# Career Aspirations Among Technical and Vocational Education and Training Students

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**DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.903SEDU0107**

**Received: 20 February 2025; Accepted: 25 February 2025; Published: 25 March 2025**

## ABSTRACT

Career aspiration is the process of shaping and developing individuals toward the workforce. It involves setting goals, making choices, planning, and having expectations for their long-term lives. Career aspiration is also an important aspect of Career Education that should be emphasized for future graduates. It is dynamic and can change based on an individual's experiences. Therefore, this study aims to identify the presence of career aspiration elements focused on knowledge, skills, and job security. The study also seeks to determine the patterns of students' career choices. The study was conducted at the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Technology, University Technology Malaysia, Johor Bahru. The respondents were third- and fourth-year students of under the Department of Advanced Technical and Vocational Education and Training, totaling 111 students. The study employs a quantitative research design by developing a questionnaire instrument using Google Forms. The data was analyzed descriptively using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29.0. The analysis results indicate that the identification of knowledge elements related to career choice among TVET students is high, with a mean score of 4.24. Similarly, the identification of skill elements related to career choice is also high, with a mean score of 4.16. The identification of job security elements related to career choice recorded the highest mean score of 4.42, falling into the very high category. Lastly, the study successfully identified the career choice category among TVET students at University Technology Malaysia, which is at a high level with a mean score of 3.89. Based on these findings, the study concludes that TVET students have received early exposure to their desired career aspirations. In line with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0), they are also prepared to work with innovative new technologies. Hence, it is crucial for future graduates to understand career shifts over time to plan and select careers that align with evolving trends.

**Keywords**: Career aspiration, Knowledge, Skills, Job Security, Career Choice, TVET students

## INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, there has been an increase in job opportunities, particularly in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). This is supported by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) through its published book Technical Vocational Education & Training (TVET) in Malaysia as in [34]. It states that the demand for highly skilled workers in industries, including the business sector is increasing. As a result, more young people are setting goals, developing enthusiasm, and cultivating interest in TVET. The government and private sectors have also implemented various TVET courses to enhance students' knowledge and skills, enabling them to establish clear career aspirations. According to the Malaysian Ministry of Education as in [34], TVET was introduced to meet industry demands for skilled human capital. This sector is vital in contributing to economic growth. TVET education follows recognized employment standards that emphasize practical skills, psychomotor abilities, and early exposure to industrial training. There are two main pathways in Malaysia's TVET education: certificate or diploma programs and special certification programs such as the National Dual Training System (SLDN). Pursuing TVET education has advantages as graduates acquire practical skills and knowledge that are highly valued by employers [2].

Career decision-making is an essential process in every individual's life as it significantly impacts their future and overall well-being. Likewise, students must be prepared for the workforce [1]. Modern industries no longer focus solely on academic achievements but also consider technical and non-technical skills. Employability skills are crucial for students to prepare for various industry demands [32]. As in [20], competition in the job market is becoming more intense, requiring graduates to equip themselves with multiple skills and adaptability. TVET students and graduates need to develop both practical and soft skills to increase their confidence and employability in the workforce.

**Problem Statement**

Data on the employability rate of TVET graduates in Malaysia highlights several issues affecting this trend. The employability rate of TVET graduates in Malaysia recorded an employability rate of 87.6% to 94.5% over the past four years as in [16]. Despite these improvements, some challenges due to TVET is often viewed as a secondary education option due to limited knowledge and perceived low career prospects. Many TVET graduates come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and see TVET as their last academic choice [20]. Over-reliance on Foreign Labor and Skill Mismatch TVET must align with industry needs to reduce unemployment and ensure graduates are job-ready [8]. Industry transformation under IR 4.0 requires students to master new technology skills [23]. Referring to Job Security Concerns, TVET graduates face lower salaries, irregular working hours, and limited job opportunities. Improvements are needed to ensure fair wages and favorable working conditions [29].

**Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study include;

1. Identify knowledge elements influencing TVET students' career choices.
2. Determine skill elements affecting TVET students' career decisions.
3. Assess job security elements in TVET career
    a. selection.
4. Identify career selection patterns among TVET students

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a survey method with a structured questionnaire to examine specific population characteristics. A quantitative approach is used, analyzing descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The study's population consists of third and fourth-year students from the Department of Advanced Technical and Vocational Education and Training, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Technology, with 141 students. Based on [15], the appropriate sample size is between 103 and 108 respondents. However, 111 of TVET students at UTM participated in the survey. Data collection was conducted using Google Forms with a five-point Likert scale. A pilot study with 30 students was conducted, achieving a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.802, indicating high reliability. The instrument was also validated by two UTM academic experts. Data analysis was performed using SPSS.

## FINDINGS

A quantitative method survey using a 5-point Likert scale was employed in this study, and the data was analyzed using three Likert scale levels [12]. The table below presents the mean values calculated using SPSS 29.0 to determine which items were most and least agreed upon by students. The results and findings of this study are explained in the following subsections.

**Analysis of Section A:** Identification of Knowledge Elements in Career Selection among TVET Students

Table 1 presents the descriptive analysis results for items in Section A.

Table 1: Mean Scores for Knowledge Elements

| Item No. | Item | Disagree (TS) | Somewhat Disagree (KS) | Agree (S) | Mean | SD | Mean Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Provides intellectual challenges (Knowledge) | 7 (6.3%) | 14 (12.6%) | 90 (81%) | 4.14 | 0.87 | High |
| 2 | Allows me to utilise prior work experience | 6 (5.4%) | 18 (16.2%) | 87(78.3%) | 4.23 | 0.91 | High |
| 3 | After understanding the scope of a job | 9 (8.1%) | - | 102(91.8%) | 4.37 | 0.63 | Very High |
| 4 | Applying existing educational knowledge | 3 (2.7%) | - | 108(97.3%) | 4.67 | 0.53 | Very High |
| 5 | Emphasising theoretical knowledge over practical | 22(19.8%) | 30 (27%) | 59 (53.1%) | 3.49 | 1.09 | Moderate |
| 6 | Offers educational opportunities while working (e.g., workshops, further studies, courses) | 8 (7.2%) | - | 103(92.8%) | 4.59 | 0.62 | Very High |

Overall Mean: 4.24 (High) Overall Standard Deviation: 0.39

Based on the study findings, the overall mean value for the knowledge element is 4.24, indicating that the identification of this element is at a high level. This shows that a total of 108 respondents, representing 97.3%, strongly agree with applying existing educational knowledge, achieving the highest mean value among all items in the knowledge element at 4.67. Meanwhile, Item 5 recorded the lowest mean value of 3.49. A total of 59 respondents (53.1%) strongly agreed with the statement in Item 3, while 30 respondents (27%) slightly disagreed, and 22 respondents (19.8%) did not agree with emphasizing theoretical knowledge over practical skills in their career aspirations.

**Analysis of Section B:** Identification of Skill Elements in Career Selection among TVET Students

Table 2 presents the descriptive analysis results for items in Section B.

Table 2: Mean Scores for Skill Elements

| Item No. | Item | Disagree (TS) | Somewhat Disagree (KS) | Agree (S) | Mean | SD | Mean Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Soft skills and employability skills that meet industry needs | 2 (1.8%) | 3 (2.7%) | 106(95.5%) | 4.68 | 0.62 | Very High |
| 2 | Computer skills and ability to operate various software | 6 (5.4%) | 42 (37.8%) | 63 (56.7%) | 3.81 | 0.93 | High |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | Skills in management and planning in work | 10 (9%) | 29 (26.1%) | 72 (64.8%) | 3.85 | 1 | High |
| 4 | Skills in innovation and design | 17 (15.3%) | 24 (21.6%) | 70 (63%) | 3.81 | 1.16 | High |
| 5 | Technical skills relevant to the TVET field (e.g., welding, wiring, construction, machining) | 4 (3.6%) | 8 (7.2%) | 99 (89.2%) | 4.4 | 0.84 | Very High |
| 6 | Ability to use various hand tools suited for tasks | 1 (0.9%) | 5 (4.5%) | 105 (94.6%) | 4.44 | 0.67 | Very High |

Overall Mean: 4.16 (High) Overall Standard Deviation: 0.51

Table 2 presents the findings on the identification of career aspirations based on the skills element. The overall mean value is 4.16, indicating a high level. This suggests that students are aware of the importance of skills in career selection. Item 1 recorded the highest mean value of 4.68, with 106 respondents (95.5%) strongly agreeing that *soft skills* and *employability* skills can meet industry needs. There are two items with the same mean score, which are also at a high level but ranked the lowest among the items: Item 2 (Computer skills and the ability to operate various types of software) and Item 4 (Skills in innovation and invention). These items recorded a mean score of 3.81, with differences in standard deviation of 0.93 (Item 2) and 1.16 (Item 4).

**Analysis of Section C:** Identification of Career Security Elements in Career Selection among TVET Students

Table 3 presents the descriptive analysis results for items in Section C.

Table 3: Mean Scores for Career Security Elements

| Item No. | Item | Disagree (TS) | Somewhat Disagree (KS) | Agree (S) | Mean | SD | Mean Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Flexible working hours | 7 (6.3%) | 11 (9.9%) | 93 (83.8%) | 4.37 | 0.99 | Very High |
| 2 | Bonus for working on public holidays | 1 (0.9%) | 9 (8.1%) | 101(90.9%) | 4.4 | 0.68 | Very High |
| 3 | Starting from a lower position with easy promotion | 14 (12.6%) | 43 (38.7%) | 54 (48.6%) | 3.59 | 1.13 | High |
| 4 | Salary that matches job responsibilities | 3 (2.7%) | - | 108 (97.3%) | 4.79 | 0.47 | Very High |
| 5 | Cheerful and cooperative workplace environment | 2 (1.8%) | - | 109 (98.2%) | 4.57 | 0.53 | Very High |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | Job satisfaction without excessive stress | 2 (1.8%) | - | 109 (98.2%) | 4.61 | 0.52 | Very High |
| 7 | Opportunity to showcase performance and gain employer recognition | 1 (0.9%) | 5 (4.5%) | 105 (94.6%) | 4.59 | 0.62 | Very High |

Overall Mean: 4.42 (Very High) Overall Standard Deviation: 0.52

Based on the study findings, the overall mean value for the career assurance element is 4.42, indicating that the identification of this element is at a very high level. This shows that students place great importance on job security in their career selection. The highest mean score recorded was 4.79, with the highest percentage of 97.3%, where 108 respondents agreed with Item 4, which states that salaries should be appropriate to the workload assigned. Meanwhile, the lowest mean score was 3.59 for Item 3, which relates to careers that start at entry-level positions and offer easy promotion opportunities. A total of 38.7% (43 respondents) slightly disagreed, while 12.6% (14 respondents) disagreed with this statement.

**Analysis of Section D**: Identification of Career Selection Categories for TVET Students at UTM

Table 4 presents the descriptive analysis results for items in Section D.

Table 4: Mean Scores for Career Selection Categories

| Item No. | Item | Disagree (TS) | Somewhat Disagree (KS) | Agree (S) | Mean | SD | Mean Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Aligns with my interests | 8 (8.1%) | - | 102(91.9%) | 4.68 | 0.62 | Very High |
| 2 | Provides independence, self-employment, and family business opportunities | 15(13.5%) | 32 (28.8%) | 64 (57.6%) | 3.67 | 1.13 | High |
| 3 | Preferring private sector over government organisations | 6 (5.4%) | 22 (19.8%) | 83 (74.7%) | 4.15 | 0.98 | High |
| 4 | Involves machine operation and assembly | 4 (3.6%) | 15 (13.5%) | 92 (82.8%) | 4.23 | 0.88 | High |
| 5 | Business management | 43(38.7%) | 24 (21.6%) | 44 (39.6%) | 3.06 | 1.35 | Moderate |
| 6 | Agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and livestock | 58(52.2%) | 9 (8.1%) | 44 (39.6%) | 2.79 | 1.65 | Moderate |
| 7 | Education sector over industry work | 3 (2.7%) | 5 (4.5%) | 103(92.8%) | 4.63 | 0.8 | Very High |

Overall Mean: 3.89 (High) Overall Standard Deviation: 0.56

Table 4 presents the findings on the identification of career selection categories among TVET UTM students. The overall mean score is 3.89, which falls within a high level. The highest mean scores were recorded for two

items: Item 1, related to interest, with a mean score of 4.68, and Item 7, related to the field of education, with a mean score of 4.63. For Item 1, a total of 102 respondents (91.9%) agreed, while 8 respondents (8.1%) disagreed. Similarly, for Item 7, 102 respondents (91.9%) agreed, and 8 respondents (8.1%) disagreed. Item 5, related to the field of company management, and Item 6, related to agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and livestock, recorded mean scores at a moderate level. For Item 5, 44 respondents (39.6%) agreed, 24 respondents (21.6%) slightly disagreed, and 43 respondents (38.7%) disagreed. Meanwhile, for Item 6, 58 respondents (52.2%) disagreed, 9 respondents (8.1%) slightly disagreed, and 44 respondents (39.6%) agreed.

## DISCUSSION

Referring to Table 1, Item 4, "Applying existing educational knowledge," received the highest level of agreement from students involved in the study. This indicates that educational experience plays a crucial role in helping individuals determine their career choices. Item 3, "After understanding the scope of a particular job," and Item 6, "Providing educational opportunities while working," also received high levels of agreement. This suggests that students are cautious and strive to clearly understand job scopes before making their choices, and they perceive the availability of educational opportunities while working as a beneficial factor for both employers and employees. However, most students disagreed with Item 5, "Emphasizing theoretical knowledge over practical skills," as they might believe that the industry primarily values practical knowledge. Recent studies and reports emphasize the critical role of practical skills in preparing students for the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0). As in [14] highlights the importance of balancing practical skills with theoretical knowledge to ensure sustained career growth in the evolving job market.

Based on Table 2, Item 1, "Soft skills and employability skills that meet industry needs," received the highest level of agreement and a very high mean score from TVET students at UTM. They priorities these skills for application in their future careers. A seminar on Industry and TVET, organized by TVET students at UTM, highlighted the importance of soft skills as perceived by the industry [20]. Items 5 and 6, which relate to technical skills and the operation of tools and machinery, also received very high mean scores. Although TVET students do not have direct placement opportunities in the education sector (Open Market), they still have career prospects within the industry. Innovation and creative skills (Item 4) also received a positive response, ranking at a high level. TVET students demonstrate good awareness of scientific and technological advancements aligned with IR4.0, which demands proficiency in computer usage and software management. Recent studies underscore the critical role of soft skills and employability competencies in enhancing the career prospects of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) graduates in Malaysia. As in [18] highlights that employers prioritize graduates who exhibit strong soft skills, including effective communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities, as these are essential for thriving in the modern workplace.

Furthermore, reference [36] emphasizes the necessity for TVET graduates to possess technological literacy, particularly computer skills and proficiency with various software applications, to meet industry demands. This aligns with the findings in Table 2, where Item 2, "Computer skills and the ability to operate various types of software," and Item 4, "Skills in innovation and invention," both received high mean scores of 3.81, reflecting students' recognition of the importance of these competencies. The emphasis on practical skills over theoretical knowledge is further supported as in [14], which advocates for a balanced approach to education that integrates practical skill development to ensure graduates are well-prepared for the workforce. Collectively, these studies affirm that Malaysian TVET students acknowledge the significance of soft skills, technological proficiency, and practical experience in aligning with industry expectations and enhancing employability.

The analysis of Table 3 shows that almost all items related to career security obtained positive mean scores. The highest-rated item was Item 4, "Providing a salary that matches the workload assigned." The aspect of salary was also linked to Item 2, "Receiving bonuses for working on public holidays," and Item 1, "Having flexible working hours." TVET students at UTM tend to prefer jobs that offer fair compensation for their responsibilities and acknowledge the importance of work-life balance. Item 5, "A cheerful and collaborative work environment," and Item 6, "Providing satisfaction and avoiding stress outside of work," also received high levels of agreement. TVET students at UTM value a positive and cooperative workplace atmosphere. However, Item 3, "Starting at a lower level and having opportunities for promotion," had a high mean score but ranked the lowest among all instrument items. This indicates that students may have limited knowledge about the appropriate job levels for

their qualifications, particularly concerning contract and temporary positions. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of salary alignment with job responsibilities and job security in career selection among Malaysian students, particularly those in TVET. Reference [10] shows, employability trends among Malaysian graduates and found that fields such as Applied Arts, including accountancy and business-related disciplines, demonstrated the highest graduate employability rates. This suggests that students prioritize careers offering competitive compensation and clear advancement opportunities.

Finally, recent research on career selection in Malaysian TVET education supports the findings in Table 4. Studies consistently show that intrinsic factors such as, personal interest and alignment with one's educational goal, play a decisive role in career decision-making among TVET students. Based on [27] found that Malaysian TVET students report high levels of interest and self-efficacy when considering career fields that resonate with their personal passions. In their study, fields related to education and technology were rated significantly higher than more extrinsically driven sectors such as company management. The analysis of career selection categories shows that Item 5 (Company management field) and Item 6 (Agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and livestock industries) received moderate levels of interest, indicating that respondents have less inclination toward these fields. Most respondents expressed a stronger preference for becoming educators, as seen in Item 7 (Education field over working in industry), which also received a high level of agreement. TVET students at UTM have the advantage of still being eligible to work in the industry, with Item 4 (Involving machine operation and assembly) being their second choice. Item 3 (Preferring private sector over government organizations) was their third preference, aligning with previous graduate tracking reports.

## CONCLUSION

The researcher concludes that TVET students at UTM with an investigative mindset tend to be more meticulous in making career decisions, especially those involving long-term life prospects. They also possess a strong awareness of IR4.0 and highly priorities skill elements in their career aspirations. These students tend to be realistic and focus greatly on operations, control, and the use of machinery and tools. Furthermore, they show a strong interest in design development and new innovations. Soft skills are also considered highly important for every future graduate in facing the working world, as these skills can enhance their employability credibility. Additionally, they are highly concerned with social aspects and work-life balance, including financial stability and job conditions. In summary, interest, knowledge, skills, and career security play a crucial role in career selection among TVET students at UTM. The researcher believes that making the right career choice will improve an individual's productivity and job satisfaction.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank all the respondents for this study for the given information needed. The authors also would also like to thank the Ministry of Higher Education and University Technology Malaysia (UTM) under UTM Potential Academic Staff with vote number Q.J130000.2753.03K96

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