

Influence of Entrepreneurship Intentions on Career Preferences of Vocational Students in Malawi

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Abstract: *This study investigates how entrepreneurial intentions influence career paths among technical and vocational education and training (TEVET) students, focusing on pre - training preferences, post - training aspirations, and long - term entrepreneurial ambitions. Using statistical analysis, the research evaluates factors such as pre - training entrepreneurial preferences, immediate post - training intentions, and long - term aspirations (five and ten years post - graduation) to assess their influence on career choices, particularly self - employment, wage employment, or combined paths. The research gathered primary data from 334 TEVET students and graduates at Lilongwe Technical College and DonBosco Technical Institute. The investigation was grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which facilitated the examination of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavior. To analyze career choices as a dependent variable through multinomial logistic regression, we assessed how perceptions of training duration, intensity, curriculum relevance, instructor expertise, level of study, college affiliation, prior training before TEVET, business ownership, involvement in a family business, gender, and field of study affect the career choices of TEVET students. The findings reveal that while a pre - training preference for entrepreneurship does not significantly predict career outcomes, a strong desire to start a business immediately after training is a significant factor. This underscores the critical role of post - training entrepreneurial momentum. Conversely, medium - term aspirations (five years) do not influence career preferences significantly, whereas long - term aspirations (ten years) emerge as a meaningful predictor, reflecting a strategic approach to entrepreneurship through resource accumulation and network building. The study also highlights a baseline preference for self - employment among TEVET graduates, independent of other variables, suggesting the presence of intrinsic motivations and an entrepreneurial orientation within TEVET programs. Respondents with strong entrepreneurial aspirations—whether immediate or long - term—are significantly more likely to prefer self - employment or mixed career paths, while those with weaker aspirations gravitate toward wage employment. These findings emphasize the importance of targeted interventions, including post - training support, mentorship, business incubation, and long - term career planning, to enhance entrepreneurial outcomes. The research underscores the need for a holistic approach to entrepreneurship education and support, addressing both intrinsic motivations and external barriers to empower TEVET graduates in their career trajectories.*

Keywords: entrepreneurship education, vocational training, career preferences, TEVET graduates, Malawi

1. Introduction

Malawi, a landlocked nation situated in Southeast Africa and bordered by Zambia, Tanzania, and Mozambique, is inhabited by approximately 17.5 million individuals, as reported in the 2018 Population Census (Nkhata, 2017). Agriculture is the primary sector that contributes to its economy, and tobacco is a significant contributor to the country's foreign exchange sources. On the other hand, Malawi is confronted with a number of socio - economic challenges, such as high unemployment rates, particularly among the youth, limited job opportunities, excessive dependence on the agricultural sector, a large informal business sector, and a decline in productive industries (Chirwa & Chilowa, 2016). In order to address these difficulties, strategic interventions are required. The education sector, and the development of skills in particular, is widely regarded as being vital for the achievement of socioeconomic development (UNESCO, 2019).

In recent years, the landscape of career choices among college students in Malawi have evolved, with graduates pursuing wage employment, entrepreneurship, or a mix of both. ". These dynamics have led to increased interest in entrepreneurship as a viable career path. This shift raises critical questions about the factors influencing pre -

entrepreneurial intentions and how they shape students career preferences. As the nation grapples with economic challenges, entrepreneurship emerges as a promising solution to unemployment and underemployment, making it essential to understand its implications. Exploring pre - entrepreneurship intentions allows for a deeper insight into students motivations and the societal context that fosters entrepreneurial aspirations. Such an analysis not only reveals the personal ambitions of students but also reflects broader economic trends in Malawi. This study aims to analyze the role of entrepreneurial intentions and training experiences in shaping career preferences among TEVET graduates in Malawi

Prior intentions play a crucial role in shaping post - training career choices, particularly among students and early - career professionals. Intentions often reflect an individual's aspirations, values, and perceptions of potential career pathways, acting as a psychological blueprint that guides decision - making. In the context of technical and vocational education and training (TEVET), prior intentions may determine whether graduates lean towards self - employment, wage employment, or alternative career paths. These intentions are often influenced by factors such as personal interests, societal expectations, family background, exposure to entrepreneurship, and the perceived value of specific career

options. Understanding the relationship between prior intentions and career outcomes is essential for designing educational and training programs that align with students' long-term goals and address gaps in preparation or resources. By examining the extent to which prior intentions shape actual career choices, this research aims to provide insights into how TEVET systems can better support students in achieving their desired career trajectories.

a) **Overview of entrepreneurship and its significance in Malawi's economic landscape**

Entrepreneurship has emerged as a pivotal force in Malawi's economic landscape, serving not only as a remedy for high unemployment but also as a catalyst for innovation and development. The landscape is characterized by a predominance of informal sector activities, where a significant portion of the population engages in entrepreneurial ventures as a means of livelihood. As outlined in recent studies, these initiatives contribute to economic resilience and empower local communities, particularly among the youth. Furthermore, entrepreneurship fosters a culture of self-sufficiency that is crucial for sustainable development in a nation facing multifaceted challenges, including poverty and limited access to education (Garbers et al.).

Upon noting numerous challenges faced by graduates from technical colleges, The Government of Malawi integrated Entrepreneurship Training modules in the Malawi TVET Curriculum, and changed the name TVET to Technical, Entrepreneurial and Vocational Education and Training (TEVET) in 1999. The inclusion of Entrepreneurial in the skills training (TVET) was meant to increase prominence of the Entrepreneurial Training. Since 1999, the Entrepreneurship Modules have been delivered as mandatory subjects in all TEVET programmes. It is anticipated that the Entrepreneurship training will have a significant impact on the career preferences of technical and vocational students in Malawi.

b) **TEVET System in Malawi**

The Technical, Entrepreneurial, and Vocational Education and Training (TEVET) system in Malawi uses Competence Based Education and Training (CBET), which is implemented by accredited Technical, Entrepreneurial, and Vocational Education and Training (TEVET) institutions in collaboration with industrial affiliation. The certification process consists of four stages of achievement. During this process, trainees learn both practical and theoretical knowledge in their chosen occupation.

The number of apprentices in TEVET institutions has had significant growth of 138% between 2013 and 2023. Specifically, the enrolment has risen from 1,084 apprentices in 2013 to 2,575 apprentices in 2023. Regarding gender, female enrolment experienced a substantial surge, with a growth rate of 270%; compared to 87% growth rate for males in the same period.

In 1999, the Government of Malawi incorporated Entrepreneurship Training modules into the Malawi Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Curriculum, subsequently rebranding TVET as Technical,

Entrepreneurial, and Vocational Education and Training (TEVET). The incorporation of entrepreneurial skills within the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) framework was intended to enhance the significance of entrepreneurial training. Since 1999, the Entrepreneurship Modules have been delivered as mandatory subjects in all TEVET programmes. It is expected that the Entrepreneurship training will profoundly influence the career aspirations of technical and vocational students in Malawi.

2. Literature Review

a) *Theoretical Frameworks*

Several theoretical models explain entrepreneurial intentions, notably Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control predict an individual's intention to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Ajzen, 1991). Krueger and Carsrud (1993) expanded this model by emphasizing the role of perceived desirability and feasibility in shaping entrepreneurial intentions. These frameworks provide a foundation for understanding how students' entrepreneurial mindsets develop and influence their career decisions.

b) *Factors Influencing Pre-Entrepreneurship Intentions*

Studies indicate that multiple factors affect students' entrepreneurial intentions. Personal traits such as risk-taking propensity, creativity, and self-efficacy are crucial predictors (Zhao et al., 2005). Additionally, socio-economic factors, including family background, access to capital, and exposure to entrepreneurial role models, significantly shape students' entrepreneurial aspirations (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). In the Malawian context, cultural values, societal norms, and the education system play pivotal roles in influencing students' perceptions of entrepreneurship as a viable career path (Chigunta, 2017).

Ndofirepi (2020) studied Zimbabwean vocational school students' perceived benefits of entrepreneurship education and their inclinations to pursue entrepreneurial aspirations. This study's quantitative research approach included a cross-sectional survey of 308 vocational education students. The theoretical framework of Ndofirepi's (2020) research stresses psychological qualities as mediators between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intent. This framework underpins research. The study examined three psychological qualities: motivation for achievement, risk-taking, and internal locus of control. Educational impact on entrepreneurial goal intents and selected psychological traits (desire for achievement, predisposition for taking risks, and internal locus of control) were positively and statistically significant. Study results showed this association was advantageous. Entrepreneurship education changed students' need for success, which influenced their entrepreneurial tendencies. This discovery matters. Entrepreneurial education, accomplishment, and aspirations are linked (Hansemark, 1998, 2003; Dinis et al., 2013; Ferreira, Raposo, & Rodrigues, 2012; Uddin & Bose, 2012). That matches those investigations.

Although Ndofirepi (2020) found that the need for completion mediates, the other two mediators, risk-taking and internal locus of control, did not. These findings counter previous

beliefs and studies that all three psychological traits would mediate the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial impulses.

Entrepreneurship education researchers will find Ndofirepi (2020)'s findings important. Demand for achievement as a mediating variable shows how crucial it is in defining student entrepreneurial goals and how significant psychological characteristics are when researching entrepreneurs. This study disproves the idea that personality research is unimportant to entrepreneurship studies by showing that it can shed light on entrepreneurial goal intents.

Despite the study's thought-provoking findings on psychological qualities that mediate the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial goals, its limitations must be acknowledged. Its main drawback is that it only examined one Zimbabwean vocational school, limiting its practical applicability. Future studies should involve students from other educational institutions to improve external validity. Because the study was cross-sectional, causality could not be established. To improve methodological rigor in future research in this topic, experimental designs and situational variables must be considered.

Ndofirepi (2020)'s research on entrepreneurship education, psychological traits, and dispositions is quite insightful. The findings emphasize the importance of success as a mediator in students' entrepreneurial aspirations and the need to address psychological factors in entrepreneurship studies. Future study should address these gaps and broaden their studies to better understand how entrepreneurship education affects students' job choices and goals. Badri and Hachicha (2019) conducted a case study to examine Tunisian university students' entrepreneurial attitudes after entrepreneurship instruction. The study examined students' gender, age, civil status, internal and external sociocultural background, business development theory and practice, and project execution.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in Malawi have increasingly integrated entrepreneurship education into their curricula to stimulate entrepreneurial mindsets (Ndala & Mwandira, 2020). Research highlights that exposure to entrepreneurship courses, workshops, and mentorship programs positively affects students' entrepreneurial intentions (Rae, 2006). However, the effectiveness of these programs in translating intentions into actual entrepreneurial behavior remains under-explored in Malawi.

Pre-entrepreneurship intentions significantly impact career preferences, often guiding students toward self-employment and business ventures rather than traditional employment (Kolvereid, 1996). In Malawi, limited formal employment opportunities further incentivize students to consider entrepreneurship as a primary career option (Nserebo, 2019). However, barriers such as lack of financial support, inadequate business skills, and regulatory challenges often deter the actualization of entrepreneurial intentions.

Despite the growing interest in entrepreneurship among Malawian college students, there is limited empirical research

exploring how pre-entrepreneurship intentions directly influence career preferences. Additionally, the role of gender, socio-economic status, and institutional support in shaping these intentions remains under-researched. Addressing these gaps can inform targeted interventions to enhance entrepreneurship development in Malawi.

The literature underscores the significant influence of pre-entrepreneurship intentions on career preferences among college students in Malawi. While various personal, socio-economic, and educational factors contribute to shaping these intentions, further research is necessary to understand how these factors interact and translate into entrepreneurial action. Strengthening entrepreneurship education and support systems within HEIs can play a critical role in fostering entrepreneurial careers among students.

3. Research Methods

The study used quantitative methods to collect primary data from a sample of students and graduates from two technical colleges, namely Lilongwe Technical College and DonBosco Technical Institute.

a) Quantitative Data Collection

The study employed a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection tool to gather numerical data from Technical, Entrepreneurial, and Vocational Education and Training (TEVET) students and graduates. The questionnaire was administered in a one-on-one format, allowing the researcher to interact directly with the respondents. This approach provided an opportunity to collect detailed and context-specific information, facilitating an in-depth understanding of the research topic.

The questionnaire was designed to capture both dependent and independent variables. The dependent variable, which was nominal in nature, focused on the career preferences of the respondents. The three categories under this variable included wage employment, self-employment, and a combination of both. These categories aimed to identify the career pathways that TEVET students and graduates were inclined to pursue.

The independent variables were assessed using Likert-scale questions, with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree). These variables measured various dimensions of entrepreneurial preferences and aspirations. For instance, one of the variables captured respondents' agreement with the statement, "I prefer a career as an entrepreneur rather than working for a company." Another variable gauged the desire to start and run their own business, reflecting the respondents' entrepreneurial ambitions.

In addition, the questionnaire explored the timing of entrepreneurial intentions. Respondents were asked about their desire to start a business immediately after completing their studies, five years after graduation, and ten years after graduation. These questions provided insights into the short-term and long-term entrepreneurial goals of TEVET students and graduates.

b) Sampling frame

This study targeted TEVET students and TEVET graduates from Lilongwe and Don Bosco Technical Colleges. The combined target population for Lilongwe Technical College and Don Bosco Technical Institute is 2280. The two colleges were chosen because of their unique characteristics. In particular, Lilongwe Technical College is one of the largest and oldest public technical college, which has been delivering TEVET programmes including Entrepreneurship Training Programmes to young people in Malawi. The two institutions are located in Lilongwe but offer training programmes to students across the country.

c) Sampling Method

This study used the probability sampling method for TEVET students and TEVET graduates. Using sample size calculator at calculator.com, the recommended sample size for a target population of 2280 was 329. This is based on a 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error and 50% population proportion.

d) Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected was analyzed using version 25 of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Inferential Statistics such as t - tests, chi - square tests, was used to compare the career preferences of students before and after entrepreneurship training, assessing the statistical significance of any observed changes. In particular the study analyzed career choices (with three categories *Wage employment*, *Self - employment*, and *Both wage and self - employment*) as a dependent variable using multinomial regression, we explored how *Preference for entrepreneurship*, *Desire to start own business*, *Desire to start business after completing training*, *Desire to start business 5 years after graduation*, *Desire to start business 10 years after graduation* (independent variables) influence the career choice of TEVET graduates.

Model framework

The multinomial regression model 3 predicts the probability of an individual choosing one career option over the baseline category based on independent variables. Model 3 is specified as follows:

$$\text{Log} (P (Y=j) / P (Y=\text{baseline}) = B_{0j} + B_{1j}X_1 + B_{2j}X_2 + \dots + B_{pj}X_p$$

Where:

- Y: Career choice (e. g., *Wage employment*, *Self - employment*, or *Both*).
- j: A specific category (e. g., *Self - employment*, *Both*).
- β_{pj} : Coefficients for independent variables.
- $X_1, X_2, \dots, X_p$: Independent variables (Prefer entrepreneurship, Desire to start own business, Desire to start business after completing training, Desire to start business 5 years after graduation, Desire to start business 10 years after graduation)

Definition of Variables**Dependent Variable (Nominal):**

- Categories: Wage employment, Self - employment, Both.

Independent Variables

- Prefer entrepreneurship: This is a Likert Scale (1 to 5) where 1 means strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree with

the statement "I prefer a career as an entrepreneur than working for a company".

- Desire to start own business: This is a Likert Scale (1 to 5) where 1 means strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree with the statement "I desire to start and run my own business".
- Desire to start own business after completing my studies: This is a Likert Scale (1 to 5) where 1 means strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree with the statement "I desire to start and run my own business after completing my studies".
- Desire to start own business 5 years after graduation: This is a Likert Scale (1 to 5) where 1 means strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree with the statement "I desire to start and run my own business 5 years after graduation".
- Desire to start own business 10 years after graduation: This is a Likert Scale (1 to 5) where 1 means strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree with the statement "I desire to start and run my own business 10 years after graduation".

Hypotheses to be Tested**Preference for Entrepreneurship**

- **H₀**: Preferring entrepreneurship does not significantly influence the likelihood of choosing self - employment or both over wage employment.
- **H₁**: Preferring entrepreneurship significantly influences the likelihood of choosing self - employment or both over wage employment.

Desire to Start Own Business

- **H₀**: The desire to start one's own business does not significantly affect the likelihood of choosing self - employment or both over wage employment.
- **H₁**: The desire to start one's own business significantly affects the likelihood of choosing self - employment or both over wage employment.

4. Results and Discussion**a) Overview of respondents**

A total of 334 TEVET students and graduates from Lilongwe and DonBosco Technical colleges took part in the survey.

Table 1: Study Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Male	205	61.4
Female	129	38.6
Total	334	100.0

b) Pre - training career intentions and Post- training career choices

The study run a nominal regression model to evaluate the relationship between career preferences and various entrepreneurial intentions, assessing their significance in predicting career choices. The likelihood ratio tests provide insights into the contribution of each effect by comparing the reduced model (excluding the effect) to the full model. This model used current career preferences as dependent variable and the following: prefer entrepreneurship, desire to start own business, desire to start business after completing training, desire to start business 5 years after graduation and desire to

start business 10 years after graduation, as explanatory variables. **Nominal Regression**

Likelihood Ratio Tests						
Effect	Model Fitting Criteria			Likelihood Ratio Tests		
	AIC of Reduced Model	BIC of Reduced Model	- 2 Log Likelihood of Reduced Model	Chi - Square	df	Sig.
Intercept	378.376	537.938	294.376 ^a	.000	0	.
Prefer entrepreneurship	373.151	502.320	305.151	10.774	8	.215
Desire to start own business	392.856	522.025	324.856	30.480	8	.000
Desire to start business after completing training	379.419	508.589	311.419	17.043	8	.030
Desire to start business 5 years after graduation	370.535	499.705	302.535	8.159	8	.418
Desire to start business 10 years after graduation	382.998	512.167	314.998	20.621	8	.008
The chi - square statistic is the difference in - 2 log - likelihoods between the final model and a reduced model. The reduced model is formed by omitting an effect from the final model. The null hypothesis is that all parameters of that effect are 0.						
a. This reduced model is equivalent to the final model because omitting the effect does not increase the degrees of freedom.						

Parameter Estimates									
cpref ^a		B	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% Confidence Interval for Exp (B)	
								Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Self employed	Intercept	1.507	.427	12.481	1	.000			
	[Prefer entrepreneurship=1]	- 1.179	.931	1.603	1	.205	.307	.050	1.908
	[Prefer entrepreneurship=2]	.159	.762	.044	1	.835	1.173	.263	5.226
	[Prefer entrepreneurship=3]	.046	.574	.006	1	.936	1.047	.340	3.223
	[Prefer entrepreneurship=4]	.193	.549	.123	1	.726	1.213	.413	3.557
	[Prefer entrepreneurship=5]	0 ^b	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
	[Desire to start own business=1]	- .770	1.345	.328	1	.567	.463	.033	6.464
	[Desire to start own business=2]	- 2.438	.885	7.579	1	.006	.087	.015	.495
	[Desire to start own business=3]	- 1.869	.676	7.655	1	.006	.154	.041	.580
	[Desire to start own business=4]	- 1.717	.527	10.631	1	.001	.180	.064	.504
	[Desire to start own business=5]	0 ^b	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
	[Desire to start business after completing training=1]	- .735	.656	1.259	1	.262	.479	.133	1.732
	[Desire to start business after completing training=2]	.334	.738	.205	1	.651	1.397	.329	5.935
	[Desire to start business after completing training=3]	.038	.559	.005	1	.946	1.038	.347	3.105
	[Desire to start business after completing training=4]	.621	.617	1.013	1	.314	1.861	.555	6.238
	[Desire to start business after completing training=5]	0 ^b	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
	[Desire to start business 5 years after graduation =1]	- .267	.614	.188	1	.664	.766	.230	2.553
	[Desire to start business 5 years after graduation =2]	.187	.715	.069	1	.793	1.206	.297	4.898
	[Desire to start business 5 years after graduation =3]	.823	.624	1.740	1	.187	2.278	.670	7.744
	[Desire to start business 5 years after graduation =4]	.480	.588	.667	1	.414	1.616	.511	5.114
	[Desire to start business 5 years after graduation =5]	0 ^b	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
Wage and self employed	Intercept	- .703	.661	1.129	1	.288			
	[Prefer entrepreneurship=1]	- 3.216	1.744	3.399	1	.065	.040	.001	1.225
	[Prefer entrepreneurship=2]	1.021	1.018	1.007	1	.316	2.777	.378	20.401
	[Prefer entrepreneurship=3]	- .017	.829	.000	1	.984	.983	.194	4.995
	[Prefer entrepreneurship=4]	- .832	.995	.699	1	.403	.435	.062	3.060
	[Prefer entrepreneurship=5]	0 ^b	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
	[Desire to start own business=1]	3.053	1.968	2.408	1	.121	21.189	.448	1002.746
	[Desire to start own business=2]	- 1.114	1.365	.666	1	.414	.328	.023	4.768
	[Desire to start own business=3]	- 1.170	1.042	1.259	1	.262	.311	.040	2.394
	[Desire to start own business=4]	- 3.276	.988	10.982	1	.001	.038	.005	.262
	[Desire to start own business=5]	0 ^b	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
	[Desire to start business after completing training=1]	.060	1.037	.003	1	.953	1.062	.139	8.103
	[Desire to start business after completing training=2]	- 1.069	1.749	.373	1	.541	.344	.011	10.595
	[Desire to start business after completing training=3]	.706	.818	.746	1	.388	2.026	.408	10.057
	[Desire to start business after completing training=4]	2.676	.839	10.165	1	.001	14.531	2.804	75.298
	[Desire to start business after completing training=5]	0 ^b	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
	[Desire to start business 5 years after graduation =1]	- .003	.957	.000	1	.998	.997	.153	6.509
	[Desire to start business 5 years after graduation =2]	.775	.963	.648	1	.421	2.171	.329	14.335
	[Desire to start business 5 years after graduation =3]	1.072	.879	1.488	1	.223	2.920	.522	16.337

[Desire to start business 5 years after graduation =4]	-.612	.951	.414	1	.520	.542	.084	3.496
[Desire to start business 5 years after graduation =5]	0 ^b	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
[Desire to start business 10 years after graduation=1]	.230	.868	.070	1	.791	1.259	.230	6.904
[Desire to start business 10 years after graduation=2]	.870	.997	.760	1	.383	2.386	.338	16.850
[Desire to start business 10 years after graduation=3]	-.635	1.390	.208	1	.648	.530	.035	8.088
[Desire to start business 10 years after graduation=4]	-.092	.969	.009	1	.924	.912	.137	6.090
[Desire to start business 10 years after graduation=5]	0 ^b	.	.	0	.	.	.	.

a. The reference category is: wage

b. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant

Prior Preference for Entrepreneurship

The effect of preferring entrepreneurship prior to training ($\chi^2=10.774$, $df=8$, $p=0.215$) is not statistically significant. This indicates that, while respondents' expressed preference for entrepreneurship may influence their career decisions, it does not contribute meaningful predictive power to the model beyond what other variables already explain.

A lack of statistical significance suggests that factors associated with preferring entrepreneurship, such as perceived benefits, societal norms, or personal motivations, might already be captured by other explanatory variables in the model. Alternatively, it could imply that the relationship between a stated preference for entrepreneurship and actual career choices is not straightforward. For example, external constraints such as access to capital, perceived risk, or market conditions may override personal preferences when determining career paths.

Although the preference for entrepreneurship might align with self - employment intentions, its inability to predict outcomes significantly highlights the complex interplay of motivations and practicalities in career decision - making. This underlines the importance of addressing external barriers to entrepreneurship in addition to fostering entrepreneurial attitudes during technical and vocational education.

Desire to start a business

The desire to start a business immediately after completing technical and vocational training is a statistically significant factor influencing career preferences ($\chi^2=17.043$, $df=8$, $p=0.030$). This finding underscores the pivotal role of post - training entrepreneurial intentions in shaping the career trajectories of TEVET graduates. The results suggest that individuals with a strong aspiration to embark on self - employment soon after completing their training are more likely to follow through with entrepreneurial activities.

The significant Chi - square statistic points to the critical timing of entrepreneurial ambitions, emphasizing the importance of the post - training period as a window of opportunity for translating intentions into action. Graduates who exhibit a desire to start a business during this phase may be capitalizing on the skills, networks, and confidence gained through their training programs. This momentum can significantly enhance their readiness to engage in self - employment, compared to those who delay such intentions or lack them altogether.

Additionally, the findings highlight the potential influence of tailored interventions during the transition from training to employment. Programs that nurture entrepreneurial mindsets,

provide business incubation support, or offer mentorship during this critical period could further amplify the likelihood of successful business ventures. On the other hand, the absence of a desire to start a business may indicate a preference for wage employment or a need for more support to foster entrepreneurial readiness.

This evidence highlights the importance of aligning training programs with the aspirations of students and supporting immediate post - training intentions to enhance self - employment outcomes in the TEVET sector.

The intercept for the self - employment category ($B=1.507$, $p=0.000$) is statistically significant, indicating a higher baseline likelihood of selecting self - employment over wage employment. This result suggests that, even when all other variables are held constant, the default tendency among the respondents is to favor self - employment. The significance of this intercept highlights that, in the absence of strong external influences, self - employment emerges as the more preferred career choice.

This finding could reflect intrinsic motivations such as a desire for independence, the flexibility associated with self - employment, or cultural and societal attitudes that valorize entrepreneurial endeavors. It may also signal that the TEVET training programs inherently encourage entrepreneurial mindsets and skills, priming students to view self - employment as a viable and attractive career path.

However, the preference for self - employment is not absolute and may be modulated by specific variables that favor wage employment. For instance, factors like the availability of stable job opportunities, financial security, or limited resources for starting a business could sway individuals towards choosing wage employment despite the baseline preference for self - employment.

This significant intercept underscores the importance of understanding the underlying factors that reinforce or counteract this baseline tendency, enabling policymakers and educators to design interventions that either support entrepreneurial ambitions or address barriers to self - employment for TEVET graduates.

Desire to Start a Business After Completing Training

The desire to start a business immediately after completing training is a statistically significant predictor of career preferences ($\chi^2=17.043$, $df=8$, $p=0.030$). This result underscores the pivotal role that immediate entrepreneurial intentions play in influencing whether individuals opt for self - employment or wage employment.

The significant chi - square statistic highlights the importance of timing in entrepreneurial decision - making. Respondents with strong intentions to launch a business immediately after training are likely to have high confidence in their skills, a clear vision for their business, or access to resources necessary for self - employment. This immediacy could also reflect a desire to capitalize on newly acquired knowledge and training while it remains fresh and relevant.

Conversely, individuals without such immediate intentions might view self - employment as a long - term goal, prioritizing wage employment to gain experience, financial stability, or additional training. This finding suggests that fostering immediate entrepreneurial intentions through targeted support—such as mentorship, startup grants, or incubation programs—could encourage more graduates to transition directly into self - employment.

The results also indicate that career preferences are influenced not just by training quality but also by the alignment of timing and motivation. Programs that emphasize practical entrepreneurship during training, paired with strategies to support immediate business creation, could amplify the impact of training on career trajectories. These findings stress the value of timely and tailored interventions in enhancing entrepreneurial outcomes.

Desire to Start a Business 5 Years After Graduation

The desire to delay starting a business until five years after graduation is not a statistically significant predictor of career preferences ($\chi^2=8.159$, $df=8$, $p=0.418$). This finding suggests that medium - term entrepreneurial intentions have a limited impact on determining whether respondents choose self - employment or wage employment as their immediate career path.

One possible explanation is that a long - term horizon for entrepreneurship may reflect aspirations that are less immediate and, therefore, less influential in shaping current career choices. Respondents with such intentions might prioritize gaining work experience, building financial stability, or acquiring additional skills in the short term, factors that could steer them toward wage employment initially.

Additionally, this result may imply that external factors, such as access to startup capital or the maturity of the market environment, overshadow medium - term intentions when respondents are making immediate career decisions. Those who intend to delay entrepreneurship might also perceive self - employment as a future goal requiring a gradual buildup of resources, networks, or confidence, rather than a direct transition post - graduation.

This finding highlights the complexity of linking stated long - term goals with immediate career preferences. It emphasizes the need for support mechanisms, such as phased entrepreneurial training and transitional resources, to help bridge the gap between medium - term aspirations and current decision - making.

Desire to Start a Business 10 Years After Graduation

The intention to start a business 10 years after graduation is a statistically significant factor in shaping career preferences ($\chi^2=20.621$, $df=8$, $p=0.008$). This finding suggests that long - term entrepreneurial aspirations play a critical role in influencing whether individuals choose self - employment or wage employment as their immediate post - graduation path.

The significance of this variable highlights a strategic approach among respondents who prioritize accumulating experience, resources, or networks before embarking on entrepreneurship. These individuals might view wage employment as a stepping stone to enhance their professional skills, establish financial stability, or build industry connections that can later support their entrepreneurial ventures. This measured approach reflects a calculated risk - taking behavior often associated with long - term career planning.

Furthermore, the finding underscores the value of fostering environments where students can develop both immediate and long - term entrepreneurial ambitions. Institutions and policymakers might consider creating pathways for individuals with deferred entrepreneurial goals, such as alumni support networks, advanced training programs, or access to venture capital later in their careers.

The results also suggest that while immediate entrepreneurial intentions are important, cultivating a vision for future entrepreneurship among students can be equally impactful. This could involve integrating long - term planning into entrepreneurship curricula, encouraging mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs, and promoting the idea that entrepreneurship is a viable career option at any stage of life.

Employment Preferences

Respondents who express disagreement (categories 2, 3, and 4 on the Likert scale) with the desire to start their own business are significantly less likely to prefer self - employment compared to those who "Strongly Agree" (category 5). For instance, individuals who "Somewhat Agree" (category 4) have 82% lower odds ($\text{Exp}(B) = 0.18$) of preferring self - employment compared to wage employment. Additionally, those who "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree" (categories 1 and 2) with starting their own business show minimal odds of choosing self - employment. Conversely, respondents who "Strongly Agree" (category 1) with the desire to start a business 10 years after graduation are 3.55 times more likely to prefer self - employment compared to wage employment.

Respondents who "Somewhat Agree" (category 4) with the desire to start their own business are 96.2% less likely to prefer a mixed career involving both wage and self - employment compared to those who "Strongly Agree" (category 5). On the other hand, individuals who "Strongly Agree" (category 4) with the desire to start a business after completing training are 14.5 times more likely to prefer a mixed employment path compared to those who "Strongly Disagree" (category 5).

Overall, respondents with lower scores on the Likert scale for entrepreneurial aspirations (e. g., 1 = "Strongly Disagree") consistently demonstrate lower odds of preferring self - employment or a mixed career compared to wage employment. In contrast, strong agreement (categories 4 and 5) on factors such as the timing of starting a business or aspirations to start a business significantly increases the likelihood of choosing non - wage employment paths.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the nuanced relationships between entrepreneurial preferences, timing of intentions, and career trajectories among technical and vocational education and training (TEVET) graduates. The findings reveal several key insights.

First, while a pre - training preference for entrepreneurship reflects personal motivations or societal influences, it does not significantly predict career outcomes. This suggests that external constraints or overlapping factors in the model, such as access to resources or market conditions, may overshadow these preferences.

Second, a strong desire to start a business immediately after completing training is a significant predictor of career preferences. This underscores the importance of post - training entrepreneurial momentum, where tailored interventions like mentorship and incubation programs can foster successful transitions to self - employment.

Third, aspirations to start a business five years after graduation do not significantly influence career preferences. However, intentions to start a business ten years post-graduation are significant. This finding suggests that long-term career planning involves a strategic approach to building resources and networks before transitioning into entrepreneurship.

Additionally, strong agreement with entrepreneurial aspirations—whether immediate or long - term- significantly increases the likelihood of choosing self- employment or mixed career paths over wage employment. Conversely, weaker entrepreneurial aspirations correspond with a preference for wage employment.

Finally, the statistically significant intercept for self-employment indicates that, even in the absence of other influences, TEVET graduates demonstrate a baseline preference for self - employment. This may reflect intrinsic motivations, or the entrepreneurial orientation embedded in TEVET programs.

6. Implications

The study underscores the complexity of career decision-making among TEVET graduates, highlighting the interplay between intrinsic motivations, external constraints, and the timing of entrepreneurial intentions. Policymakers and educators should enhance immediate post - training support to capitalize on graduates' entrepreneurial momentum. They should also address external barriers like access to capital, market risks, and resource constraints to empower aspiring entrepreneurs.

Fostering both immediate and long - term entrepreneurial ambitions through phased interventions, alumni networks, and advanced training is also essential. Moreover, aligning TEVET programs with students' aspirations and emphasizing both entrepreneurship and employability can support diverse career paths.

Overall, these findings emphasize the need for a holistic approach to entrepreneurship education and support, considering the diverse motivations and challenges faced by TEVET graduates in navigating their career trajectories. Future research should explore longitudinal outcomes and assess the scalability of entrepreneurship programs across diverse regions in Malawi.

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