

The Role of Attitude in Student Motivation: A Study of Southern Zone Vocational Colleges

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Abstract

The field of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been recognized as a "game changer" in Malaysia's development, as outlined in the Twelfth Malaysia Plan 2021–2025 (RMK-12) by the Economic Planning Unit (2021). The government has made significant efforts to increase student enrolment in TVET, starting from school level to college, polytechnic, and university, with the aim of producing a skilled workforce in specialized fields. This study focuses on college-level students enrolled in TVET programs at vocational colleges (KV). While student enrolment in KV has remained consistently high for the Malaysian Vocational Certificate (SVM) level each year, a declining trend has been observed in admissions to the Malaysian Vocational Diploma (DVM) level from 2018 to 2024. To understand this issue, a descriptive quantitative survey was conducted using questionnaires, involving 374 final-year SVM students from KV in the Southern Zone. The study aimed to assess students' attitudes toward their motivation in their chosen fields, based on the ABC Attitude Model (Affective, Behavioral, Cognitive) and the Self-Determination Motivation Model (SDT). The findings indicate that students exhibit a high level of attitude towards their chosen fields, with behavioral attitude ranking highest, followed by cognitive and affective attitudes. Furthermore, the study highlights that students practiced attitudes significantly influence their motivation. It was also found that intrinsic motivation among students in KV Southern Zone is higher than extrinsic motivation.

Keywords: Attitude, Motivation, TVET

Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is an educational framework designed to equip students with industry-specific competencies through structured skill-based learning. It integrates work-oriented training with a strong emphasis on practical applications, aiming to cultivate a proficient workforce in specialized sectors (KPM, 2023).

TVET has been widely acknowledged as an essential mechanism for economic development, as highlighted by Mohamed (2022), who underscores its critical role in fostering a skilled labor market.

To ensure effective workforce preparation, early exposure to TVET is crucial. Vocational colleges (KV) serve as institutions where skill acquisition takes precedence over conventional academic curricula (Yusof et al., 2020). KV operates under the Vocational College Standard Curriculum (KSKV), which is systematically aligned with contemporary industry demands through the National Occupational Skills Standards (NOSS). This alignment enables students to receive structured training tailored to expert-defined operational standards within specific fields (Noorazman et al., 2017).

Empirical studies have identified three primary factors influencing students' engagement with TVET: peer influence, perceived economic benefits, and prevailing socio-political conditions (Ohiwerei & Nwosu, 2016). Additionally, Ozioma (2017) highlights the significance of socioeconomic background, gender disparities, and inadequate career counselling as key determinants in students' decision-making processes regarding TVET enrolment. Given its highly practical nature, TVET demands a strong intrinsic interest and commitment from learners to ensure competency-based skill mastery.

Motivation is an integral component of effective learning within TVET disciplines. Research by Arif et al. (2019) illustrates that motivated students exhibit enhanced cognitive engagement, adopt proactive learning strategies, and demonstrate sustained academic focus. Furthermore, studies establish a direct correlation between students' attitudes toward TVET and their levels of motivation. Omar et al. (2020) reaffirm that student interest, parental influence, and peer encouragement significantly impact their persistence and success in TVET education.

Objective of the Study and Research Question

This study establishes the following research objectives to systematically address its core inquiries:

1. What is the level attitude practices among vocational college students?
2. What is the level of motivation among vocational college students?
3. What is the dominant type of motivation among vocational college students?

Literature Review

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

TVET is an educational system designed to produce a highly skilled workforce across various industries. It emphasizes hands-on learning and industry-based training, enabling students to acquire technical expertise and practical knowledge relevant to current job market demands. However, enrolment in this field remains low.

A study by Halik Bassah (2019), which examined TVET student admissions in Malaysia, found that the strategies outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint for Higher Education 2015–2025 (PPPM PT) have failed to significantly boost enrolment. TVET continues to be perceived as a second-tier education option by Malaysian society.

Data from the Malaysia Education Statistics (2021) indicate a decline in TVET enrolment between 2018 and 2020. This trend also applies to vocational college (KV) enrolment, which saw a decrease over three years—from 57,808 students in 2018 to 47,136 in 2020. Although there was a slight increase of 3,014 students in 2021, the numbers remain concerning.

Additionally, in 2018, the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) reported that only 28% of students expressed interest in pursuing TVET programs. According to Abdul Manaf (2018), this low interest stems from students perceiving TVET as lacking career prospects and associating it with low academic achievement in school.

Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (2012) explained that the CEFR as the linguistics fluency required to participate fully in professional and academic life as neighbouring Asian education systems in China, South Korea, and Singapore are increasingly focused on developing students who are not only proficient in their national language but also English language to maximise the employability in the worldwide workforce. The adoption of the CEFR in the development of the Malaysian English education system is to meet international standards.

Interest

Interest is a key factor that drives students to engage in learning activities. A student must have a deep interest in their field of study, as it helps them focus entirely on their chosen discipline. The influence of interest in learning directly affects students' attitudes and concentration in the classroom. When students lack interest, they often struggle to comprehend lessons and instructional content delivered by educators (Hasanati & Purwaningsih, 2021).

Attitude

In addition to interest, a student's attitude toward their chosen field significantly influences their engagement in learning. One of the key concepts in psychology is attitude, which explains how individuals make decisions and take action. According to Ayub (2017), parental attitudes toward Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) play a crucial role in shaping students' choices. Parents tend to encourage their children to pursue careers in law, medicine, and accounting rather than TVET-related professions (Maria, 2018). Research on the impact of parental influence on students' attitudes toward TVET has shown a significant correlation between parental perspectives and students' career choices (Lavendets et al., 2019).

Attitude refers to an individual's perception, which can be positive, negative, or neutral. It plays a critical role in shaping various behaviors (Ayub, 2017). In social sciences, attitude is considered a fundamental concept because it significantly influences a wide range of behaviors, including personal preferences and interactions. De Clercq, Dimov, and Thongpapanl (2013) highlight that an individual's attitude is closely linked to their aspirations and desires. Similarly, Noor, Basir, and Mohammad (2019) emphasize that attitude is a crucial determinant in decision-making, particularly when pursuing personal goals. Consequently, choosing TVET as a primary education or career pathway depends largely on an individual's attitude toward the field.

Furthermore, peer influence plays a significant role in shaping students' learning motivation (Tang & Amir, 2024). Among students, peer relationships strongly impact classroom engagement. Salleh (2020) identifies peer influence as a key factor in personal development, value formation, and attitude shifts. Students surrounded by peers who exhibit responsibility, diligence, and active participation in learning tend to adopt similar positive behaviors, which ultimately impact their academic performance and overall mindset (Salleh, 2020).

From an educator's perspective, peer learning is recognized as an effective teaching strategy that fosters both academic and social skills among students (Topping, 2019). Research by Tang and Amir (2024) found that peer influence among students exists at a moderate level, but the trust among peers remains significantly high. Peer groups also shape students' daily behaviors, as they are the second closest individuals to students after their parents (Nursiah et al., 2020). The time spent together strengthens relationships and builds trust among peers, reinforcing their influence (Talib & Kutty, 2022).

Motivation

Family support plays a vital role in encouraging students and fostering their motivation to learn. Various forms of family support include emotional encouragement, recognition or rewards, and informational guidance (Laka et al., 2020; Simunovic & Babarovic, 2020). Research has shown that a decline in learning quality or interest is often linked to a student's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Herbert & Bragg, 2021).

Additionally, studies on the relationship between self-directed learning, family support, and learning motivation have found a significant connection between family support and students' motivation to engage in learning activities (Azhari et al., 2023). Motivation is a crucial factor in all aspects of life, influencing an individual's well-being, approach to tasks, and overall performance (Legault et al., 2007). It is a complex concept, with some definitions describing it as a state while others define it as a process (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Motivation involves a subjective feeling that drives individuals to seek change whether within themselves or their surroundings and includes tendencies that push them to act in ways that facilitate this transformation.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a psychological framework that explains motivation and human well-being. The primary aim of SDT is to understand how and why intrinsic motivation occurs. This theory achieves its goal by differentiating six mini-theories that address fundamental questions about who, what, where, when, why, and how human behavior develops (McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019). Autonomous motivation, also known as self-determined motivation, is considered the strongest form of motivation as it does not rely on external goals or rewards to drive an individual's motivation (McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019).

SDT emphasizes that effective motivation depends on the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs which are Autonomy, the ability to make choices freely and act according to personal interests; Competence, a sense of mastery and effectiveness in carrying out tasks; and Relatedness, the need to form meaningful connections with others.

However, according to Nguyen et al. (2023), the effectiveness of this theory declines when external support such as encouragement from teachers, parents, and peers is lacking. Additionally, external goals, such as securing a good job or obtaining a scholarship, can further enhance an individual's determination to work harder in their studies (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity for the sheer enjoyment and satisfaction of doing it. Individuals who are intrinsically motivated participate willingly, without external or internal pressure, and without expecting any rewards (Ryan & Deci, 1985; Deci et al., 1991; Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992; Vallerand et al., 1992; Frederick & Ryan, 1995).

In the context of education, intrinsic motivation is the pleasure and fulfillment students experience when they engage in learning, explore new ideas, or attempt something novel (Barkoukis et al., 2019). It stems from a person's internal drive to achieve goals, fueled by genuine interest and enjoyment rather than external rewards or pressure (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

According to the self-determination theory, intrinsically motivated behavior refers to actions performed "for their own sake," driven by innate curiosity and the joy of discovery (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity for specific external reasons rather than personal desire (Alexandra et al., 2021). Unlike intrinsic motivation, which is driven by interest, enjoyment, or satisfaction, extrinsic motivation is not fueled by internal motives. Instead, it relies on external rewards, pressure, or consequences (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

One way to stimulate extrinsic motivation in students within an online learning environment is by encouraging collaboration or competition. Previous research has shown that external motivation can be valuable and beneficial, helping students achieve their objectives. However, intrinsic motivation tends to be more enduring, whereas extrinsic motivation requires continuous reinforcement (Liu et al., 2020).

Additionally, some studies suggest that intrinsic motivation can be influenced by extrinsic factors. Specifically, students may react differently to rewards—while some may find them motivating, others may experience a decline in motivation as a result (Hewett & Conway, 2016).

Methodology

This study was conducted to address its objectives, which include identifying students' level of interest, assessing their attitudes, and determining the dominant type of motivation among students in the Electronic Technology Program (ETN) at vocational colleges (KV) in the Southern Zone.

The study employs a quantitative survey research design, using questionnaires to examine the influence of interest and attitude on student motivation in KV in the Southern Zone. This

survey method is also used to specifically describe sample characteristics and collect detailed information within the scope of the study (Ghazali & Sufean, 2018).

This research involved 12 KV offering the Electronic Technology program in the Southern Zone, covering three states: Johor, Melaka, and Negeri Sembilan. A total of 374 respondents, consisting of final-year students in the Malaysian Vocational Certificate (SVM) program, participated in this study.

The study utilized a questionnaire containing two main sections, focusing on attitude and motivation, adapted and modified from previous research. According to Kalisa et al. (2023), the reliability of the overall attitude instrument recorded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.82, while the reliability of the motivation instrument was 0.91. A total of 94 items were included in this study, using two types of Likert scales which are 5-point Likert scale for attitude-related items and 7-point Likert scale for motivation-related items, used to collect data on respondents' agreement levels with specific statements.

Additionally, mean score classification follows Pallant's (2006) interpretation, categorizing scores into low, moderate, and high, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Classification of Mean Score Levels

Mean Score Range	Classification
1.00 – 2.33	Low
2.34 – 3.66	Moderate
3.67 – 5.00	High

Results and Discussion

What are the levels of attitude and motivation among vocational college students?

The study employed descriptive analysis of mean and standard deviation to determine students' attitude and motivation levels. The findings indicate that students exhibit a high level of attitude, with $M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.15$, and a high level of motivation, with $M = 5.30$, $SD = 0.25$. These results suggest that vocational college students demonstrate strong attitude and motivation toward the programs they are enrolled in. Table 2 provides a summary of the analysis findings on students' attitude and motivation levels.

Table 2
Analysis of Students' Attitude and Motivation Levels

Element	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Level
Attitude	4.21	0.15	High
Motivation	4.87	0.25	High
Overall Mean	4.50	0.20	High

The findings of this study indicate that students generally have a positive attitude toward their chosen field. Student attitudes are categorized into three elements: affective attitude, behavioral attitude, and cognitive attitude. Based on the analysis conducted, the overall level of student attitudes, according to the attitude model, is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Analysis of Student Attitude Levels Based on the ABC Attitude Model

No	Element	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Level
1	Affective attitude	4.10	0.17	High
2	Behavioral attitude	4.28	0.18	High
3	Cognitive attitude	4.27	0.23	High
Overall Mean		4.22	0.12	High

Based on Table 3, the analysis results illustrate the levels of student attitudes according to the ABC Attitude Model. The findings indicate that students have a high level of attitude toward their chosen field, with $M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.12$. Among the three attitude elements, behavioral attitude, which reflects students' actions, ranked the highest ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.17$), followed by cognitive attitude, which encompasses students' perceptions, beliefs, or opinions ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.23$), and lastly, affective attitude ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.18$)

What is the dominant type of motivation among vocational college students?

Student motivation is divided into two elements: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. To determine the dominant type of motivation among students, the study utilized descriptive analysis of mean and standard deviation along with inferential analysis using the T-test to assess differences in dominant motivation across gender.

Based on the analysis conducted, the dominant type of motivation among vocational college students is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Analysis of Student Motivation Types Toward Their Field of Study

No	Type of Motivation	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Level
1	Intrinsic Motivation	4.74	0.69	High
2	Extrinsic Motivation	4.27	0.52	High
Overall Mean		4.09	4.51	High

Based on Table 4, the findings indicate that students exhibit high levels of motivation for both intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Among the motivational factors analyzed, intrinsic motivation is the most dominant among vocational college students in their chosen field ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 0.69$), followed by extrinsic motivation ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.52$). These findings align with Deen et al. (2021), who emphasized that intrinsic motivation serves as the primary driving force in enhancing student interest and engagement in learning. Table 5 presents an analysis of dominant motivation types according to gender.

Table 5

Analysis of Student Motivation by Gender

No	Type of Motivation	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Level
1	Intrinsic Motivation			
	Boy	4.40	0.58	High
	Girl	4.49	0.55	High
2	Extrinsic Motivation			
	Boy	4.46	0.47	High
	Girl	4.39	0.44	High

Based on Table 5, the findings highlight differences in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among students based on gender. Female students exhibited higher intrinsic motivation (M = 4.49, SD = 0.55) compared to male students (M = 4.40, SD = 0.58). Conversely, male students displayed stronger extrinsic motivation (M = 4.46, SD = 0.47) compared to female students (M = 4.39, SD = 0.44).

Intrinsic motivation arises naturally, and psychological literature suggests that intrinsically motivated individuals voluntarily engage in tasks or activities they find meaningful (Eren, 2020). In contrast, extrinsic motivation refers to behavior that is not driven by internal motives, relying instead on external rewards, pressure, or consequences (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Variations in motivation levels among students are often linked to internal and external influences that shape their engagement. Motivation is frequently associated with factors that stimulate individual behavior over time (Olushola & Adewumi, 2021). As a psychological factor, motivation influences students by acting as a driving force composed of various goals that encourage learning (Sadirman, 2019).

As conclusion, based on the analysis conducted, the ABC Attitude Model, which comprises three sub-elements, helps differentiate student attitude patterns that may impact their motivation. The findings reveal that behavioral attitude recorded the highest mean score, followed by cognitive attitude, and finally affective attitude. This pattern suggests that all three sub-elements of attitude contribute to student motivation in their chosen field.

Thus, teachers should identify students' motivation types and apply appropriate teaching and learning strategies to enhance student interest and motivation within their academic programs.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined the attitudes and motivation levels of vocational college students in the Southern Zone, focusing on three key aspects: affective, behavioral, and cognitive attitudes, as well as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The findings reveal that students exhibit a high level of attitude toward their chosen field, with behavioral attitude ranking highest, followed by cognitive and affective attitudes. Additionally, intrinsic motivation was found to be the dominant motivational factor among vocational college students.

The findings indicate that vocational college students in the Southern Zone exhibit a high level of attitude toward their chosen field. In this study, student attitudes are divided into three sub-elements, based on the ABC Attitude Model developed by Breckler (1984). These three sub-elements include affective attitude, behavioral attitude, and cognitive attitude. These

components form the foundational elements used in the model to assess individuals' attitude practices.

Each sub-element in this study was examined to analyze its influence on student attitudes. The findings help differentiate the attitude patterns practiced by students, which can impact their motivation. According to the results, behavioral attitude recorded the highest mean score, followed by cognitive attitude, and lastly, affective attitude. This suggests that all three sub-elements contribute to students' motivation in their chosen field of study.

According to Drew (2023), affective attitude refers to how an individual emotionally perceives a subject or experience. The findings of this study indicate that most respondents exhibit a high level of affective emotional engagement toward TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training). These results align with the study conducted by Kalisa, Kinyaduka, and Kalimasi (2023), which found that students generally hold positive attitudes toward TVET programs. This suggests that respondents enjoy and feel highly confident about their chosen field of study.

However, the findings of this study contradict those of Tsehay (2016), which revealed that students had negative attitudes toward technical and vocational education and training, showing a preference for preparatory programs instead. The results further indicate that students in Electronic Technology programs at vocational colleges in the Southern Zone exhibit high motivation levels overall. This study classifies student motivation into two sub-elements, following the Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan (2000) are Intrinsic motivation – driven by personal interest and satisfaction; Extrinsic motivation – influenced by external rewards, pressures, or incentives.

Based on the findings, intrinsic motivation was found to be higher than extrinsic motivation among vocational college students in the Southern Zone. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation was the dominant motivational factor among female students, whereas extrinsic motivation was more prevalent among male students.

Differences in students' motivational levels are often attributed to internal and external influences that shape their engagement. Motivation is frequently linked to factors that stimulate individual behavior over time (Olushola & Adewumi, 2021). Similarly, Pintrich and Schunk (2002) assert that motivation is closely associated with behavioral responses to stimuli.

In the educational context, conceptualizing motivation also involves enhancing student engagement and productivity in learning (Wisener & Eva, 2018). Highly motivated students tend to remain focused in class and approach learning with enthusiasm. Conversely, students lacking motivation often display disinterest in the subjects taught but may still force themselves to study (Sadiq & Hassan, 2021).

The findings of this study indicate that students exhibit a high level of motivation in their chosen fields. These results support the findings of Mohamed and Hassan (2021), which suggest that students with strong academic motivation consistently demonstrate a deep desire to learn. Motivation is essential for students as it is closely tied to their self-belief

(Mohamed & Hassan, 2021). Students who aspire to succeed typically recognize and understand that the key driver of their success lies within themselves. They take responsibility for their personal development, whereas students who neglect their motivation are often associated with academic failure (Mohamed & Hassan, 2021).

To enhance student motivation within their chosen fields, discussions on interest and attitude toward technical and vocational education and training (TVET) become crucial. Literature reviews widely associate student interest and attitude with efforts to increase motivation in learning. Beyond the key elements explored in this study, additional factors may also contribute to fluctuations in student motivation in education.

Given these findings, educators should consider implementing strategies that reinforce behavioral and cognitive attitudes in students while sustaining intrinsic motivation. Teachers can achieve this by fostering engaging learning environments, encouraging self-directed learning, and integrating practical experiences that align with students' interests. Furthermore, institutions should conduct awareness programs to emphasize the benefits of vocational education to students and parents, addressing societal misconceptions about TVET.

By strengthening students' attitudes and motivation, vocational colleges can enhance retention rates and better prepare students for future career pathways. Future studies could explore the impact of additional socio-economic factors on student motivation and attitude to gain a more comprehensive understanding of engagement in vocational education.

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