



# Applying TPB in investigating the Intentions of Accounting Students on Pursuing Professional Accountancy Qualification

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**Abstract.** This study, based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), explores the factors influencing accounting students' intentions to pursue professional accountancy qualifications. The research finds that personal attitudes, views of significant others, and students' perceptions of their interests and abilities are the main factors influencing students' entry into the accounting profession. Notably, intrinsic factors have a greater impact on students. With the growing popularity of the concept of choice freedom and the challenges of the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) exam, the influence of intentions may change. Further analysis or research would help to understand the feasibility of TPB in practical applications.

**Keywords:** Theory of Planned Behavior, accounting profession, professional accountancy qualification

## 1 Introduction

The accounting system led by accountants plays a vital role in the development effort of a country. It provides essential financial information that helps businesses make informed decisions and contributes to the overall economic growth of a nation (Melnik et al., 2020[14]). However, in recent years, the shortage of professional accountants has become a global issue that has raised concerns among stakeholders in the accounting profession (Ademola et al., 2021[1]). The demand for accounting professionals has increased significantly due to the growth of businesses and the complexity of financial laws and regulations. This shortage has led to a competitive job market, with companies struggling to find qualified candidates to fill their accounting positions. So, concerns have been raised about the shortage of professional accountants worldwide due to an increased demand for accountants caused by the significant number of businesses, changes in financial laws, and others. For instance, the Global Upside (2014)[10] report claimed that “there is a shortage of neither American choosing to study accounting in college nor graduates choosing it as a career”(p.1). The shortage of professional accountants is particularly acute in developing countries, where the lack of qualified professionals can hinder economic growth. In these countries, the shortage of accountants

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is often due to a lack of educational opportunities and resources, as well as a lack of awareness of the benefits of pursuing a career in accounting. Therefore, it is urgent to find the factors. Based on the theory of planned behavior (TPB), attitude, parental influence, interest and ability all influence the intention of accounting major students to obtain professional accounting qualifications (Conner, 2020[7]). Attitude refers to the individual's beliefs and feelings about the accounting profession. Students who view accounting as a stable and lucrative career are more likely to pursue careers in the field. On the other hand, those who see accounting as boring or uninteresting may be less likely to pursue careers in the field. Parental influence is also an important factor that can influence students' intentions to pursue careers in accounting. Parents who have positive perceptions of the accounting profession may encourage their children to pursue careers in the field. On the other hand, negative perceptions may discourage students from pursuing accounting as a career. Interest and ability are also important factors that influence students' intentions. Accounting requires a specific set of skills, including analytical thinking, attention to detail, and strong communication skills (Dolce et al., 2020[9]). Students who possess these skills and have an interest in accounting are more likely to pursue careers in the field. It is important to address these factors in order to encourage more students to pursue careers in accounting and meet the growing demand for professional accountants worldwide.

## 2 Literature Review

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is a psychological theory that has been widely used to predict human social behavior. It is based on the idea that an individual's beliefs and attitudes shape their behavioral intentions, which in turn influence their behavior. The theory consists of three main components: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The scholar Ajzen (1991)[2] who elaborated TPB defined attitude as an individual's positive or negative feelings about behavior. These feelings are a function of the individual's beliefs about the consequences of that behavior and their evaluation of the desirability of those consequences. For example, if an individual believes that exercising regularly will lead to better health and they value good health, they are likely to have a positive attitude towards exercising. Subjective norms refer to an individual's perception of whether or not the people around them believe that the behavior should be performed. This can include the opinions of family members, friends, and colleagues. If an individual perceives that the people around them believe that a particular behavior, such as recycling, is important, they are more likely to engage in that behavior. The subjective norm is an individual's perception of whether or not the person to whom he or she attaches importance believes the behavior should be performed. Furthermore, perceived behavioral control refers to the degree to which an individual feels able to perform a particular behavior. This depends on the degree of control that the individual has over the behavior and their confidence in their ability to perform it. For example, if an individual wants to start a new exercise routine but feels that they do not have enough time, they may perceive that they have low control over the behavior and may be less likely to engage in it. In conclusion, perceived behavioral

control is the degree to which a person feels able to perform the behavior, which depends on the degree of control he has over the behavior and his confidence (Ajzen, 1991[2]).

TPB has been widely applied to predict various behaviors, including health-related behaviors, leisure choices, adoption of new technologies, unethical behavior, and so on. The studies Wen mentioned have used the framework provided by the TPB to analyze and explain students' career decisions. Although researchers in the past have studied various factors that explain students' career choices in multiple occupations using theories such as trait and factor theory (TFT) and theory of reasoned action (TRA), TPB covers voluntary behaviors of people that TFT and TRA cannot explain. When individual control over behavior is limited, individual behavioral intentions cannot be the sole determinant of behavior. The TPB can explain the relationship between behavioral intentions and actual behavior by adding "perceived behavioral control."

As TPB is considered a well-established theory to explain behavioral prediction, TPB is used as the underlying theory to investigate accounting students' intentions to obtain a professional accounting qualification and seeks to understand what drives these intentions in this paper (Albayati, et al., 2023[3]; Alshurafat, et al., 2021[4]; Taing & Chang, 2021[15]). There is no perfect relationship between behavioral intention and actual behavior, but such intention can be used as a proxy measure of behavior. As a result, to investigate accounting students' intentions to obtain professional accounting qualifications, many researchers conducted a sampling survey on the factors that influence students' willingness to learn CPA qualification. Commonly used TPB assumptions include :

H1. Students' attitudes towards professional accounting careers.

H2. Views of significant others.

H3. Students' views on their interests and abilities.

The data and results provided by previous scholars have contributed greatly to the goals of this study. These assumptions will be specifically examined and described in detail below.

### **3 Factors that Affect the Intentions of Accounting Students in pursuing Professional Accountancy Qualification**

#### **3.1 Attitudes**

Attitudes are an essential component of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and have been shown to have a significant impact on behavior. Attitudes are influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Extrinsic factors, such as social prestige, market opportunities, and earning potential, are external motivators that can influence an individual's attitude towards a particular behavior. On the other hand, intrinsic factors are internal motivators that stem from an individual's personal interests, values, and beliefs. In the context of accounting education, extrinsic factors such as earning potential and market opportunities have been shown to influence students' attitudes towards pursuing a

career in accounting (Hatane, et al., 2021[11]; Jackson, et al., 2023[13]). Intrinsic job satisfaction factors include opportunities for creativity and independence, as well as the opportunity to be challenged in one's daily work. However, intrinsic factors such as job satisfaction, opportunities for creativity and independence, and intellectual challenges associated with accounting courses have been found to be less emphasised by accounting students. Despite the apparent lack of importance placed on intrinsic factors by accounting students, it can be inferred that these factors are more dominant than extrinsic factors in influencing students' willingness to pursue a future career as a professional accountant. This is because perceived intrinsic factors are the basis of both the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and TPB. Intrinsic factors such as job satisfaction and opportunities for creativity and independence are essential motivators that can lead to a positive attitude towards a particular behavior. When students perceive accounting as a profession that offers opportunities for creativity, independence, and intellectual challenges, they are more likely to have a positive attitude towards pursuing a career in accounting. Furthermore, intrinsic factors such as job satisfaction and opportunities for creativity and independence can also lead to higher levels of job performance and job satisfaction. When individuals are satisfied with their jobs and feel that they have opportunities to be creative and independent, they are more likely to be motivated to perform well and achieve their goals. In conclusion, attitudes are an essential component of the TPB and have a significant impact on behavior. Attitudes are influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, but intrinsic factors are more dominant in influencing students' willingness to pursue a future career as a professional accountant. Intrinsic factors such as job satisfaction, opportunities for creativity and independence, and intellectual challenges associated with accounting courses are essential motivators that can lead to a positive attitude towards pursuing a career in accounting. By understanding the importance of intrinsic factors, accounting educators and professionals can better motivate and prepare students for a successful career in accounting.

### 3.2 Subjective Norms

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) suggests that social pressure plays a significant role in an individual's decision-making. According to TPB, in the subjective norm, social pressure influences a person's decision-making. Social pressure in TPB comes mainly from the people around him or her. Specifically, the subjective norm component of TPB suggests that an individual's perception of what significant others think about a particular behavior can influence their behavioral intentions. This social pressure can come from a variety of sources, including family, friends, and instructors. In the context of accounting education, the role of the accounting instructor is crucial in shaping students' perspectives. Jackling and Calero (2006)[12] argue that accounting instructors can influence students' attitudes towards the profession and their intentions to pursue a career in accounting. By providing students with a positive view of the accounting profession and highlighting the opportunities and benefits of pursuing a career in accounting, instructors can influence students' perceptions of the profession and their intentions to pursue it. Parents and peers can also play a significant role in shaping students' intentions to pursue a career in accounting. Dalci and Özyapici (2018)[8] suggest that

parental influence and peer pressure can influence students' intentions to choose a career in accounting. In particular, the authors suggest that parental influence is significant in Chinese culture, where respect for the authority of parents and teachers is deeply ingrained. In Confucianism, obedience, loyalty, and care for parents are considered fundamental values that lay the foundation for moral behavior in individuals. However, as Western values such as personal autonomy and freedom of choice become more prevalent in Chinese society, the influence of parental and peer pressure on students' career choices may be weakening. Students may be more likely to make their own decisions about their career paths, rather than simply following the wishes of their parents or peers. Despite the potential weakening of parental and peer influence, the role of social pressure in shaping students' intentions to pursue a career in accounting should not be underestimated. Instructors, parents, and peers can all play a significant role in shaping students' perceptions of the accounting profession and their intentions to pursue it. By providing positive messages about the profession and highlighting the benefits of pursuing a career in accounting, these individuals can influence students' attitudes towards the profession and their intentions to pursue it. In conclusion, the theory of planned behavior suggests that social pressure, as reflected in the subjective norm component of the theory, can influence an individual's decision-making. In the context of accounting education, instructors, parents, and peers can all play a significant role in shaping students' perceptions of the accounting profession and their intentions to pursue a career in accounting. While the influence of social pressure may be weakening in some cultures, it remains an important factor to consider in understanding students' intentions to pursue a career in accounting.

### 3.3 Perceived Behavioral Control

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) suggests that perceived behavioral control is an essential component in predicting an individual's behavior. Perceived behavioral control refers to the degree of control an individual has over achieving their goals. In the context of accounting education, an accounting student's personal interests and abilities are particularly important in determining their intentions to qualify for the accounting profession. For example, an accounting student's interest in taking the CPA exam and their ability to obtain a CPA certificate while in college can affect their intentions to pursue a career in accounting. The CPA designation is not only difficult to obtain but also challenging to maintain. According to the China Institute of Certified Public Accountants (CICPA), the average pass rate for all Level I exams from 1993 to 2007 was only 16% (CICPA, 2012)[6]. This indicates that obtaining a CPA designation is a challenging task that requires a significant amount of effort and dedication. Furthermore, maintaining the CPA designation is also challenging for accounting professionals. The CICPA requires its members to take a minimum of 80 hours of continuing professional education (CPE) every two years to maintain the CPA designation (CICPA, 2006)[5]. This indicates that maintaining the CPA designation requires a significant amount of time and effort, and it may not be feasible for some accounting professionals. In the context of TPB, whether accounting students are interested in obtaining the CPA designation and their confidence level in their ability to maintain the credential become

critical assumptions. If an accounting student has a high level of interest in obtaining the CPA designation and is confident in their ability to maintain the credential, they are more likely to have a positive attitude towards pursuing a career in accounting and a higher intention to do so. On the other hand, if an accounting student has a low level of interest in obtaining the CPA designation or is not confident in their ability to maintain the credential, they are less likely to have a positive attitude towards pursuing a career in accounting and a lower intention to do so. In conclusion, perceived behavioral control is an essential component of the TPB in predicting an individual's behavior. In the context of accounting education, an accounting student's personal interests and abilities are particularly important in determining their intentions to pursue a career in accounting. Whether accounting students are interested in obtaining the CPA designation and their confidence level in their ability to maintain the credential become critical assumptions in the TPB. By considering these factors, accounting educators and professionals can better understand and predict students' intentions to pursue a career in accounting.

## 4 Conclusions

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) has been widely used to understand the factors that influence students' intentions to pursue careers in accounting. According to TPB, personal attitudes, the perceptions of influential people around them about the accounting profession, and students' interests and abilities are the main factors that influence their intentions. Personal attitudes refer to the individual's beliefs and feelings about the accounting profession. For example, a student may view accounting as a stable and lucrative career, or they may see it as boring and uninteresting. These attitudes can be shaped by personal experiences, cultural norms, and societal expectations. The perceptions of influential people around them also play a significant role in shaping students' intentions. These influential people may include parents, teachers, peers, and mentors. If these individuals have positive perceptions of the accounting profession, they may encourage students to pursue careers in accounting. On the other hand, negative perceptions may discourage students from pursuing accounting as a career. Students' interests and abilities are also important factors that influence their intentions. Accounting requires a specific set of skills, including analytical thinking, attention to detail, and strong communication skills. Students who possess these skills and have an interest in accounting are more likely to pursue careers in the field. However, the effect of intentions may change over time. With the growing popularity of freedom of choice and the challenge of the CPA exam, students may face more barriers to entering the accounting profession. For example, the CPA exam is notoriously difficult, and many students may struggle to pass it. Additionally, the increasing demand for accounting professionals has led to a more competitive job market, making it more difficult for students to find employment in the field. Despite these challenges, the accounting profession remains an attractive career choice for many students. It offers stability, job security, and the potential for career advancement. Furthermore, the skills and knowledge gained through an accounting education can be applied to a wide range of industries and professions. To encourage more students to pursue careers in accounting, it is important to

address the barriers that they may face. This may include providing more resources and support for students preparing for the CPA exam, promoting the benefits of pursuing a career in accounting, and increasing awareness of the career opportunities available in the field. While the effect of intentions may change over time, the accounting profession will continue to play a vital role in the development of countries and economies around the world.

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