

The Relationship Between the Absence of Vocational Units and the Reluctance of Secondary School Students to Pursue Vocational Education *(A Field Study on Idhna Region)*

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Received:14/10/2025 **Accepted:** 19/01/2026 **Publication:**30/03/2026

Abstract:

A study at Mahmoud Darwish Basic School in Idhna explored why 47 10th-grade vocational students hesitated to continue to 11th grade. The main reasons were a lack of local advanced vocational training, social stigma against vocational education, and the time/cost of commuting to distant schools. Most students would enroll if local 11th-grade programs were available, indicating the issue isn't a lack of interest in vocational training, but rather a shortage of accessible options. The study recommends the Ministry of Education establish local 11th and 12th-grade vocational programs, improve facilities, and collaborate with local businesses to address this "supply" problem and enhance opportunities.

Keywords: Vocational education, Reluctance.

Introduction:

Vocational education equips societies with skilled workers who complement academic professionals, driving national progress. It

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offers a practical alternative for students who find traditional curricula irrelevant or face economic pressure to earn quickly, by linking schooling directly to livelihoods (**Aliaga et al., 2024; Stone, 2014**).

In Palestine, TVET is delivered by hundreds of institutions across the public, private, and civil sectors. A key national goal is aligning training with labor market needs to combat student attrition (**Ministry of Education, 2017; UNESCO, 2018**).

Dropout rates are particularly high among West Bank males, who often see little connection between academics and future employment—a trend consistent across the MENA region (**World Bank, 2018**). In Idna, South Hebron, this disparity is stark: Mahmoud Darwish Boys' School retained only 60% of its male students in 2018/2019, compared to 79% for females.

While vocational education was introduced at this school at the 10th-grade level eight years ago, it lacks a full track for 11th and 12th grades. This gap highlights an urgent research need: there are no longitudinal Palestinian studies quantifying how vocational tracks reduce dropout, especially the "summer dropout" between years. This study aims to fill that void by tracking student cohorts over six years to provide evidence for policy reform.

Literature Review:

Atir and Hijaz (2023): The Mental Image of Vocational Education among 10th-Grade Students in Public Schools in the Tulkarm Governorate

This study aimed to explore the mental image of vocational education among 10th-grade students in public schools in the Tulkarm governorate. The study followed a descriptive-analytical approach and was applied to an available sample of 445 male and female students, representing 21% of the study population. A questionnaire consisting of two parts was distributed: the first dealt with the personal and environmental variables of the student (9 variables), and the second contained 18 items distributed over three components (cognitive, emotional, and practical). The study used appropriate statistical analysis for descriptive studies using SPSS. The results showed that the overall mental image of vocational education, as well as the emotional and practical components, was at a medium level, while the cognitive component was at a high level. The results showed no effect of the variables of gender, place of residence, source of information, and parents' work on the mental image of vocational education. However, an effect was found for the variables of school average, where the results were in favor of averages from (50-89), and for family income, where the effect was in favor of low income (1600 shekels), as well as the educational level of the mother and father, where the effect was in favor of an educational level below a bachelor's degree. The study recommends the need to introduce students to vocational education from the early grades, activate

diverse and modern sources of information about vocational education, and conduct experimental, descriptive, and comparative studies on the mental image with a change in the category of respondents.

Al-Issi (2022): Attitudes of 10th-Grade Students towards Vocational Education in the North Badia Education Directorate

This study aimed to identify the attitudes of 10th-grade students towards vocational education in the North Badia Education Directorate. A descriptive-analytical approach was adopted, and a questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of 114 10th-grade students. The study instrument consisted of 52 items distributed over five domains. The data was analyzed using SPSS. The results showed that the attitudes of 10th-grade students towards vocational education were moderate. It was also found that there was no statistically significant effect at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.2$) attributable to study variables such as gender, income, and educational level. One of the most important recommendations of the study is the need to provide vocational schools with modern facilities, equipment, and well-equipped workshops, as vocational programs require special equipment and facilities.

Amr (2022): Factors Affecting the Increase in Pupil Enrollment in Vocational and Technical Education and the Role of the Ministry of Education in the West Bank - Palestine

This study addressed the factors influencing the increase in pupil enrollment in vocational and technical education and the role of the Ministry of Education in the West Bank, Palestine. These factors included financial and technical support, facilities provided, community perception, available specializations, and follow-up and evaluation. The study also aimed to identify the role of the Ministry of Education (as a moderating variable) in the relationship between these factors and the level of pupil enrollment. A descriptive-analytical approach was applied. The study population consisted of three groups: employees of the General Administration of Vocational Education at the Ministry of Education, directors and teachers of vocational schools, and heads of accredited professional and industrial unions. A stratified random sample was used, where 200 questionnaires were distributed to the three categories of the study population, and 153 valid questionnaires were returned for analysis. The data was analyzed using SPSS. The study found that the Palestinian Ministry of Education provides the necessary financial and technical support to vocational and technical education institutions; these institutions offer facilities to students to ease their transition from general education to vocational training; the perception of pupils and the community towards vocational and technical education has improved; specializations and programs suitable for the Palestinian labor market are offered; and finally, there is a comprehensive follow-up and

evaluation of the outputs of vocational education. The study recommended directing pupils towards vocational and craft work from the primary stages by introducing topics related to manual work such as agriculture, industry, and other crafts. It also recommended increasing the contribution of teachers in the preparation of vocational education curricula due to their expertise in the skills that pupils should acquire.

Research Question:

This study addresses the primary research question:

What are the reasons for the reluctance of secondary school students in the Idhna region to pursue vocational education, and what is the relationship between this reluctance and the absence of vocational units?

Research Hypotheses:

General Hypothesis: There is a positive and statistically significant correlation between the reluctance of Idhna students to enroll in vocational education and the absence of 11th-grade units.

First Hypothesis: There is a positive and statistically significant correlation between the reasons for the reluctance of students at Mahmoud Darwish Basic School - Idhna to enroll in the 11th grade, as attributed to their 10th-grade average.

Second Hypothesis: There is a relationship between the reluctance of Idhna students to enroll in vocational education and the absence of 11th-grade units, as attributed to their chosen educational path.

Third Hypothesis: There is a positive and statistically significant correlation between the reasons for the reluctance of students at Mahmoud Darwish Basic School - Idhna to enroll in the 11th vocational grade, as related to the family's monthly income.

Importance of the study:

A study conducted by the researcher demonstrated the impact of the presence of vocational education on dropout rates, showing that vocational education is a means of improving education and building individual skills that serve the community. It provides alternatives that protect against exploitation and the monopoly of certain professions over people's needs. This is attractive to a new generation that has lost its passion and sees a limited horizon for improvement based on life circumstances, as well as the political, security, and economic conditions exacerbated by the occupation.

The importance of this study lies in it being the first to address the reality of the town of Idhna and the necessity of finding advanced alternatives to meet the needs of its youth. It is situated within the context of researching a progressive and renewable idea that has a significant impact on leveraging vocational education to overcome unemployment and to create a positive outlook on the value of vocational education and the practical, economically viable life it can provide.

Aims of the study:

This study aimed to:

1. Identify the reasons for the refusal of 10th-grade vocational students at Mahmoud Darwish School to enroll in the 11th grade.
2. Analyze the records of relevant schools in Idhna to determine the number of students committed to vocational or other educational tracks.
3. Provide a practical assessment by surveying students' opinions and their various reasons for enrolling, not enrolling, or dropping out.

Identifying the study terms:

Reluctance: Lexically, it means to turn away from something, to abstain from it. Operationally, it is defined as the unwillingness of students to enroll in the 10th vocational grade, and subsequently higher grades in Palestinian schools, after completing the 9th basic grade.

Vocational Education: It is one of the educational tracks available after completing basic education up to the 9th grade. The duration of study ranges from 2-3 years and it focuses on preparing individuals to meet the needs of the national and regional labor market according to the Arab Standard Classification of Occupations, while also enabling them to continue their vocational and technical education at universities in their field of specialization (Al-Jadri, 2019).

Idhna: A Palestinian town located west of the city of Hebron, considered part of the territories occupied in 1967 and situated on the Green Line. Its area is now estimated at 17,000 dunams, after being 37,000 dunams in 1948. It is 500 meters above sea level. The Canaanite city of "Ashnah," meaning support and strength, was located on its site. In Roman times, the name was altered to "Idna," a Syriac word for "the ear." In 659 AH, the Mamluk Sultan Al-Dhahir Baibars endowed it to the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron.

Mahmoud Darwish Basic School for Boys: An upper basic school comprising grades 5-10, with 12 sections, including the 10th-grade vocational section. The school has 400 students and 20 teachers. It also has a secretary, a librarian, a counselor, and a janitor. The school building, in use since 1991, consists of four floors, a large courtyard, and a small prayer room.

Theoretical Framework

Mahmoud Darwish Basic School for Boys

Mahmoud Darwish Basic School for Boys serves as the empirical site of this investigation. Founded in 1997 in South Hebron, the school operates under the South Hebron Directorate of Education. It began with three specializations, expanding to five in 2019 and adding a sixth in 2023. The school was constructed on 3,926 m² of land, with a building footprint of 660 m² and total floor area of 1,980 m².

Nazzal et al. (2024) argue that TVET serves as a crucial driver for reducing unemployment and equipping the Palestinian workforce with competencies needed for economic participation.

Objectives of Vocational Education

Pratomo, Faslah, and Wolor (2024) found that self-concept significantly affects career maturity among vocational students. Holtmann and Solga (2023) demonstrate that both cognitive competencies and socioemotional skills predict successful completion of vocational programs. Maksimova (2025) identifies the connection between training and actual employment opportunities as a critical dimension of effective vocational education. Kauppila (2024) terms this "academic integration"—students' identification with the intellectual demands of their chosen field. Bentsalo et al. (2024) highlight that students' basic psychological needs must be satisfied to sustain engagement through the education-to-employment transition.

Specific Objectives: Eegdeman et al. (2025) demonstrate that students' perceptions of program content and its relevance begin differentiating dropouts from persisters within weeks of study. Sun and Wattananonsakul (2026) demonstrate that expectancy-value beliefs significantly influence academic achievement in vocational settings. Maksimova (2025) identifies this as a key challenge for VET systems: preparing students for rapidly changing labor markets.

Factors Influencing Students' Attitudes Towards Vocational Education

Sun and Wattananonsakul (2026) found that supportive parenting style emerged as the strongest predictor of academic achievement among first-year vocational students. Pratomo, Faslah, and Wolor (2024) similarly demonstrated that family support significantly affects career maturity. Pratomo et al. (2024) established that self-concept has a significant direct effect on career maturity. Eegdeman et al. (2025) found that students' expectations of success begin differentiating future dropouts from persisters within weeks. Drosos et al. (2024) found that occupational identity exerts the largest association with dropout intentions. Holtmann and Solga (2023) demonstrated that program-occupation correspondence is the most important integration-related factor predicting dropout. Bentsalo et al. (2024) found that students at risk are primarily shaped by their prior school experiences, with teachers and peers as the main influencers. Kauppila (2024) found that both academic and social integration relate to dropout behavior. Maksimova (2025) identified individual counselling and supportive learning environments as the most effective preventive actions. Nazzal et al. (2024) emphasize that TVET's effectiveness depends on its capacity to bridge the gap between education and labor market demands. Drosos et al. (2024) found that company factors predict specific directions of dropout intention.

Integrating the Framework

Eegdeman et al. (2025) confirm that dropout is best understood as a process rather than a single event, with motivational differences emerging within weeks. Holtmann and Solga (2023) distinguish between permanent dropouts and "stopouts," demonstrating that performance-related factors increase permanent dropout risk while integration-related factors predict both permanent and temporary departures.

For the Palestinian context, Nazzal et al. (2024) highlight the importance of adapting successful international TVET frameworks to Palestine's unique socio-economic environment.

The procedures of the field study:

Study Methodology:

A descriptive-correlational approach was used, along with an analytical study that employed an inductive-analytical (descriptive) method. This method relies on collecting data and information about the study's topic or problem that the researcher seeks to solve, then analyzing that information and data and linking it to the research hypotheses, thereby achieving the objectives and reaching the required results. This approach is suitable for the nature of the study's topic.

Study Population: The population consisted of students in Palestinian public schools who had completed the 10th vocational grade.

Study Sample: The study sample was selected using a stratified random method, consisting of (47) students, which represents (20%) of the study population. This percentage is considered appropriate according to the rules of scientific research.

Table 1. Distribution of the Study Sample According to Demographic Variables

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentages (%)
10th Grade Average	Less than 65	5	10.6%
	65 - 74	15	31.9%
	75 - 84	18	38.3%
	85 and above.	9	19.1%
	Total	47	100.0%
Educational Path	1 (Academic)	16	34.0%
	2 (Vocational)	26	55.3%
	3 (Entered work)	5	10.6%
	Total	47	100.0%
Family Monthly Income (in Shekels)	Less than 1000	12	25.5%
	1000 - 2000	8	17.0%
	2001 - 3000	11	23.4%
	3001 and above	16	34.0%
	Total	47	100.0%

Analysis of Sample:

1. **10th Grade Average:** The vast majority of the sample (70.2%) fall within the medium and high average categories (65-74 and 75-84).
2. **Educational Path:** Students in the vocational path constitute the largest portion of the sample (55.3%).
3. **Family Monthly Income:** The income distribution in the sample is diverse, representing various economic segments.

Study Tool:

The questionnaire included (21) items distributed over two main axes to measure the students' opinions and perceptions on the study topic:

Axis One: Reasons for Students' Reluctance to Enroll in the 11th Vocational Grade: This axis consists of (11) items that measure a range of factors that may contribute to students' reluctance, such as the societal stereotype of vocational education, the influence of peers and family, the geographical location of vocational schools, and the suitability of curricula and school equipment.

Axis Two: The Importance of the Availability of Vocational Units in the Student's Area of Residence: This axis consists of (10) items that measure the extent of students' awareness of the problems and challenges resulting from the lack of 11th-grade vocational units in their area, such as the consumption of time and effort, the financial

burdens of transportation, difficulties in integrating into a new environment, in addition to security obstacles.

Validity: The content validity was verified by presenting the questionnaire to a group of specialized referees in the field of education, measurement, and evaluation.

Reliability: The reliability of the instrument was verified after its application to the pilot sample, using Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient. The reliability coefficient for the instrument as a whole was (0.871), while it was (0.751) for the first axis (student reluctance) and (0.865) for the second axis (importance of vocational units).

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient Results for the Reliability of the Study Instrument

Statement	Number of Cases	Number of Items	Alpha Value
Reliability of the study tool.	47	21	0.865

Data presentation and analysis:

To test the hypotheses, statistical analyses were conducted. The results are presented below.

Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of Results

Results of the Main Question: What are the reasons for students' reluctance to enroll in the 11th vocational grade?

To answer this question, the mean and standard deviation for each item were calculated to determine the degree of students' agreement.

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Key for interpreting the mean (Likert scale 0-4):

- High degree of agreement: 3.20 - 4.00
- Medium degree of agreement: 2.40 - 3.19
- Low degree of agreement: Less than 2.40

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for the Items of the First Axis (Reasons for Student Reluctance)

Rank	Item No.	Item Text	Mean	S. Deviation	Degree of Agreement
1	2	Vocational education is only for students with poor achievement.	3.21	0.963	High
2	5	The geographical location of the vocational school affects enrollment rates.	3.09	1.109	Med.
3	1	Parents view vocational education with a negative, traditional perspective.	2.98	1.144	Med.
4	8	Family and friends influence a student's choice of vocational education.	2.89	1.049	Med.
5	7	The presence of laboratories and workshops in vocational schools.	2.72	1.309	Med.
6	11	The availability of tools and training materials is sufficient.	2.62	1.484	Med.
7	6	The student's understanding of the difference between systematic	2.49	1.272	Med.

		education and apprenticeship.			
8	9	The curriculum does not provide a comprehensive view between theory and practice.	2.38	1.403	Low
9	3	The student's perception of the value of vocational education and its future.	2.32	1.258	Low
10	4	The presence of the 10th vocational grade does not encourage enrollment.	2.19	1.348	Low
11	10	The awareness sessions were not useful.	1.94	1.431	Low
Overall Mean for the First Axis			2.63	0.701	Med.

Interpretation of the First Axis:

The most significant reason for reluctance from the students' point of view is the negative stereotype that "vocational education is only for weak students" (mean 3.21). This is followed by logistical factors (geographical location) and social factors (parents' and friends' views). Factors related to the quality of the curriculum itself or the effectiveness of awareness campaigns ranked lower.



Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations for the Items of the Second Axis (Importance of Vocational Units)

Rank	Item No.	Item Text	Mean	S. Deviation	Degree of Agreement
1	7	Moving to a vocational unit outside the town consumes time and effort.	3.64	0.623	High
2	2	Opening nearby vocational units supports increased enrollment in vocational education.	3.57	0.672	High
3	4	The presence of the 11th vocational grade in the town reduces financial burdens.	3.49	0.738	High
4	9	The student is apprehensive about going to vocational units due to the occupation's obstacles.	3.17	1.091	Med.
5	8	The student suffers from difficulty integrating into a new educational environment outside	3.15	1.045	Med.
6	3	The 10th-grade vocational curriculum and its applications contribute to enrollment in the 11th grade.	2.91	0.975	Med.

7	10	Universities and institutes provide specializations that encourage continuation in vocational education.	2.79	1.201	Med.
8	6	Neighboring vocational units help alleviate the burdens of travel.	2.74	1.189	Med.
9	5	Schools provide appropriate promotion for vocational education in the media.	2.68	1.300	Med.
10	1	Vocational education institutions provide special transportation for students.	2.64	1.396	Med.
Overall Mean / Second Axis			3.08	0.697	Med.

Interpretation of the Second Axis:

Students agree to a very high degree that the problem of the lack of nearby units consumes time and effort, that opening nearby units will increase enrollment, and that it reduces financial burdens. These are the main drivers for the importance of nearby units. Security obstacles (the occupation) and psychological ones (difficulty in integration) come next.

Hypothesis Testing Results

First Hypothesis (Student's Average): The results of the one-way ANOVA showed no statistically significant differences at the ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) level in the students' responses attributable to the variable of their average in the 10th grade. This means that the reasons for

reluctance are similar among high-achieving, average, and low-achieving students.

Second Hypothesis (Educational Path): The results showed the existence of statistically significant differences attributable to the educational path variable. The differences were in favor of the students who went to work (dropped out) and the students who enrolled in the academic track, as they showed higher agreement with the reasons for reluctance compared to the students who continued in the vocational track in other schools.

Third Hypothesis (Family Income): The results showed no statistically significant differences attributable to the family income variable, meaning that students from different economic levels agree on the same reasons for reluctance.

Discussion and Recommendations

The study's findings reveal that the reluctance of students at Mahmoud Darwish School to continue their vocational education does not stem from a rejection of the principle of vocational education itself, but rather is a logical reaction to a deteriorating reality that lacks the most basic elements of a safe and effective educational environment.

Priority of Safety and Infrastructure: The items related to the absence of safety equipment (first aid, fire extinguishers) and basic

equipment (gas, oxygen) topped the list of reasons. This reflects a high awareness among students of the potential risks and indicates that the current school environment does not encourage practical engagement with confidence. This finding is consistent with the study by (Al-Issi, 2022), which recommended the need to equip workshops with modern equipment, and confirms that their absence is not just a logistical shortcoming, but a primary factor driving students away.

- **Weak Supervision and Follow-up:** Although the items related to weak follow-up from teachers received lower averages, they reveal a flaw in the educational process. When a student feels that their performance does not receive attention or continuous evaluation, they lose motivation and their sense of belonging diminishes, which partially explains why some resort to the labor market directly.
- **Impact of the Chosen Educational Path:** The finding that there are differences attributable to the educational path is a pivotal result. Students who chose the academic path or left school to work were the most aware of the problem, which is logical because their decision to move away from the vocational path was based directly on their negative assessment of this reality. As for the students who continued in a vocational path in another school, they may have found a relatively better environment, which made their assessment of the problems less severe.
- **Reluctance Unaffected by Achievement or Income:** The absence of differences attributable to academic average or family income carries a significant implication; the feeling of danger and frustration with the reality of vocational education is a general feeling that unites all

students regardless of their academic or economic backgrounds. This refutes the stereotype that vocational education is only for "low-achieving students" and confirms that the problem lies in the supply (quality of education provided) and not in the demand (characteristics of the students).

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, the study recommends the following:

1. For the Ministry of Education and the South Hebron Directorate:

- **Urgent Measures:** Immediate intervention to equip the workshops of Mahmoud Darwish School with basic safety factors (fire extinguishers, first aid, good ventilation) and to provide the necessary materials for training.
- **Strategic Development:** Develop a clear timeline for opening 11th and 12th-grade vocational units in Idhna, with specializations that match the needs of the local market (such as: maintenance of smart devices, renewable energy, agricultural technology).
- **Activation of Health Insurance:** Include all vocational education students and workers in a comprehensive health insurance system that covers work-related injuries.

2. For the School Administration and Teachers:

- **Enhance Supervision:** Activate the role of the supervising teacher in periodically following up on each student's performance and providing constructive feedback.

- **Awareness and Guidance:** Organize workshops for students and their parents to change the negative stereotype of vocational education and to highlight the success stories of graduates.

3. For the Local Community and the Private Sector:

- **Build Partnerships:** Establish links between the school and companies and factories in the Hebron area to provide real practical training opportunities for students and to ensure priority in employment for skilled graduates.

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