

Factors Influencing Students' Enrolment Decisions in TVET Programs in Malaysia

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Article History: Received 12 January 2026; Revised 11 March 2026;

Accepted 03 Jun 2026.

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Abstract

This study examines the factors influencing student enrolment decisions in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs at Jabatan Perdagangan, Politeknik Port Dickson, Malaysia. Despite TVET's critical role in developing a skilled workforce, enrolment rates in polytechnic institutions remain low, partly due to negative perceptions of TVET as a less prestigious educational pathway. Drawing on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), this quantitative study investigates the impact of career opportunities, family influence, peer influence, and interest and self-efficacy on enrolment decisions, and examines whether enrolment decisions differ based on gender. Data were collected through an online survey of 159 students. Multiple regression analysis confirmed that all hypothesized factors significantly predict enrolment decisions, with interest and self-efficacy as the strongest influences. Family and peer influences were also significant, while career opportunities had a smaller yet meaningful effect. No significant gender differences were found. The findings highlight the importance of intrinsic motivation and social support in shaping TVET enrolment and suggest targeted policy interventions to improve awareness, perceptions, and curriculum alignment with industry demands.

Keywords: Career Opportunities; Family Influence; Interest and Self-Efficacy; Peer Influence, Student Enrolment Decisions; TVET.

1.0 Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is a pivotal component of Malaysia's human capital development strategy, playing an instrumental role in supporting the nation's aspiration to transition into a high income, technology driven economy. As industries increasingly demand a skilled, adaptable, and job ready workforce, TVET institutions play a vital role in developing graduates with practical competencies and occupation specific skills that meet labour market demands (Fuller, 2015; Chear & Arifin, 2024). Recognizing the importance of TVET in supporting national economic development, the Malaysian government has continuously introduced reforms to strengthen governance, enhance industry collaboration, and improve graduate employability.

The strategic importance of TVET has been further reinforced under the MADANI Government. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has emphasized the establishment of a dedicated TVET Commission tasked with streamlining governance, improving stakeholder coordination, and aligning training programs more closely with industry demands. Recent initiatives including the rollout of the National TVET Policy 2030, increased government investment, and expanded industry linked training opportunities demonstrate Malaysia's commitment to positioning TVET as a central pathway for developing a skilled workforce essential to the country's economic transformation and technological progress (Malay Mail, 2025; The Vibes, 2025).

Despite these developments, attracting sufficient student enrolment in TVET programs remains a significant challenge. Vocational education continues to be perceived by many as a less prestigious alternative to conventional academic pathways, adversely affecting students' educational aspirations. Such misperceptions often discourage potential students from pursuing TVET, notwithstanding its strong potential for promising career outcomes and advancement (Ayanwale et al., 2023).

Prior research indicates that various factors influence students' decisions regarding their educational and career pathways. These include perceived career opportunities, family influence, peer influence, and individual factors such as interest and self-efficacy (Ayanwale et al., 2023; Noh & Awi, 2022). Collectively, these determinants reflect the interaction of personal beliefs, expected outcomes, and environmental influences that shape students' enrolment decisions.

Although literature on TVET participation has expanded, research specifically focused on commerce related TVET programs within Malaysian polytechnics is limited. Additionally, many prior studies have examined these influencing factors independently, thereby limiting understanding of how these variables collectively affect enrolment decisions. Consequently, an integrated investigation of career opportunities, social influences, and individual motivation is necessary to develop a comprehensive understanding of student enrolment in the Malaysian polytechnic context.

To address these gaps, this study examines the influence of career opportunities, family influence, peer influence, and interest and self-efficacy on students' enrolment decisions in TVET programs within the Malaysian polytechnic system. Furthermore, the study investigates whether gender differences significantly impact enrolment decisions. The findings are expected to contribute valuable insights to both academic scholarship and practical policymaking, equipping educators and decision makers with evidence-based strategies to enhance enrolment and engagement in TVET.

Despite Malaysia's recognition of TVET as a strategic pathway for economic growth and workforce development, attracting students to these programs remains a significant challenge. Although the government has strengthened

the TVET ecosystem through policy reforms, industry collaborations, and institutional improvements, vocational education is still often perceived as a less desirable alternative to traditional academic pathways (Omar et al., 2020; Ahmed Alnaqbi, 2015). Such perceptions may shape students' educational aspirations and influence their enrolment decisions.

Research suggests that educational choices are shaped by the interaction of personal beliefs, expected career outcomes, and social influences. Key determinants frequently associated with students' educational and career decision making include perceived career opportunities, family influence, peer influence, and individual attributes such as interest and self-efficacy. These factors collectively influence how students evaluate educational pathways, develop career aspirations, and make decisions regarding their future studies.

While considerable attention has been given to TVET participation, empirical research focusing on factors influencing students' enrolment decisions in commerce related TVET programs within Malaysian polytechnics remains limited. Furthermore, existing studies have often examined these determinants independently, resulting in a fragmented understanding of how personal and social factors collectively influence enrolment decisions. Therefore, a more comprehensive investigation into the combined influence of career opportunities, family influence, peer influence, and interest and self-efficacy on students' enrolment decisions in TVET programs is warranted.

Given the pivotal role of TVET in supporting Malaysia's skilled workforce agenda, understanding the factors that influence students' enrolment decisions is essential for developing effective strategies to strengthen participation in TVET programs. In addition, examining potential differences in enrolment decisions based on gender may provide further insights to support more inclusive and targeted TVET promotion strategies. The objectives of this study are:

- i. To determine the influence of career opportunities, family influence, peer influence, and interest and self-efficacy on students' enrolment decisions in TVET programs.
- ii. To examine whether significant differences exist in students' enrolment decisions in TVET programs based on gender.

Research suggests that students' enrolment decisions are influenced by a combination of personal, social, and career related factors. Among the most frequently identified determinants are perceived career opportunities, family influence, peer influence, and individual characteristics such as interest and self-efficacy. These determinants are consistent with Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which posits that educational and career decisions are shaped by the interaction of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and contextual influences (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Lent & Brown, 2020).

Within the TVET context, favourable career opportunities may strengthen students' outcome expectations, while family and peer influence function as contextual supports that shape educational aspirations and decision making

(Yusran et al., 2021; Ayub, 2017). Interest and self-efficacy represent important personal factors that influence students' confidence and willingness to pursue vocational education. Recent studies have reported that these factors significantly influence students' educational choices and participation in TVET programs (Ayanwale et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2021; Noh & Awi, 2022; Abu Bakar et al., 2024).

Despite growing interest in TVET participation, empirical evidence focusing on commerce related TVET programs within Malaysian polytechnics remains limited. Furthermore, previous studies have frequently examined these determinants independently, resulting in a fragmented understanding of how personal and social factors collectively influence students' enrolment decisions. Therefore, this study adopts SCCT as the underlying theoretical framework to examine the influence of career opportunities, family influence, peer influence, and interest and self-efficacy on students' enrolment decisions in TVET programs.

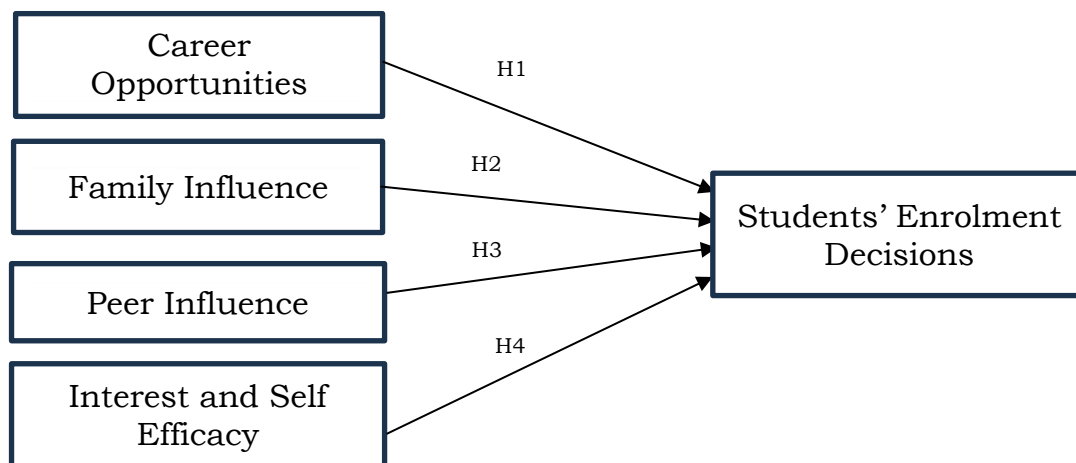


Figure 1: Shows the conceptual framework based on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

2.0 Methodology

This quantitative study investigates factors influencing TVET enrolment decisions, grounded in SCCT, focusing on commerce related students at Jabatan Perdagangan, Politeknik Port Dickson. Data was collected via a self-administered online questionnaire measuring key SCCT constructs on a five-point Likert scale. The survey was distributed via WhatsApp, WeChat, and Telegram. A priori power analysis using G*Power confirmed a minimum sample size of 129 (Faul et al., 2007), and 159 valid responses were obtained. Data analysis involved multiple regression and independent samples t-tests to test hypotheses and gender differences.

3.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study. The results are organized into four parts: respondents' demographic profiles, descriptive statistics, gender differences in enrolment decisions, and the factors influencing students' enrolment decisions in TVET programs.

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents who participated in the study. A total of 159 valid responses were analyzed. The sample was predominantly female (86.8%), aged between 20 and 21 years (52.8%), and Malay (88.1%). Most respondents were enrolled in the Diploma in Science Secretary program (67.3%), followed by Diploma in Accountancy (17.6%) and Diploma in Marketing (15.1%). Family income was relatively balanced across categories, with the largest proportion reporting a monthly household income of RM5,000 and above (28.3%).

Table 1: Respondents' Profile

Variables	Description	Frequencies	Percentage%
Gender	Male	21	13.2
	Female	138	86.8
Age	18-19 years old	66	41.5
	20-21 years old	84	52.8
	22 years and above	9	5.7
Races	Malay	140	88.1
	Chinese	1	0.6
	Indian	14	8.8
	Others	4	2.5
Program	Diploma in Science Secretary	107	67.3
	Diploma in Marketing	24	15.1
	Diploma in Accountancy	28	17.6
Family Income	Below RM2,000	38	23.9
	RM2,001-RM3,000	39	24.5
	RM3,001-RM5,000	37	23.3
	RM5,000 above	45	28.3

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables. Career opportunities recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.52, SD = 0.61), indicating that respondents generally perceived favourable employment prospects associated with TVET programs. Interest and self-efficacy also demonstrated a relatively high mean score (M = 4.26, SD = 0.69). In comparison, peer influence (M = 3.74, SD = 0.86) and family influence (M = 3.68, SD = 0.88) recorded moderate mean values. Overall, students exhibited positive enrolment decisions towards TVET programs (M = 4.16, SD = 0.69).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Variables	Mean	Std Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Career Opportunities	4.52	.610	3	5
Family Influence	3.68	.879	2	5
Peer Influence	3.74	.861	2	5
Interest and Self Efficacy	4.26	.685	2	5
Students' Enrolment Decision	4.16	.693	2	5

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether significant differences existed in students' enrolment decisions based on gender. The results indicated no statistically significant difference between male and female students, $t(157) = 0.246$, $p = .806$. Therefore, gender was not found to significantly influence students' enrolment decisions in TVET programs.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-Test Results for Gender Differences in Students' Enrolment Decision

Variables (Students Enrolment Decision)	t-value	df	p-value (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% CI of the Difference Lower	95% CI of the Difference Upper
Equal variances assumed	.246	157	.806	.040	-.281	.362
Equal variances not assumed	.232	25.445	.816	.040	-.316	.396

Notes: * Significance at the 0.05 level. N for Male=21, N for Female=138

Table 4 presents the findings of the multiple regression analysis examining the influence of career opportunities, family influence, peer influence, and interest and self-efficacy on students' enrolment decisions. The regression model explained 42.8% of the variance in students' enrolment decisions ($R^2 = .428$), indicating moderate explanatory power. This suggests that the selected factors collectively contribute substantially to students' decisions to enroll in TVET programs.

The findings revealed that all four independent variables significantly influenced students' enrolment decisions. Interest and self-efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .599$, $p < .001$), followed by family influence ($\beta = .189$, $p < .001$), peer influence ($\beta = .133$, $p = .016$), and career opportunities ($\beta = .125$, $p = .016$). These results indicate that personal confidence and motivation play a more substantial role in shaping students' enrolment decisions than social and career related considerations. Therefore, H1, H2, H3, and H4 were supported.

Table 4: Result of Multiple Regression Analysis (Factors Affecting Student's Enrolment Decision)

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta Weight	Std Dev	T Value	P Value	R ²	Result
H1	Career Opportunities → Students Enrolment Decision	.125	.693	2.439	.016	.428	Supported

H2	Family Influence → Students Enrolment Decision	.189	.610	3.991	<.001		Supported
H3	Peer Influence → Students Enrolment Decision	.133	.879	2.437	.016		Supported
H4	Interest and Self Efficacy → Students Enrolment Decision	.599	.861	10.557	<.001		Supported

Notes: * Significance at the 0.05 level. N=159

The findings support the assumptions of SCCT, which posits that educational and career decisions are influenced by the interaction of personal beliefs, outcome expectations, and contextual factors (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2020). The results indicate that career opportunities, family influence, peer influence, and interest and self-efficacy significantly influence students' enrolment decisions in TVET programs.

Among the factors examined, interest and self-efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor of enrolment decisions. This finding suggests that students who possess greater confidence in their abilities and stronger interest in vocational education are more likely to choose TVET pathways. Consistent with SCCT, higher levels of self-efficacy foster positive outcome expectations, which subsequently increase students' willingness to enrol in TVET programs (Abu Bakar et al., 2024; Noh & Awi, 2022).

Family influence and peer influence were also found to significantly affect students' enrolment decisions, indicating that social support remains an important consideration in educational decision making (Ayanwale et al., 2023; Ayub, 2017; Omar et al., 2020). Although career opportunities significantly influenced enrolment decisions, its effect was comparatively weaker than the other predictors. Nevertheless, the finding suggests that students continue to consider employment prospects and future employability when evaluating TVET programs, supporting ongoing national initiatives to strengthen the attractiveness of vocational education.

Finally, no significant gender differences were observed in students' enrolment decisions, indicating that male and female students exhibit similar motivations and perceptions towards TVET participation. Overall, these findings contribute to the growing body of literature on TVET participation and provide practical insights for policymakers and educational institutions seeking to strengthen student enrolment. Future research may examine additional institutional and contextual factors to further explain students' enrolment decisions.

4.0 Conclusion

This study successfully achieved its objectives by examining the factors influencing students' enrolment decisions in TVET programs. The findings revealed that career opportunities, family influence, peer influence, and interest and self-efficacy significantly influence students' enrolment decisions, with interest and self-efficacy emerging as the strongest predictor. In contrast, gender was not found to significantly affect students' enrolment decisions, suggesting that individual and social factors play a greater role in shaping participation in TVET programs.

The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on TVET enrolment by providing empirical evidence within the Malaysian polytechnic context and supporting the applicability of SCCT in explaining students' educational choices. The study highlights the importance of strengthening students' confidence, interest, and awareness of vocational education while fostering supportive family and peer environments to encourage greater participation in TVET.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, educational institutions, and industry stakeholders in designing strategies to enhance TVET enrolment and improve public perceptions of vocational education. Future research is recommended to examine additional institutional, psychological, and socioeconomic factors that may further explain students' enrolment decisions and strengthen the predictive power of the proposed model.

Based on the findings of this study, efforts to strengthen TVET enrolment should focus on increasing public awareness and improving societal perceptions of vocational education. Government agencies, educational institutions, and industry stakeholders should collaborate in implementing sustained publicity campaigns through mainstream media, digital platforms, educational fairs, and community engagement programs. These initiatives should emphasise the importance of TVET, the employability of graduates, and the contribution of vocational education to Malaysia's workforce development agenda.

In addition, TVET institutions should intensify the promotion of available programs and career pathways. Comprehensive information on course offerings, industry relevance, career progression opportunities, and graduate success stories should be disseminated through school visits, road tours, career talks, and TVET awareness programs. Such initiatives would help students make informed educational decisions while addressing misconceptions surrounding vocational education.

Finally, stronger collaboration between TVET institutions and industry partners should be encouraged to provide clearer career pathways and enhance graduate employability. Given that interest and self-efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor of enrolment decisions, initiatives that increase students' confidence, motivation, and exposure to TVET opportunities should be prioritised. Collectively, these efforts can contribute to higher TVET participation and support Malaysia's long term human capital development agenda.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to extend their sincere gratitude to Politeknik Port Dickson and Jabatan Pendidikan Politeknik dan Kolej Komuniti, who have made significant contributions to various parts of this research effort.

Author Contributions

N. Mohd Shahir: Conceptualization, Abstract, Introduction, Analysis, Results; **A. Abd Aziz:** Data Collection, Conclusion, Recommendation, Editing; **A. E. Lomi Nyoko:** Reviewing

Conflict Of Interest

The manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by other journals. All authors have approved the review, agree with its submission and declare no conflict of interest in the manuscript.

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