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What Drives TVET Enrollment? Evidence from Malaysian Youth on Economic, Social, and Technological Enablers

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Abstract (Font Tahoma 13 Bold)

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has become increasingly important in supporting national economic development, workforce readiness, and industrial competitiveness in the era of Industry 4.0. As economies continue to undergo rapid digital transformation, industries are demanding workers equipped with technical, vocational, and technological competencies that can support automation, artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, and digital operations. Consequently, governments worldwide have recognized TVET as a strategic mechanism for developing skilled human capital and addressing labor market demands. In Malaysia, TVET has been positioned as a key component of the national workforce development agenda, with substantial investments directed toward strengthening vocational institutions, modernizing curricula, and expanding training opportunities. Despite these initiatives, enrollment rates among Malaysian youth remain below expectations, creating concerns regarding the nation's ability to produce a sufficient number of skilled workers capable of supporting future economic growth.

The issue of low TVET enrollment is particularly significant because it has implications that extend beyond the education sector. If Malaysian youth continue to demonstrate limited participation in vocational and technical education pathways, the country may experience persistent skills shortages, reduced labor productivity, increased dependence on foreign skilled workers, and difficulties in achieving national development objectives associated with digital transformation and industrial modernization. Furthermore, the mismatch between labor market demands and educational preferences may contribute to graduate unemployment and underemployment, as many students continue to pursue traditional academic pathways despite growing demand for technical competencies. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence Malaysian youths' decisions to enroll in TVET programs is essential for policymakers, educators, industry stakeholders, and TVET institutions seeking to strengthen workforce development and enhance national competitiveness.

Although previous studies have investigated factors influencing educational choices and vocational education participation, much of the existing literature has examined economic, social, or technological determinants separately. Consequently, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding how these factors collectively influence TVET enrollment decisions among Malaysian youth. In addition, many previous studies have focused on students already enrolled in TVET institutions, providing limited insights into the perceptions and decision-making processes of prospective students who are still evaluating their educational and career options. Addressing this gap is important because educational decisions are often influenced by multiple interconnected factors rather than a single determinant. Therefore, this study proposes an integrated framework that simultaneously examines the influence of perceived job opportunities, social stigma, financial support, parental influence, socioeconomic background, and technological advancement tools on TVET enrollment decisions among Malaysian youth.

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on the integration of the Push-Pull-Mooring (PPM) Model and Human Capital Theory (HCT). The PPM model explains how individuals make decisions by considering attractive factors that encourage a particular choice (pull factors), discouraging factors that deter a choice (push factors), and contextual conditions that facilitate or constrain decision-making (mooring factors). Within the context of TVET enrollment, perceived job opportunities, financial support, and technological advancement tools represent pull factors that attract youth toward vocational education. Social stigma functions as a push factor that discourages participation due to negative societal perceptions associated with vocational pathways. Meanwhile, parental influence and socioeconomic background serve as mooring factors that shape educational decisions through family support, access to resources, and social circumstances. Complementing the PPM model, Human Capital Theory suggests that individuals invest in education and skills development to improve their future productivity, employability, and earning potential. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the economic, social, and technological influences affecting TVET enrollment decisions.

To empirically test the proposed framework, this study adopted a quantitative research design utilizing a cross-sectional survey approach. The target population consisted of Malaysian youth who had completed the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination or higher educational qualifications. This group was selected because they are actively engaged in making educational and career decisions that may influence their participation in TVET programs. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that respondents possessed

characteristics relevant to the objectives of the study. Specifically, only Malaysian citizens with the educational background necessary to consider post-secondary educational pathways were included. The use of purposive sampling is appropriate because it enables researchers to obtain responses from individuals who are directly relevant to the phenomenon under investigation.

Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed across multiple digital platforms, including social media networks, educational communities, university platforms, and youth-oriented online groups. The questionnaire was adapted from established instruments in previous educational and vocational research studies to ensure content validity and reliability. Prior to the main data collection process, a pilot study involving 30 participants was conducted to assess clarity, reliability, and comprehensibility of the survey items. A total of 384 valid responses were obtained, meeting the sample size recommendations of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and providing sufficient statistical power for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis. The sample comprised respondents from diverse demographic backgrounds, including variations in age, gender, educational attainment, employment status, and household income levels. Such diversity enhances the relevance of the findings to the broader Malaysian youth population. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics and AMOS software through a two-step approach involving Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

The results of the study indicate that all six proposed hypotheses were supported. Perceived job opportunities demonstrated a significant positive influence on TVET enrollment decisions ($\beta = 0.284$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that Malaysian youth are increasingly motivated by career prospects and employment opportunities associated with vocational education. Financial support was also found to positively influence enrollment decisions ($\beta = 0.194$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting the importance of scholarships, grants, subsidies, and training allowances in reducing financial barriers and encouraging participation. Similarly, parental influence exhibited a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.168$, $p = 0.001$), reflecting the important role families play in shaping educational and career choices among Malaysian youth. Socioeconomic background also positively influenced enrollment decisions ($\beta = 0.121$, $p = 0.014$), indicating that access to resources and educational opportunities contributes to students' willingness to pursue TVET pathways.

In contrast, social stigma demonstrated a significant negative influence on TVET enrollment decisions ($\beta = –0.153$, $p = 0.001$). This finding suggests that negative societal perceptions regarding vocational education continue to discourage participation despite increasing recognition of the value and relevance of technical skills in the modern labor market. Furthermore, technological advancement tools emerged as the strongest predictor of TVET enrollment decisions ($\beta = 0.317$, $p < 0.001$). This finding underscores the growing importance of digital learning environments, Industry 4.0 technologies, virtual simulations, and technology-enabled learning platforms in enhancing the attractiveness of TVET programs among younger generations.

The findings contribute significantly to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence that TVET enrollment decisions are multidimensional and influenced by a combination of economic, social, and technological factors. The study extends the application of the PPM model and Human Capital Theory within the context of vocational education and demonstrates the value of integrating these theoretical perspectives to explain educational decision-making behavior. From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that increasing TVET enrollment requires a comprehensive strategy that simultaneously addresses employability concerns,

financial accessibility, social perceptions, family engagement, and technological modernization. Policymakers should strengthen collaborations between educational institutions and industries to enhance employment opportunities for graduates, expand financial assistance programs for disadvantaged students, implement nationwide awareness campaigns to reduce social stigma, engage parents in career guidance initiatives, and invest in advanced technologies that improve learning experiences within TVET institutions.

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing TVET enrollment decisions among Malaysian youth. The findings demonstrate that perceived job opportunities, financial support, parental influence, socioeconomic background, and technological advancement tools positively encourage enrollment, whereas social stigma remains a significant barrier. By addressing these interconnected determinants, Malaysia can strengthen participation in TVET programs, reduce skills shortages, support workforce development, and enhance national competitiveness in an increasingly digital and technology-driven economy.

Keywords:
TVET enrollment decisions; Push–Pull–Mooring model; Human Capital Theory; Technological advancement tools; Youth education choice; Social Stigma