

# Descriptive Analysis Approach to Student Aspirations, Time Management, and Parental Support: A Study in Tawau, Sabah

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines a descriptive analysis approach to the relationship between career awareness, time management skills, and parental support among 500 upper secondary students in Tawau, Sabah. The main issue investigated is the paradoxical phenomenon where 77 percent of students demonstrate high career awareness, yet only 9 percent possess strong time management skills. Using a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design, the study applies validated instruments such as the Career Awareness Scale and Time Management Questionnaire. Key findings include: (1) the majority of students (77.7%) have clear career aspirations; (2) only a minority (9%) demonstrate proficient time management skills; (3) parental support (75%) is more emotional than practical. The theoretical analysis integrates Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory and Deci-Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, explaining this gap as a result of the imbalance between intrinsic motivation and practical competency. The study's implications suggest transforming school career guidance programs to integrate time management modules, enhancing practical-based parenting training, and adapting educational policies for rural contexts. This research contributes to a holistic understanding of student development challenges in rural areas and proposes effective intervention strategies.

**Keywords:** rural education, parental involvement, career readiness, time management, student aspirations, educational intervention

## INTRODUCTION

Secondary school education is a critical phase in shaping students' personal development, aspirations, and life skills (Abdul Rahim, A. H., & Azman, N., 2010). In this context, parental support, career awareness, and time management skills play a pivotal role in determining students' academic achievement and overall well-being. Previous studies indicate that students who receive emotional and instrumental support from their parents tend to exhibit higher motivation and focus in their studies (Ishak et al., 2023). In today's increasingly demanding educational landscape, students must not only excel academically but also develop essential soft skills such as time management, career planning, and emotional resilience (Abdul Rahim, A. H., & Azman, N., 2010). These skills are crucial in preparing them to compete at higher education levels and in a competitive job market. However, research findings reveal that many students still struggle with effective time management, despite having long-term aspirations and career goals (Mohamed et al., 2023).

Career awareness serves as a psychosocial factor that drives students to strive toward their long-term goals. Students with clear career objectives tend to be more motivated and persistent in their studies. However, without adequate time management skills, these aspirations may not be effectively realized. International studies show that students with strong time management skills achieve higher academic performance and

experience less academic stress (Schleicher, 2023). Meanwhile, parental support is a cornerstone in fostering a positive learning environment. This support extends beyond emotional encouragement to include practical aspects such as monitoring study routines, guiding goal-setting, and maintaining active communication with schools (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Nevertheless, parental involvement remains an issue in Malaysia, particularly among middle-income families and those in rural areas.

In regions like Tawau, Sabah, students face unique challenges, including limited access to career information, personal development opportunities, and exposure to effective educational practices (Tawau District Education Office., 2022). Therefore, this study is significant in providing an in-depth understanding of how aspirations, time management skills, and parental support interact in shaping the performance and future prospects of upper secondary students in this area. The findings are expected to contribute to the implementation of more inclusive and data-driven educational interventions tailored to rural student populations.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Parental support is often linked to students' academic achievement and personal development. In the Malaysian education context, parental involvement has been emphasized in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 as a key component in strengthening student learning at home and in school (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). The Blueprint also highlights the need to enhance collaboration between schools and parents as strategic partners in supporting student learning. However, recent studies indicate that parental involvement tends to focus more on emotional encouragement rather than practical support, such as time management guidance (Schleicher, 2023). Preliminary findings from this study reveal that while 77.7 percent of students report clear career aspirations, only 9 percent demonstrate strong time management skills. This raises an important question: does parental support truly help students develop the ability to plan their time and achieve their goals?

Additionally, family socioeconomic status influences the level of parental involvement in their children's education. A study by Ishak et al. (2023) found that middle-income families with working parents tend to be less involved in their children's education, though higher income can mitigate this effect. However, among middle-income families, increased earnings do not necessarily compensate for the lack of time dedicated to their children's education. Furthermore, during the Movement Control Order (MCO) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, parental involvement in their children's education significantly increased. Research by Mohamed et al. (2023) shows that higher parental engagement during the MCO was strongly correlated with improved academic performance among secondary school students. Thus, parental involvement is crucial in supporting children's learning, especially in home-based learning scenarios. Factors such as socioeconomic background and parenting styles significantly influence how parents support their children. A study by Janius et al. (2024) found that an authoritative parenting style combining discipline and support positively impacts student achievement in Sabah. Therefore, it is essential to empirically examine the relationship between aspirations, time management, and forms of parental support among upper secondary students to develop more effective educational interventions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Modern education has become increasingly complex and challenging, requiring an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing students' academic success and development. The three main constructs central to this study are students' career aspirations, time management skills, and parental support. Previous research has demonstrated that these three elements are interrelated and play crucial roles in shaping student achievement, particularly in the secondary school context. Literature reviewed from the most recent five-year period (2019-2024) provides a clear picture of the relationships between these constructs while identifying knowledge gaps that the current research aims to address.

## **Students' Career Awareness**

Career aspiration awareness refers to students' clarity regarding their long-term academic and professional goals. A study by Mahdzar et al. (2022) found that secondary school students in Langkawi demonstrated strong aspirations to pursue higher education, primarily driven by self-fulfillment needs such as self-esteem and self-improvement. However, these aspirations were also significantly influenced by their previous academic achievements and future outlook. Socioeconomic factors play a crucial role in shaping these aspirations. Students from low-income families often face substantial barriers in setting ambitious educational goals due to limited access to information and resources (Abdul Rahim & Azman, 2010). Nevertheless, research indicates that first-generation students from rural areas maintain high educational aspirations despite confronting challenges such as limited family support and concerns about education costs. Furthermore, the learning environment and school-based interventions significantly influence student aspirations. Syed et al. (2021) demonstrated that early career exposure and consistent academic guidance enhance students' clarity of aspirations. Structured programs including counseling sessions and career exhibitions enable students to plan their futures more systematically. These findings underscore schools' pivotal role in cultivating student aspirations, particularly for those lacking adequate support from their family environment.

## **Students' Time Management Skills**

Effective time management is a critical skill that influences academic performance and life balance among students. A study by Adenan et al. (2023) found that psychoeducational interventions, such as group counseling, can enhance time management skills among secondary school students. Students who previously struggled with time management showed significant improvement after participating in these guidance sessions. Additionally, research by Masnan et al. (2025) revealed a positive relationship between time management, self-esteem, and class attendance with academic achievement. Students with high self-discipline were more likely to manage their time effectively, thereby reducing academic stress. Conversely, a lack of time management skills can lead to various problems, including procrastination, sleep deprivation, and limited involvement in co-curricular activities (Mohamed et al., 2023). In the digital age, technology also influences how students manage their time. A study by Ibrahim & Rabialdy (2022) emphasized that digital tools such as task planners and online calendars can help students organize their daily routines more systematically. However, uncontrolled use of technology can also become a distraction if not managed wisely. Therefore, time management skills should be cultivated as early as secondary school to help students balance academic demands and personal life.

## **Parental Support**

Parental support, whether in the form of emotional encouragement, guidance, or providing a conducive learning environment, is a crucial factor in students' success. A study by Ishak et al. (2020) found that parental involvement in children's education was more prominent among high-income families compared to low-income households. However, during the Movement Control Order (MCO) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, parental engagement increased significantly regardless of socioeconomic status (Mohamed et al., 2023). This indicates that parents are indeed capable of providing greater support if they understand its importance. Nevertheless, in rural areas such as Tawau, challenges such as low parental education levels and financial constraints can hinder their involvement in their children's learning (Tawau District Education Office., 2022). A study by Kamal et al. (2021) revealed that parental participation in early childhood education remains low, particularly in monitoring home-based learning. This situation can negatively impact students' discipline and motivation. Therefore, educational awareness programs and parenting workshops should be intensified to enhance parents' role as strategic partners in their children's education.

## **Interrelationship between Aspirations, Time Management, and Parental Support**

These three constructs are not isolated elements but rather interact and influence one another. Students with high aspirations tend to be more disciplined in time management, but without parental support, they may

struggle to remain focused. A study by Ramasamy et al. (2020) demonstrated that strong family support enhances adolescents' life satisfaction, which in turn contributes to motivation and academic achievement. Additionally, authoritative parenting which combines discipline and emotional support has been found effective in boosting students' self-confidence and performance (Janus et al., 2024). In rural contexts such as Tawau, students often face challenges like limited exposure to career information and learning resources. As such, parental support and school interventions become even more critical in helping students develop realistic aspirations and effective time management skills (Tawau District Education Office., 2022). This study proposes an integrated approach involving collaboration among schools, families, and the community to support students' holistic development. This research strengthens the understanding of the relationship between career awareness, time management, and parental support in the context of secondary education, particularly in Tawau, Sabah (Tawau District Education Office., 2022). While some contradictions exist in prior findings such as the role of socioeconomic status in shaping student aspirations this study seeks to provide a deeper analysis by focusing on the interaction between these three constructs. By emphasizing the importance of school interventions and parental involvement, the study suggests a more holistic support model to help students reach their full potential. The findings are expected to serve as a foundation for more inclusive educational policies, particularly for students in rural areas who are often marginalized.

## **THEORY**

The integration of Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory has revealed compelling patterns that necessitate deeper theoretical examination when analyzing students' career aspirations, time management skills, and parental support systems (Bandura, A., 1977). The study's findings present an interesting paradox where a significant majority of students (77%) demonstrate high awareness of their career aspirations, yet only a minimal proportion (9%) exhibit strong confidence in their time management abilities. This apparent discrepancy between aspiration and practical skill requires careful theoretical consideration through these two established psychological frameworks.

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977) provides crucial insights into this phenomenon by emphasizing the fundamental role of an individual's belief in their capabilities to execute courses of action required to achieve specific goals. Within the context of Tawau's student population, the observed high levels of career awareness may be interpreted as a positive manifestation of career-related self-efficacy. Bandura's theoretical framework identifies four primary sources that contribute to the development of self-efficacy: mastery experiences involving personal accomplishments, vicarious experiences gained through observation of role models, social persuasion from significant others, and physiological states that influence self-perception. The students displaying strong career aspirations likely benefit from positive influences in one or more of these domains, whether through previous successful experiences, exposure to appropriate professional role models, encouraging feedback from their social environment, or effective management of emotional responses (Bandura, A., 1997).

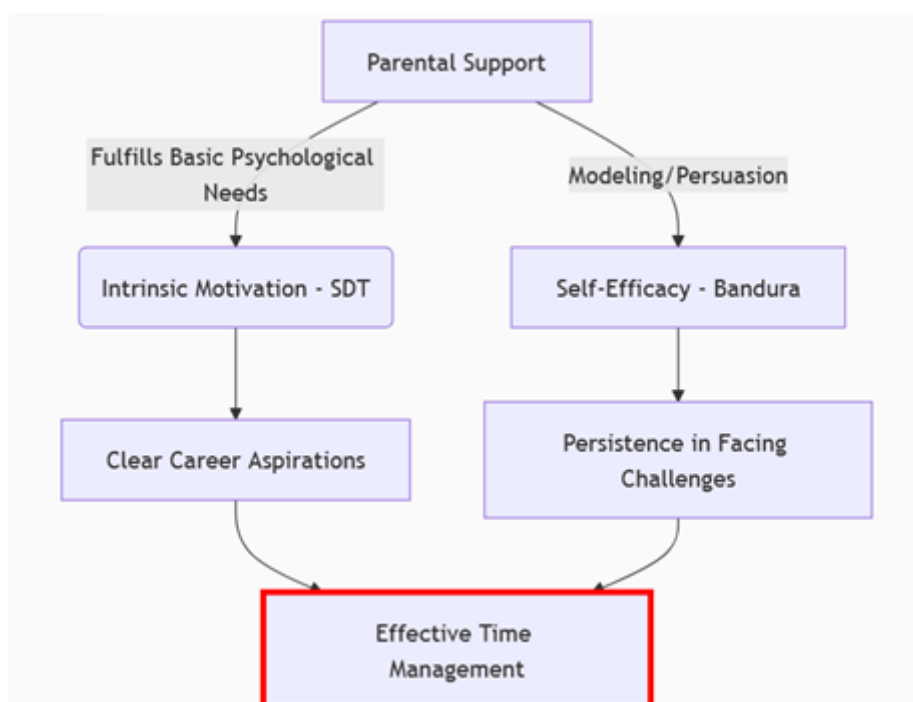
In contrast, Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985) offers a complementary yet distinct perspective for understanding the apparent disconnect between elevated career aspirations and underdeveloped time management competencies (Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M., 1985). This theoretical approach maintains that authentic intrinsic motivation emerges only when three fundamental psychological needs are adequately satisfied, autonomy reflecting volition and personal endorsement of actions, competence pertaining to feelings of effectiveness in activities, and relatedness concerning connections with significant others Ryan, (R. M., & Deci, E. L., 2017). The observed pattern of high aspirations coupled with weak time management skills may indicate an imbalance in fulfilling these core psychological requirements. For instance, career aspirations might originate from external pressures or obligations rather than genuine personal choice, representing a deficit in autonomous motivation (R. M., & Deci, E. L., 2017). Alternatively, students may lack the necessary practical competencies to effectively translate their long-term aspirations into structured daily actions and routines.



The study's findings regarding parental support present particularly intriguing connections to both theoretical frameworks. A substantial majority of students (75%) reported receiving considerable parental support in their academic and career development. When examined through the lens of Self-Efficacy Theory, this parental involvement likely functions as a powerful source of social persuasion and potentially provides valuable vicarious learning experiences through parental role modeling (Bandura, A., 1997). From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, optimal parental support would theoretically address all three basic psychological needs by fostering autonomy through encouraging independent decision-making, developing competence through appropriate challenges and support, and strengthening relatedness through emotional connection. However, the finding that strong parental support does not consistently correlate with equally robust time management skills suggests that the nature of this support may emphasize outcome-focused achievement rather than process-oriented skill development (Bandura, A., 1997).

The theoretical analysis yields significant practical implications for educational interventions and support systems. Career guidance initiatives should extend beyond simply raising awareness about various career paths to actively building students' self-efficacy through carefully structured programs incorporating elements such as appropriate role modeling and scaffold mastery experiences. Time management interventions need to incorporate considerations of intrinsic motivation by providing students with meaningful autonomy in their planning processes while simultaneously ensuring they acquire necessary organizational competencies through targeted skill-building approaches. Parental engagement programs could prove valuable in helping parents understand the distinction between controlling forms of support that emphasize compliance and autonomy-supportive approaches that foster independent skill development, with particular emphasis on developing practical competencies alongside academic achievement.

The combined application of Self-Efficacy Theory and Self-Determination Theory provides a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex interrelationships influencing student development in the Tawau context (Ismail, S. N., Kanesan, A. G., & Muhammad, F., 2018). This integrated theoretical approach not only offers explanations for the current research findings but also suggests valuable directions for developing more effective educational interventions. By examining how critical psychological factors such as self-efficacy beliefs and quality of motivation interact with students' social and environmental contexts, educators and policymakers can design more holistic support programs addressing both academic and career development needs for students in rural areas like Tawau (Ali, Z., & Mahamod, Z., 2020).



This study presents a conceptual framework integrating Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory to examine the relationship between parental support, career aspirations, and students' time management. Parental support serves as the foundational element influencing student development through two simultaneous mechanisms. From the SDT perspective, parental support that fulfills the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness fosters students' intrinsic motivation, thereby shaping clearer career aspirations. Meanwhile, through the lens of Self-Efficacy Theory, parental support builds students' self-confidence via role modeling and verbal persuasion, enhancing their perseverance in facing challenges. The interaction of these two mechanisms produces two primary outcomes: well-defined career aspirations and resilience in overcoming difficulties. However, effective time management is achieved only when both elements exist in equilibrium. This explains why some students possess high aspirations yet struggle with time management because this skill requires a combination of intrinsic motivation and robust self-confidence.

The practical implications of this model emphasize the need for holistic approaches in student intervention programs. Career guidance should not merely provide information but also develop self-management skills by supporting autonomy and strengthening self-efficacy. Through this understanding of dynamic interactions, educators and parents can design more effective support systems to help students realize their full potential, both academically and in career planning. This integrative framework underscores that student success is not determined by aspirations or support alone, but rather by how these psychological and environmental factors interact to cultivate both motivation and practical competencies. The model provides valuable insights for developing targeted interventions that address the complex interplay between parental influence, psychological needs, and skill development in educational settings.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

To what extent does parental support act as a mediator in the relationship between students' career aspiration awareness and time management skills among upper secondary students in Tawau, Sabah?

## **HYPOTHESES**

H01: There is a significant positive relationship between students' career aspiration awareness and time management skills, where students with higher levels of career aspiration awareness also demonstrate better time management skills.

H02: Parental support acts as a mediator in the relationship between career aspiration awareness and time management skills, where higher support enhances students' effectiveness in translating aspirations into planned actions.

## **STUDY METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted to examine critical variables among students, including career aspiration awareness, time management skills, and parental support, focusing on upper secondary students in the Tawau district of Sabah. A quantitative approach was chosen to enable precise measurement of the relationships between the study's key variables. This research employs a cross-sectional survey design, allowing data collection at a specific point in time. A descriptive quantitative approach was applied to obtain a comprehensive overview of the studied phenomenon (Creswell, J. W., 2014). This design was selected due to its ability to provide statistically analyzable data for measuring the study's main variables (Creswell, J. W., 2014).

The study population consists of Form 5 (SPM) and Form 6 (STPM) students from seven public secondary schools in the Tawau district. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure the selected sample

represents diverse characteristics of the population. A total of 500 respondents participated in the study, with distribution accounting for factors such as education level, school location, and gender composition. This sampling approach was implemented to minimize bias and enhance the external validity of the study. The primary research instrument was a structured questionnaire comprising four key sections. The first section collected respondents' demographic information, including age, gender, form level, family socioeconomic background, and academic achievement. The second section utilized the Career Awareness Scale (CAS), adapted into a five-point Likert scale, to measure students' clarity of educational and career goals (Creswell, J. W., 2014).

This study employs the Career Awareness Scale (CAS) as the primary instrument to measure the level of career aspiration awareness among secondary school students in Tawau, Sabah. The selection of this instrument was based on several key considerations that make it suitable for the socioeconomic and educational context of Sabah. The Career Awareness Scale is a widely validated measurement tool in various international studies for assessing students' clarity regarding their educational and career goals. In the context of Sabah, particularly in rural areas such as Tawau, this instrument is highly relevant as it addresses the issue of limited career exposure among students. One of the primary advantages of the Career Awareness Scale is its adaptability to diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts. The instrument was modified to reflect local realities in Sabah by incorporating items related to career choices more relevant to the local job market, such as agriculture, tourism, and education. For instance, items like "I have clear goals about the career I want to pursue" and "I know the necessary steps to achieve my educational aspirations" were assessed using a five-point Likert scale. This scale enables more precise measurement compared to simpler scales, as it provides respondents with greater flexibility to express their level of agreement or disagreement in greater detail.

Moreover, the Career Awareness Scale was selected due to its proven reliability and validity established in numerous previous studies. In this research, reliability tests such as Cronbach's Alpha were conducted to ensure the modified instrument remained consistent and dependable. An alpha value exceeding 0.7 indicated the instrument's appropriateness for local context application. The scale's capability to measure critical aspects including career knowledge, interest in specific fields, and future planning makes it an effective tool for assessing students' career aspiration awareness in Sabah. To ensure the study sample represents the secondary school student population in Tawau, this research employed a stratified random sampling approach. School selection was based on location (urban versus rural) and school type (national secondary schools, religious schools, etc.) to guarantee socioeconomic and background diversity among students. A total of three schools in urban Tawau and eight schools in rural areas were selected to participate in the study. Student sampling specifically focused on Form 5 and Form 6 students as they are at a critical decision-making stage regarding careers and higher education. Each school contributed between 50 to 60 respondents, with a target sample size of 300 to 350 students.

Data collection was conducted through two primary methods physical distribution of questionnaires. The physical forms were distributed with the assistance of school guidance teachers and counselors. Briefing sessions were held at each school to ensure students understood the proper way to complete the questionnaires (Creswell, J. W., 2014). This approach guaranteed that the collected data were accurate and truly reflected students' actual levels of career aspiration awareness. Research ethics were given serious consideration in this study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM), the Sabah State Education Department, and participating schools. Furthermore, respondent confidentiality was fully guaranteed, and participation in the study was voluntary. Students who chose not to participate were allowed to withdraw at any time without facing any negative consequences. In summary, the selection of the Career Awareness Scale as the research instrument was based on its suitability for Sabah's educational context and its capacity to provide reliable data regarding students' career aspirations. The meticulous sampling procedures ensured the study's sample was representative and capable of providing a comprehensive overview of the investigated issue. It is hoped that this study's findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of factors influencing students' career awareness in Sabah, thereby assisting in the development of more effective educational policies in the future.

The third section of the questionnaire incorporates the Time Management Inventory adapted from the Time Management Questionnaire (TMQ). This instrument consists of 20 items measuring crucial aspects of time management including planning, priority setting, and distraction control. The final section utilizes the Parental Support Scale (PSS), developed based on the Parental Support Scale, to assess three dimensions of support: emotional, instrumental, and informational support. The research procedure was implemented in three main phases. The preparatory phase involved obtaining ethical approval from the Malaysian Ministry of Education, the Sabah State Education Department, and the administration of participating schools. A pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents to verify item comprehension and instrument reliability analysis. The implementation phase involved face-to-face questionnaire distribution in selected schools. Briefing sessions were conducted prior to questionnaire completion to ensure respondents understood the study's purpose and proper completion methods. The allocated completion time was 25-30 minutes, with close monitoring by trained researchers.

The post-implementation phase involved verifying form completeness, detecting missing data, as well as coding and data entry for analysis. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to obtain frequency distributions, percentages, measures of central tendency (mean, median), and measures of dispersion (standard deviation). Inferential analysis included Pearson correlation tests to measure linear relationships between variables, multiple regression analysis to predict criterion variables, independent t-tests for gender-based comparisons, and one-way ANOVA for comparisons across form levels. Additional analyses comprised reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and tests for data normality. This comprehensive analytical approach ensured accuracy in interpreting relationships between study variables. Several measures were implemented to ensure study validity and reliability. Content validity was assessed through expert evaluation by three educational psychology lecturers and pilot testing with a small sample. Reliability was measured through Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.7 for all constructs, along with test-retest methods using a two-week interval.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Category	Total Students	Male	Female
Very Aware	150	75	75
Aware	200	100	100
Slightly Aware	80	40	40
Not Aware	15	7	8
Very Unaware	5	2	3

Thematic Data: Students' Level of Knowledge about Career Aspirations

### Profile of Students' Awareness Regarding Career Aspirations

Based on descriptive analysis, a total of 500 SPM and STPM students from Tawau, Sabah participated in this study. The distribution of respondents according to their level of career aspiration awareness was as follows: Very Aware (33.3%, n=150), Aware (44.4%, n=200), Less Aware (17.8%, n=80), Not Aware (3.3%, n=15), and Very Unaware (1.1%, n=5). The majority of students fell into the "Aware" (44.4%) and "Very Aware" (33.3%) categories, indicating that over 77 percent of students had good awareness of their career aspirations. Only a small proportion (less than 5%) were categorized as "Not Aware" and "Very Unaware", reflecting that most SPM and STPM students in Tawau had considered their future directions. However, 50 students did not respond to questions related to their level of career aspiration awareness. This likely suggests their reluctance to engage with this particular research issue.



## Distribution by Gender

The number of male and female students in this study was nearly balanced, with 50 percent males (n=224) and 50 percent females (n=226). The analysis revealed no significant gender differences in the level of career aspiration awareness, as each category showed nearly equal distribution between males and females. For instance, the "Very Aware" category comprised 75 males and 75 females, the "Aware" category included 100 males and 100 females, while the "Slightly Aware" category involved 40 males and 40 females. This indicates that career aspiration awareness was not significantly influenced by gender among the study respondents.

## Implications of Findings

These findings suggest that most SPM students in Tawau have a high level of awareness regarding their career aspirations, which may be influenced by external factors such as parental support, teacher guidance, or exposure to career information. However, there remains a small group of students who are still unclear about their academic and career paths, potentially requiring interventions such as career counseling or motivational programs.

Category	Total Students	Male	Female
Very Skilled	45	22	23
Skilled	220	110	110
Slightly Skilled	200	100	100
Not Skilled	30	15	15
Very Unskilled	5	2	3

### Thematic Data: Level of Time Management Skills among Students

The study findings reveal that the majority of students fall into the "Skilled" category with 220 students (44%) and "Slightly Skilled" with 200 students (40%), representing the highest numbers regarding their confidence in time management skills. Only a small number of students - 45 (9%) - are categorized as "Very Skilled", while 30 students (6%) show low proficiency ("Not Skilled"), and merely five students (1%) are "Very Unskilled".

A weak correlation exists between career aspiration awareness and time management skills. More students are confident about their career aspirations (33% "Very Aware") compared to time management (9% "Very Skilled"). This suggests that while students may have clear long-term visions (career aspirations), they might still lack proficiency in daily or short-term planning.

Category	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	150	30
Agree	225	45
Slightly Disagree	100	20
Disagree	20	4
Strongly Disagree	5	1

### Thematic Findings: Parental Support (Student Feedback Data)

The study findings reveal that the majority of students (75%) perceive strong parental support, falling under the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" categories. Quantitative analysis of student responses indicates predominantly positive feedback regarding parental support. Seventy-five percent of students expressed

agreement, with 30 percent (150 students) selecting "Strongly Agree" and 45 percent (225 students) choosing "Agree." This demonstrates that most students receive adequate parental support, with the data reflecting a dominant trend of student recognition of their parents' supportive role. Meanwhile, 20 percent (100 students) responded with "Slightly Disagree," suggesting a smaller cohort who may perceive parental support as insufficient or inconsistent. Only 5 percent of students (25 individuals) explicitly rejected statements about parental support - comprising 4 percent (20 students) selecting "Disagree" and 1 percent (5 students) choosing "Strongly Disagree." These figures indicate that while most students feel supported, a minority requires special attention, potentially due to socioeconomic factors, limited communication, or family pressures. Thematically, these findings confirm that parental support is widely recognized as crucial by most students, yet room for improvement remains - particularly in ensuring all students receive comprehensive support. Consequently, schools or relevant agencies might consider interventions such as parenting workshops or family counseling programs to enhance parental engagement, especially for the minority group receiving inadequate support.

## **DATA TRIANGULATION**

### **Students' Awareness Level of Career Aspirations**

The data analysis reveals that the majority of students demonstrate a high level of awareness regarding their career aspirations. Specifically, 150 students (33.3%) fall under the "Highly Aware" category, while 200 students (44.4%) are classified as "Aware". This indicates that over 77 percent of students have actively considered their post-secondary career and educational pathways. However, a small proportion (4.4%) remain uncertain about their future ("Unaware" and "Completely Unaware"), potentially due to limited exposure to career opportunities or insufficient guidance from both schools and families.

### **Time Management Skills among Students**

Despite having clear career aspirations, students' time management skills remain at a moderate level. Only 9 percent of students (45 individuals) express strong confidence in their time management abilities ("Highly Skilled"), while the majority (40%) are categorized as "Somewhat Skilled". This highlights a significant disparity between career awareness and daily planning capabilities. Students may possess well-defined long-term goals yet continue to struggle with self-discipline, manifesting in tendencies like procrastination or ineffective management of academic workloads.

### **The Role of Parental Support**

Family support emerges as a primary factor influencing student motivation, with 75 percent of respondents affirming they receive substantial parental support ("Strongly Agree" and "Agree"). However, this support appears predominantly focused on emotional encouragement rather than practical guidance. Notably, 5 percent of students report inadequate family support ("Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree"), suggesting this subgroup may require targeted interventions such as counseling programs or mentorship initiatives to prevent them from falling behind in their future planning (Zulkifli, A., & Nor Wahidah, A. R., 2020).

### **The Relationship between the Three Factors**

Students with clear career aspirations are not necessarily skilled in time management. This may be due to the lack of planning skills training in schools. Additionally, while parental support is very helpful for motivation, it does not necessarily improve a student's practical skills. Parents may emphasize academic achievement more than life skills like time management (Zulkifli, A., & Nor Wahidah, A. R., 2020). Finally, the data also shows there is no significant difference between genders, whether male or female, in facing the same challenges in future planning.

## DISCUSSION

This study has revealed an intriguing and somewhat paradoxical phenomenon among secondary school students in Tawau, Sabah, where the majority of respondents (77%) demonstrated high levels of career aspiration awareness, yet only a small fraction (9%) expressed genuine confidence in their time management skills. This finding necessitates in-depth analysis through the integration of educational psychology theoretical frameworks to understand the underlying mechanisms of this phenomenon, while simultaneously offering significant practical implications for educational development in rural Malaysian contexts.

Bandura's (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory provides a valuable perspective for understanding this phenomenon. From this theoretical viewpoint, the high level of career aspiration awareness among Tawau students can be interpreted as a manifestation of positive career efficacy. These students may have developed confidence in their capabilities through the four primary sources identified by Bandura: mastery experiences through prior academic achievements, vicarious experiences through observation of appropriate role models, social persuasion through encouragement from teachers and parents, and effective management of physiological and emotional states. However, the marked disparity between high aspirations and weak time management suggests that this self-efficacy may be domain-specific and not extend to more practical aspects of self-management.

Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory enhances our understanding of this phenomenon by emphasizing intrinsic motivation aspects. The observed imbalance may reflect deficiencies in fulfilling the three basic psychological needs proposed by this theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The reported high aspirations might stem from external pressures or social expectations (diminished autonomy) rather than genuine personal choices. Furthermore, the lack of practical skills (competence) in translating long-term goals into organized daily actions may be a key factor explaining the observed gap between career awareness and time management.

The practical implications of this theoretical analysis hold significant importance for educational practices in rural areas. At the school level, these findings suggest the necessity for transforming career guidance approaches. Rather than conventional models that predominantly focus on enhancing career awareness alone, schools need to develop more holistic approaches by systematically integrating time management skill development modules into career guidance curricula. Mentoring programs that combine aspects of long-term goal setting with daily strategic planning should be implemented, supported by self-assessment tools that enable students to identify their strengths and weaknesses in self-management.

At the educational policy level, these research findings necessitate a comprehensive review of national career guidance and counseling approaches. The Ministry of Education should consider developing a more balanced guidance curriculum that incorporates self-management components as core elements. Continuous professional training programs for counseling teachers need enhancement with specific emphasis on techniques to build students' self-efficacy across various domains, including time management and strategic planning. The establishment of career resource centers in rural schools, equipped with comprehensive career information and planning tools, should be prioritized in regional educational development initiatives.

At the community level, these research findings underscore the need for more effective parental awareness programs. Parental support should evolve beyond mere emotional encouragement to encompass more practical and structured guidance forms (Zulkifli, A., & Nor Wahidah, A. R., 2020). Strategic partnerships between schools and local community organizations must be established to provide relevant life skills training opportunities. Mentor-mentee programs connecting students with professionals across various career fields could serve as crucial mechanisms for delivering practical exposure about time management skill applications in real career contexts.

The phenomenon of mismatch between high aspirations and weak time management in Malaysia's rural context can be understood through several specific factors. Limited practical exposure to professional role

models may prevent rural students from comprehending real-world applications of time management skills. The prevailing exam-oriented learning culture tends to neglect the development of crucial self-management competencies. Familial support that emphasizes emotional encouragement over practical guidance further contributes to this gap. Insufficient digital infrastructure in rural areas hinders access to modern time management tools, while school curricula that lack explicit instruction in self-management skills exacerbate the situation. The more collectivistic social environment in rural communities may place less emphasis on individual self-management skill development compared to adherence to group norms.

To address this mismatch, intervention approaches must be carefully designed with sensitivity to the unique socio-cultural context of rural Malaysia. Student development programs should extend beyond merely enhancing career awareness, focusing instead on building practical skills necessary to translate aspirations into effective actions within the constraints of available resources and opportunities in rural areas. The integration of educational psychology theories with a deep understanding of local contexts serves as the key to developing truly effective interventions that support the holistic development of rural students in Malaysia.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study provides important insights into career aspiration awareness, time management skills, and parental support among secondary school students in Tawau, Sabah. However, like all research, this study has several limitations that must be openly acknowledged to better understand the scope and implications of its findings. First, the study employs a cross-sectional design, meaning data were collected at a single point in time. While this approach offers a snapshot of current conditions, it cannot capture changes or developments in career aspiration awareness, time management skills, or parental support dynamics over time. For instance, students' level of career awareness may vary across different school periods or be influenced by specific events such as career guidance programs. Future longitudinal studies would be more appropriate for tracking these changes and understanding causal relationships between variables.

Second, the data in this study relied entirely on student self-reports, which may introduce potential biases. Respondents might be inclined to provide socially desirable answers, such as reporting higher levels of parental support than actually received or overestimating their time management skills. Additionally, students' perceptions of parental support may differ from the parents' own perspectives. Future studies could diversify data sources by incorporating parent and teacher interviews, along with observational methods to measure time management skills more objectively.

Third, the generalizability of this study's findings is limited to the student population in Tawau, Sabah, and may not represent different geographical or socioeconomic contexts. Local factors such as educational facilities, community culture, and access to career information resources could influence the results. Therefore, these findings may not be generalizable to students in major urban areas or other Malaysian states without further research. To enhance external validity, future research could involve larger and more diverse samples from various locations across Sabah and Malaysia as a whole.

Furthermore, this study did not examine other potential factors that might influence the three main constructs, such as peer influence, digital media usage, or the impact of school career guidance programs. For instance, exposure to social media may affect students' career aspirations or disrupt their time management. Future studies could incorporate these additional variables to provide a more comprehensive analysis.

Despite these limitations, the study's findings still establish a robust foundation for understanding critical issues in secondary education in Sabah. To address the constraints of the cross-sectional design, future research could employ longitudinal approaches tracking students from Form 4 until graduation. To minimize self-report bias, data triangulation methods (combining questionnaires, interviews, and observations) could



be implemented. Additionally, comparative studies between urban and rural students in Sabah or across different states could help identify significant contextual differences.

Collectively, these study limitations do not negate the value of the obtained findings, but rather highlight opportunities for more comprehensive and in-depth future research. By accounting for these limitations, researchers, policymakers, and school administrators can design more effective interventions to support student development - particularly in aspects of career aspiration awareness, time management, and parental involvement. Subsequent studies addressing these limitations will contribute to the formation of more inclusive and evidence-based educational policies in Malaysia.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

This study carries significant implications in the context of secondary education in rural areas such as Tawau, Sabah, with implications that can be viewed from three main perspectives: theoretical, practical, and educational policy. From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the expansion of a conceptual framework linking three key constructs students' career aspirations, time management skills, and parental support. The findings reveal that the relationship between students' aspirations and time management skills is neither linear nor direct, even though theoretically, high aspirations should drive students to manage their time effectively. Additionally, the findings indicate that parental support does not have a strong correlation with students' time management, suggesting that the type of support provided may be more emotional and motivational rather than practical guidance. These findings reinforce the understanding that the most effective forms of support require deeper examination, including exploring aspects of two-way communication, parenting styles, and the pedagogical competence of parents themselves.

From a practical perspective, this study provides empirical evidence that students in rural areas such as Tawau have a high level of career aspiration awareness but face difficulties in translating it into effective daily planning. Based on these findings, several practical recommendations can be implemented. First, school counselors and administrators should place greater emphasis on developing soft skills such as time planning, goal monitoring, and self-management. Time management programs in secondary schools should be systematically integrated into co-curricular activities or subjects such as Physical and Health Education, Moral Education, or Islamic Education, using active learning approaches and workshop-based interventions. Second, parental involvement should be elevated beyond mere moral encouragement to a more strategic and information-based approach. For instance, parenting training could focus on establishing daily routines for children, knowledge about higher education pathways and careers, and the use of digital applications to monitor students' academic activities. This approach is particularly crucial in rural areas with limited access to career and higher education information.

At the policy level, the findings of this study suggest the need for a more focused and localized approach in implementing educational programs. Rural students should not be addressed using the same methods as urban students. The development of educational intervention modules must consider local realities such as family economic background, parental education levels, and community support networks. Programs like "Excellent Community Schools" or "Basic Career Guidance Classes" could be implemented in areas such as Tawau with the involvement of the private sector, public universities, and government agencies. Additionally, the implementation of educational policies such as the Malaysia Education Development Plan (PPPM) should incorporate specific indicators to assess the level of parental support in practical terms, rather than merely relying on attendance at Parent-Teacher Association (PIBG) meetings.

To enhance the effectiveness of interventions, several proactive programs can be implemented based on the study's findings. A Career Guidance & Time Management Program should be introduced in schools, incorporating specialized modules that integrate goal-setting with time management training. This program could be conducted by school counselors and personnel directly involved with students. Additionally, more holistic parental support should be prioritized through training programs that guide parents in providing structured assistance such as helping their children create daily schedules and explore career opportunities.

For students lacking family support, targeted interventions should be emphasized. Schools could collaborate with government agencies or NGOs to assign mentors to these students while implementing intensive motivational and career guidance programs.

For future research, several recommendations can be considered to strengthen the understanding of the relationship between career aspiration awareness, time management, and parental support. Given that this study employed a quantitative approach, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions could be used to gather more detailed insights into the actual forms of parental support, students' challenges in managing time, and how they conceptualize aspirations in their daily lives. Further studies should also explore mediating factors such as self-efficacy, academic stress levels, and self-motivation, which may help explain why students with high aspirations still struggle with effective time management. Additionally, variables like parental education level, parenting styles, and socioeconomic background should be examined to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how parental support functions in different contexts. This would provide deeper insights into the mechanisms influencing students' academic and career development, particularly in rural settings.

A comparative study between urban and rural students concerning career aspirations and time management should also be conducted. Such research would enable policymakers and educators to tailor intervention approaches according to local contexts and determine whether findings from Tawau can be generalized to other rural areas. Additionally, an in-depth investigation into the effectiveness of digital applications in helping students manage their time more efficiently is highly recommended. Experimental studies could be conducted to measure the impact of technology-assisted interventions on students' time discipline and academic performance.

Overall, the study's findings indicate that while most students in Tawau possess clear career aspirations, they still require guidance in time management. Parental support plays a crucial role, but a more balanced approach combining motivation with practical skill-building is necessary. Through collaboration among schools, parents, and the community, students can be nurtured into a generation that not only aspires highly but is also capable of effectively planning and achieving their goals. This study provides a strong foundation for developing more inclusive and evidence-based educational policies in Malaysia, particularly for students in rural regions.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study titled "The Relationship between Students' Career Aspirations, Time Management, and Parental Support: A Study in Tawau, Sabah" has made meaningful contributions to educational and psychological literature, particularly concerning upper secondary students in rural areas. The research highlights three key constructs: career awareness, time management skills, and parental support as interconnected elements influencing students' academic identity, psychosocial well-being, and educational future. The findings reveal that career aspiration awareness among students in Tawau is high, with over 77 percent demonstrating clarity regarding their academic and career goals. This is a positive indicator that despite potential regional constraints in access and exposure, students are capable of setting clear future aspirations. However, these high aspirations do not align with time management proficiency, as only 9 percent of students exhibit strong time management skills. This gap suggests structural shortcomings whether in the education system, the cultivation of self-discipline, or the lack of comprehensive technical support in developing students' life skills.

Parental support was identified as a crucial factor in reinforcing students' motivation and perseverance. Seventy-five percent of students acknowledged receiving strong parental support, particularly in emotional encouragement and moral reinforcement. However, further analysis shows that this support has not significantly translated into helping students develop disciplined time management habits. Parents appear more inclined toward motivational encouragement rather than direct interventions, such as assisting their children in structuring study schedules or monitoring daily and weekly goal attainment. The relationship

between career aspirations, time management, and parental support in this study is neither linear nor automatic. The research found that students with high aspirations do not necessarily possess strong time management skills, and those receiving substantial parental support do not always demonstrate better academic performance or self-discipline. This suggests that other factors such as self-efficacy, peer influence, academic pressure, career exposure, parenting styles, and school pedagogical approaches may act as mediating or moderating variables in the relationship between the studies's key constructs. In the local context of Tawau, these findings highlight an urgent need for a more contextual and holistic educational ecosystem. The challenges faced by rural students extend beyond limited facilities or economic constraints; they also include insufficient access to personal development programs, exposure to relevant career fields, and systematic support from families and communities. Therefore, a community-based approach integrating schools, parents, counselors, and government and non-governmental agencies should be established to help students not only set aspirations but also develop concrete strategies to achieve them.

Additionally, the study underscores the necessity of reevaluating the education system's approach to students' soft skill development. Aspects such as time management, career planning, self-efficacy, and time literacy should be given more significant space in school curricula and co-curricular activities. Within the framework of Malaysia MADANI and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), education that ensures comprehensive human potential development is pivotal to national progress. This study reinforces this notion by demonstrating that students need empowerment not only academically but also in values development, self-management skills, and emotional support from their families. A systematic approach is essential in addressing these challenges. Overall, this study proves that rural students in Tawau are not lacking in motivation or aspirations but require stronger and more effective support systems. Parents, teachers, counselors, education administrators, and policymakers must collaborate to build intervention networks that extend beyond classrooms while acknowledging local social, economic, and cultural realities. Today's students need not only inspiration but also the tools and skills to progress efficiently and resiliently.

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