

# Developing a Framework for Accounting Students' Career Path in Forensic Accounting

Mohamad Shahril Isahak<sup>1\*</sup>, Yusri Hazrol Yusoff<sup>2</sup>, Shukriah Saad<sup>3</sup>, Mohamad Ezrien Mohamad Kamal<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90300046>

Received: 06 February 2025; Accepted: 13 February 2025; Published: 28 March 2025

## ABSTRACT

Forensic accounting has gained increasing importance in Malaysia, particularly following high-profile financial scandals. Despite growing interest, there is a lack of clear guidance for accounting students regarding career opportunities and the skillset required for forensic accounting. This study aims to develop a framework to understand the career preferences of accounting students toward forensic accounting, focusing on the roles of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and the mediating effect of intention on students' career decisions. Data were collected from accounting students at UiTM through a survey questionnaire based on the Likert scale. The analysis identified four primary variables: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, intention, and career choice. The results show that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations significantly influence students' decisions to pursue forensic accounting, with the intention also serving as an effective mediator. UiTM is recommended to enhance its career development programs by increasing students' exposure to forensic accounting and highlighting the skills and opportunities in this field. The university should also strengthen the integration of career guidance initiatives to support students in making informed decisions about their future careers. Furthermore, professional accounting bodies should consider aligning their recruitment strategies with the factors that motivate students, ensuring continued interest in forensic accounting and helping to address the growing demand for professionals in this field.

**Keywords:** forensic accounting, career path development, career motivation, professional development, accounting student

## INTRODUCTION

Forensic accounting is increasingly given importance in the era after the establishment of a Madani government in Malaysia, especially in dealing with high-profile financial scandals such as the 1MDB scandal and corruption cases involving famous political figures. The need to detect, investigate, and prevent financial irregularities becomes increasingly urgent in efforts to strengthen the integrity of the public and private sectors (Honigsberg, 2020). Forensic accounting that combines accounting and investigative expertise is vital in supporting good governance and maintaining public trust in financial and business institutions (Gangwani, 2021).

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), a large educational institution in Malaysia, sees this development as an opportunity to provide a relevant educational platform for accounting students. The emphasis on the uniqueness of this framework is significant for groups of students as they will be able to understand the career prospects and skill requirements in the field of forensic accounting. Previous studies show that exposure to forensic accounting significantly influences students' career choices (Ghani et al., 2019). Therefore, UiTM is committed to developing a clear and practical framework to help students understand the career prospects and skills required in forensic accounting. An example of the program offered in forensic accounting at UiTM is the Master of Forensic Accounting and Financial Criminology (AC703 – by coursework).

The main objective of this study is to explore the needs of forensic accounting in Malaysia and develop a framework that can help students from accounting backgrounds choose a career in this field. This research will also evaluate the factors that influence students' choices and outline the skills needed to succeed in a forensic

accounting career, especially in the context of education at UiTM.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) explains the factors influencing an individual's career choice. The SCCT theory also explains that beliefs and psychological factors influence individual career choices (Amalia, 2023). This theory is used to understand how an individual chooses a career in forming an interest in a vocational field and evaluates their ability to develop a career. The study results show that SCCT believes that a person's career choices and goals are influenced by two main factors, namely self-efficacy beliefs and career expectations. Self-efficacy beliefs refer to a person's confidence in their ability to perform career-related tasks. At the same time, career expectations refer to beliefs about the results or effects that will occur when a person performs specific actions in their career.

SCCT is a comprehensive theory encompassing three main variables: personal, contextual, and behavioural. Personal variables, which include an individual's interests, skills, and personality, are internal factors that influence career choices. Contextual variables, on the other hand, are external factors such as social support or environmental obstacles. Finally, behavioural variables are individuals' actions or decisions in their careers. Understanding these variables is key to fully grasping the SCCT and its implications for career development.

### Career Pathway

The career path is an individual's professional journey and how various factors influence it. According to Tomperi et al. (2022), the career path is a lifelong journey that should be planned at the beginning of one's career. Good career planning should start from the beginning of the individual entering the world of work. Wang et al. (2022) also defined a career path as a professional position held by an individual throughout his life. Individuals can build careers in various fields, such as marketing, finance, art, engineering, etc. However, career path and progression often describe how a person can progress in their professional field regarding position, experience, and achievements.

In the context of this research, career path refers to the career choices taken by accounting students after graduation. This option covers various fields such as audit, tax, financial accounting, management accounting, forensic accounting, finance and others. Dalton et al. (2014) added that most accounting students tend to choose a career in audit and taxation when starting their career. Another factor is that a person's characteristics influence the selected career path. These characteristics include an individual's interests, values, and personality. Career path refers to advancement in terms of position, work experience, personal growth, employment status, and job satisfaction. This research uses Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) to investigate how accounting students in higher education institutions choose their career paths. SCCT helps in understanding the factors that influence a person's career choice. Overall, this sentence explains that a career path is a person's career journey that is influenced by initial planning, personal characteristics, and work experience and is connected to career advancement in various professional fields.

### Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation comes from within a person, where a person does something because of personal satisfaction and interest in the activity. It explains that intrinsic motivation refers to actions performed because of personal pleasure or challenge without being influenced by external rewards or pressure (Ryan & Deci, 2019). A study in Japan offers insights into how intrinsic motivation, driven by personal interest and satisfaction, influences students' decisions to pursue accounting careers (Sugahara & Boland, 2010). Meanwhile, educational experiences focusing on personal development and internal satisfaction can influence career paths, making them relevant to discussing career programs and training exposure (Hansen & Burris, 2015).

In addition, previous studies show that exposure to professional experiences, such as industrial training or career programs organised by universities, can influence students' career choices. The study also found that accounting

students in Malaysia are more likely to start a career in public accounting than in management accounting due to the lack of exposure and related programs (Hutaibat, 2018). This shows that students need more detailed information and sufficient knowledge about career options in particular accounting areas.

H1: Do intrinsic motivational factors influence accounting students to choose the forensic accounting career path in Malaysia?

### **Extrinsic Motivation**

Meanwhile, extrinsic motivation differs from intrinsic motivation, which refers to the drive to do an activity or task due to external factors, such as rewards, pressure, or environmental influences. A person driven by extrinsic motivation may do something not because of personal interest or pleasure but to achieve a specific goal, such as getting a salary, praise, promotion, or avoiding punishment. Demagalhaes et al. (2011) found that extrinsic motivation positively correlates with career path selection. Bainbridge (2015) discusses how extrinsic motivation motivates a person to do a task, even if they may not enjoy it, emphasising that it comes from external factors such as lifestyle, family, and culture. Meanwhile, Hejazi and Bazrafshan (2013) state that financial accounting is more popular than management accounting among students because it offers extrinsic motivational rewards such as higher salaries and better promotion opportunities. This means a significant relationship exists between external factors such as salary and job opportunities and a person's career choice. Porter and Woolley (2014) also agree on the effect of extrinsic motivation on career choice. However, although they agree that an accounting career provides extrinsic benefits such as salary and career stability, they argue that intrinsic motivation is a more critical factor in influencing career choice. Therefore, the hypothesis for extrinsic motivation in this study is as follows:

H2: Do extrinsic motivational factors influence accounting students to choose the forensic accounting career path in Malaysia?

### **Intention in Motivation**

Intention in motivation is the determination or intention that drives students to achieve specific career goals. In other words, when students have a clear intention to follow a career path and are motivated to achieve it, they will be more likely to take proactive steps such as choosing relevant courses, looking for internship opportunities, and connecting with professionals in the field.

A study states that intention in motivation helps students set clear career goals and objectives (Seo et al., 2017). When students firmly intend to pursue a career path and are motivated to achieve it, they will take more proactive actions. Examples of such actions include choosing courses that suit the desired career path, looking for opportunities such as internships or job shadowing, and building a network with professionals in the field of interest. This shows that a firm intention helps them to focus more and work towards their desired career.

Intention in motivation guides students in making more informed career decisions (Connors et al., 2015). Motivated students are usually more involved in self-reflection, evaluating their interests, values, and career choices. In addition, students will also conduct research to understand the career options available and how each option can meet their long-term aspirations. This intention makes students more aware of their choices and how much they support their career ambitions.

In addition, intention in motivation contributes to job satisfaction and long-term career fulfilment of students (Ahmed & Islam, 2011). When students are driven by their intrinsic interests, values, and passion for a field, they are more likely to find meaning and purpose in their chosen occupation. This leads to higher job satisfaction as well as long-lasting career fulfilment. In other words, motivation based on deep intention and interest helps students find satisfaction in their career path. Here, intention in motivation not only influences the decisions made by students in planning their careers but also significantly impacts the proactive steps taken, the quality of their decisions, and the satisfaction and fulfilment of their future careers. Therefore, the hypothesis of this variable is as follows:

H3: Does intention in motivation mediate between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and accounting students' career paths towards choosing forensic accounting studies?

## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

In this study, the researchers will explore the relationships between the variables, which were established based on prior research. As a result, this study proposes a framework adopted by Ng et al. (2016)



**Figure I. Schematic Diagram of the Research Framework**

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a survey (questionnaire) as a data collection method, where questions are given to respondents to obtain the necessary information. Simple random sampling means that everyone in the population is equally likely to be selected as a respondent. The population of this study consists of accounting students at several Universiti Teknologi MARA in Malaysia. This study focuses on pre-graduate students as respondents. The targeted sample was 350 accounting students, but data collection was only obtained from 300 students from the sampling. This aligns with Sekaran's (2016) proposal to get an adequate sample from at least 285 of the population.

The questions in this survey were developed based on a previous study by Ng et al. (2016) and Yusoff et al. (2023). However, the questions have been adapted according to the context of Universiti Teknologi MARA in Malaysia to ensure relevance and accurate understanding. This study uses a five-point Likert scale to rate respondents, where the number '1' represents "strongly disagree" and the number '5' represents "strongly agree". This allows for the measurement of respondents' level of agreement or disagreement with each statement in the survey. Analyse the collected data using WARP PLS, a software for analysing structural models and regression equations suitable for quantitative studies.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

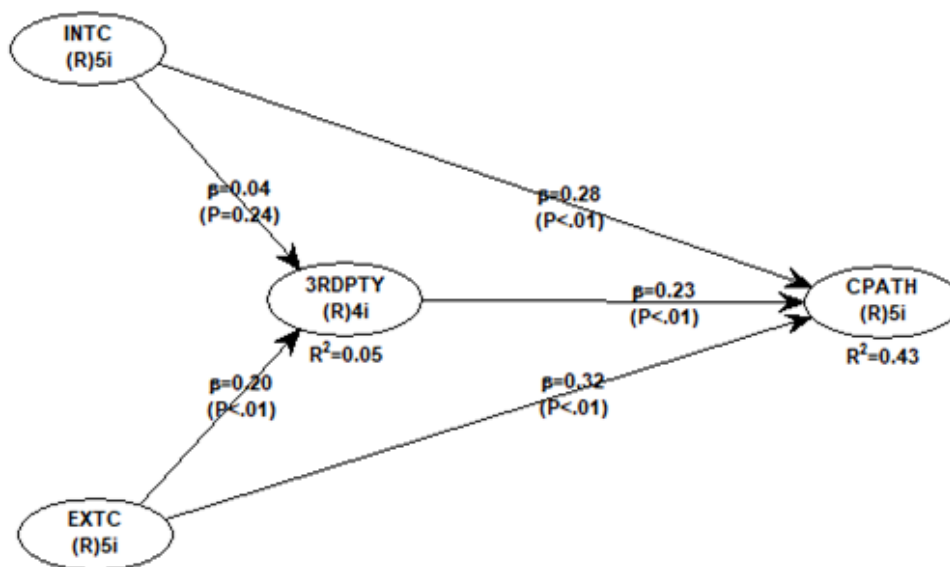
Descriptive statistics differ from inferential statistics (Yusoff et al., 2023). Descriptive statistics describe or summarise collected data without drawing conclusions or inferences about the larger population. Meanwhile, inferential statistics are used to conclude the population based on the analysed sample. Table 1 in this study summarises the survey responses received from each university. Based on the information in the table, the data was collected from Universiti Teknologi MARA in Malaysia, which offers accounting courses. Currently, there are 13 branches scattered all over Malaysia, and these accounting programs are overseen and regulated by Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). This means that the programs offered meet the standards set by the ministry.

**Table I: Descriptive Analysis**

No	University Teknologi MARA Branch (Accounting Course)	Quantity
1	Sungai Petani, Kedah	15

2	Arau, Perlis	10
3	Tapah, Perak	24
4	Shah Alam, Selangor	30
5	Puncak Alam, Selangor	35
6	Alor Gajah, Melaka	32
7	Segamat, Johor	25
8	Jengka, Pahang	20
9	Dungun, Terengganu	15
10	Machang, Kelantan	22
11	Kota Bharu, Kelantan	30
12	Kota Samarahan, Sarawak	22
13	Kota Kinabalu, Sabah	20
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>

The analysis found that the p-value for H1 was  $<0.01$ , and the p-value for H2 was  $<0.01$ . This indicates that when the levels of Intrinsic and Extrinsic factors are high, accounting students are more inclined to choose forensic accounting as a career path. Additionally, Intention also influences career paths, as it impacts the decision to pursue a career as a forensic accountant. The p-value for H3 was also  $<0.01$ . Therefore, when an individual's Intention is high, it becomes a strong mediating factor for students in selecting forensic accounting as their career choice. A summary of the data analysis results is presented in Figure 2 below.



**Figure II. Results of Analysis**

Based on Table II, the hypotheses accepted are H1, H2, and H3. The results for the path coefficients and p-values

exceed the threshold (0.05). In Table 3, the findings show that H1 has the most decisive influence on the forensic accounting career path among accounting students at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. H2 also demonstrates a strong external influence in choosing a career in forensic accounting. Similarly, H3 indicates that motivation intention as a mediator is also necessary for students to select a career as a forensic accountant. Further analysis recorded that the path coefficient for H3 is 0.23 and R<sup>2</sup> is 0.43. Therefore, this study has addressed H1, H2, and H3.

**Table II: Hypothesis Results**

Hypothesis	P-Value	$\beta$ - Value	Result
H1	0.01	0.28	Accepted
H2	0.01	0.32	Accepted
H3	0.01	0.23	Accepted

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study align with those of Mohd Khalid et al. (2021), who found that accounting graduates perceive the benefits gained, work environment, and other influences as having a significant impact on career selection. However, the results of this study do not align with the findings of Hsiao and Nova (2016) and Pratama (2017), who emphasised that power and prestige in the accounting profession do not influence graduates' decisions to pursue a study or career in forensic accounting. In conclusion, most accounting students' career choices are driven by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Additionally, intention also serves as an effective mediator in supporting students' selection of a career path as a forensic accountant. UiTM should enhance its career development programs by increasing students' exposure to forensic accounting and highlighting key skills and career opportunities. This can be done through workshops, industry collaborations, and practical case studies in the curriculum. Strengthening career guidance is also essential to help students make informed career choices. Professional accounting bodies should align recruitment strategies with factors that attract students to forensic accounting. This could include showcasing career paths, offering mentorship, and providing scholarships or incentives. These efforts will sustain student interest and meet the growing demand for skilled forensic accountants. A strong partnership between universities and professional bodies can bridge the gap between academic training and industry needs, ensuring a steady flow of qualified professionals in forensic accounting.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Authors would like to express their gratitude to the Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia, for funding and facilitating this research project. [Grant no: 600-TNCPI 5/3/DDF (AKAUN) (017/2023)]

## REFERENCES

1. Ahmed, I. & Islam, T. (2011). Relationship between Motivation and Job Satisfaction: A Study of Higher Educational Institutions. *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies*, 3(2), 94–100.
2. Bainbridge, C. (2015). What is extrinsic motivation? Retrieved from <https://www.parentingforbrain.com/extrinsic-motivation/>
3. Connors, B. L., Rende, R., & Colton, T. J. (2015). Decision-making style in leaders: Uncovering cognitive motivation using signature movement patterns. *International Journal of Psychological Studies*, 7(2), 105. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijps.v7n2p105>
4. Dalton, D.W., Buchheit, S. & McMillan, J.J. (2014). Audit and tax career paths in public accounting: an analysis of student and professional perceptions. *American Accounting Association*, 28(2), 213- 231.
5. Demagalhaes, R., Wilde, H. & Fitzgerald, L.R. (2011). Factors affecting accounting students' employment choices: a comparison of students' and practitioners' views. *Journal of Higher Education*

- Theory and Practice, 11(2), 32-40.
6. Gangwani, M. (2021). Suitability of forensic accounting in uncovering bank frauds in India: An opinion survey. *Journal of Financial Crime*, 28(1), 284–299. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFC-07-2020-0126>
7. Ghani, N. F., Mohamad, R., & Hassan, S. (2019). Impact of forensic accounting education on students' career choices in Malaysia. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(1), 19–29. <https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.61.2019.71.19.29>
8. **Hansen, D. T., & Burris, M. A. (2015).** Educational transformation as teaching for human flourishing. *Educational Theory*, 65(1), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12055>
9. Hsiao, H., & Nova, W. (2016). *Analysis of Factors That Affect the Job Choice of Accounting Students*. *Journal of Business Research*, 9(17), 102–107.
10. Hejazi, A., & Bazrafshan, A. (2013). The survey of graduated accounting students' interest in management accounting: Evidence from Iran. *Open Journal of Accounting*, 2(3), 88-92. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojacct.2013.23013>
11. Honigsberg, C. (2020). Forensic accounting. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 16, 147–164. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-020320-022159>
12. Hutaibat, K. (2018). Interest in the management accounting profession: Accounting students' perceptions in Jordanian universities, *Asian Social Science*, 8(3), 303–316.
13. Mohd Khalid, F., Abdul Rauf, F. H., Mohd Hanapiah, M. A. A., Joon, M. I., Abdul Razak, N. A., & Vijayandran, S. (2021). Factors influencing accounting students' career choice in Malaysia. *Global Business and Management Research: An International Journal*, 13(4S)
14. Ng, Y.H., Lai, S.P., Su, Z.P., Yap, J.Y., Teoh, H.Q., & Lee, H. (2016). Factors influencing accounting students' career paths, *Journal of Management Development*, 36(3), 319–329.
15. Porter, S., & Woolley, A. (2014). Factors influencing accounting students' career paths. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 5(6), 45–56.
16. Pratama, A. (2017). Why do accounting students choose a career in accountancy? An exploratory study in Bandung City, West Java, Indonesia. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research*, 6(2), 393–407.
17. Amalia, R. S. (2023). Career choice on Gen Y & Z after the pandemic Covid-19: A social cognitive career theory. In *Proceedings of the Conference of Psychology and Flourishing Humanity (PFH 2022)* (pp. 265–279). Atlantis Press. [https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-032-9\\_27](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-032-9_27)
18. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2019). Brick by brick: The origins, development, and future of self-determination theory. In A. J. Elliot (Ed.), *Advances in motivation science* (Vol. 6, pp. 111–156). Elsevier Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.adms.2019.01.001>
19. **Sekaran, U. (2016).** *Research methods for business: A skill-building approach* (7th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
20. Seo, E., Patall, E. A., Henderson, M. D., & Steingut, R. R. (2017). The effects of goal origins and implementation intentions on goal commitment, effort, and performance. *Journal of Experimental Education*. Advanced online publication.
21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.2016.1277334>
22. **Sugahara, S., & Boland, G. (2010).** The Accounting Profession as a Career Choice for Tertiary Business Students in Japan—A Factor Analysis. *Accounting Education: An International Journal*, 19(3), 295-311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639280902886092>
23. Tomperi, P., Kvivesen, M., Manshadi, S., Uteng, S., Shestova, Y., Lyash, O., Lazareva, I., & Lyash, A. (2022). Investigation of STEM subject and career aspirations of lower secondary school students in the North Calotte region of Finland, Norway, and Russia. *Education Sciences*, 12(3), Article 192. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12030192>
24. Yusoff, Y. H., Ghazali, N. I., Fazel, A. A. M., Jamaludin, N., Tawil, N. L., & Madzlan, N. (2023). Roles of Auditor in Combating Money Laundering: A Concept Paper. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(4), 78 – 87.
25. Wang, D., Liu, X., & Deng, H. (2022). The perspectives of social cognitive career theory approach in current times. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 1023994. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1023994>&#8203;;contentReference[oaicite:0]{index=0}&#8203;;contentReference[oaicite:1]{index=1}.