

Community Interest and the Future of Community Academy: a Case for Establishing a State Polytechnic in West-South Aceh

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines community perceptions and levels of interest in the establishment of a state polytechnic in the West-South Aceh region, particularly following the collaborative initiative of D4 programs by Akademi Komunitas Negeri Aceh Barat (AKN Aceh Barat) and Politeknik Negeri Lhokseumawe (PNL). Using a quantitative cross-sectional design, data were collected through an online survey completed by 242 respondents. Descriptive statistics, t-tests, and one-way ANOVA were applied to assess perceptions across three key indicators: the urgency of establishing a polytechnic, personal interest in attending, and family interest in polytechnic education. Results indicate overwhelming support across demographic groups, with over 93% consider the establishment urgent, and more than 84% expressed personal or familial interest. Although men showed significantly higher personal interest than women, no significant differences were observed by region or education level. Community preferences for mining, maritime, and informatics programs demonstrate a clear connection to the region's workforce demands and industrial profile. These findings provide strong empirical support for upgrading AKN Aceh Barat into a state polytechnic, addressing both educational and regional workforce development needs.

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Introduction

Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 7 on Establishment, Modification, and Dissolution of Public and Private Higher Education Institutions (2020) restricts community colleges in Indonesia from offering degrees higher than 2 year diploma (D2) programs. Without the

opportunity to develop into a Polytechnic, Institute, or University, community colleges remain at the lowest tier of the higher education system. This restriction aligns with Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 4 of 2014 on the Implementation and Management of Higher Education (2014), which defines vocational education as a higher education institution that prepares students for jobs with certain applied expertise from diploma to applied undergraduate programs.

According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Kementerian Ketenagakerjaan, (2024), a total of 92 state community academy have existed in Indonesia. However, only 63 community academy remain operational in Indonesia, of which only five are state-run institutions Daftarsekolah, (2025). All of these state-run community academies were nationalized during Bambang Yudhoyono's administration. These institutions are: Akademi Komunitas Negeri Pacitan (AKN Pacitan), East Java; Akademi Komunitas Negeri Putra Sang Fajar Blitar (AKB), East Java; Akademi Komunitas Negeri Seni dan Budaya Yogyakarta (AKNSB Yogyakarta), Special Region of Yogyakarta; Akademi Komunitas Negeri Aceh Barat (AKN Aceh Barat), Aceh; and Akademi Komunitas Negeri Rejang Lebong (AKREL), Bengkulu Albertus, (2023).

These state-run community colleges have struggled to attract students each year due to negative employment perceptions of D1 and D2 graduates. One such institution is AKN Aceh Barat, the only community college in Aceh Province, which offers a D2 program in engineering. Research by Utomo (2021) and Abrassart and Wolter (2020) supports this observation, arguing that low social prestige and skepticism about vocational graduates' career prospects in Indonesia often result in prospective students avoiding vocational higher education pathways. This perception is compounded by the lack of job openings specifically targeting D2 qualifications in both the public and private sectors Abrassart and Wolter, (2020). For instance, job fair data from the Department of Manpower Aceh Barat Dinas Tenaga Kerja Aceh Barat, (2024) revealed that only one position was available for D2 graduates, specifically in the health sector. This misalignment between educational qualifications and labor market needs underscores the diminishing relevance of D2 programs in meeting local workforce demands (Esmail and Khan, 2024; Putranto et al., 2024).

The ongoing stigma surrounding D1 and D2 education has contributed to a steady decline in student enrollment at community colleges over the years. Enrollment data from P2M AKN Aceh Barat shows that the number of students at AKN Aceh Barat dropped from 75 in 2019 to just 27 in 2022. However, this trend has recently reversed, with enrollment rebounding from 45 students in 2023 to 110 in 2024, 20% of whom were employed workers. This sudden increase appears to be driven by a recent shift in promotional efforts Chusanawati and Purwinarti, (2015), a factor also

observed in Politeknik LP3I Makassar Nasir, (2025) and Politeknik Tridaya Virtu Morosi Badia et al., (2024), where changes in promotional strategies played a role in attracting prospective students and.

Even though previous studies indicate that the majority of students enrolled at AKN Aceh Barat come from vocational high schools and that gaining practical skills was the primary reason they chose AKN Aceh Barat over other local institutions such as Universitas Teuku Umar (UTU) and STAIN Meulaboh Masykar and Nurrahmi, (2020), the number of enrolled students remains lower than those at the two state campuses in Aceh Barat. This disparity highlights the persistent gap between student motivations and public perceptions of vocational education's long-term value Cheng and Nguyen, (2024).

AKN Aceh Barat established a collaboration with Politeknik Negeri Lhokseumawe (PNL), the only state-owned polytechnic in Aceh, to offer a D4 program through a joint degree. As a result, students enrolling in D2 programs at AKN Aceh Barat now have a direct transfer pathway to D4 programs at PNL, making the existing D2 programs more attractive. This aligns with findings by Wahyuni, (2023) who reported high public interest in distance learning programs offered by vocational institutions at Universitas Indonesia (UI). Among the reasons cited for this interest are cost-effectiveness and accessibility, as distance learning reduces the financial burden of travel and accommodation.

For students in Aceh Barat, studying D4 at PNL requires a five-hour commute, along with additional expenses for travel, accommodation, and living costs, making it financially burdensome. By offering a joint learning program at AKN Aceh Barat, students can now pursue higher education without leaving their hometown, making enrollment in D2 programs more appealing. The success of this new promotional approach and program expansion raises the question of whether another polytechnic is needed in Aceh. While many of the 92 state community colleges have been merged with nearby polytechnics and universities, none have been upgraded into a polytechnic. This may soon change, as the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology has indicated the possibility of converting five state-owned community colleges into polytechnics Tubinnews, (2025).

This study identifies a significant research gap in the existing literature regarding the level of community interest in establishing a state polytechnic in West-South Aceh in light of the recent collaboration between Akademi Komunitas Negeri Aceh Barat (AKN Aceh Barat) and Politeknik Negeri Lhokseumawe (PNL) to offer a D4 program through distance learning. While previous research has explored the challenges and opportunities of vocational education in Indonesia

(Putranto et al., 2024; Utomo, 2021; Wahyuni, 2023), there is a lack of specific data on community perceptions and needs in this particular region Masykar and Nurrahmi, (2020).

This study aims to address this gap by investigating the following research questions: To what extent does the community in West-South Aceh support the establishment of a state polytechnic in terms of perceived urgency, personal interest, and family interest? How do demographic factors such as gender, education level, and region influence community interest in polytechnic education? What study programs are most preferred by the community, and how do these preferences align with regional economic characteristics? By utilizing a mixed-methods approach—incorporating online surveys, interviews, and qualitative data analysis—this research aims to offer valuable insights into community perspectives. These findings can help policymakers, educational institutions, and stakeholders strengthen vocational education and adapt to the region's evolving needs. Transforming AKN Aceh Barat into a polytechnic could increase student enrollment and produce more D3 and D4 graduates, aligning with the workforce demands of both the public and private sectors in the region.

Method

This study used a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional survey method. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via WhatsApp and other digital platforms. Although the online survey method poses certain limitations, particularly for individuals with insufficient digital literacy, it also offers advantages. Respondents were able to access the questionnaire more easily and complete it at their convenience, which helped increase participation rates. A total of 242 respondents with an average age of 34. (SD = 11.12) completed the survey, with a margin of error of 6.29% at a 95% confidence level. The survey instrument included two main sections: demographic information (age, gender, region, education level, and occupation) three items using a 7-point Likert scale to assess perceptions of the urgency of establishing a polytechnic, personal interest in attending, and family interest in polytechnic education. Prior to distribution, it was reviewed by four experts in vocational education to ensure content validity. Cronbach's alpha for the three Likert-scale items was 0.81, indicating good reliability.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe sample characteristics and overall trends. Inferential statistics, including independent sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA, were employed to examine whether responses varied significantly across education levels, gender, and regional origin. The assumptions underlying the t-tests and ANOVA were considered. Data were treated as

approximately normal given the sample size and scale type, and Levene’s Test confirmed homogeneity of variances in all but one case. Where this assumption was violated (personal interest), Welch’s correction was applied. The analysis aimed to determine the consistency and variation of support for the establishment of a polytechnic across different demographic segments.

Result and Discussion

Demographic Data

The survey results reveal a diverse range of respondents interested in the potential establishment of a polytechnic in West-South Aceh. The majority of respondents are male (61.6%) and of working age (26-45 years old). Most respondents have pursued higher education, with the largest group holding D3/D4/S1 degrees, followed by postgraduate degree holders. Occupationally, government employees comprise the largest group, followed by private sector employees and self-employed individuals. Students also constitute a substantial portion of the respondents. This diverse demographic profile highlights the broad interest in the establishment of a polytechnic and the potential impact it could have on various segments of the community.

The data in Table 1 reveals a diverse age and gender distribution among the survey respondents. The largest age group is 26–35 years, comprising 97 respondents, followed by the 36–45 age group with 61 respondents—both of which indicate a significant proportion of working-age individuals. Younger respondents aged 16–25 also represent a considerable segment of the sample (43 respondents), suggesting active interest in polytechnic education among those at the beginning of their higher education journey.

Table 1. Age distribution of the respondents

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>
16-25	43	Male	171
26-35	97	Female	70
36-45	61		
46-55	23		
56-67	15		

Older age groups, such as those aged 46–55 (23 respondents) and 56–67 (15 respondents), are represented in smaller numbers, yet contribute valuable generational perspectives. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents are male (171 individuals), while females make up 70 of the total participants. This demographic spread highlights broad-based interest in the potential

establishment of a polytechnic, with perspectives coming from both genders and across multiple life stages, from youth considering future educational paths to adults reflecting on regional development and vocational opportunities. Table 2 explain the distribution of respondents' educational backgrounds reveals that most have pursued higher education, with D3/D4/S1 graduates constituting the largest group (65 individuals), followed by postgraduate degree holders (48 individuals).

Table 2. Education distribution of the respondent

<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>
High school graduate	51
Diploma 1 and 2	30
Diploma 3 & 4 and Bachelor degree	60
Postgraduate	40

This indicates a strong presence of individuals with advanced academic qualifications. Meanwhile, 50 respondents have completed SMA (high school) or its equivalent, highlighting a notable number still considering higher education options. D1/D2 graduates account for 36 respondents, reflecting a moderate presence of those with vocational diplomas. This number is expected considering AKN Aceh Barat produced less D2 graduate each year compared to nearby universities. Table 3 presents the distribution of respondents by their occupation category. The largest group is "government employees," comprising 78 respondents, which includes teachers, civil servants, and other public sector employees.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents by occupation category

<i>Occupation category</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>
High school graduate	51
Diploma 1 and 2	30
Diploma 3 & 4 and Bachelor degree	60
Postgraduate	40

This is followed by "private sector employees" with 38 respondents and "self-employed" with 35 respondents. "students" make up a substantial portion with 35 respondents, while "unemployed" accounts for 14 respondents. The smallest groups are pensioners with 8 respondents. This distribution indicates a diverse range of occupations among the respondents, with a notable

representation from both the public and private sectors, as well as students and self-employed individuals. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of survey respondents by district origin within the West-South region of Aceh.

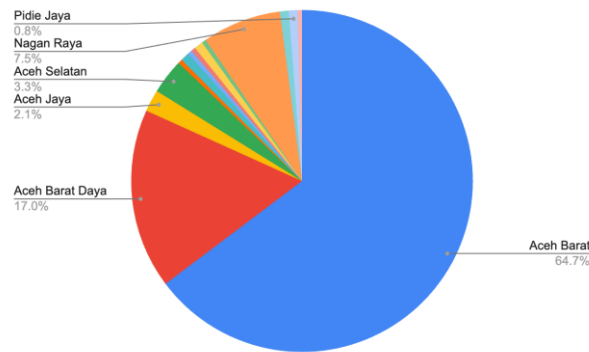


Fig 1: Distribution of respondents by district of origin

The majority of respondents—64.7%—are from Aceh Barat, which is also the location of Akademi Komunitas Negeri Aceh Barat (AKN Aceh Barat), suggesting strong local participation and interest. The second-largest group comes from Aceh Barat Daya with 17.0%, followed by Nagan Raya at 7.5%. Other districts are represented in smaller proportions, including Aceh Selatan (3.3%), Aceh Jaya (2.1%), and Pidie Jaya (0.8%). This uneven distribution of responses is likely influenced by proximity to the community college and existing awareness of vocational education initiatives in the area. When compared to the population distribution chart (Figure 2), it becomes evident that while Aceh Selatan and Nagan Raya have large populations within the productive age range (15–64 years), with 150,773 and 107,038 individuals respectively, their representation among survey respondents is relatively low.

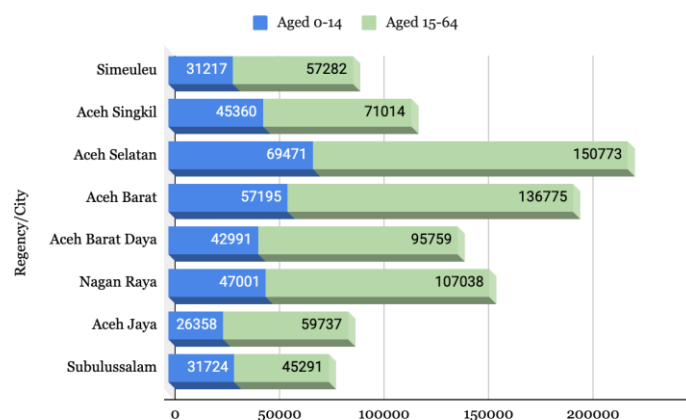


Fig 2: Population of the West-South region aged 0–14 and 15–64

In contrast, Aceh Barat, with a population of 136.775 in the same age group, contributes the highest proportion of respondents. This discrepancy suggests that factors such as geographic proximity to AKN Aceh Barat, program outreach, and existing community engagement efforts may significantly influence survey participation. Despite substantial populations in surrounding districts, interest in polytechnic development may be underrepresented due to limited access or awareness, highlighting a potential area for strategic outreach and inclusion in future planning.

Community Interest in Polytechnic

The survey results in Figure 3 demonstrate strong community interest in the establishment of a polytechnic. A significant majority of respondents (93.6%) perceive the establishment of a polytechnic as urgent, while only 5.9% consider it non-urgent. Regarding individual interest in studying at a polytechnic, 84.5% of respondents expressed willingness to enroll, compared to 15.0% who were not interested. Similarly, when asked about their family's interest, 90.9% reported that their family members were interested in pursuing education at a polytechnic, while only 8.6% indicated a lack of interest. These findings highlight an overwhelming community demand and support for the presence of a polytechnic, both for personal education and for the educational aspirations of family members that shown on figure 3.

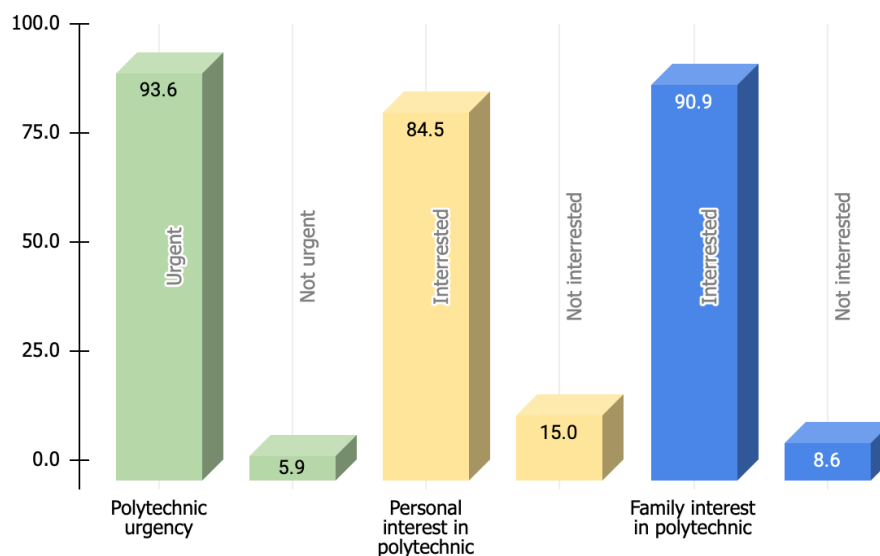


Fig 3: Community interest in polytechnic in general

Statistical analysis was conducted to examine the differences in responses regarding the establishment of a Politeknik Negeri in Aceh Barat and interest in attending it. Three variables were analyzed, representing agreement with establishing the polytechnic, personal interest in studying

there, and the belief that a family member would be interested. Pairwise t-tests were performed to compare the means of each column pair, and an ANOVA was conducted to assess overall differences across the three columns. The t-tests revealed no statistically significant differences between the mean responses for any of the paired comparisons (polytechnic urgency vs. personal interest in polytechnic: $t = 1.05$, $df = 394.81$, $p = 0.294$; polytechnic urgency vs. familial interest in polytechnic: $t = 0.91$, $df = 395.98$, $p = 0.364$; personal interest in polytechnic vs. familial interest in polytechnic: $t = -0.14$, $df = 397.99$, $p = 0.889$). Similarly, the ANOVA showed no statistically significant overall difference in the means of the three variables ($F = 0.607$, $df = 2, 594$, $p = 0.545$). In conclusion, the analysis suggests that there is no significant variation in the level of agreement, personal interest, and perceived family interest related to the establishment of the Politeknik Negeri. In other words, people's general support for the polytechnic to be established in the South West region is consistent with their personal and familial interest in it.

Preferred majors for polytechnic

The survey findings presented in Figure 4 reveal a clear hierarchy of community interest in preferred fields of study at the proposed polytechnic. The mining sector emerged as the most favored, with 69.9% of respondents expressing interest, followed by maritime (56.2%) and information technology (41.6%).

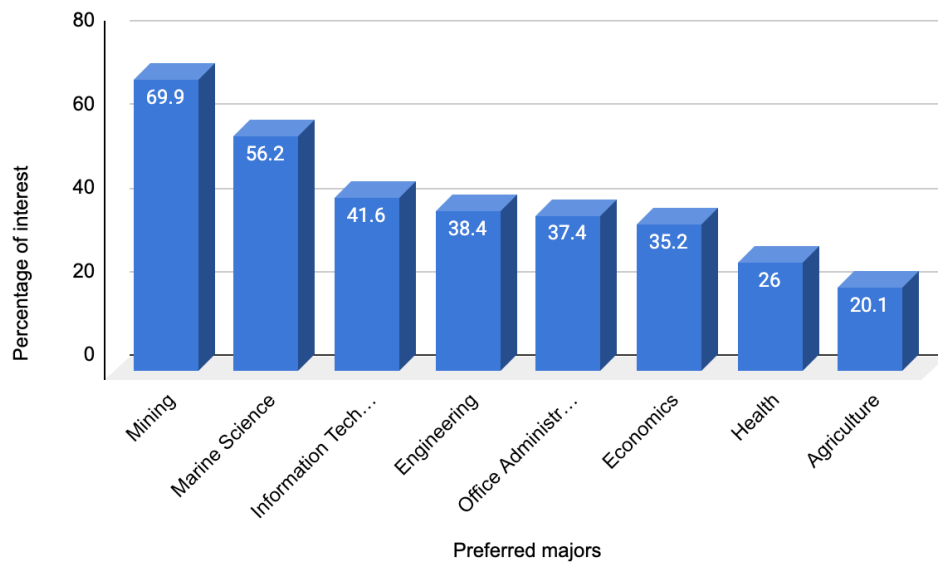


Fig 4: Percentage of interest in polytechnic majors

These fields show strong appeal and are likely influenced by regional characteristics—mining is expectedly popular given the number of coal mining companies operating in the area, while the

interest in marine science is supported by West Aceh’s coastal geography along the west-south coastline of the province. Other fields such as engineering (38.4%), office administration (37.4%), and economics (35.2%) also attracted notable attention, although to a slightly lesser extent. Meanwhile, health sciences (26.0%) and agriculture (20.1%) received the least interest, though they remain significant in terms of regional development potential. Interestingly, the pattern of preferences observed in this study contrasts with national trends reported by Statistik Pendidikan Tinggi Dihni, (2021) which highlight more conventional majors such as education and health sciences as the most popular in Indonesia. These differences underscore the importance of designing polytechnic programs that are tailored to local economic contexts and labor demands rather than relying solely on national-level trends. The strong community interest in mining, maritime, and informatics suggests that aligning academic offerings with these sectors could not only increase enrollment but also enhance the relevance and impact of vocational education in the region Wu, (2024).

Polytechnic interest based on background education

Figure 5 presents a comparison of polytechnic interest across respondents with different educational backgrounds: High School, 1-2 Year Diploma (D2), 3-Year Diploma & Bachelor, and Postgraduate.

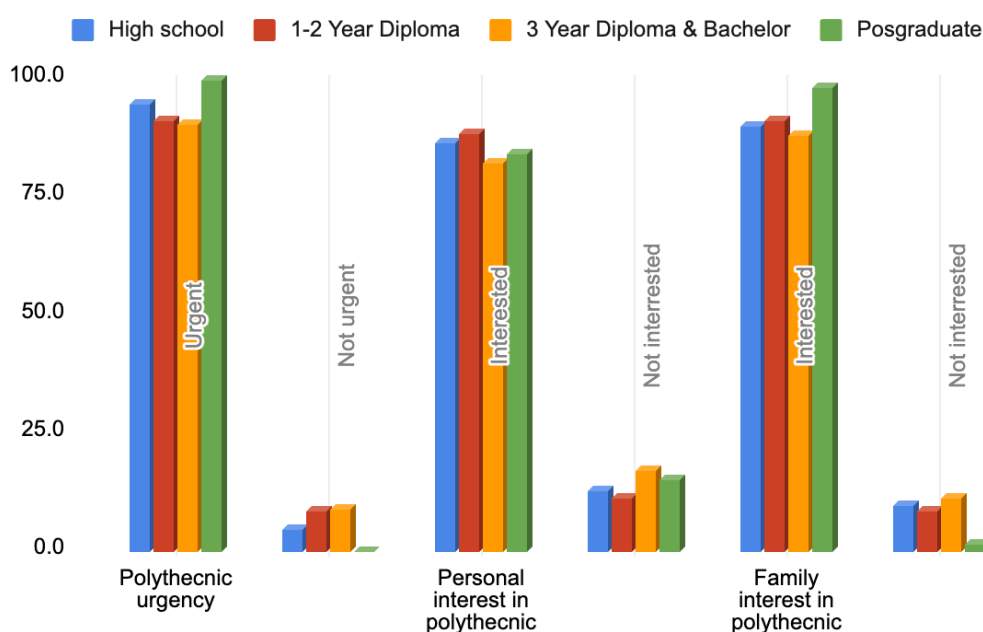


Fig 5: Comparison of polytechnic interest between high school and D2 graduates

The figure illustrates responses across three indicators: the urgency of establishing a polytechnic, personal interest in attending, and family interest in polytechnic education.

Overall, all education groups demonstrate very high levels of agreement regarding the urgency of establishing a polytechnic, with percentages approaching or exceeding 90%. Postgraduate respondents show the highest urgency levels, followed closely by high school and diploma graduates. Similar patterns are observed in personal interest, where all groups show strong support, though high school and D2 graduates report slightly higher enthusiasm than those with more advanced academic qualifications. In terms of family interest, support remains consistently strong across all groups, with postgraduates again showing the highest level of agreement. Previous research by Busemeyer and Garritzmann (2017) also highlighted that educational background plays a crucial role in shaping preferences for vocational education, which aligns with the distribution trends observed in this study.

To assess whether these differences were statistically significant, a One-Way ANOVA test was conducted for each variable. The results showed no significant differences in responses based on educational background. For polytechnic urgency, the ANOVA yielded $F(1.64) = 0.036$ with a p-value of 0.849. For personal interest, $F(1.64) = 0.367$ with a p-value of 0.547, and for family interest, $F(1.64) = 0.176$ with a p-value of 0.676. These results confirm that while there are visible trends in the chart, the differences across educational backgrounds are not statistically significant, indicating broad and uniform support for polytechnic education regardless of academic attainment. Previous research also highlighted that education background played a crucial role in preferences for vocational education.

Polytechnic interest based on gender

The chart in Figure 6 illustrates a comparison of polytechnic interest between male and female respondents across three dimensions: perceived urgency of establishing a polytechnic, personal interest in attending a polytechnic, and family interest in polytechnic education. The data shows that both male and female respondents overwhelmingly view the establishment of a polytechnic as urgent, with both groups nearing or slightly exceeding 90%. In terms of personal interest, male respondents exhibit higher enthusiasm (mean = 5.95) than females (mean = 5.36), and a similar pattern is observed in family interest, with males reporting a mean of 6.32 compared to females at 5.96. According to the Centre for the Development of Vocational Training Cedefop, (2025) in Europe and Kenya, Africa Murgor, (2013), male participation in vocational education and training (VET) programs in Europe is generally higher than female participation. Similar patterns are observed In

Indonesia. Data from the OECD (2024) indicates that while 51% of graduates from upper secondary general programs are female, only 46% of graduates from vocational programs are female.

Statistical analysis using independent t-tests revealed that the difference in perceived urgency between males (mean = 6.52) and females (mean = 6.44) was not statistically significant ($t = 0.370$, $p = 0.712$). Similarly, the difference in family interest was also not significant ($t = 1.562$, $p = 0.120$). However, the difference in personal interest was found to be statistically significant ($t = 2.038$, $p = 0.044$), with males expressing a notably higher interest than females. Levene's test indicated unequal variances for this variable ($p = 0.024$), and the appropriate correction was applied.

Notably, the proportion of respondents who are not interested or consider the initiative not urgent remains very small across all categories and both genders. The statistically significant difference in personal interest may reflect gender-based differences in access to, or perception of, vocational pathways. Overall, the findings confirm broad and consistent support for the establishment of a polytechnic among both male and female respondents.

This gender disparity aligns with broader findings that women remain underrepresented in technical and STEM-oriented vocational education (Cedefop, 2025; Zhou and Chen, 2025). In Indonesia specifically, studies indicate that males dominate engineering and maritime fields in vocational high schools, while females are concentrated in business, tourism, arts, and health domains (Purnomo et al., 2025). Moreover, the labor market structure also reinforces these choices: sectors such as mining remain overwhelmingly male, with over 90% employment by men (Tjitrajaya and Handoko, 2025). Cultural expectations and the perception of higher wages in technical fields further intensify this phenomenon Khabibah et al., (2025). Explain comparison of polytechnic interest between male and female in Figure 6

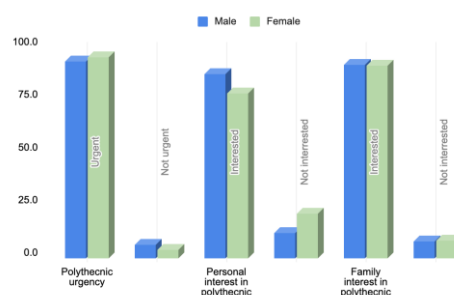


Fig 6: Comparison of polytechnic interest between male and female

Polytechnic interest based on regions

Across all three groups, there is a consistently high perception of urgency in establishing a polytechnic (Figure 7). Respondents from the West and Other districts express almost unanimous

agreement, with percentages approaching or reaching 100%. In contrast, respondents from the South also show a majority agreement, though at a slightly lower rate—around 65%—suggesting comparatively lower urgency in that region. However, results from a one-way ANOVA confirm that the observed variation is not statistically significant ($F = 0.121$, $p = 0.886$), indicating that perceptions of urgency are statistically consistent across the three regions. When it comes to personal and family interest, respondents from the Other districts show the strongest support, followed by those from the West. The South region reports noticeably lower levels in both dimensions, though a majority still express interest. Despite these differences in observed proportions, ANOVA tests again reveal no statistically significant differences in personal interest ($F = 0.167$, $p = 0.846$) or family interest ($F = 0.094$, $p = 0.910$) across the three regions. These findings suggest that although there may be practical or perceptual variations between regions, the overall support for establishing a polytechnic remains statistically uniform. Grafik Comparison of polytechnic interest between districts in Figure 7.

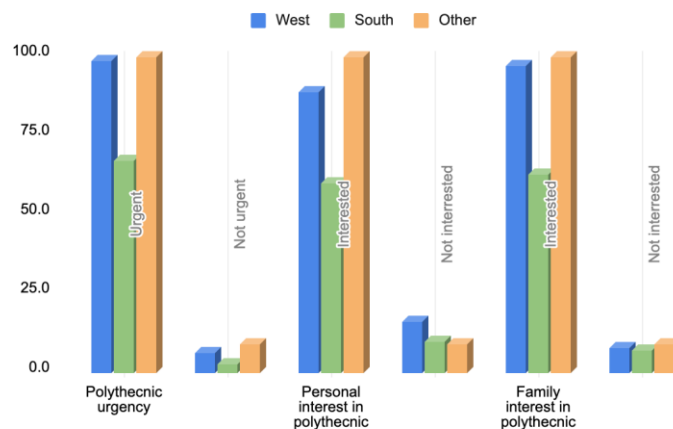


Fig 7: Comparison of polytechnic interest between districts

The Figure 7 highlights regional variation in visible enthusiasm, with the West and Other districts demonstrating stronger readiness compared to the South. These insights, despite lacking statistical significance, may still be valuable in guiding targeted outreach and program design to better engage communities, particularly in the southern districts.

Conclusion

This study found widespread and consistent community support for the establishment of a state polytechnic in West-South Aceh. Most respondents, regardless of gender, region, or educational background, perceived the initiative as urgent and expressed strong personal and familial interest

in polytechnic education. Interest was especially high among respondents from working-age groups and those with D2 backgrounds. Mining, maritime, and informatics emerged as the most favored study programs, reflecting local economic priorities. Although minor variations existed by gender and region, statistical analysis confirmed that most differences were not significant, except for a higher level of personal interest among male respondents. These results reinforce the case for upgrading AKN Aceh Barat into a state polytechnic as a strategy for expanding access to vocational education and aligning educational pathways with regional workforce needs. This study is limited by its exclusive use of online survey methods, which may not fully capture the perspectives of individuals without reliable internet access or digital literacy, particularly in remote areas. Furthermore, the respondent distribution is concentrated in Aceh Barat, potentially biasing results toward higher levels of interest due to geographical proximity to AKN Aceh Barat. The study's reliance on self-reported data also introduces potential for response bias. Future studies should consider broader geographic sampling and alternative data collection methods to validate and expand upon these findings.

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