Addis Ababa as an English teacher and office assistant, and therefore it was natural to use this context for the thesis data collection. The English lessons gave me and my respondents the time to gain each other’s trust.

1.1. Background

1.1.1. Vocational Education System in Africa and Ethiopia

In most African countries the students have to, at some point, make the choice as to whether they want to continue onto higher education, or vocational training,
which usually leads to immediate entrance into the labour market (Oketch, 2007). In contrast to VET, university education usually requires more studying time before gaining the qualifications necessary to access employment. VET also includes several providers and methods of finance, and informal activities of training are common. Non-formalized apprenticeships and workshops are paths of education, and often family ties connect to learning a profession (Oketch, 2007). Unfortunately, in many countries vocational training is seen as “the last choice” for those who have not scored high enough in final exams. VET is not considered as a desired career alternative in the eyes of young people. (Oketch, 2007)

In Ethiopia, vocational training is offered by public and private institutions, and both enterprises and NGOs represent the non-governmental actors. Whilst the quality of teaching significantly varies between the providers, generally the NGO institutions hold the best reputation. Regarding finances, public VET is free, in private institutions there are tuition fees and as for NGOs, the funding policies vary. To offer official education, private actor enterprises and NGOs need to be certified. (Krishnan & Shaorshadze, 2013) There are also different levels of VET programmes in Ethiopia. Scores of final exams determine if students can enter to one, two or three-year programmes or maybe to university. Apprenticeships are often part of the vocational training as well. (Krishnan & Shaorshadze, 2013)

The government of Ethiopia has acknowledged the importance of VET and it is highlighted in the country’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (Krishnan & Shaorshadze, 2013). However, the government’s actions express the top-down approach to education (and development) because the interventions are steered and decided from above, and the policies do not reflect the wishes of the people. In this Ethiopian case, vocational education and training can be characterized as supply-driven (Krishnan & Shaorshadze, 2013), meaning that the government determines the forms of VET. This has led to the situation in which the needs of both markets and the workers, are neglected.

1.1.2. Recent Trends regarding VET in Developing Countries

VET systems both in Africa and elsewhere in the Third World have gone through changing ideals and practices during the last decade. The role of education in poverty alleviation has been generally acknowledged for a long time. However, previously academia and policy-making have mainly focused on basic education and VET has been left out from the most of the discussions. When it has been mentioned, its benefits have been understood in terms of increased labour productivity and employment. An increase in skills has been seen to promote human capital and in this way, contribute to economic growth. (Tilak, 2002 in Oketch, 2007) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education For All (EFA) of the United Nations have also focused more on basic education (McGrath, 2012), thereby receiving larger amounts of investments and more consistent policies (within and among countries) in comparison to VET. Nonetheless, the third EFA goal “Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults”, appears to more applicable to VET, but it has been left in the shadow of other forms of education, like literacy teaching.

Nevertheless, vocational training has become more common in developing countries and also in Ethiopia in recent years. This is partly due to the fact that VET is considered as a main tool for finding solutions to solve massive
youth employment and urban poverty in Africa (Oketch, 2007). Poverty is also said to be a result from a lack of skills and use of technology. Even if VET can offer solutions for both unemployment and low-skilled labour force (Krishnan & Shaorshadze, 2013), more and more critiques are stressing that the merits of it could be defined in other terms than economic indicators (Atchoarena & Delluc, 2001 in Oketch, 2007). Poverty is determined by social and cultural factors as well and these dimensions can be, for example, dependency on others, stigmatization or exclusion. (Spicker, 2007: 68, 71)

Despite the fact that VET has caught more attention during recent years and it has started to be seen in a more multidimensional way, it still holds many drawbacks. For example Atchoarena & Delluc (2001 in Oketch, 2007) underline many problems of current VET systems. They list the following features: poor quality, high costs training that do not match socio-economic conditions, neglect of the needs of informal actors and mismatch with the demands of labour market. Krishnan & Shaorshadze (2013) argue also that lack of qualified teachers in VET institutions is a major challenge regarding Ethiopian vocational education system.

1.1.3. The Good Samaritan Training Center (GSTC)

The NGO in which the case study was conducted was called The Good Samaritan Training Center. As the name implies, there is a Christian ideology behind the charity work, but like my key informants highlighted, women from all religious and ethnic groups are welcome to study at the center. Alongside vocational training, GSTC also organizes pre-school education for orphan and destitute children, but my research do not touch upon these activities. Studies are free for students, and the vocational training programmes (in hair dressing, catering, sewing and child care) last one year. Besides the professional skills women are also taught about family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, saving, hygiene, business management and English. They receive counselling from center’s social worker.

In the group discussion with my key informants (the head teacher of the training center, social worker, accountant and administrator of GSTC), I was told, for example, that the Ethiopian government helps the organization to find the poor women in different administrative zones, woredas. Most women have finished their basic education, but they have either been at home with children or worked in low-paid, informal jobs before starting in their current programmes. All key informants agreed that the worst-off youth do not have the possibility to start new education due to lack of time. In August 2013, 120 women started their studies at GSTC and only 10 of them had dropped-out after six months. According to the staff, GSTC was ranked first place out of all vocational training providers of Addis Ababa during my internship period. They also explained that there is a great demand for vocational skills and the graduates usually find employment easily or start their own businesses. The organization helps the students in finding jobs and planning the business activities.
1.1.4. Young Women as a Target Group

Young women are often in especially vulnerable situations in African countries, also what comes to education. Taking this into consideration it is important to map holistically their realities to find the possibilities to expand their economic and social opportunities (or expand their freedoms) and improve the quality of life. Micro studies are needed to gather information on situations and perceptions of the poor, because most of the research done regarding the relation of VET and poverty reduction is quantitative and answering only questions at the national level (Powell, 2012). In macro studies and many of the qualitative research as well (like Powell, 2012), women are usually not separated as group, but they are studied in the same sample with men. This can prevent discovering the unequal structures and the gender based discrimination.

This research aims to give a voice to young women. Women are often neglected in research or they are considered only as objects (Bryman, 2008: 396). Feminist scholars have pointed out that it is central to describe the daily situations of women and identify the structures that hinder social justice and equality (Eichler, 1986 in Punch, 2005). Women in most societies, including Ethiopia, are the primary caretakers of the households (UNDP, 2014); they are expected to spend their time in cooking and taking care of children and the elderly. With lower levels of education (compared to men), women have generally lower incomes and more insecure jobs and due to this they seldom can, for instance, have bank loans for investments (UNDP, 2014). At the reproductive age, women are easily left out from society, isolated into homes and often forced to drop-out school. If they get the possibility to educate themselves and get their own jobs and income, their independence increases and they gain access to public space. With economic and social independence, women can become empowered both within their families and in society. Women’s status and well-being is also crucial not only for themselves, but for their children (UNDP, 2014). Mother’s life opportunities and capabilities are often passed to the next generations, for example in forms of access to health care and knowledge.

These are only examples of social structures hindering women’s equal freedoms compared to men and making them a marginalized group. Besides these, one major factor is also child marriage. According to UNICEF (2013 in Girls Not Brides, 2014a), 16 % of Ethiopian women marry before the age of 15 and 41% before turning 18. This limits women’s opportunities to access education and finish school (including vocational education) and further get a profession and independent life. On the contrary, being able to continue education longer postpones the age of marriage and having the first child (Girls Not Brides, 2014b). Through education women can gain the freedom to choose when they start their family and with whom, because they can avoid the economic pressures of getting married.

1.2. Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

As young women are in especially vulnerable situations in Ethiopia, the focus of this thesis will be on the perceptions of young female students regarding vocational education. This is approached from a micro scale perspective as opposed to the commonly used macro scale approaches. Most of the studies done on VET and its role in poverty reduction neglect the viewpoints of the students, but the capabilities approach, which is used as a theoretical framework in this
paper, highlights the deep understanding of the overall well-being of the poor. These people are both beneficiaries and agents of the development in their lives and that is why it is essential to obtain their own perceptions.

The relation of VET and poverty alleviation is also observed through the idea of competition over space. The population pressure, caused by population growth and urbanization, has resulted in the crowded city of Addis Ababa having poor opportunities for those who do not have a proper profession. The competition over jobs requiring no education is extensive, because there are so many uneducated people moving from countryside to the capital.

1.2.1. Research Questions

In order to deal with the topic at hand I intend to answer the following questions:

- How do young female students perceive vocational education and training to improve their lives and increase their capabilities?

- How are new skills perceived to contribute to competitiveness and increase opportunities in a highly crowded urban context?

The aim is to concentrate on the perceptions of change, which (possibly) happens in women’s lives after their graduation from GSTC. Interview questions for my study included, for example, questions such as:

- How does the vocational education improve your life?

- How do you see your situation compared to same aged girls but without vocational or higher education?

The complete interview guide can be found in appendix section (Part 8).

1.2.2. Relevance to Human Geography

As already mentioned, the population of Addis Ababa is growing fast due to two main contributing factors, increased birth rates and migration from countryside to the capital. This has led to great changes in the urban public space, both in physical, economic and social terms (term ‘urban public space’ defined more accurately in the section 1.3.4.). In particular, those moving from rural areas are usually lacking professional or higher education, and while they all are looking for jobs in the city, there is great supply of labour in low-paid branches. The contest over the jobs requiring special skills is considerably less extensive.

It is the informal sector that most commonly employs poorly educated individuals in big cities in developing countries. This is also the case in regard to Ethiopia. Even if the accessibility to the informal sector may be better compared to the formal one (Kolev & Suarez-Robles, 2010), there are various disadvantages to being involved in these activities. Primarily, there is less security, crimes are more common and the infrastructure can be poor by its quality. Entrepreneurs, like street traders, do not hold the property rights on their land, so they cannot control their assets. (Brown & Rakodi, 2006: 198-199) In many cases,
the government can act in a hostile way towards the informal sector (Pratt, 2006: 42), evictions are not rare and development projects in the formal sector can negatively affect the possibilities of making a living in the informal sector. In addition, globalization hits harder on informal activities (Brown & Rakodi, 2006: 198). According to the World Bank (n.d. in Pratt, 2006: 41), access to different resources, such as finance, bank loans and training, is more difficult in the informal sector and this limits the opportunities of the enterprises operating in street trading and other similar activities. Many of my interviewees currently studying at GSTC had the job background from the informal sector.

Public urban space and also the informal sector, is often best serving the interests of those who hold the power in the society (Pratt, 2006: 43). The woman's place is seen to be at home, carrying out domestic work. Vocational education can offer young women in Addis Ababa more opportunities and their chances to access to public space and gain formal employment increase. It becomes easier to start a successful business, compared to the former situation, in which they did not have any special skills helping them to compete over economic and social space. Access to VET expands women’s freedoms to do what they actually want to do and become empowered.

1.3. Main Concepts

It is important to be exact with the terms and concepts, because they can be understood in different ways. In this thesis I am interested in the benefits of the vocational education and training for young women. Before we can understand which kinds of impacts it has, we need to define what it means. Also the key concept of the theoretical framework, ‘capabilities’, is clarified further. Increased capabilities are stated to be a measurement of development in this paper. The research also aims to highlight the voices of those, who actually are involved with the vocational training, so it can be said to take the bottom-up perspective. As the findings are put into perspective of urban public space, it requires definition as well. My objective is to explore women’s access to public space, so it is essential to know what I mean with this concept.

1.3.1. Vocational Education and Training (VET)

In this paper I mainly use the term vocational education or the acronym VET (vocational education and training), when referring to teaching and learning of vocational skills, which also includes, in this case, adult education. For my respondents, these professional skills included cooking, sewing and hairdressing, and subjects such as English and family planning that complemented their professional studies. In the literature, however, VET has different names (like Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) or life skills training).

“Throughout the course of history, various terms have been used to describe elements of the field that are now conceived as comprising TVET. These include: Apprenticeship Training, Vocational Education, Technical Education, Technical-Vocational Education (TVE), Occupational Education (OE), Vocational Education and Training (VET), Professional and Vocational Education (PVE), Career and Technical Education (CTE), Workforce Education (WE), Workplace Education
Generally speaking VET activities are aimed to offer students qualifications to enter the labour market as soon as possible. It is seen as a crucial tool in improving the employment situations of the youth. (Oketch, 2007)

1.3.2. Capabilities

My theoretical framework, ‘capabilities approach’, relies on the concept of capability. This concept enables the understanding of development and poverty alleviation in a particular way – with expanded freedoms. This thesis aims to map the advantages of vocational training from the perspective of increased capabilities. In practice, vocational education can increase for example the capabilities of having a satisfying job, adequate information about STDs or the possibility to get a bank loan due to continuous income.

Capabilities are opportunities or freedoms regarding what people can do. What is possible for them in their lives? Both internal (or personal) characteristics and skills define individuals’ capabilities, but so does the economic, social and political environment the individual is living in (Nussbaum, 2011: 20). How do different structures support or block people’s opportunities? Capabilities differ from functionings in a way that they reflect the ‘potential doings’, what is possible, whilst functionings are only those doings put in action. Besides this, the freedom to choose is a major feature of a capability. (Nussbaum, 2011: 25)

1.3.3. Bottom-up Approach

Because this thesis aims to hear and analyze the perceptions of the vocational students (those who actually are involved in VET services), it represents the so-called bottom-up perspective. The term ‘bottom-up’ comes from general development discussion and it refers to the direction of development actions. It can be perceived through its opposite, ‘top-down’, which incorporates the idea of development interventions coming from above. The actor operating in a highest level can be the state, free market (Potter et al. 2008: 93), international community or all of them together. In this case, the focus is on national economic growth and for example the increase of labour productivity. Development and progress move from urban areas to countryside through industrialism (Potter et al. 2008: 94).

The bottom-up approach instead describes the contrary direction of development – from below. Still, Stöhr (1981 in Potter et al. 2008: 117) reminds us that unlike the top-down model, the bottom-up perspective does not offer one specific guideline to development (or for example how to organize vocational education). Instead, it underlines that the people, who are going to live with the policies made, should be those who plan the interventions; their needs should be taken into consideration. The bottom-up approach recognizes the value of context, “socio-cultural, historical and institutional conditions”, and it highlights the importance of local knowledge. (Potter et al. 2008: 117) This is crucially important to note, because the local understanding needs to be heard in academic world as well.
1.3.4. Urban Public Space

Like Harvey (2006: 119) states, space as a concept can mean many things. It can be understood for example in economic, social, cultural or material terms or it can be personal or defined by a group (Harvey, 2006: 121-122). In this bachelor’s thesis, the idea is to explore the perceptions and thoughts of young female students on their economic and social spaces, and how they see the possibility of change in these spaces caused by the vocational training. In other words, how they understand their opportunities before and after education and to what extent they think they benefit economically and socially from their new skills and knowledge, in a changing urban environment.

Mandanipour (1999 in Brown, 2006: 18) describes the difference between private and public space by stating that private space is “the area […] where strangers cannot enter without negotiation, signified by actual or notional boundaries.” On the contrary, public space is a certain ‘common ground’. When characterizing urban public space, Mandanipour (1999 in Brown, 2006: 20-21) claims that urban space includes both physical and social space in the context of a city. This essentially means that, for example, material infrastructure such as roads and buildings acquire their actual functions with their social roles and purposes; without them they are not the entities that we perceive them to be. Social norms, institutions and relationships are part of public urban space (Brown, 2006 in Brown, 2006: 21). Vocational education and having a job or own enterprise in the future can help young women to access urban public space, which is often dominated by men. They can have the alternative options rather than being only mothers and wives, and staying only at home. Own income brings independence, which enables empowerment in families and in the whole society.

2. THE RELATION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TO POVERTY REDUCTION IN THE LITERATURE

The literature discussing the benefits of the education, and VET in particular, concentrates mainly on two perspectives. The first one highlights the role of VET in solving employability issues and increasing the productivity at the national level. This takes place through technology and growing human capital, and the results are measured with growth rates and statistics. It neglects the bottom-up views, the well-being of people and the aspect of justice.

Another approach focuses on the human rights and equality of all human beings. Besides economic aspects, development includes other factors such as democracy and sustainability. The human rights perspective has many similarities with the capabilities approach, but it has been criticized for being too universal (forgetting the context) and putting all of its efforts in legal rights as opposed to the actual possibilities also formed by social and cultural structures, and personal capabilities.

2.1. Productivity & Human Capital Approach

For example, the International Labour Office (ILO, 2008: 9) has stated that improved skills of work force will lead to increased employability, efficiency,
technological development and economic growth. Vocational education represents one of the main actors providing these skills, and that is why its role is seen as crucial in increasing productivity. For instance, supporters highlight the importance of promoting access to VET. (ILO, 2008: 9-10) According to productivism, training and skills give an impulse to increased productivity of the labour force, which reflects on growth rates. Tikly & Barrett (2011) describe the same development ideology through the concept of human capital regarding all education; education generates human capital, which has positive impacts on economic growth. Hanushek & Wössmann (2007 in Tikly & Barrett, 2011) highlight the quality of education in the process of increasing human capital in the society. Inequality can be a major hindrance for quality education in many contexts (Tikly & Barrett, 2011) and also for human capital generation.

Globalization, according to Mouzakitis (2010), also brings its challenges for VET systems. He argues that VET needs to be planned to serve the needs of the global market, and in this way the effectiveness can be maximized. He states that there is a great demand for diversified skills in the global economy and due to this, VET systems must adapt to new conditions. Mouzakitis reminds also about the importance of technology, good communication, creative thinking, entrepreneurship and team work. Tabbron & Yang (1998 in Mouzakitis, 2010) point out that links between vocational training and the academic world, should be strengthened.

McGrath (2012) criticizes the human capital approach and productivism, stating that these perspectives concentrate too much on money instead of human well-being. The capabilities and freedoms of people do not get attention, and the focus is only on immediate employability and economic aspects of development. McGrath connects the current stage of VET with broader development theories and trends. He states that even if the overall emphasis in development has moved towards more human-friendly ideas and policies, regarding VET things have happened considerably slowly. VET is still partly stuck with the neoliberal ideologies. (McGrath, 2012)

2.2. Rights-based Approach

The rights-based perspective has its roots in The United Nations’ Human Rights Declaration from the year 1948, and it can be defined to belong to mainstream development, together with productivism and human capital promotion. Unlike the productivism, the rights-based approach (sometimes called the human rights approach) acknowledges the fact that poverty and development cannot be measured only with economic terms. Tikly & Barrett (2011) point out that the human rights approach underlines poverty as being a multidimensional process by also taking into account social, political, environmental and cultural aspects of poverty alongside the economic ones.

In this approach investments in education are seen as crucial because of both instrumental and intrinsic reasons. “The human rights approach to education quality is interested in the role of education in securing rights to education, rights in education and rights through education” (Subrahmanian, 2002; Unterhalter, 2007 in Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Although Tikly & Barrett are not writing especially about vocational education, these findings are applicable to VET as well. They also highlight the democratic participation of all actors in the planning of educational development (Tikly & Barrett, 2011).
On the other hand, McGrath (2012) points out how the rights-based approach keeps the focus on the most vulnerable groups such as women and disabled people. This is also presented in Tomasevski’s (2001 in McGrath, 2012) theorization about the quality education as a universal right through the concept of accessibility, which includes four components. These components are 1) availability, 2) access in practice, 3) acceptability including quality of teaching and content, and 4) adaptability of education to the needs of groups and individuals.

The rights-based approach has replaced the previous needs-based perspective to education (UNICEF-UNESCO, 2007: 11), after the switch in development theory. According to mainstream thinking, the value of human rights approach lies in following impacts of it:
- promotion of democracy
- peace and peaceful conflict resolution
- positive social transformation
- sustainability and effectiveness
- economic development
- growing capacities of governments to fulfill the needs and rights of citizens
(UNICEF-UNESCO, 2007: 11-13)

However, the human rights approach has been criticized due to its neglect of context (Alston & Robinson, 2005 in McGrath, 2012). Human rights are interpreted to be universal, but regarding education and especially VET, context plays an essential role. For example, culture and the demands of the labour market determine the needed policy actions. Also the concentration on the legal rights only, not the actual possibilities of the people to do things, has encountered criticism (McGrath, 2012). Despite the critique the rights-based perspective has many similarities with the capabilities approach, the theoretical framework used in this thesis. Nevertheless, it lacks some of the distinctions and dimensions of it.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I chose capabilities approach as my theoretical framework because through its concepts, it is possible to get an accurate idea on people’s actual opportunities in society. It utilizes the micro, bottom-up viewpoints, which are important for my research design and focus on the students’ perceptions about the benefits of their training. The capabilities approach includes features from rights-based perspective, and it also recognizes the importance of economic factors alongside the other contributors of development. However, it adds the aspect of ‘freedom to choose’ and speaks for the ‘potential doings’; not what people actually do, but what they are capable of doing. The approach complements the gaps in the productivist approach and human rights perspective. More about the justification of the theory is been written in the section 3.2.

3.1. Capabilities Approach

The capabilities approach was first presented by Amartya Sen and later on Martha C. Nussbaum, who has included her own components and nuances to this perspective to evaluate development. Sen and Nussbaum do not talk directly about evaluating education or VET, but development in general. Nonetheless, the model
is applicable to vocational education as it offers an alternative to economic measurements and leaves space for contextual variation. In the literature, the capabilities approach is sometimes called the human development approach. However, I chose to use the name ‘capabilities approach’.


According to Sen “development can be seen, […] as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” and “[it] requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom” (Sen, 1999: 3) By this he is claiming poverty to be a state in which the freedoms of a group or an individual are limited in comparison to others. Sen also reminds us that poverty and development are multidimensional processes and also involve other aspects such as social and political aspects, as opposed to just economic ones. Human beings are viewed in a broad sense. (Sen, 1999: 296) Despite this, Sen points out that increased income often contributes to the improved capabilities and it cannot be neglected in poverty reduction (Sen, 1999: 72). On the other hand, improved capabilities, in many cases, have a positive impact on income levels.

The mentioned unfreedoms that Sen refers to can be, for example, lack of sanitation, inadequate education or poor access to health care services. Sen underlines that freedoms hold two separate but important roles: constitutive (or intrinsic) and instrumental. The first role highlights the role of development as an end or primary goal, whilst the instrumental aspect claims that the expansion of freedom is a crucial tool, a means, for economic development. (Sen, 1999: 36-37)

Sen also wants to separate the term ‘freedom’ from ‘functionings.’ The difference can be said to be simply that the concept ‘functioning’ refers to actual doings and ‘freedom’ to the possibilities of doings (Sen, 1999: 73). This presents the core idea of the freedoms and capabilities approach; people should be able to choose. Sen offers an example of fasting versus starvation (Sen, 1999: 76) - there is a difference if you can choose to not eat or if you are forced to be without nutrition due to the circumstances. Another important component of the capabilities approach is the idea of agency. This concept is well explained in Human Development Report of the UNDP (2010: 23); people should be actors, not only beneficiaries of the development.

People’s quality of life is central for the capabilities approach. Human development, the improvement of the quality of life, “is the expansion of people’s freedoms to live long, healthy and creative lives; to advance other goals they have reason to value; and to engage actively in shaping development equitably and sustainably on a shared planet. People are both the beneficiaries and drivers of human development, as individuals and in groups” (UNDP, 2010: 22) Human development consists of three vital components of 1) well-being including the expanded freedoms that “people can flourish”, 2) empowerment and agency giving people and groups tools to promote desired goals and 3) justice highlighting equity, human rights and the preferences of local society. (UNDP, 2010: 22)
3.1.2. Nussbaum’s Perspective to Capabilities

In addition to Sen’s ideas, Nussbaum highlights human dignity and defines ten so-called ‘central capabilities’. Sen does not specify any minimum standards for decent life, but Nussbaum does. The first point includes simply possibilities of living a normal and dignified life, whilst the second one concentrates on physical health. The third point, ‘bodily integrity,’ consists of freedoms to move from one place to another, sexual satisfaction and the choice regarding reproduction, but also life without violence. The fourth part highlights the importance of being able to think, imagine and aspire (education plays a crucial role in this, if it directs students to think independently), and the fifth one states the same considering the possibilities to feel different feelings. ‘Practical reasons’ refers to the capability to recognize good and plan one’s life. The seventh point has two different dimensions; being able to connect socially with other human beings and being treated in an equal way due to certain amount of self-respect. ‘Other species’ refers to the harmony with nature and other animals and plants, whilst the ninth central capability reminds us of the importance of laughing, playing and having fun. Lastly, Nussbaum underlines that being able to take part in society politically and holding equal property rights, are crucial components of attaining the minimum standard of human development. (Nussbaum, 2011: 33-34)

Central capabilities, according to Nussbaum (2011: 39), support and maintain each other. A good example of this is proper education, in a VET institution for example, which increases the employment capabilities. Being able to earn money in its turn empowers women both politically and within a family. Capabilities consist of internal capabilities (personal abilities, characteristics, knowledge and skills) and suitable social, economic and political environment to use these freedoms (Nussbaum, 2011: 20). However, Nussbaum also states that in most cases, achieving social justice requires more than just these ten capabilities (2011: 40). Nevertheless, guaranteeing these ten freedoms offers some kind of basis; “The capabilities approach, in my version, focuses on the protection of areas of freedom so central that their removal makes a life not worthy of human dignity.” (Nussbaum, 2011: 31)

Despite defining the ten most important capabilities, Nussbaum refuses to determine good values of a society (2011: 28). This would threaten the idea of free will and freedom to choose. She also argues that governments have the main responsibility of improving the quality of people’s lives, which in this context means enlarging capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011: 19). Society needs to support the development of internal capabilities and enable the ideal environment for using them. She adds that those who have fewer freedoms, should get more support from the society (Nussbaum, 2011: 24).

Wolff & De-Shalit (2007 in Nussbaum, 2011: 44) present the two indispensable concepts; ‘fertile functioning’ and ‘corrosive disadvantage’. These reflect actions which have a promoting or deteriorating impact in regard to a certain capability. For example, education expands other freedoms, such as the freedom to feel dignity and postpone the age of having first child, whilst child marriage can hinder the capabilities of being healthy and accessing desired education. There are also situations in which it is necessary to limit someone’s freedoms to guarantee someone else’s capabilities. This is called ‘tragic choice’ (Nussbaum, 2011: 37).
3.1.3. Gender and Education in Capabilities Approach

As already mentioned, women, particularly at reproductive age, are more vulnerable compared to men of similar ages. Social structures in developing countries, such as Ethiopia, set hindrances to equality between sexes. The well-being of women is recognized to have positive effects on whole society, children especially, but also men. This is why highlighting the gender perspective is crucial, and is also present in this thesis.

For a long time, poverty reduction regarding women has highlighted only the well-being of them, neglecting the agency aspect (Sen, 1999: 189). It was forgotten that women could be the actors of the development of their own lives. Of course, these two dimensions, well-being and agency, connect with each other as it is impossible to think of development only with agency, minus the well-being aspect. The option to choose or refuse is also critical in regard to women (Sen, 1999: 190). A clear example is family planning, which offers young women an opportunity to control the number of children they have. Aside from this, the increase of female agency increases the well-being of the women themselves and this has been proved to have positive impacts on societies as a whole, including men. (Sen, 1999: 191)

Education plays a crucial role in expanding people’s, in this case, women’s capabilities. “[…] women’s well-being is strongly influenced by such variables as women’s ability to earn an independent income, to find employment outside the home, to have ownership and to have literacy and be educated participants in decisions within and outside the family.” (Sen, 1999: 191) It can be said that education has an empowering influence. It gives tools to survive better in life and combat poverty. This reflects especially the instrumental value of education. However, attaining proper education has also its intrinsic value as people, both women and men, are entitled to go to school and get the knowledge needed to have a decent, dignified life.

3.2. Justification for Choosing the Theoretical Framework

The capabilities approach holds certain advantages compared to the other perspectives in terms of discussing the benefits of education and, for example, vocational education. Sen (1999: 87-88) has discussed these positive features in his work. Firstly, poverty can be defined easily in terms of capability deprivation. The approach also sees the intrinsic value of, for example vocational training, not only its instrumental benefits. Secondly, more is needed to eradicate poverty than just increased income and growth. The capability approach acknowledges the multidimensionality of both poverty and development. Besides the economic factors, social and political aspects play a key role. Thirdly, Sen reminds us that the instrumental value of capabilities in relation to income varies depending on the context. Countries, regions, communities, families and even individuals are different, and therefore how income generates capabilities and how capabilities increase income, will diverge under different conditions. (Sen, 1999: 87-88) This is why it is essential to conduct case studies and define the context before evaluating processes.

Economic approaches concentrate only on growth, employability and increase of income. These are vital components of development, but alone they are inadequate. McGrath (2012) states that these perspectives do not
adequately explain what it is to be a human being and criticizes them being oriented only towards short-term solutions. Powell (2012) instead underlines that the capabilities approach puts focus on ‘human flourishing,’ compared to the one-sided economic view. The capabilities approach is also applicable to different cultures and ideologies (UNDP, 2000: 22), because it appreciates the viewpoints of those involved such that there is room for non-Western preferences as well.

Even if the human capital approach and capability approach have in common the tendency to actually see the human beings and their abilities from agency perspective (Sen, 1999: 293), they have different goals. The term development is interpreted in a different way. For a supporter of the human capital view, the value of education lays in increased productivity. In the other words, people are as the means of growth. In contrast, in the capabilities approach, the intrinsic value is also acknowledged (Sen, 1999: 294-295).

Universal human rights have, to a great extent, a similar content to that of the capability approach. However, the capability approach complements the human rights perspective with the ideas of human dignity and the possibility to choose. (Nussbaum, 2011: 62-63) Nussbaum (2011: 64) agrees with the human rights approach that governments should guarantee certain basic entitlements. Alston & Robinson (2005 in McGrath, 2012) also point out that the human rights perspective neglects the context and focuses only on legal rights of people.

Most of the research made on schooling does not consider students’ perspectives and ideas on their education, particularly with regards to VET. Powell (2012) is one of those exceptional researchers, who highlights the importance of hearing the voices of students. If we want to capture the realities of the poor and make people also agents of the development, their point of views need to be brought into light. Offering a micro approach, alongside the many macro ones, is also crucial. The usage of the capabilities approach really gives the voice to the ordinary people and also enables the construction of desired policies:

“[Capability approach highlights] the ability of policy to construct meaningful interventions that show respect for and empower real people, rather than simply reflecting the biases of intellectual elites.”

(Nussbaum, 2011: Preface xi)

4. DATA COLLECTION

Catching comprehensively the perceptions of people on their realities, demands qualitative research design. As I explored how young female VET students see new opportunities arising with their future professions, this dictated to a large extent my sampling and methodology. I conducted ten semi-structured interviews, and to attain the best possible background information, I organized a group discussion with the staff of GSTC. Also participant observation raised my understanding on the context. I had my challenges and difficulties during the data collection process, but I managed to handle them in a way that they had no impact on my research results.
4.1. Research Design and its Justification

Research design is highly determined by the research questions. In this study, I am especially interested in the perceptions, thoughts and feelings of the female students. How do the young women see themselves to benefit from their vocational education? And to what extent do they expect training to increase their freedoms? The qualitative research enables us to hear the voices of the poor and captures the insider’s perspective through interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994 in Punch, 2005: 140). The women’s goals and views can be brought up, because they are studied particularly as women (Flick, 2009: 67-68). This kind of bottom-up thinking comes together with the capabilities approach, in which the poor are seen both as actors and targets of the development (UNDP, 2010: 22). Qualitative research and my study as well, aim towards the holistic perspective on the studied area, context and the ways how people see their daily lives (Miles & Huberman, 1994 in Punch, 2005: 140-141). The capabilities approach and bottom-up perspective give a great chance to observe the benefits of VET in terms of geography; how they see their lives improving in the context of a changing city and an increasingly competitive labour market and social space.

Certain inductiveness is a crucial dimension of qualitative research and this is also the case with my bachelor’s thesis. Like Bryman (2008: 11) claims, “with an inductive stance, theory is the outcome of research. In other words, the process of induction involves drawing generalizable inferences out of observations”. However, “[…] the inductive process is likely to entail a modicum of deduction.” (Bryman, 2008: 11) With this he points out that it is unlikely and challenging for a researcher to put all of his/her expectations and presumptions aside in different stages of the research process, although this can be a goal. I also tried to keep my mind as open as possible during my time in the field, although I acknowledged the fact that I had assumptions on possible answers of respondents, for example.

In relation to qualitative studies, the question of generalization often comes up. However, Punch (2005: 255) indicates that the term of transferability would be more accurate regarding this type of research. How my findings are applicable to other cases and environments? The broad description of the context plays always a key role in qualitative research and every researcher needs to consider if two contexts are comparable. Still, clarifying the concepts thoroughly and the proper sampling can improve the validity of the findings in different contexts. (Flick, 2009: 407)

4.2. Sampling

The research question affects also the sampling of interviewees. My question defined the target group as ‘young female students of VET institution’ as I especially wanted to attain information about the ideas and thoughts of this precise group. In this sense, the sampling was purposive; my respondents represented the typical cases within the target group (Flick, 2009: 122) and the organization of my internship offered an ideal context for finding interviewees from this group. Nevertheless, my sampling method can be said to belong to convenience sampling as well (Flick, 2009: 122), based on the fact that the actual individuals chosen within the context of GSTC were selected on the grounds of who was available and willing for an interview. However, I wanted to include respondents from all available study lines, which were catering, sewing and hair
dressing, to my research. Child care students had not started their courses yet, so I could not include them in the sample.

4.3. Methods and Data Collection Process

To achieve my research goals, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with an average length of 30 minutes. I had an interview guide with some possible questions, but depending on the respondent’s activity and eagerness to talk about certain topics, I varied the content. With follow-up questions, I managed to attain, even from shy interviewees, more than yes-no answers, but this led to variations in answers between women interviewed. I was not allowed to record the interviews so I had to rely on my notes. However, I was able to take the necessary time and after, I made further markings to remember everything later on.

I also organized a group discussion with my key informants, who were staff members of GSTC (social worker, head teacher, accountant and administrator). The aim of this whole group interview was to map the backgrounds of the women studying at the center, and also to attain information about the educational system and especially VET in Ethiopia and Addis Ababa.

I was lucky to be able to get to know my respondents before starting the research data collection, whilst I was teaching English during my internship. The classes were very interactive; both I and my students were sharing things about ourselves, which gave us an opportunity to become more familiar with each other. This helped me a lot when aiming to achieve the trust of the students during the interviews. Trust and respect both ways played a crucial role, particularly when I tangled sensitive issues with my interview questions. The women were willing to tell me their stories, because they knew me. However, we were not too close due to my role as a teacher, but same gender and age helped us to find a connection.

One of the teachers at the training center operated as my translator. The English skills of the vocational students were not good enough to communicate fully about themes like poverty and education, so the usage of a translator was a necessity. The translator spoke English very well and we discussed beforehand what I wanted her to actually do. I explained that I wanted her to tell me what the respondents were saying and not what she thinks I would like to hear. She also clarified some cultural things that came up in the discussions and were unfamiliar to me. As an example, things were mentioned in relation to food and religion. I do not speak Amharic at all, so of course I lost some nuances of the language and possibly some actual information on the way. Under these circumstances, however, the shared understanding of me, interviewees and the translator was the best possible.

As I spent nine weeks in the field and at GSTC I also held the role of a participant observer. The observations were essential, when trying to perceive the context of my study. In my bachelor’s research, I try to obtain an insiders’ perspective (Flick, 2009: 226) and pass it to academic audience. However, I must make the reader aware that I was never a full member of the group studied; I was a visitor and I had completely different roles, in comparison to the respondents.
4.4. Ethical Issues

When carrying out qualitative research, there are several ethical considerations that need to be taken into account. Allmarks (2002 in Flick, 2009: 40) reminds us about the importance of offering adequate information on research for participants and always asking for their consent. I explained the reasons for the interviews for my respondents and chose them based on their voluntarism. Other criterion for their participation was that they did not have a class during that time. As the students had breaks at different times, I asked those women, who were not busy, to answer my questions because I wanted to avoid interfering (Flick, 2009: 41) with their studying.

I also highlighted the anonymity and confidentiality for my interviewees (Flick, 2009: 42). When talking about sensitive issues, it is crucial to be able to trust the researcher. Also during my interviews, I was told sad stories, but I was able to keep the atmosphere positive and future-oriented.

4.5 Challenges

I faced many challenges when collecting my primary data in Ethiopia. Some of them could be explained with cultural differences, such as the different idea of time. Planning of interviews was impossible; the translator, interviewees and I had different schedules and plans made for the next day or week, never did take place. For example, my work programme changed constantly and even if I learned to double-check everything, I was sometimes forced to conduct an interview in a slight hurry. However, I think that the quality of information received did not suffer from the lack of anticipation.

Flick (2009: 107-109) reminds us that doing research in an organization may be challenging. I found this out in practice; an outsider observing and asking questions made some people nervous. Pure curiosity with my study was obvious, but some staff members acted no less than in a hostile way. Mainly they were worried about me asking political questions, which are very sensitive in Ethiopia. I heard that many NGOs had been shut down due to too active political participation. Considering this, I understood the worry of the staff that the research could cause harm either to the students or the organization. Nevertheless, we had a common understanding with the director of GSTC; she believed me when I assured her that my intention was not to ask anything politically related. However, this did not remove the doubts among certain staff members.

Of course my study also caused further problems as it consumed the time of other workers of the organization. As Flick (2009: 108-109) states, this often happens in these kinds of research cases. Sometimes the staff members did not understand why I could not talk about my interviews, or they criticized the way I had planned my research. Some people seemed to be irritated, because I was there asking questions, and I was constantly reminded of how my study would not help the organization – they were only helping me as an individual person. Nonetheless, most of the people reacted very well and did not see my research as a problem.

5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS
In my interviews at GSTC, we discussed how the students thought about their contemporary education and how they believed their lives to be changed when having a profession. The results clearly showed how freedoms and opportunities were expected to expand, whereas women without vocational or higher education, were assumed to be much more diverse. The competition over space and resources, and for example jobs, in Addis Ababa is an acute issue due to population pressure. Based on the results of my research, the young women anticipate having enlarged capabilities to take care of themselves and their families much better, after their graduation and having training. Their expectations were very optimistic regarding their future and this was especially seen as a consequence of accessing VET.

5.1. Profile of Interviewees

My ten interviewees were aged from 18 to 31 and they represented catering (two students), hairdressing (five students) and sewing (three students) departments of GSTC. Before starting in their current training programmes, most of the respondents had worked in poorly paid jobs, such as cleaners or construction workers. One student told that she had earned her living as a prostitute and some had come directly from high school.

All women interviewed came from households with low income levels. Five out of ten stated that they belonged to a single-parent family, either being a parent or a child. One respondent told me that she was living alone with her brother. Some women had a job alongside of their studies, for example as shopkeepers, factory workers or at the road constructions. In cases in which the students were not working, their family members worked in same types of jobs, such as drivers, gardeners, mechanics and farm workers. Two households received economic assistance from a relative and some respondents mentioned their families were obtaining income from renting a room in their house. Biggest household expenses identified by the female vocational students were house rent and food. One interviewee stated that “after food, there is no money left for anything else”. Also transport and educational costs of siblings were brought up in couple of conversations.

5.2. Benefits of Vocational Education according to the Students

5.2.1. Economic Status and Improved Quality of Life

Eight out of ten respondents mentioned directly that they expect their income level to rise after finishing their vocational education programme. The reasons to appreciate the ongoing training varied, because of different backgrounds, but all students had high hopes for a better income in the future. Based on the overall discussions, all ten expected to be able to increase their income due to their new profession and in this way, improve their living standards. Eight women were quite sure that they would start their own business after graduation, and for the other two, it was a potential option alongside a paid job. Migration as an opportunity to make more money was an alternative for four interviewees, and one of them told me that she was also ready to move abroad if a good job was offered.
It was obvious that women desired the increased income due to the possibility to improve the quality of life. “Saving for emergencies” and “buying my own house” were common answers when I asked what the respondents would do with their increased salaries. Both a “more diversified diet” and “having a holiday” were mentioned once. Also the intrinsic aspect of education, “knowing more things and learning new skills”, came up.

The notable pattern in my findings was that the students deeply valued the teaching about family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, English, hygiene, saving and business management. Eight interviewees stated that the family planning knowledge was helping them to avoid poverty. Arguments like “I can control the number of my children” and “I can afford to take care of all my children” came up in several discussions. Also the HIV/AIDS information was regarded especially valuable:

“This knowledge keeps me healthy and I am able to work and earn money. I have seen people who have got HIV and fallen into poverty.” (Respondent 1)

“Now I can protect myself from STDs.” (Respondent 3)

English skills helped the students, according to them, to be prepared to serve foreign customers when running their own business. Some also stressed that they expected to benefit from the knowledge received about saving and handling money, both in home economics and as future entrepreneurs. Seven women were sure that they would pass their learnings of common subjects to their children as well. Also, it appeared that the counselling offered by the social worker was highly valued among the interviewees.

When asked about respondents’ current situations compared to the same aged women but without vocational or other higher education, several students identified the tendency of women without any profession leading education marrying younger. Nine interviewees said this to be the case, and at least partly due to economic reasons.

5.2.2. Confidence for Brighter Future

Vocational students had generally very optimistic outlooks. Many highlighted their willingness to work hard for their and their families’ well-being. One respondent also studying in another institution stated in the following way:

“In the future I see myself running a hair dressing business and working as an engineer at the same time.” (Respondent 10)

Interviewees noted that finding employment or customers for business is not difficult in their future branches in Addis Ababa, especially as they are skillful professionals. These impressions matched with the statements of the staff of GSTC, which revealed that the employers often contact the organization beforehand to get new graduates to work for their companies. Most of the women also perceived their education as an instrument to make their dreams come true or enable a desired way of life:

“I want to be a fashion designer.” (Respondent 8)

“I hope to make changes in my lifestyle.” (Respondent 10)
For some the possibility to start in a training programme, meant a new start in life; they were happy to move on in their life.

“Because of this education I was able to get rid of the bad things in my life and stop prostitution.” (Respondent 5)

Despite the hopeful future prospects, three women claimed that gender inequalities were in place within working environments in Ethiopia. Two of them indicated that fitting family and career together was more challenging for women, mainly because of lack of time and expectations to take care of children and home. One respondent stated also that:

“Sometimes women are afraid to ask for jobs […] because they are not appreciated as workers as much as men.” (Respondent 6)

5.2.3. Aims to Support Others

Improving the well-being of others, family members and relatives, was a notable goal for most of the interviewees. They were not aiming only to use their future increased income for themselves, but also for children’s, parents and siblings’ welfare. Most popular, was to invest in the education of siblings and own children, with six respondents claiming to be working for this. Two students mentioned that helping their mother was one thing they would use their money for. The other one specified especially that she would buy a house for her mother. The other one wanted to make a living together with her mother:

“I would invest in business together with my Mom and in this way help her with her economic situation.” (Respondent 5)

The same respondent also planned to invest in her and her son’s medical care:

“My 12-years-old son has serious eye problems. I need to pay his treatment. I would also buy him and myself HIV/AIDS medicines.”

5.3. Connecting Own Findings to the Theoretical Framework

How did the previous statements of female students reflect the increasing opportunities (or capabilities) in urban public space? In the interviews, the women highlighted especially that they received certain tools for life through VET training. These tools or skills, according to themselves, offered them a way to improve life in a changing environment. Considering this their new knowledge has both instrumental and intrinsic values. Their education and future profession gave them a possibility to choose a different kind of life. This could mean increased income, more preferred housing type or quitting prostitution or it could mean independence from relatives and the capability to feel dignity. In other words, VET removed many unfreedoms which had hindered the women achieving the better quality of life. As an example, they received information about HIV/AIDS and family planning; the unfreedoms of being unaware about these issues.

My respondents acknowledged that with certain capabilities, they are able to access other freedoms as well. For example education and employment were perceived as ways for better income, which could be used for instance, for
better health care. Income also gave them the choice to not get married and only get married with the real will to do that. However, this pattern functions the other way around as well – postponing the marriage and staying healthy makes working and earning money possible.

Of course there are several benefits of education that interviewees did not mention directly, but I think these come with the fundamental change in the lives of the students. Their agency in development process got an opportunity to flourish and they obtained more power both within their families and more broadly in the society through the increased independence. Nevertheless, these structural phenomena were not discussed during the interviews as we focused on their individual point of views. I also want to point out that all the statements of the respondents were only future prospects and ideas about their future, not the actual reality. We do not know how the situations evolve after women’s graduation.

5.3.1. Expanded Central Capabilities

In Nussbaum’s theorization on capabilities, she underlined the minimum basic level of certain freedoms, so-called central capabilities (2011: 33-34). Based on the interviews, I can say that the vocational students expected these central capabilities to increase due to the education at GSTC.

Interviewees showed pride, joy and feelings of success because of their access to vocational education and the opportunities they saw coming with a new profession. They stated being able to leave their old, unpleasant lives and have a fresh start with dignity. Self-respect and confidence had increased among the women after starting in their study programmes. They told me that they had been given tools for taking care of their health in the future, for example in the forms of information and means to achieve better living standards (and in this way prevent illness and being able to afford treatment). Because of the family planning guidance offered at the center, the young women got improved access to reproductive choice, and professions enabled them to live longer outside of marriage, because they did not have to rely economically on anyone. Economic independence of women can generally contribute to gender equality, when women get empowered within households (affecting on power relations in family) and more generally in society.

Nussbaum’s central capabilities also claim for the capability to aspire and dream. This development was obvious in my research – students were planning their future, starting own businesses, buying new houses or aiming to become “a famous fashion designer”. They had clear visions of how they would use their new skills and knowledge to benefit themselves and their families. They showed great optimism and were both hopeful and ready to work hard to achieve what they desired. Education at GSTC motivated them and offered an opportunity to work in a satisfying job, even in a dream job. As already mentioned, the VET was valued for both instrumental and intrinsic reasons as it was seen as a means for a better life, but also as an ends.
5.3.2. Increased Capabilities in Changing Social and Economic Space

Many of the vocational students mentioned that they expected being able to save money for either emergencies or special purposes such as houses or cars. Saving and later on making investments was not possible for women before, but they saw this opportunity becoming realistic after they had achieved a professional competence and a proper employment. Freedom to save may contribute to women having a bank loan in the future and being able to invest, for instance, in their own businesses or housing. Students also acknowledged that education and employment could decrease their dependencies on others, for example relatives. Like Spicker (2007: 74-76) reminds us, dependency is one major feature of poverty and it often causes stigmatization. By having vocational education and obtaining diplomas indicating their skills, women’s status can raise while they are recognized as professionals. This may also have further positive impacts on the sense of self-respect of the young women. It is also crucial to point out how some respondents desired having expanded capabilities, enabling them to do something fun. In their current life situations, their time is spent mainly on fulfilling the basic needs; going to work or taking care of the household. For example, “having a holiday” was mentioned in this sense of possible leisure time.

As already stated, the choice regarding fertility grows alongside the income increase of women. This gives options to motherhood and taking care of domestic work (Kolev & Suarez-Robles, 2010). In a broader sense, education can also offer previous housewives and non-respected workers the possibility to enter the public space in society. This can be a first step towards larger democratic participation, even if there are many obstacles complicating this. As many studies have underlined, the impact of increased income of women reflects directly on children (Kolev & Suarez-Robles, 2010). This was clear in my interviews as well; the women were planning to save for their children’s education and invest in the health care of them. The “more diversified diet” would have positive influence on children as well. Women’s improved access to public sphere can lead to that their daughters have the same access. In addition, the students can offer, for example, their mothers a chance to enter the public space, while they were planning to start a business together with them. Furthermore, improved language skills in English can increase women’s contacts with foreigners (customers or employers for instance) and improve their access to different information available, such as that on the internet. These aspects and the possibility for migration can positively contribute to women’s entry into urban public space.

It can be also said that having VET training increases the competitive advantage of young women to find employment, by increasing their skills and knowledge and making them more competent job applicants compared to others not having professional training background. Population growth and rural-urban migration have led to a great number of low-educated people, especially youth, in Addis Ababa. Vocational education increases the options and possibilities of these people to choose in a competitive labour market. By having a proper job and income, even single-parent women and their families can have access to, for example, better housing and adequate nutrition. Kolev & Suarez-Robles (2010) have also discovered that education has a more positive impact on women’s living standards compared to men. Thus, by educating women, the gender equality can be promoted.

The large share of the Ethiopian economy belongs to the informal sector, and poorly educated young women are most likely to be employed in it, if
they are not taking care of children at home. Studies have revealed that gender based discrimination in the labour market, hinders women attaining jobs in public and formal sector. (Kolev & Suarez-Robles, 2010) My interviewees and their families came from informal job backgrounds, and mainly because they had no other options. Enlarging capabilities through vocational training enabled them to get rid of unwanted activities. The informal sector does not offer protection like the public sector does (Kolev & Suarez-Robles, 2010), but when other alternatives are lacking, the poor have to rely on these ways of making a living.

Expanded freedoms are tightly connected with concepts of justice, empowerment and agency (UNDP, 2010: 22). Based on my results, the female VET students perceived their training to increase all these components of human development.

5.4. Similar Findings from Similar Studies

Posti-Ahokas & Palojoki (2014) have made research in Tanzania among female secondary students regarding their thoughts about their education. Findings also discovered the youth being very future-oriented, optimistic and eager to learn more. They also had aims to support their families, similar to the aims of my interviewees. Tanzanian secondary students recognized the instrumental and intrinsic values of their schooling. They perceived it as a tool to achieve other goals, like employment, but it meant to them also attaining a decent, meaningful life and hope.

The target group of the research made by Powell (2012) in South-Africa considered VET students, like in my bachelor’s thesis. South-African youth, when asked about their training, highlighted the feelings of pride and capabilities to aspire. They explained that they had greater opportunities in life compared to their parents, who did not have the opportunities to educate themselves. They further underlined the importance of the possibility of having a satisfying job and the possibility ‘to start over’ after hardships.

These studies support my findings by showing very similar results as my research in Addis Ababa. However, it is always necessary to consider the local context before making any overall generalizations when conducting a study regarding people’s perceptions and beliefs.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Compared to many other studies conducted regarding VET, my research focuses on a small-scale sample and takes a qualitative perspective. It does not concentrate only on the economic development of nations, or look the poverty only through the lens of lacking universal human rights, even if they are crucial measurements to keep in mind. This micro approach to the discussion on benefits of vocational education reflects the viewpoints of the students. Qualitative research design enables the mapping of the multidimensional characteristics of vocational training and its effects on the multidimensional concept of poverty. Instead of top-down analysis, the change and development are interpreted from below, from the perspectives of the poor themselves. This approach holds great value for further academic discussion and policy-making in regard to VET.
In this thesis, VET and its advantages are observed in the context of changing urban space of Addis Ababa. Within the growing contest over economic and social space, the young women with vocational training background hold the notable competitive advantage compared to youth lacking the comparable education. They have greater opportunities and more options available for example in labour market, but also regarding the decisions in relation to reproduction and marriage. They have improved access to public sphere and the formal sector employment (even if the social norms would encourage young women to stay at home).

My theoretical framework, the capabilities approach, is based on the thoughts of Amartya Sen and Martha C. Nussbaum. They highlight development being measured with increased freedoms and improved opportunities of people to choose what they actually want to do in their lives. For many individuals, this is not possible, especially in developing countries, where social structures and other situations are limiting the options of people. The capabilities approach reveals the non-economic aspects of poverty, aspects like social status and dependency. It also hears what the people, whose lives are intervened with the poverty alleviation actions, are thinking. The role of context is recognized within this theoretical framework and vocational education is seen to hold benefits both in intrinsic and instrumental terms. These are factors that have been poorly represented in the discussion on vocational training and poverty reduction. These discussions should hear those, who are involved currently in the vocational education, so that suitable and context matching policies could be designed. In the case of my research capabilities approach helped to see that the VET students appreciated their education for multiple reasons, which were not only economic. It also gave practical examples of how the women aimed to ‘do better’ in the future and make the best of their training, but also how their status and situation in a changing urban environment could improve.

Studies of Posti-Ahokas & Palojoki (2014) and Powell (2012) show similar findings with my research. There are some slight differences in contexts, for example the study made in Tanzania (Posti-Ahokas & Palojoki, 2014) was conducted among secondary female students, but the results are comparable with my findings. They also found out that female youth appreciated their education – they perceived it to expand their freedoms in multiple ways. Vocational training offers young women not only the opportunities to attain increased income and better living standards, but it has a positive impact on overall well-being, empowerment and agency, which can be passed on to the next generations as well. VET also promotes MDGs like gender equality, improved health, combating poverty and preventing and treating HIV/AIDS.
7. REFERENCES

Articles:


Books:


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8. APPENDIX

8.1. Interview Guide

Here is the interview guide I used in my interviews with the vocational students. However, the questions varied in different interviews due to the respondents’ willingness to talk about more about certain topics. I also made different follow-up questions depending on the situation.

1. Family situation and basic information:
   - Age?
   - What do you study at GSTC?
   - Family members?
   - Income sources of the family? Do you have a job as well alongside of studying?
   - What are the biggest household expenses of your family (food, house rent, transportation, clothing…)?
   - What did you do before education in the training center?

2. How does the vocational education improve your life?

3. Would you change something in your life if you had bigger income?

4. Would you spend more on your family? In which way?

5. Would you save money (for emergencies or for something specific)?

6. What kinds of opportunities of making a living you can see after your graduation?
   - Have you considered migration as an opportunity to increase income?
   - Do you think it’s easy to get a job or find customers after the graduation?

7. If you think the same aged girls as you but without vocational training, what are their possibilities to earn money in Addis Ababa?
   - Do you see your situation better?

8. Do you think that girls without higher education marry younger? Why?

9. At the center you learn also English, saving, family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, hygiene, business attitude etc.
Do you think this kind of knowledge will help you to make more money in the future and avoid poverty? If yes, how?

Do you think that you will pass this knowledge to your children?

10. Where you see yourself five years from now? What are your future plans?

- How your life has changed if you have been able to receive a good income level?

11. Do you think that finding employment and earning money are more difficult for women than men in Ethiopia?

- Don’t have time because of taking care of children and household work?