



# A Conditional Process Model of Polytechnic Enrolment Intentions in Northeast Nigeria: Roles of Socio-Economic Barriers, Value Perception, Employability Expectations, and Attitude to Polytechnic Education

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## Abstract

This conceptual paper develops a conditional process model to explain enrollment intentions in Northeast Nigerian polytechnics, where socio-economic barriers and declining confidence in higher education value have contributed to low participation rates. Drawing on expectancy-value theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and rational choice theory, the model posits that perceived value and employability expectations influence enrollment intentions indirectly through attitudes toward polytechnic education, while socio-economic constraints moderate these effects. The framework suggests that even when students recognize the benefits and employment prospects of polytechnic education, financial and contextual constraints can attenuate the positive influence of attitudes on intentions. The study argues for integrating marketing strategies that emphasize affordability, vocational relevance, and labor market linkages to strengthen perceived value and employability messaging. Policy interventions, including need-based financial aid and flexible learning options, are also recommended to alleviate structural barriers. The paper contributes to higher education marketing literature by introducing a moderated mediation perspective and calls for empirical validation using advanced statistical techniques such as PLS-SEM or Hayes' PROCESS macro. Findings have theoretical, practical, and policy implications for improving enrollment outcomes in resource-constrained educational contexts.

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## Introduction

Declining enrollment in tertiary institutions is a global concern, particularly in developing countries where value skepticism and economic hardship are widespread. Recent surveys in the United States indicate that only one in three prospective students strongly believe a two- or four-year degree offers the best path to a good job; many prefer cheaper, shorter alternatives like certificates or on-the-job training (Blake, 2024). This trend reflects a broader rational-choice calculus by students, especially among less privileged individuals, who weigh costs and anticipated benefits intensively before investing in education (Nikolov & Jimi, 2020).

In Nigeria, and particularly in the Northeast—a region plagued by insecurity, poverty, and infrastructural decay—polytechnic enrollment suffers acute challenges. Technical and vocational institutions are critical for producing mid-level technical manpower, yet enrollment remains disproportionately low. Data show that polytechnic and technical college enrollments comprise fewer than 3% of senior secondary graduates, compared to nearly 10 times more entering universities (Yakubu, 2019). Without robust polytechnic participation, addressing national technical skills shortages becomes untenable. Despite introducing the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) in 2011—a performance-based funding

model meant to bolster public tertiary institutions—polytechnics continue to lag. Although TETFund provides structured intervention for infrastructure, equipment, and training, the allocation of funds frequently favors universities over polytechnics (Wikipedia, 2025). Many polytechnics suffer from limited infrastructure, poor governance, and constrained budgets, exacerbating their enrollment challenges (SchoolDoings, 2025).

In the Northeast, where Boko Haram insurgency and economic hardship compound systemic educational inequality, student intentions to enroll in polytechnics are shaped by more than academic aspirations. They reflect a calculus of perceived educational value, uncertain employability prospects, and socio-economic constraints. Students face cultural biases that favor university degrees, skepticism about the return on polytechnic credentials, and real constraints such as tuition costs and family obligations. Consequently, enrollment intention is low, even though demand for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) could potentially be high.

While educational marketing literature increasingly recognizes the role of perceived value and employability messaging (Gunarto & Hurriyati, 2020), most studies rely on linear models or simple associations. Few apply conditional process modeling—combining mediation and moderation—to



educational decision-making, especially in resource-constrained polytechnic contexts. This gap limits our understanding of how value or career expectation translates into actual behavioral intention under varying socio-economic conditions.

To address this gap, this paper proposes a conditional process model of enrollment intentions, accounting for perceived value, employability expectations, attitude toward polytechnic education, and socio-economic constraints. Perceived value refers to the extent to which students evaluate polytechnic education as worthwhile relative to its cost. Employability expectations capture beliefs about job prospects or income after graduation. Attitude toward polytechnic education serves as the mediator, reflecting learners' favorable or unfavorable evaluation of enrolling. Socio-economic constraints act as a moderator, including financial hardship, family responsibilities, and infrastructural barriers. The objectives are to conceptualize how perceived value and employability expectations influence enrollment intentions via attitude, to demonstrate how socio-economic constraints weaken this mediated relationship, and to derive actionable insights for educational marketing and policy in resource-constrained contexts.

This model extends existing literature by integrating expectancy-value theory (Eccles et al., 1983) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) within a moderated mediation framework. It clarifies how contextual conditions shape the strength of relationships between cognitive antecedents and intention. For polytechnic leaders and marketing managers, the model offers guidance on crafting communications that build perceived educational value and employability expectations while addressing socio-economic barriers. For policymakers and financing bodies like TETFund, the model underscores the importance of tying enrollment incentives to proactive marketing strategies and targeted support for disadvantaged students. It supports the allocation of funds not just on quantity (enrollment numbers) but on enabling access in constrained environments.

This introduction lays the groundwork for the rest of the paper. Section 2 reviews the conceptual foundations of perceived value, employability expectations, attitude, and socio-economic constraints. Section 3 develops the conceptual model, accompanied by Figure 1. Section 4 articulates theory-driven propositions. Section 5 outlines the implications for theory, practice, and policy. Finally, Section 6 concludes with a summary and directions for empirical research.

## Theoretical Background

### Perceived Value in Educational Decision-Making

Perceived value is widely recognized as a central determinant of consumer choice, including educational decisions. Zeithaml (1988) conceptualized perceived value as the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product or service based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. Applied to education, perceived value represents students' evaluation of the benefits of enrolling in a program relative to the financial, temporal, and psychological costs involved (Kotler & Fox, 1995). This assessment becomes particularly salient in higher education, where students make significant investments of time and resources under conditions of uncertainty about future returns (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015).

Perceived value is multidimensional, encompassing functional, social, and emotional components. Functional value relates to tangible benefits such as academic quality, skill acquisition, and employability outcomes (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). For polytechnic education, functional value is strongly associated with the promise of vocational skills and job readiness. Social value pertains to the prestige and social recognition linked to obtaining a qualification (Pinar et al.,

2014). In Nigeria, polytechnics often face negative societal perceptions compared to universities, reducing their perceived social value (Uwadiae, 2019). Emotional value reflects the affective rewards of learning, including satisfaction, self-esteem, and personal growth (Ivy, 2008). Collectively, these dimensions influence whether students perceive polytechnic education as "worth the investment," particularly in resource-constrained contexts.

The role of perceived value in educational choice is amplified under economic hardship. Expectancy-value theory (Eccles et al., 1983) posits that individuals' achievement-related choices depend on both their expectations for success and the subjective value attached to the task. When students believe that attending a polytechnic will yield meaningful outcomes—such as better job opportunities and higher earnings—they assign greater value to enrollment and exhibit stronger intentions to pursue it. Conversely, skepticism about educational value has been linked to declining enrollment globally (Blake, 2024). Recent evidence suggests that prospective students increasingly compare degree programs with shorter, cheaper alternatives that appear to deliver similar career benefits (Brown, 2024). These findings indicate that in contexts such as Northeast Nigeria, where socio-economic constraints are acute, students' cost-benefit calculations significantly influence enrollment intentions.

Empirical studies reinforce this theoretical perspective. For example, Alnaeem et al. (2024) reported that low perceived value of distance education was strongly associated with negative attitudes and reduced motivation among nursing students in rural areas. Similarly, Vrontis et al. (2018) found that perceived value was a significant predictor of student choice behavior in higher education markets. These findings align with the argument that polytechnic students who perceive high value in their education—whether in terms of career prospects, affordability, or personal development—are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward enrollment, which in turn increases their behavioral intention. Thus, marketing strategies that clearly communicate polytechnics' value propositions, including affordability and employability outcomes, are essential for improving enrollment in resource-constrained settings.

### Employability Expectations and Enrollment Decisions

Employability expectations refer to students' beliefs about their likelihood of securing meaningful employment and achieving career advancement after completing a given educational program. In higher education decision-making, these expectations strongly influence both attitudes and behavioral intentions, as prospective students seek assurance that their educational investments will yield tangible labor market returns (Tomlinson, 2012). The salience of employability expectations is particularly pronounced in resource-constrained contexts such as Northeast Nigeria, where unemployment rates are high, and economic opportunities are limited (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022).

The theoretical foundation for understanding employability expectations lies in Expectancy Theory, which posits that individuals' motivation to engage in a particular behavior depends on the anticipated outcomes and the perceived probability of achieving those outcomes (Vroom, 1964). Specifically, the theory suggests that students' decision to enroll in a polytechnic program is shaped by two interrelated beliefs: (a) that completing the program will lead to desirable job opportunities (instrumentality), and (b) that such opportunities will result in valued rewards such as income, security, and social status (valence). When students perceive a strong link between educational attainment and employability outcomes, their motivation to enroll—and their attitude toward enrollment—tends to increase significantly (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Empirical evidence supports the critical role of employability in shaping enrollment decisions. Torres-Gordillo and García-



Martínez (2022) found that Spanish university students with high employability expectations exhibited greater satisfaction and persistence, indicating that anticipated labor market success reinforces positive attitudes toward education. Similarly, recent research highlights that prospective students worldwide prioritize programs that demonstrate strong industry linkages, practical training, and clear pathways to employment (Vrontis et al., 2018). In the Nigerian context, studies have shown that negative perceptions of employability outcomes in polytechnics contribute to declining enrollment, as many students view university degrees as more prestigious and conducive to securing high-paying jobs (Uwadiae, 2019). This perception persists despite evidence that polytechnics provide vocationally relevant skills that align with labor market needs.

The growing emphasis on employability expectations also reflects broader changes in higher education markets, where institutions compete to position themselves as gateways to career success (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). For polytechnics in Northeast Nigeria, this competition is intensified by socio-economic constraints that heighten students' sensitivity to the economic returns of education. Under these conditions, marketing strategies that highlight employability—through alumni success stories, industry partnerships, and job placement rates—are essential for shaping positive attitudes and enrollment intentions. By signaling strong employment prospects, polytechnics can enhance students' expectancy that enrollment will lead to valued outcomes, thereby increasing the likelihood of behavioral commitment.

#### **Attitude Towards Polytechnic Education as a Mediator**

Attitude, defined as an individual's overall evaluation of performing a particular behavior, plays a central role in shaping behavioral intentions in the TPB framework (Ajzen, 1991). According to TPB, attitudes toward a behavior, combined with subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, predict an individual's intention to engage in that behavior. Within the context of polytechnic education, attitude refers to prospective students' positive or negative evaluation of enrolling in a polytechnic program, influenced by their beliefs about the anticipated outcomes and the value of such an educational pathway.

The mediating role of attitude arises from the process by which cognitive evaluations—such as perceived value and employability expectations—are translated into behavioral intentions. Students who perceive polytechnic education as valuable and expect strong employment outcomes are more likely to form favorable attitudes toward enrollment, which in turn increases their intention to enroll (Ajzen, 1991; Simiyu et al., 2019). This mechanism aligns with expectancy-value theory, which suggests that individuals' attitudes toward a task are shaped by the perceived importance and utility of the task (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). In other words, positive evaluations of polytechnic programs, grounded in cost-benefit analysis and anticipated career benefits, foster favorable attitudes that bridge the gap between cognitive beliefs and the actual intention to enroll.

Empirical evidence supports the mediating influence of attitudes in educational decision-making. Simiyu et al. (2019) demonstrated that student attitudes mediated the effect of institutional image on postgraduate enrollment intentions, suggesting that favorable perceptions alone do not directly lead to intentions unless internalized as positive attitudes. Similarly, research on higher education choice models indicates that when students develop strong positive attitudes toward an institution, these attitudes become a critical determinant of enrollment decisions, even when controlling for other factors such as financial capability and social influences (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015).

In the case of Northeast Nigerian polytechnics, attitudes toward technical and vocational education are often shaped by societal perceptions and personal beliefs. Negative stereotypes that position polytechnics as inferior to universities may attenuate the influence of perceived value and employability expectations on intentions, unless marketing strategies explicitly work to reshape attitudes. Conversely, interventions that enhance the attractiveness of polytechnic education—by emphasizing affordability, practical skills, and employability outcomes—can foster positive attitudes that strengthen the pathway from cognitive appraisals to enrollment intentions.

Therefore, in the proposed conditional process model, attitude functions as a key mediator that channels the effect of perceived value and employability expectations onto enrollment intentions. Without this attitudinal transformation, even students who recognize potential benefits may not translate such evaluations into behavioral commitment. This underscores the importance of marketing strategies that go beyond providing information to actively building emotional and cognitive engagement with polytechnic education.

#### **Socio-Economic Constraints as a Moderator**

Socio-economic constraints refer to the structural and personal limitations arising from economic hardship, low household income, limited financial resources, and competing family obligations that restrict individuals' educational opportunities (Boudon, 1974; EUROStudent, 2024). In the context of higher education, these constraints manifest as financial barriers to paying tuition, lack of access to educational resources, and cultural expectations that prioritize immediate income generation over continued schooling (Okebukola, 2021). For students in resource-constrained environments such as Northeast Nigeria—where poverty rates remain among the highest in the country (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022)—these factors significantly shape educational aspirations and decision-making processes.

Rational choice theory provides a theoretical lens for understanding how socio-economic constraints moderate the relationship between cognitive evaluations (such as perceived value and employability expectations) and behavioral intentions. Boudon (1974) argued that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds face both primary effects (academic preparation) and secondary effects (decision-making influenced by costs and benefits). Even when individuals perceive education as valuable and expect strong employability outcomes, the perceived or actual costs of participation—tuition, transportation, opportunity cost of foregone earnings—may discourage enrollment. Conversely, when financial constraints are minimal, the positive effects of perceived value and employability expectations on enrollment intentions are likely to be stronger.

Empirical research reinforces this moderating effect. For example, studies in Europe and Africa indicate that socio-economic background remains a significant determinant of higher education access, even after controlling for academic ability (EUROStudent, 2024; Orazem et al., 2022). In Nigeria, rural students and those from low-income families are disproportionately underrepresented in polytechnics due to affordability issues, despite demonstrating interest in vocational education (Yakubu, 2019). Similarly, Xu et al. (2024) found that household income and parental education levels strongly predicted enrollment decisions, suggesting that structural inequalities amplify the perceived risk associated with educational investment. These findings suggest that socio-economic constraints function as a "contextual filter" that attenuates the pathway from positive beliefs (value and employability) to intention, especially when the costs of education appear prohibitive.

In the proposed conditional process model, socio-economic constraints moderate the direct and indirect relationships



between perceived value, employability expectations, and enrollment intention. Specifically, under conditions of low constraint, perceived value and employability expectations are more likely to translate into positive attitudes and strong intentions to enroll. Under high constraint, however, these relationships weaken because financial and logistical barriers override positive evaluations. This dynamic underscores the importance of institutional strategies—such as need-based scholarships, flexible payment plans, and part-time study options—to reduce the impact of socio-economic limitations. Addressing these constraints not only strengthens the link between positive beliefs and enrollment intentions but also promotes equity in higher education access.

**Educational Marketing Perspective**

Educational marketing plays a critical role in shaping the perceptions and attitudes that influence enrollment intentions. Originally viewed as a peripheral function limited to promotional campaigns, marketing in higher education has evolved into a strategic capability aimed at influencing student decision-making through branding, relationship management, and value communication (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Maringe, 2010). In contexts of intense competition and resource scarcity, such as Northeast Nigerian polytechnics, marketing strategies are indispensable for altering perceptions of institutional value, reinforcing employability narratives, and fostering positive attitudes toward enrollment.

Marketing strategies can directly influence perceived value, a key predictor of student choice. By articulating clear value propositions—such as affordability, practical skill development, and return on investment—institutions can enhance functional and emotional components of perceived value (Kotler & Fox, 1995; Ivy, 2008). For example, communicating transparent tuition structures alongside evidence of labor market relevance signals economic rationality to cost-sensitive students. Similarly, highlighting unique program attributes, such as industry partnerships and entrepreneurship training, reinforces the instrumental benefits of polytechnic education, thereby improving its comparative appeal relative to universities (Hemsley-Brown et al., 2020).

Employability messaging is another central lever in educational marketing. As employability expectations strongly influence attitudes and intentions, institutions must adopt strategies that demonstrate clear pathways to employment. This can include showcasing alumni success stories, publishing graduate employment statistics, and promoting internship opportunities through digital platforms (Vrontis et al., 2018). Research confirms that students respond positively to marketing messages that align academic programs with career outcomes (Tomlinson, 2012). In the Nigerian polytechnic context, where societal biases often favor university degrees, marketing campaigns that emphasize the vocational relevance of polytechnic qualifications can counter negative stereotypes and reposition technical education as a credible pathway to economic mobility (Uwadiae, 2019).

Beyond information dissemination, marketing must focus on attitude building—fostering favorable emotional and cognitive evaluations of polytechnic education. According to the TPB (Ajzen, 1991), attitudes are critical mediators between beliefs and intentions. Therefore, marketing efforts should go beyond rational appeals to incorporate experiential engagement strategies such as open days, campus tours, and skill demonstrations that allow prospective students to visualize the benefits of enrollment (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Digital platforms can also enhance interactive communication, enabling prospective students to connect with current students and alumni, thereby generating positive word-of-mouth and reinforcing trust (Simiyu et al., 2019).

For polytechnics in resource-constrained settings, cost-effective marketing approaches are essential. These may include leveraging community networks, social media campaigns, and partnerships with local industries to amplify value and employability narratives at low financial cost. Such strategies not only shape perceptions of value and employability but also contribute to transforming attitudes toward technical education, ultimately influencing enrollment intentions. In sum, educational marketing serves as a strategic enabler that aligns institutional offerings with student expectations while mitigating socio-cultural and economic barriers to enrollment.

**Conceptual Model Development**

The proposed conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1 integrates cognitive, affective, and contextual determinants of enrollment intentions within a conditional process framework. This model draws on expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), the TPB (Ajzen, 1991), and rational choice theory (Boudon, 1974) to explain how perceptions of value and employability expectations shape prospective students’ intentions to enroll in polytechnic education, mediated by attitude towards polytechnic education and conditioned by socio-economic constraints.

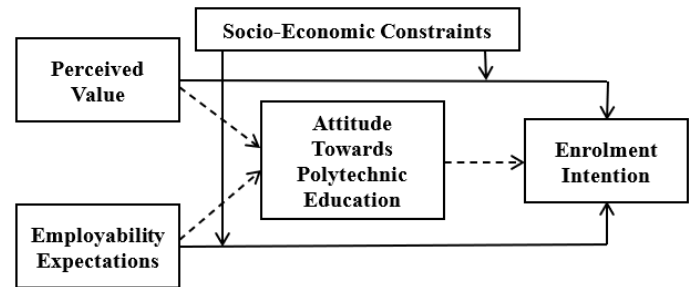


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model

**Direct and Indirect Effects**

Perceived value represents students’ assessment of the benefits of polytechnic education relative to its costs (Zeithaml, 1988). Higher perceived value is theorized to increase favorable attitudes toward enrollment, which subsequently enhances enrollment intentions (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Similarly, employability expectations—students’ beliefs about their likelihood of securing desirable employment after graduation—are expected to positively influence attitudes and, through them, intentions (Tomlinson, 2012; Torres-Gordillo & García-Martínez, 2022). These mediated relationships reflect the TPB principle that attitudes serve as a proximal predictor of intention, translating cognitive beliefs into behavioral readiness (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, both antecedent variables (perceived value and employability expectations) exert indirect effects on enrollment intention through attitudes.

**Mediating Role of Attitude**

The mediation logic is rooted in the assumption that cognitive evaluations of value and employment prospects do not automatically convert into behavioral intentions without a positive attitudinal orientation (Ajzen, 1991; Simiyu et al., 2019). When students perceive polytechnic education as valuable and believe it enhances employability, they are likely to develop favorable attitudes toward enrolling. These attitudes, in turn, strengthen their commitment to act. Conversely, negative attitudes—often shaped by societal biases against vocational education—can attenuate or nullify the effect of positive evaluations on intention (Uwadiae, 2019). Therefore, attitude serves as the critical psychological mechanism linking cognitive beliefs to behavioral intention.



### Moderating Role of Socio-Economic Constraints

While the indirect pathway from perceived value and employability expectations to intention is important, its strength is not uniform across contexts. The model posits that *socio-economic constraints*—including low household income, family obligations, and poverty-induced opportunity costs—moderate these relationships. In conditions of high constraint, the positive effect of perceived value and employability expectations on attitudes and intentions weakens because structural barriers override motivational factors (Boudon, 1974; EUROStudent, 2024). For instance, even when students recognize the benefits of polytechnic education, they may forgo enrollment if they cannot afford tuition or must prioritize immediate income generation (Xu et al., 2024). Conversely, when constraints are low (e.g., availability of financial aid or flexible study options), the influence of value perception and employability expectations on attitudes and intentions is amplified.

The proposed model conceptualizes enrollment intention as the outcome of a conditional process in which perceived value and employability expectations positively influence attitudes, which in turn mediate their relationship with enrollment intention, while socio-economic constraints moderate both the direct and indirect effects—weakening these relationships under high-constraint conditions and strengthening them when constraints are low. This integrated framework provides a theoretically grounded and context-sensitive explanation of enrollment decisions in resource-constrained settings, offering a foundation for empirical testing and strategic intervention.

### Propositions

Building on the conceptual model outlined in the preceding section, this study develops six propositions grounded in expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), the TPB (Ajzen, 1991), and rational choice theory (Boudon, 1974). These propositions reflect the direct, mediated, and moderated relationships hypothesized among the core constructs: perceived value, employability expectations, attitude toward polytechnic education, socio-economic constraints, and enrollment intention.

*P1: Perceived value positively influences enrollment intention.*

Students who perceive polytechnic education as delivering high functional, social, and emotional benefits are more likely to intend to enroll, given that perceived value reduces uncertainty and reinforces the rationality of educational investment (Zeithaml, 1988; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015).

*P2: Employability expectations positively influence enrollment intention.*

Consistent with expectancy theory, when students anticipate favorable employment outcomes from polytechnic programs, they are more likely to form strong intentions to enroll because the perceived instrumental value aligns with their long-term career goals (Vroom, 1964; Tomlinson, 2012).

*P3: Attitude toward polytechnic education mediates the relationship between perceived value and enrollment intention.*

Positive perceptions of value are expected to shape attitudes, which then influence behavioral intentions. This reflects the TPB framework in which attitudes serve as a critical link between beliefs and intention (Ajzen, 1991; Simiyu et al., 2019).

*P4: Attitude toward polytechnic education mediates the relationship between employability expectations and enrollment intention.*

Similarly, employability beliefs enhance attitudes toward enrollment, and these attitudes, in turn, predict intention. Without attitudinal endorsement, positive employability beliefs may not translate into enrollment behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Torres-Gordillo & García-Martínez, 2022).

*P5: Socio-economic constraints moderate the relationship between perceived value and enrollment intention, such that the relationship is stronger when constraints are low.*

In contexts of low financial barriers, the positive influence of perceived value on intention strengthens. Under high constraint, this relationship weakens because structural limitations overshadow perceived benefits (Boudon, 1974; EUROStudent, 2024).

*P6: Socio-economic constraints moderate the relationship between employability expectations and enrollment intention, such that the relationship is stronger when constraints are low.*

When financial and structural constraints are minimal, employability expectations exert a stronger effect on intention. Under severe constraints, the effect diminishes because economic realities limit students' capacity to act on positive expectations (Orazem et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2024).

These propositions set the foundation for future empirical validation using conditional process modeling approaches such as Hayes' PROCESS macro or structural equation modeling (SEM), enabling researchers to test the hypothesized mediation and moderation mechanisms in polytechnic enrollment decisions.

### Implications

#### Theoretical Implications

This study offers significant contributions to theory by introducing a conditional process modeling perspective into higher education marketing literature. While previous research has explored factors influencing student enrollment—such as perceived value, institutional image, and employability expectations—most studies have employed linear or additive models (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Vrontis et al., 2018). The present framework advances this literature by proposing a moderated mediation structure, capturing the dynamic interplay between cognitive, affective, and contextual factors in shaping enrollment intentions. Specifically, by modeling attitude toward polytechnic education as a mediator and socio-economic constraints as a moderator, the framework moves beyond simplistic associations to explain *when* and *how* positive evaluations translate into behavioral intentions under varying structural conditions (Hayes, 2018; Ajzen, 1991).

Second, the study expands traditional decision-making theories in education by integrating expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) and the TPB (Ajzen, 1991) within a context-sensitive model. Expectancy-value theory has been widely used to explain how students' beliefs about task value influence achievement-related choices, but it often overlooks structural constraints. By incorporating socio-economic limitations as a moderator, this model reflects a more realistic depiction of decision-making in resource-constrained environments, aligning with rational choice theory (Boudon, 1974). This integration acknowledges that even when students hold strong positive beliefs about the value and employability of polytechnic education, financial and cultural barriers can attenuate or override these effects.

Finally, the model underscores the importance of contextualizing behavioral theories in underdeveloped settings, where poverty, insecurity, and cultural hierarchies shape educational behavior differently from developed contexts (Orazem et al., 2022). This theoretical advancement encourages future research to examine conditional processes in other educational decisions, such as persistence and program choice, thereby extending the applicability of behavioral and marketing theories to diverse socio-economic environments.



### Practical Implications

The proposed model offers actionable insights for polytechnic administrators and marketing practitioners operating in resource-constrained environments. First, the findings emphasize the importance of marketing strategies that clearly communicate affordability and employability as key value propositions. Cost-sensitive students in Northeast Nigeria often prioritize affordability due to prevailing poverty and unemployment levels (Yakubu, 2019; Okebukola, 2021). Consequently, polytechnics should adopt transparent tuition disclosure, flexible payment plans, and targeted scholarship schemes as part of their promotional messages. Highlighting financial accessibility can strengthen perceived value, thereby improving attitudes toward enrollment (Kotler & Fox, 1995).

Second, employability messaging should be central to recruitment campaigns. Employability expectations have been shown to significantly influence educational choices (Tomlinson, 2012; Torres-Gordillo & García-Martínez, 2022). Polytechnics can leverage alumni success stories, internship programs, and partnerships with local industries to showcase the labor market relevance of their programs. Marketing communication should emphasize technical skill acquisition, entrepreneurial opportunities, and vocational credentials as pathways to sustainable employment. Digital platforms, including social media and institutional websites, can serve as cost-effective channels for disseminating such information, particularly among urban youth who have higher internet access (Simiyu et al., 2019).

Third, recruitment strategies must address socio-economic realities that constrain enrollment decisions. Campaigns should extend beyond traditional promotional tactics to incorporate community-based outreach, career counseling, and engagement with parents, who often influence educational choices in collectivist cultural settings (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Initiatives such as mobile enrollment drives and financial literacy workshops can reduce structural barriers and empower families to make informed decisions. Furthermore, institutions should explore blended learning models and flexible study schedules to accommodate students balancing work and family obligations (Orazem et al., 2022).

### Policy Implications

The conditional process model proposed in this study holds critical implications for education policy and funding frameworks, particularly in resource-constrained environments such as Northeast Nigeria. Performance-based funding mechanisms, such as those implemented through Nigeria's Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), have traditionally emphasized enrollment and graduation rates as key performance indicators (Ogunode & Musa, 2021). However, these frameworks rarely account for the role of marketing and institutional outreach strategies in driving such outcomes. The findings of this study suggest that funding agencies should link financial support to the adoption of marketing innovations that address structural enrollment barriers and improve the perceived value of polytechnic education.

First, funding bodies should create incentives for polytechnics to implement context-sensitive marketing strategies that emphasize affordability, employability, and attitudinal change. For instance, TETFund interventions could incorporate dedicated allocations for strategic marketing campaigns, digital engagement platforms, and community outreach programs. Such provisions would recognize marketing as a strategic capability essential for enrollment growth and institutional sustainability (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Kotler & Fox, 1995).

Second, policy guidelines should mandate accountability metrics for marketing-driven enrollment interventions, ensuring that institutions not only invest in infrastructure but

also actively communicate their value propositions to prospective students. This aligns with global trends in higher education governance that link resource allocation to measurable student recruitment and retention outcomes (Vrontis et al., 2018). Embedding marketing innovation within quality assurance and funding criteria, could encourage institutions to adopt evidence-based practices that improve enrollment performance under challenging socio-economic conditions.

Finally, funding frameworks should support programs that mitigate socio-economic constraints, such as scholarship schemes, conditional cash transfers, and flexible financial aid mechanisms. These interventions complement marketing efforts by reducing structural barriers that weaken the relationship between positive perceptions and actual enrollment intentions (Boudon, 1974; Orazem et al., 2022). Integrating financial accessibility measures into policy ensures that marketing campaigns promoting affordability are substantiated by practical support.

### Conclusion

This paper conceptualized a conditional process model to explain enrollment intentions in polytechnic education, particularly within resource-constrained contexts such as Northeast Nigeria. Drawing upon expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), the TPB (Ajzen, 1991), and rational choice theory (Boudon, 1974), the model integrated cognitive, affective, and structural dimensions of decision-making. Specifically, perceived value and employability expectations were proposed as key antecedents influencing enrollment intention through attitudes toward polytechnic education, with socio-economic constraints moderating both direct and indirect effects. This framework moves beyond linear perspectives in higher education marketing by introducing conditional process modeling to capture the complex interplay of individual evaluations and contextual limitations.

The theoretical contribution of this model lies in its recognition that positive perceptions alone do not guarantee enrollment intentions. In environments characterized by poverty and socio-cultural hierarchies, structural barriers can attenuate the influence of value-based and employability-driven beliefs. As such, marketing interventions must be strategically designed to address both psychological and economic constraints. For polytechnic administrators, this means implementing campaigns that highlight affordability, labor market relevance, and program flexibility, while policymakers should link funding incentives to evidence-based marketing strategies that target underrepresented groups.

Future research should empirically validate the proposed model using advanced statistical techniques, such as partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) or Hayes' PROCESS macro, to test the mediating role of attitude and the moderating effect of socio-economic constraints. Such studies could incorporate longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic nature of enrollment decision-making and assess whether similar conditional processes operate in other developing country contexts. Additionally, comparative studies between polytechnics and universities could offer deeper insights into institutional positioning strategies.

Ultimately, this study underscores the strategic importance of educational marketing in ensuring polytechnic survival and competitiveness. By understanding how perceived value, employability expectations, and contextual realities jointly shape enrollment intentions, institutions can design interventions that are both theoretically informed and practically impactful, thereby improving access to technical education and fostering economic development in disadvantaged regions.



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