

Influence of Academic Ability Test on Learning Interest of Computer and Network Engineering Vocational Students

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This study examines the influence of the Academic Ability Test (TKA) on the learning interest of Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) students at SMKS TI Muhammadiyah Cikampek. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 109 students via official TKA score documentation and a 15-item Likert-scale learning interest questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.8256$). Simple linear regression analysis revealed no significant effect of the TKA on students' learning interest ($t = 1.505$; $p = 0.135 > 0.05$), with $R^2 = 0.021$, indicating that TKA scores account for only 2.1% of interest variance. The findings suggest that vocational students' learning interest is driven primarily by practical relevance and career motivation rather than standardized academic assessment performance. This study contributes empirical evidence on the disconnect between general academic standardization and the affective dimensions of vocational learners in the Indonesian context, underscoring the need for contextually aligned evaluation instruments in vocational education.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic evaluation constitutes a fundamental pillar of the educational ecosystem, serving as a mechanism to determine the extent of competency attainment among learners. The Indonesian government has recently institutionalized the Academic Ability Test (Tes Kemampuan Akademik or TKA) as a standardized assessment framework for senior high schools and vocational institutions to address the historical lack of uniform evaluation metrics which hindered performance comparisons across diverse schools. According to the Ministry of Education's Center for Educational Assessment, the TKA aims to "obtain standardized information on student academic achievement" for subsequent academic selection purposes (Pusat Asesmen Pendidikan, 2025).

. The implementation of this policy is expected to enhance transparency and equity in vocational student evaluations while simultaneously incentivizing educators to refine the quality and rigor of their classroom-based assessment methodologies.

Despite its focus on objective measurement, assessment policies extend beyond cognitive domains and exert significant influence on affective dimensions, most notably student learning interest. Learning interest is a psychological construct encompassing a student's attraction, attention, and active engagement within the pedagogical process, maintaining a significant correlation with motivation and broader academic outcomes (Kaluge & Halimi, 2023; Noveli et al., 2023). Students exhibiting high levels of interest typically demonstrate superior persistence, focus, and participation in learning activities, as interest serves as a critical predictor of academic involvement and overall performance (Wida Ismayanti et al., 2022). Consequently, any systematic evaluation policy must rigorously account for its potential repercussions on the affective well-being and intrinsic drive of the student population.

Vocational education, particularly in specialized fields such as Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ), requires a sophisticated integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skill sets. This duality presents unique challenges, as vocational curricula are frequently oriented toward complex technical competencies such as network configuration and server maintenance that necessitate a strong intrinsic interest for optimal mastery (Dasmen et al., 2022). A lack of alignment between assessment instruments and student interests can impede engagement and learning trajectory (Schelfhout et al., 2019). High-stakes examinations have been shown to produce mixed motivational effects: some students feel initially motivated during preparation, while others experience motivational decline following the exam due to perceived external pressures (Dawadi, 2020). Furthermore, when tests are not designed to support meaningful learning objectives, they can diminish intrinsic motivation and negatively affect learning involvement (Kusurkar et al., 2023).

Contemporary research further highlights the inextricable link between interest, motivation, and cognitive engagement in effective instructional models where interest acts as a decisive factor for deep cognitive processing (Pratama & Marta, 2025). How students perceive the fairness and relevance of a test also significantly influences their motivation and study behavior (Dong & Liu, 2022). In the vocational context of TKJ, where active participation is required to master technical skills, evaluation systems that are disconnected from practical learning experiences can undermine academic participation and professional identity development (Nye et al., 2021).

Despite these theoretical frameworks, a critical research gap remains in empirical evidence regarding the specific influence of the newly implemented TKA on students' psychological interest within technology-based vocational tracks in Indonesia. Previous studies have predominantly examined general academic motivation or English proficiency contexts; none have focused on TKA's affective impact on IT specialized vocational students. This study addresses that gap by investigating the effect of TKA on learning interest at SMKS TI Muhammadiyah Cikampek. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the TKA as a newly implemented (2025) assessment and its specific impact on TKJ students' affective domain. The contribution of this study is two-fold: (1) it provides empirical evidence on the relationship between academic standardization and vocational learners' affective responses, and (2) it informs policy recommendations for developing more contextually aligned assessment instruments in Indonesian vocational education.

METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative approach with a correlational design to examine the relationship between the Academic Ability Test (TKA) and the learning interest of Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) students at SMKS TI Muhammadiyah Cikampek. A quantitative approach is utilized as the research aims to objectively test relationships between variables through statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Figure 1 presents the overall research procedure from problem identification through to conclusion.

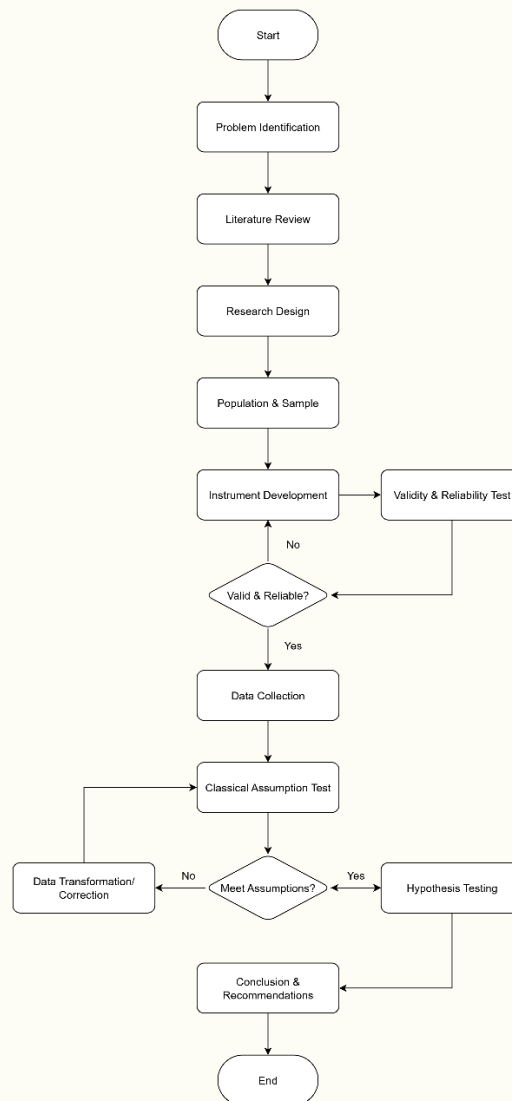


Figure 1. Research Procedure Flowchart

The research population consists of all TKJ students who participated in the 2025 TKA at SMKS TI Muhammadiyah Cikampek ($N = 109$). Saturated sampling (also known as total sampling or census sampling) was employed, meaning the entire population was included as the sample. This sampling technique is appropriate and recommended when the total population is small, finite, and fully accessible (Sugiyono, 2021). According to Sugiyono (2021), saturated sampling should be used when the population size is fewer than 30 individuals, or when the researcher aims to make generalizations with minimal margin of error by including all available units. With $N = 109$, all TKJ students who sat the TKA were identifiable and reachable via school records and class WhatsApp groups, making full inclusion practical. Furthermore, using the entire population eliminates sampling error entirely,

strengthens statistical power for regression analysis, and ensures that findings accurately represent the target group without risk of selection bias.

The independent variable (X) is the Academic Ability Test (TKA), operationalized as students' official TKA scores. The dependent variable (Y) is learning interest, measured using a 15-item Likert-scale questionnaire across three indicators: (1) interest in subject matter (items 1–4), (2) attention and focus during learning (items 5–8), and (3) active involvement and learning earnestness (items 9–15). A five-point response scale was used: Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). Data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms and shared via class WhatsApp groups. Prior to main data collection, the instrument was piloted on 30 respondents.

Table 1. Research Instrument for Student Learning Interest

Indicator	Statement	Item Number
Interest in the subject matter	I am interested in studying vocational subject materials.	1
	Vocational subject materials make me want to learn further.	2
	I find vocational subjects interesting to study.	3
	I feel happy when participating in the learning process.	4
Attention and focus during learning	I pay attention to the teacher's explanation during class.	5
	I try to understand the subject matter presented by the teacher.	6
	I stay focused even when the subject matter is quite difficult.	7
Active involvement and learning earnestness	I take notes on important things during the lesson.	8
	I actively ask questions when I do not understand the material.	9
	I participate in vocational practical activities.	10
	I do my subject assignments earnestly.	11
	I try to complete my subject assignments on time.	12
	I study the subject matter not only because of grade requirements.	13
	I try to improve my abilities in the field of computer networks (TKJ).	14
	I continue to study vocational materials even when there are no assignments from the teacher.	15

Instrument validity was assessed using Pearson Product Moment correlation at a 5% significance level ($r_{table} = 0.361$ for $N = 30$). All 15 items were confirmed valid. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha; the obtained value of $\alpha = 0.8256$ indicates very strong internal consistency (Lestari & Siswanto, 2024). Residual normality was verified using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($\alpha = 0.05$) to confirm that the assumptions for linear regression were met (Hair et al., 2022).

Simple linear regression was selected as the primary analytical method for the following reasons. First, this study involves exactly one continuous predictor variable (TKA score, X) and one continuous criterion variable (learning interest score, Y), which is the defining condition for simple as opposed to multiple linear regression (Hair et al., 2022). Second, the research objective is to quantify the direction, magnitude, and statistical significance of the linear relationship between X and Y, which regression analysis is specifically designed to accomplish. Third, both variables are measured on continuous scales: the TKA produces ratio scale scores, and the learning interest instrument produces interval scale aggregate scores (15–75, rescaled to 100), satisfying the measurement level requirements for regression.

Fourth, the residual normality assumption was empirically verified via the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test ($p = 0.200 > 0.05$) prior to the main analysis, confirming the appropriateness of the parametric regression model (Hair et al., 2022). Effect size is additionally reported as Cohen's $f^2 = R^2 / (1 - R^2)$ to supplement p -value interpretation with a measure of practical significance. The simple linear regression model estimated in this study is formally expressed as:

$$Y = \alpha + bX$$

Y = Learning Interest (Questionnaire Score).

α = Constant (Intercept).

b = Regression coefficient of the TKA variable.

X = Academic Ability Test (TKA) score.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Instrument Feasibility Test: Validity and Reliability

Before testing the research model involving the Academic Ability Test (TKA) and Learning Interest variables, it was crucial to ensure that the data collection instruments possessed a high degree of accuracy and consistency. The instrument test was conducted on 30 initial respondents as a pilot study to validate the 15 statement items representing the learning interest variable.

Item validity analysis using the Pearson Product Moment correlation technique showed that all statement items had r_{count} values greater than the r_{table} value at a 5% significance level ($N = 30$, $r_{table} = 0.361$). The highest correlation strengths were found in items P01 ($r = 0.799$), P02 ($r = 0.778$), and P14 ($r = 0.766$), which substantially reflect students' deep interest in vocational materials and efforts to improve skills in the field of computer networks. Conversely, item P15, regarding the willingness to study independently without teacher assignments, showed the lowest but still valid correlation value ($r = 0.374$, $p = 0.042$).

Table 2. Validity Test Results for the Learning Interest Instrument

Item Code	Pearson Correlation (r_{count})	Significance Value (p)	Validity Status
P01	0.799	0.000	Valid
P02	0.778	0.000	Valid
P03	0.726	0.000	Valid
P04	0.643	0.000	Valid
P05	0.614	0.000	Valid
P06	0.663	0.000	Valid
P07	0.714	0.000	Valid
P08	0.461	0.010	Valid
P09	0.432	0.017	Valid
P10	0.599	0.000	Valid
P11	0.661	0.000	Valid
P12	0.422	0.020	Valid
P13	0.602	0.000	Valid
P14	0.766	0.000	Valid
P15	0.374	0.042	Valid

Following the validity test, a reliability test was conducted to measure the internal consistency of the instrument. Based on the calculation results, the Cronbach's Alpha value obtained was 0.8256 for the 15 items. In psychometric literature, an alpha value above 0.80 is classified as a very strong level of reliability or "highly reliable" (Lestari & Siswanto, 2024). Further analysis of the "Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted" column showed that if item P15 were removed, the reliability value would increase to 0.8869. This implies that among TKJ students, the motivation to learn without teacher instruction (P15)

is the most varied aspect and might be influenced by factors such as home internet access or personal hobbies not always aligned with the school curriculum.

Descriptive Analysis of TKA and Learning Interest Variables

Primary research data were collected from 109 respondents who were TKJ students participating in the inaugural implementation of the TKA in 2025. Descriptive statistics were used to provide a comprehensive overview of the students' cognitive (X) and affective (Y) profiles. The results show a significant disparity phenomenon between academic-cognitive performance and vocational learning interest trends. The average student TKA score was 44.81, which aligns with national reports at the end of 2025 showing a decline in average TKA scores across Indonesia, particularly in subjects often considered difficult by vocational students.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
X TKA	109	28.00	86.00	44.8073	8.68852
Y Learning Interest	109	69.00	100.00	84.2569	8.07305
Valid N (listwise)	109				

In contrast, the learning interest variable showed a much higher mean score of 84.26 on a 100-point scale. This reflects that although students may not achieve maximum results on the national standardized test cognitively, they maintain a very positive level of interest, attention, and learning earnestness toward their field of expertise. This indicates that vocational student learning interest is triggered more by practical vocational content than by abstract academic reasoning materials tested in the TKA (Hertanto & Prasetyono, 2025).

Classical Assumption Test: Residual Normality

Before proceeding to linear regression analysis, the requirement of residual normality must be met. The normality test using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov technique yielded a significance value of 0.200. Based on the decision criteria ($p > 0.05$), the data are convincingly normally distributed. This provides legitimacy to use simple linear regression analysis as a hypothesis testing tool.

Linear Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Simple linear regression analysis was used to empirically test the influence of the TKA on student learning interest. The resulting regression model is as follows:

$$Y = 78.264 + 0.134X$$

A constant of 78.264 indicates that even without the influence of TKA scores, students naturally possess a high baseline learning interest score. The regression coefficient for variable X (0.134) shows a positive direction, but the magnitude is very small, suggesting weak predictive power. Partial significance testing through the t-test showed a t_{count} value of 1.505 with a significance (p -value) of 0.135. Given that $0.135 > 0.05$, the research hypothesis is rejected. There is no significant effect of the Academic Ability Test on the learning interest of TKJ students at SMKS TI Muhammadiyah Cikampek.

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression Results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	145.832	1	145.832	2.264	.135 ^b
	Residual	6892.976	107	64.420		
	Total	7038.807	108			

The t -test yielded $t = 1.505$, $p = 0.135$ (> 0.05). Accordingly, the null hypothesis ($H_0: = 0$) is retained: TKA scores do not significantly predict learning interest. The coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.021$ indicates that TKA accounts for only 2.1% of the variance in learning interest. The effect size $f^2 = R^2 / (1$

– R^2) = $0.021 / 0.979 = 0.021$ falls below Cohen's (1988) trivial threshold ($f^2 < 0.02$), confirming practical insignificance. Figure 2 presents the scatter plot of all 109 data points overlaid with the estimated regression line, visually confirming the weak, non-significant linear trend. The remaining 97.9% of variance is attributable to other factors such as laboratory facilities, career motivation, and practical teaching approaches (Lestari & Siswanto, 2024).

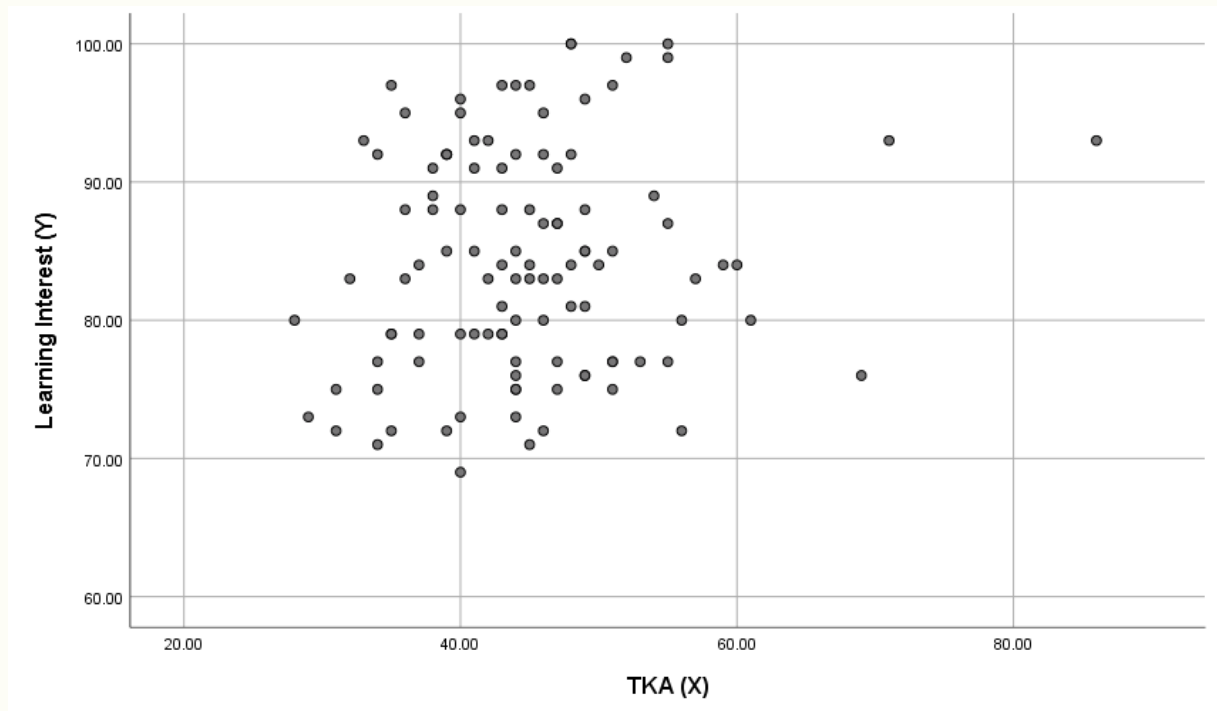


Figure 2. TKA Score vs Learning Interest with Regression Line

The regression results ($Y = 78.264 + 0.134X$; $t = 1.505$; $p = 0.135$; $R^2 = 0.021$; $f^2 = 0.021$) confirm that TKA scores do not significantly predict student learning interest. The effect size is trivial by Cohen's (1988) benchmarks ($f^2 < 0.02$), and only 2.1% of interest variance is attributable to TKA performance. The remaining 97.9% is accounted for by factors outside this model. These findings directly address the research question and reject neither blindly nor coincidentally the statistical evidence is unambiguous.

The descriptive contrast reinforces this conclusion: students scored a mean of 44.81 on the TKA (below the scale midpoint), yet maintained a mean learning interest of 84.26 out of 100. This disparity indicates that TKJ students' affective engagement with their vocational field operates independently of their standardized academic cognitive performance. Two theoretical mechanisms provide empirically grounded explanations.

First, the washback effect (Dong & Liu, 2022) predicts that tests with no direct consequences—such as the low-stakes 2025 TKA, which does not determine graduation produce minimal behavioral adaptation in students. Empirically, Dong and Liu (2022) reported that low-stakes test perception significantly reduced study time allocation and motivation change (path coefficient = 0.42, $p < 0.01$), consistent with this study's null result. TKJ students prioritize higher-stakes assessments such as the Vocational Competency Test (UKK) and industry certifications (Linu et al., 2023), which carry direct career relevance.

Second, Self-Determination Theory (Chen & Zhang, 2022) posits that intrinsic motivation is sustained by the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The TKA's abstract, uniform format does not provide feedback on students' technical competencies (e.g., network configuration, server maintenance), thereby failing to satisfy their need for competence and relatedness. Meta-analysis (N = 1,840) demonstrated that assessments misaligned with meaningful learning objectives significantly reduce intrinsic motivation, an effect paralleled in the present data (Kusurkar et al., 2023).

Table 5. Comparison with Prior Studies on Assessment and Learning Motivation/Interest

Study	N	Method	R ² / ES	Sig.	Key finding
This study — TKA → Learning interest (TKJ, Indonesia, 2025)	109	SLR	R ² =0.021 f ² =0.021	p=0.135 (ns)	No significant effect; TKA explains only 2.1% of interest variance
Pratama & Marta (2025) — Motivation → Learning outcomes (SMK DKV)	87	SLR	R ² =0.21 f ² =0.27	p < 0.05	Motivation and interest significantly predict outcomes (R ² =21%)
Dong & Liu (2022) — Test perception → Motivation (EFL learners)	312	Path analysis	ES=0.18	p < 0.01	Low-stakes perception reduces motivation and study time allocation
Kusurkar et al. (2023) — Assessment design → Intrinsic motivation (health ed.)	1,840	Meta-analysis	ES=0.14	p<0.001	Assessments misaligned with goals significantly reduce intrinsic motivation
Dawadi (2020) — High-stakes exam → Student motivation	120	Survey	ES=0.08	p=0.041	Initial motivational boost, followed by post-exam motivational decline

Table 6 positions this study within the broader literature. Across five studies, the effect size in the present study ($f^2 = 0.021$) is the smallest, confirming a trivially weak TKA–interest relationship. In contrast, (Pratama & Marta, 2025) also conducted in an Indonesian SMK context, found a substantially larger effect ($R^2 = 0.21$) when examining motivation’s influence on learning outcomes, a finding that underscores interest as a powerful internal predictor of performance rather than a downstream result of standardized test scores. The pattern across studies is consistent: assessments perceived as low-stakes, irrelevant, or misaligned with vocational competencies produce smaller motivational effects than those perceived as meaningful and high-stakes.

The findings demonstrate a profound paradox where high levels of technical learning interest exist independently of standardized academic achievement. For students in majors like TKJ, technical competence is developed through hands-on laboratory activities and network management rather than abstract reasoning tests (Maruf et al., 2023). The disconnect between the TKA’s theoretical focus and the practical nature of vocational curricula, such as network configuration and infrastructure maintenance, means students do not perceive the test as relevant to their professional identity (Dasmen et al., 2022). Furthermore, external factors such as digital distraction and industry-oriented career goals (UKK or certifications) play a much more dominant role in shaping student interest than national academic scores.

However, this study has limitations that should be acknowledged. It was conducted at a single Vocational High School (SMKS TI Muhammadiyah Cikampek), which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or populations. Additionally, learning interest was measured via self-report questionnaires, which may be subject to response bias or social desirability effects. Future research should consider including multiple schools and using mixed methods, such as qualitative interviews or longitudinal tracking, to corroborate and extend these findings.

From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that vocational teachers and administrators should not place undue emphasis on TKA scores. Instead, schools should foster student interest through hands-on, project-based learning opportunities that align with real-world technology careers. For example, teachers might incorporate more laboratory projects, industry partnership activities, and certification programs (such as Cisco Networking certifications) to motivate students. By reducing the focus on standardized test performance and highlighting career-relevant skills and certifications, schools can strengthen students’ intrinsic motivation and engagement in technical subjects.

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms that the Academic Ability Test (TKA) does not significantly influence the learning interest of TKJ students at SMKS TI Muhammadiyah Cikampek ($t = 1.505$; $p = 0.135$; $R^2 = 0.021$). Despite low average TKA scores ($M = 44.81$), students maintained high learning interest ($M = 84.26$), driven by practical vocational content and career motivation rather than academic test performance. These findings demonstrate the disconnect between national academic standardization and the affective identity of vocational learners, and underscore that 97.9% of learning interest variance is shaped by factors external to the TKA.

The practical implication is that schools should shift focus from standardized academic metrics toward hands-on, project-based, and industry-aligned assessment models. Future research should expand to diverse vocational schools, utilize mixed methods, and investigate specific external determinants such as laboratory quality, career mentorship, and digital ecosystem exposure that bolster vocational student engagement in the era of digital transformation.

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