

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Governance frameworks and their impact on enrolment factors, academic performance, and emotional well-being in tertiary education

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Abstract - The enrolment of students in tertiary education is influenced by multiple factors, including personal interest, career prospects, and social influences, which may affect academic performance and emotional well-being. Understanding these relationships is essential for higher education institutions to design governance frameworks that support student success and retention. This study investigates the relationship between enrolment factors, academic performance, and mental and emotional well-being among tertiary students. A quantitative research design was employed, using a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to collect data from 40 tertiary-level students. Descriptive analysis, one-sample t-tests, and bivariate correlation analyses were conducted using PSPP. The findings indicate that career advancement opportunities were the most influential enrolment factor. However, no statistically significant correlation was found between enrolment factors and academic performance or mental and emotional well-being. Despite this, most students reported high levels of satisfaction with their programme and generally good mental health. These results suggest that while enrolment factors may not directly influence measurable academic outcomes, they play an important role in programme suitability, motivation, and long-term student engagement. Ultimately, this study contributes to the literature by highlighting the need for tertiary education governance frameworks that prioritise student-centred programme design and well-being support.

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1. Introduction

Tertiary education institutions play a crucial role in shaping future professionals by providing advanced knowledge, skills, and competencies required in an increasingly competitive global economy (Abd Majid et al., 2020). Beyond academic instruction, these institutions also foster students' personal development, emotional well-being, and long-term employability (Abelha et al., 2020). Effective governance frameworks are therefore essential to ensure that institutional policies, programme structures, and student support mechanisms align with both educational objectives and student needs. Student enrolment decisions are influenced by a variety of factors, including personal interest, perceived employability, institutional reputation, economic considerations, and social influences (Sarkodie et al., 2020; Sinaga & Rahayu, 2024). These enrolment factors not only determine programme selection but may also shape students' motivation, engagement, and persistence throughout their academic journey (Siddiky & Haque, 2024). From a governance perspective, enrolment strategies reflect institutional priorities and decision-making processes that directly affect programme quality, student satisfaction, and retention outcomes. Despite the growing body of literature on enrolment determinants, limited research has examined how enrolment factors relate simultaneously to academic performance and students' mental and emotional well-being. Existing studies often focus on enrolment trends, institutional capacity, or resource allocation rather than student-centred outcomes such as well-being and academic sustainability (Akinoyemi & Gbenu, 2021; Aina et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the transition from secondary to tertiary education is frequently associated with increased academic pressure and psychological stress, making emotional well-being a critical component of student success (Salmela-Aro, 2020; Sheldon et al., 2021). Within this context, governance frameworks in tertiary education play a pivotal role in shaping institutional responses to student needs. Effective governance ensures that programme offerings align with labour market demands and provide adequate academic guidance and mental health support (Abd Majid et al., 2020). Inadequate governance structures, however, may result in mismatches between student expectations and programme outcomes, potentially affecting motivation, academic performance, and emotional well-being. This study addresses these gaps by examining the relationships between enrolment factors, academic performance, and mental and emotional well-being within the context of tertiary education governance. By adopting a student-centred perspective, the study aims to generate empirical insights that can inform institutional governance practices, enhance programme suitability, and support sustainable student development.

Despite the recognised importance of higher education, some students still choose not to enrol in tertiary institutions. While numerous studies have examined factors influencing students' enrolment decisions, the extent to which these factors affect students' academic performance and mental and emotional well-being remains underexplored. Understanding these relationships is crucial, as students' emotional well-being and motivation are closely linked to academic success and retention. Previous research by Sarkodie et al. (2020) identified key factors influencing students' enrolment decisions; however, the study did not examine how these factors subsequently affect academic performance or emotional well-being. Similarly, Akinoyemi and Gbenu (2021) discussed enrolment in relation to academic performance,

but their focus was primarily on the utilisation of educational resources resulting from increased enrolment, rather than on student-centred outcomes. Although their findings acknowledged the role of institutional resources in attracting students, they did not address how enrolment motivations shaped students' academic and emotional experiences. More recent research has examined enrolment factors in private tertiary institutions, emphasising the role of institutional branding in students' choices (Wickneswary et al., 2024). Yet, the implications of these factors for student well-being remain underexplored. In addition, rising dropout rates present a significant concern for higher education systems and national workforce development. Studies have shown that economic constraints, particularly among students from B40 households, are a major contributor to dropout decisions (Samsiah Sani et al., 2020). Other contributing factors include academic dissatisfaction and poor academic performance (Nurmalitasari et al., 2023). Persistent dropout trends may reduce the availability of skilled graduates, thereby affecting long-term national development. Motivation has been widely recognised as a key determinant of academic performance. Siddiky and Haque (2024) highlighted motivation as a central driver of students' learning outcomes, while Salmela-Aro (2020) emphasised the importance of academic well-being during the transition from secondary to tertiary education. Mental and emotional well-being plays a critical role in sustaining motivation and academic engagement. Identifying factors that place students at risk of psychological distress enables institutions to design timely and effective interventions (Sheldon et al., 2021). Therefore, this study incorporates mental and emotional well-being as a core component in examining the broader effects of enrolment factors on students' academic experiences. The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: Section 2 reviews the related literature, Section 3 outlines the research methodology, Section 4 presents and discusses the findings, and Section 5 concludes the study. The research questions are: what is the primary factor that most influences students to enrol in a tertiary education program; do students' enrolment factors affect their academic performance; and do students' enrolment factors influence their mental and emotional well-being. The hypotheses are that peer influence is the predominant factor motivating students to enrol in their current program; that students possess good mental and emotional health; that enrolment factors are positively correlated with academic performance; and that enrolment factors are positively correlated with mental and emotional well-being. The research objectives are to identify the primary factors influencing students' enrolment in tertiary education programs; to analyse the correlation between enrolment determinants and academic achievement; and to explore the association between enrolment factors and students' mental and emotional well-being.

2. Literature Review

Tertiary education institutions serve as platforms for specialised skill development and career advancement. Students may choose between public and private institutions based on perceived quality, reputation, and available resources (Klafke et al., 2020; Sinaga & Rahayu, 2024). These choices are influenced by individual aspirations as well as institutional branding and governance practices. Previous studies have identified several key enrolment factors, including personal interest, economic considerations, and future employability (Sarkodie et al., 2020). Siddiky and Haque (2024) further suggested that enrolment motivations influence students' learning motivation and academic engagement. However, most studies focus on enrolment decisions without examining subsequent academic or emotional outcomes. Student dropout has emerged as a significant concern in higher education. Dropout decisions are often linked to financial constraints, dissatisfaction, and declining academic motivation (Aina et al., 2022; Behr et al., 2021). In the Malaysian context, economic challenges among B40 students have been identified as a major contributing factor (Samsiah Sani et al., 2020). High dropout rates may negatively affect national human capital development. Mental and emotional well-being has been shown to influence students' academic performance and decision-making. Academic stress, family pressures, and financial concerns contribute to psychological distress, which may impair concentration and academic achievement (Deng et al., 2022). Ocaña-Moral et al. (2021) highlighted the negative relationship between perceived stress and academic performance, emphasising the importance of mental well-being in higher education. From a governance perspective, higher education institutions must balance enrolment growth with adequate academic and emotional support structures. Effective governance ensures that institutional policies promote not only academic excellence but also student well-being and employability (Abd Majid et al., 2020).

3. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the relationships between enrolment factors, academic performance, and mental and emotional well-being. A survey-based approach was selected because it is well-suited to analysing relationships among variables in educational research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms in mid-April 2024. The questionnaire received responses from 40 students enrolled in tertiary education institutions. To prevent duplicate responses, the survey was restricted to one submission per email address. The questionnaire comprised 18 items divided into five sections: demographic information, enrolment factors, programme satisfaction, mental and emotional well-being, and future academic intentions. Likert-scale items were used to measure satisfaction and well-being, consistent with prior studies in higher education (Siddiky & Haque, 2024). Statistical analysis was conducted using PSPP, an open-source statistical software comparable to SPSS. Descriptive statistics, one-sample t-tests, and bivariate correlation analyses were employed to test the study hypotheses.

4. Results and Discussion

This research used PSPP, a statistical analysis program for sampled data, to analyse the feedback from the distributed questionnaire.

4.1 Respondent Demographics

Table 1 exhibits the demographic profile of respondents. A total of 40 respondents participated in the study. Female students constituted 57.5% of the sample, while 42.5% were male. Most respondents were aged between 21 and 24 years. The majority were enrolled in private institutions, and most reported a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) above 3.50.

Table 1

Respondent demographic, N = 40

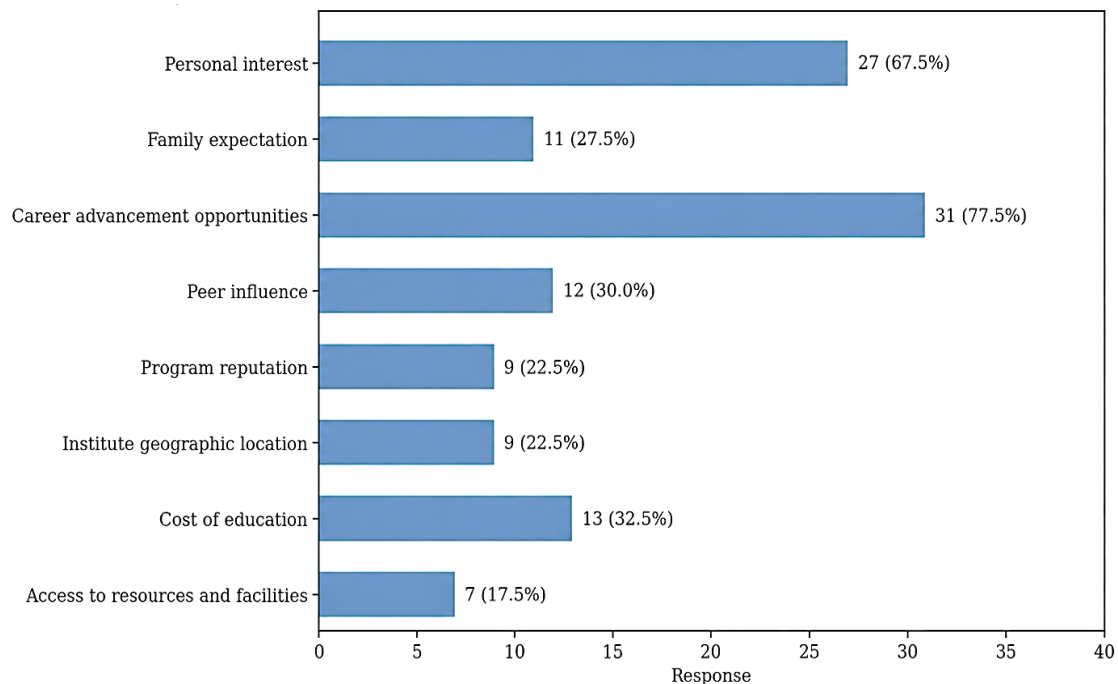
	Frequency	Percentage (%)		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender			Institute type		
Male	17	42.5	Public	12	30.0
Female	23	57.5	Private	28	70.0
Total	40	100.0	Total	40	100.0
Age			CGPA		
18-20	7	17.5	3.51-4.00	27	67.5
21-24	31	77.5	3.01-3.50	7	17.5
25-30	2	5.0	2.51-3.00	5	12.5
Total	40	100.0	2.01-2.50	1	2.5
			Total	40	100.0

4.2 Enrolment Factors

In this study, enrolment factors were examined as determinants that may influence students' motivation during their academic journey and, subsequently, their academic performance and mental and emotional well-being. As illustrated in Figure 1, career advancement opportunities emerged as the most influential enrolment factor, with 31 respondents (77.5%) indicating this as a primary reason for selecting their current programme. In contrast, only 7 respondents (17.5%) reported access to institutional resources and facilities as a motivating factor. These findings indicate a clear preference among students for programmes perceived to offer stronger future employment prospects. Based on these results, H1 was not supported, as peer influence was not identified as the dominant enrolment factor. The prominence of career advancement opportunities suggests that students prioritise long-term employability and financial stability when making enrolment decisions. This outcome aligns with contemporary trends in higher education, where students increasingly view tertiary education as an investment in their future careers. The relatively lower emphasis on access to resources and facilities may reflect students' greater concern with programme content, institutional reputation, and perceived market value of their qualifications rather than physical or infrastructural considerations.

Figure 1

Student enrolment factors



H1: Peer influence is the most common factor that motivates students to join their current program.

H1 proposed that peer influence is the most common factor motivating students to enrol in their current programme.

4.3 Student Expectations of the Current Program

As shown in Table 2, most respondents reported that their current programme met their expectations, with 38 students (95%) indicating a positive response. Only two respondents (5%) reported that their programme did not meet their expectations. This finding suggests a generally high level of alignment between students' expectations and their chosen academic programmes. Meeting academic expectations is commonly associated with positive psychological outcomes. When students perceive that their programmes align with their goals and expectations, they are more likely to experience satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment, which may contribute to better mental and emotional well-being. Conversely, unmet expectations may increase stress and dissatisfaction, potentially affecting students' motivation and overall academic experience. Although this study did not directly test causality, the high level of programme satisfaction observed may help explain the generally positive mental health outcomes reported by respondents.

Table 2

Students' expectations of the current programme

Does the current program meet expectations?		
	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	38	95
No	2	5
Total	40	100

4.4 Programme Satisfaction

As illustrated in Table 3(a) and Table 3(b), the mean satisfaction score for the current programme was 4.13, indicating a high level of student satisfaction. The 95% confidence interval ranged from 0.82 to 1.43, with the upper bound exceeding the lower bound, suggesting that responses were skewed toward the higher end of the Likert scale. This distribution indicates that most students expressed positive perceptions of their programme. Overall, the results demonstrate that students were generally satisfied with their current programme, reflecting favourable evaluations of programme quality and alignment with their academic expectations.

Table 3(a)

One-Sample Statistics: Student satisfaction with the current programme

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	S.E. Mean
Overall _ Satisfaction	40	4.13	0.97	0.15

Table 3(b)

One-Sample Test: Student satisfaction with the current programme

Test Value = 3						
				95% Confidence interval of the difference		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Lower	Upper
Overall satisfaction	7.37	39	0.000	1.13	0.82	1.43

4.5 Student Engagement Level with Course Material

As shown in Table 4(a) and Table 4(b), the mean score for student engagement with course materials was 3.95, indicating a moderately high level of engagement. The 95% confidence interval, ranging from 0.68 to 1.22, suggests that responses were generally distributed above the midpoint of the Likert scale. This distribution indicates that most students reported positive engagement with the provided course materials.

Table 4(a)

One-Sample Statistics: Student engagement level with course material

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	S.E. Mean
Level of engagement	40	3.95	0.85	0.13

Table 4(b)

One-Sample Test: Student engagement level with course material

Test value = 3						
				95% Confidence interval of the difference		
	t	df	Significance (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Lower	Upper
Level of engagement	7.10	39	0.000	0.85	0.68	1.22

High engagement with course materials is commonly associated with favourable learning experiences and sustained academic involvement. While this study does not establish a direct causal relationship, the observed level of engagement suggests that students perceived the instructional materials as sufficiently relevant and supportive of their learning process, which may contribute to improved academic outcomes.

4.6 Challenges Faced by Students

Figure 2 illustrates the challenges students encounter during their studies. The most frequently reported challenge was balancing work, study, and personal life, cited by 23 respondents (57.5%). In contrast, only six respondents (15%) reported no significant challenges or barriers during their studies. This finding highlights the competing demands faced by many tertiary education students. In addition, 50% of respondents ($n = 20$) reported difficulty understanding course materials, suggesting that academic workload and content complexity contribute to students' overall challenges. Financial constraints were also reported by 11 respondents (27.5%), indicating that the need to work alongside academic commitments may further intensify difficulties in maintaining a balanced lifestyle. Collectively, these findings suggest that academic, financial, and personal factors interact to shape students' educational experiences and may influence their overall well-being and capacity to cope with academic demands.

Figure 2

Challenges faced by students

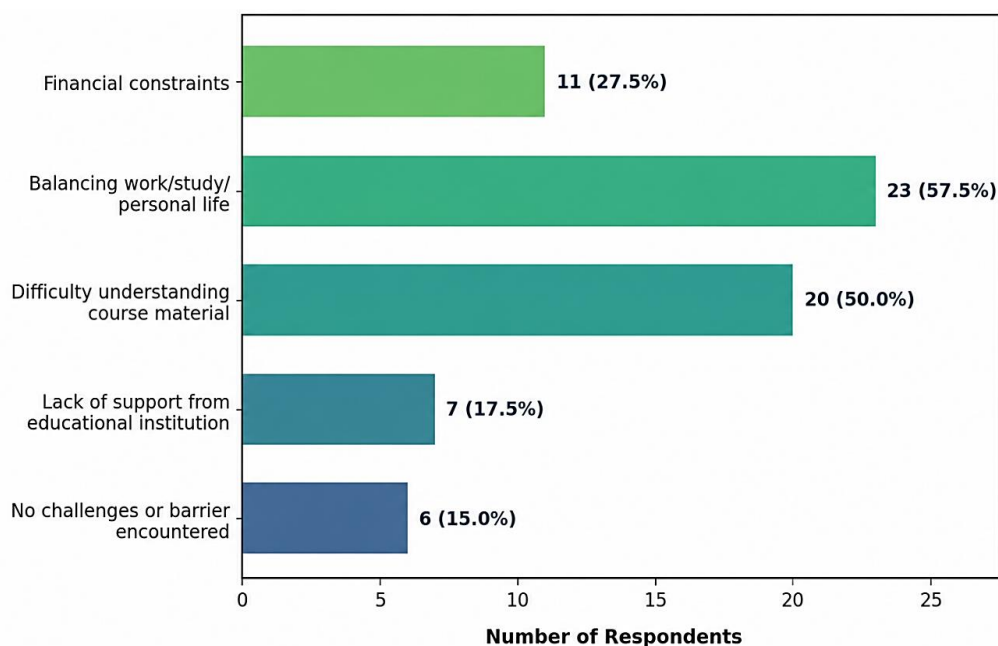


Table 5

Students' rating of their mental health

	Frequency	Percentage
1	2	5
2	2	5
3	16	40
4	14	35
5	6	15
Total	40	100

4.7 Mental and Emotional Health

Table 5 summarises students' self-reported mental health ratings. Most respondents reported moderate to positive mental health levels, with 40% ($n = 16$) selecting a rating of 3 and 35% ($n = 14$) selecting a rating of 4. Fewer respondents reported extreme ratings at either end of the scale, with only 10% selecting the lowest rating (1 or 2) and 15% selecting the highest rating (5). As shown in Table 6(a) and Table 6(b), the mean mental and emotional health score was 3.52, indicating a level above the midpoint of the Likert scale. This result suggests that, on average, students perceived their mental and emotional health positively. Accordingly, H2 is supported, as the findings indicate that students generally experienced satisfactory mental and emotional well-being during their studies.

H2: Students have good mental and emotional health.

H2 proposed that students exhibit generally good mental and emotional health.

Table 6(a)

One-Sample Statistics: Students' ratings of their mental health

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	S.E. Mean
Mental and emotional health	40	3.52	0.99	0.16

Table 6(b)

One-Sample Test: Students' rating of their mental health

	Test Value = 3					
						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Significance (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Mental and emotional health	3.36	39	0.002	0.53	0.21	0.84

4.8 Anxiety Related to Academic Workload

Anxiety is commonly defined as a feeling of uneasiness or apprehension related to perceived challenges or future outcomes. In the context of tertiary education, academic demands are a frequent source of anxiety among students. As shown in Table 7, a substantial majority of respondents, 77.5% ($n = 29$), reported experiencing increased anxiety related to academic workload, while 22.5% ($n = 11$) indicated that they did not experience such anxiety. The high prevalence of academic-related anxiety suggests that workload intensity, assessment deadlines, and course demands are significant stressors for students. Although some level of anxiety is a common and expected aspect of academic life, persistent or excessive anxiety may have implications for students' academic engagement and well-being. While this study did not assess the severity or long-term effects of anxiety, the findings highlight the importance of institutional awareness and support mechanisms to help students manage academic stress effectively.

Table 7

Students' anxiety of academic workload

Experience of anxiety related to academic workload?		
	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	29	77.5
No	11	22.5
Total	40	100

4.9 Coursework Load Impact on Personal Life

As shown in Table 8, most respondents (75%; $n = 30$) reported that their academic workload did not negatively affect their personal life or overall well-being. In contrast, 25% ($n = 10$) indicated that their workload negatively affected them. These findings suggest that most students managed their academic responsibilities without substantial disruption to their personal lives. In this study, a negative impact was interpreted as a noticeable interference with daily functioning or well-being. While most respondents appeared to cope effectively with academic demands, the proportion of students reporting negative effects highlights a subgroup that may require additional academic or psychosocial support. This underscores the importance of institutional policies and support services that help students balance academic responsibilities with personal well-being.

Table 8

Academic workload effect on personal life

Does academic workload negatively impact personal life?		
	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	25
No	30	75
Total	40	100

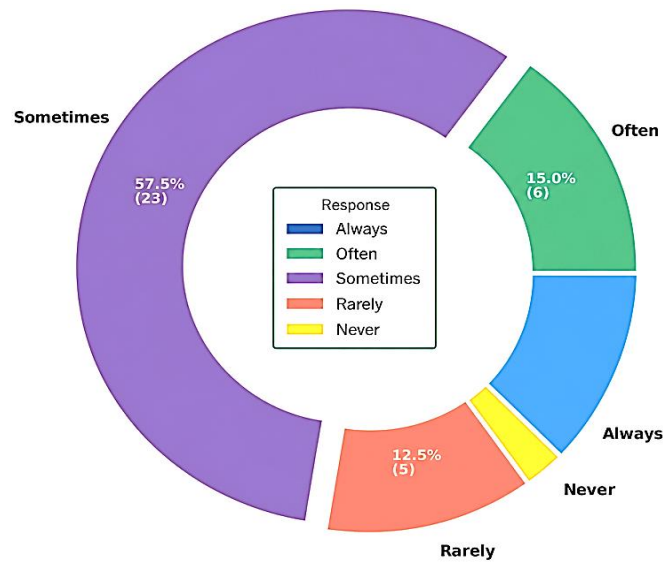
4.10 Academic Responsibilities

Figure 3 illustrates the extent to which students felt overwhelmed by their academic responsibilities. Feelings of being overwhelmed are commonly associated with increased academic pressure and may affect students' mental and emotional well-being and their overall satisfaction with their academic experience. The results indicate that 57.5% ($n = 23$) of respondents reported sometimes feeling overwhelmed by academic responsibilities. Only one respondent (2.5%) reported never experiencing such feelings. These findings suggest that while feelings of being overwhelmed are relatively common among students, they are generally experienced at a moderate rather than persistent level. This moderate level of academic

pressure may be manageable for many students; however, it also highlights the need for institutions to monitor academic workload and provide appropriate support to prevent excessive stress.

Figure 3

Academic responsibilities' effect on students' mental health



4.11 Mental and Emotional Health Issues

Table 9 presents students' responses regarding their use of support or resources for mental and emotional health concerns. The results indicate that 37.5% (n = 15) of respondents reported seeking support, while 62.5% (n = 25) reported not accessing any such resources. The finding that most students did not seek support does not necessarily indicate the absence of mental or emotional health concerns. Instead, it may reflect a range of factors, including perceived self-sufficiency, limited awareness of available services, stigma surrounding mental health support, or barriers to access. Nevertheless, the proportion of students who reported seeking support highlights the presence of mental and emotional challenges among a substantial subset of respondents. These findings underscore the importance of ensuring that support services are accessible, visible, and responsive to students' needs within tertiary education institutions.

Table 9

Finding support for mental and emotional health issues

Finding Support for Mental and Emotional Health Issues?		
	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	15	37.5
No	25	62.5
Total	40	100

Table 10

Correlations between enrolment factors and CGPA

		Enrolment factor	Current CGPA
Enrolment factor	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-0.181
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.264
	N	40	40
Current CGPA	Pearson Correlation	-0.181	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.264	
	N	40	40

4.12 Enrolment Factors and Academic Performance

To test this hypothesis, a two-tailed bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between enrolment factors and CGPA. As shown in Table 10, the correlation coefficient between enrolment factors and CGPA was $r = -0.181$, indicating a weak negative relationship. However, this association was not statistically significant, suggesting that enrolment factors were not meaningfully related to students' academic performance in this sample. Consequently, H3 was not supported. These findings indicate that while enrolment factors may influence students' programme selection and motivation, they do not appear to affect measurable academic outcomes such as CGPA directly.

Other factors may shape academic performance, including individual learning strategies, academic preparedness, instructional quality, and assessment practices.

H3: There is a positive correlation between enrolment factors and academic performance.

H3 proposes a positive relationship between enrolment factors and academic performance, measured by students'

4.13 Enrolment Factors and Mental and Emotional Health

To test this hypothesis, a two-tailed bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between enrolment factors and self-reported mental and emotional health. As illustrated in Table 11, the correlation coefficient between enrolment factors and mental and emotional health was $r = -0.193$, indicating a weak negative relationship. However, this relationship was not statistically significant, suggesting that enrolment factors were not meaningfully associated with students' mental and emotional health in this study. Accordingly, H4 was not supported. These results suggest that while enrolment factors may influence students' initial programme choices, mental and emotional well-being is likely shaped by a broader set of factors, such as academic workload, personal circumstances, and access to institutional support services, rather than enrolment motivations alone.

H4: There is a positive correlation between enrolment factors and student mental and emotional health.

H4 proposes a positive relationship between enrolment factors and students' mental and emotional health.

Table 11

Correlations between enrolment factors and mental and emotional health

		Enrolment factor	Mental and emotional health
Enrolment factor	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-0.193
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.233
	N	40	40
Mental and emotional health	Pearson Correlation	-0.193	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.233	
	N	40	40

5. Conclusion

This study examined the relationships between enrolment factors, academic performance, and mental and emotional well-being among tertiary education students. Based on data collected from 40 respondents and analysed using two-tailed bivariate correlation analysis, the findings indicate that enrolment factors do not have a statistically significant direct effect on students' academic performance or mental and emotional well-being. In addition to addressing the primary research questions, the study also explored broader aspects of students' academic experiences. Results from the one-sample t-test revealed that most students were satisfied with their current programme and reported generally positive mental and emotional health. These findings suggest that although enrolment factors may not directly influence measurable academic outcomes, they remain important in shaping students' perceptions of programme suitability and overall satisfaction. From a broader perspective, this research highlights the importance of informed enrolment decisions in supporting student motivation and long-term engagement in higher education. While multiple factors influence academic performance and well-being, selecting a programme that aligns with students' interests and career aspirations may enhance motivation and persistence throughout their academic journey. The findings also provide valuable insights for higher education institutions, particularly for refining enrolment strategies and governance practices to attract and support students more effectively.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Shakirah Saidin: Conceptualisation; Analysis; Supervision; Writing - original draft

Ong Zhong Yi: Investigation; Methodology; Data curation; Resources; Writing –review & revise

Yap Ching Ling: Investigation; Methodology; Data curation; Resources; Writing –review & revise

Siti Aishah Zakaria: Analysis; Writing –review & revise

Norhabibi Aishah Shaiful Bahari: Verification; Methodology; Writing –review & revise

Availability of Data and Materials

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author.

Ethics Declarations

This study did not involve human participants or animals. Ethical approval was therefore not required.

Generative Artificial Intelligence Declarations

The authors claim that artificially intelligent-assisted technologies, such as generative AI, were not used to generate content, ideas, or theories. We have just utilised AI to enhance readability and refine the language. We used it under strict human control and oversight. The authors take full responsibility for reviewing and approving the content.

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