

An Enquiry on Career Aspirations among Higher Secondary School Students in Kerala

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Abstract

One of the major objectives of formal education is to prepare the educand for a suitable career and to achieve it. Higher secondary education is a gateway to different careers and the students make career decisions during this period of studies. The present study explores the level of career aspiration among higher secondary school students in Kerala state. A career aspiration scale constructed and standardized by Grewal (2011) was administered to a sample of 250 higher secondary school students in the State of Kerala. The results of the study show that the higher secondary school students possess average level of career aspiration. It was found that demographic variables such as gender, locale, and socio-economic status influence the level of career aspiration. The findings of the study point to the need for providing career guidance programmes to augment the career aspirations of students, especially male students and students from rural areas and from families of low socio-economic status.

Key words: Education; Career Aspiration; Demographic Variables; Career Guidance; Socio-Economic Status and Higher Secondary School Students.

Introduction

Today nobody can live without engaging in an occupation. But it is very difficult for an individual to achieve desired profession. Opportunities are meager and millions of seekers compete for them. Human beings are craving for the scarce resources for their livelihood. One should excel others in his/her performance otherwise he/she will be thrown out from the career market. Therefore, one should aspire for a career keeping in mind the realities of the present world and his/her own strengths and weaknesses. Aspirations help define one's career goals. Some people require the position and responsibility of a traditional career. Others want financial security. Some look for technical areas. Others want freedom for working. There are individuals who want a balance with their work and their personal lives. Such

aspirations develop in individuals during their adolescent period.

Career aspiration may be considered as a cluster of needs, motives, and behavioral intentions which individuals articulate with respect to different career field options. Researchers have defined the concept of aspiration as an expectation or goal comprising intentions and attitudes. An intention is a plan of action undertaken to achieve a particular goal, whereas an attitude represents one's personal orientation toward a goal. Thus, the intention to pursue the goal and the attitude toward the goal comprise an individual's aspiration. Career aspirations are individual ambitions related to occupations (Rojewski, 2005). Teenage career aspirations are linked to adult social status attainment (Ashby & Schoon, 2010). One's level of career aspiration thus becomes an indicator of his/her future affluence.

In many cases, students' career aspirations are influenced by the stereotypes held on what men and women can be, rather than their potentials, interests, values, and special abilities. In the absence of proper career guidance programmes, many other factors influence the students' career aspirations such as opinion and attitude of the family members, teachers,

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relatives, and peers. At the higher secondary school level, students are given opportunities to choose subjects that they would wish to concentrate on higher education in colleges and universities. Although the selection is supposed to be on the basis of their performance, their interests and aptitudes are never considered; hence majority choose careers, according to the opinion of peers, teachers, the financial potentials of the parents or with no specific reasons.

Development of career aspiration is influenced by a number of factors. Crowley-Long (2003) observed that there are a number of individual factors that could influence career aspirations, one of which is gender. Gender is often linked to certain stereotyped career roles. Brown and Barbosa (2001) found that career aspirations of young females who came from low-income families were confined to experiences of their relatives and friends. Parenting behaviour is another determinant of career aspiration (Metheny, 2009). Career development and aspirations are highly influenced by the socioeconomic status of families (Bergen, 2006; Shukla & Agarwal, 1997; Herr & Cramer, 1996). Pfingst (2015) noticed that there is a relationship between parental socio economic status and girls' career aspirations.

Rationale of the Study

The major purpose of formal education is to prepare the educand to enter to a career. According to John Dewey "education is the process of living through a continuous reconstruction of experiences. It is the development of all these capacities in the individual which will enable him to control his environment and fulfill his possibilities" (cited in Dash, 2005). The period of higher secondary education is a turning point in the life of students; they make career choices during this period of study. Most of the students develop career aspirations based on the information they get regarding various occupations from different sources. Today it is not a difficult task to get information about various professions and vocations as a result of technological advancements. The modern world of competition demands incessant hard work from the learners to realise the goals related to their occupation. By understanding students aspirations teachers can plan and organize their instructional activities according to student's interests. Students' aspirations can influence their future career. High aspiration of students is a motivating force to pursue their studies as well as to achieve their goals. For students studying in higher secondary schools it is a decision point in their life as it is the time for choosing a career on the basis of interests and aptitudes. They plan for their

expectations at this period. Thus it is valuable to explore the influence of demographic factors on career aspiration of higher secondary school students.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the level of career aspiration of higher secondary school students
2. To compare the level of career aspiration of higher secondary school students based on gender, locale, and socio-economic status (SES).

Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is significant difference in the career aspiration of male higher secondary school students and female higher secondary school students in the State.
2. There is significant difference in the career aspiration of rural higher secondary school students and urban higher secondary school students in the State.
3. There is significant difference in the career aspiration of higher secondary school students belonging to families of high, medium and low socio-economic status.

Methodology

Method adopted for conducting the present study was normative survey. A representative sample of 250 students was randomly selected from various higher secondary schools of Ernakulam district in Kerala, giving due weight to gender, locale and socio-economic status. The data were collected using a career aspiration scale prepared and standardized by Grewal (2011) and a socio-economic status scale (Upadhyay & Saxena, 2008). Various descriptive and inferential statistical techniques such as arithmetic mean, median, mode, standard deviation, kurtosis, skewness, and critical ratio were employed for the analysis of data in the present study.

Analysis and Discussion

The scores were codified and analysed on the basis of the objectives of the study.

Career Aspiration of Higher Secondary School Students
Scores of the selected sample of 250 higher

secondary school students were collected and subjected to descriptive data analysis. The career aspiration scale consisted of eight items with 10 alternatives each. Each alternative has an assigned

score (ranging from zero to nine) and the maximum score that can be obtained by a respondent is 72. The statistical constants calculated for the distribution of career aspiration scores is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Statistical constants for the distribution of career aspiration scores in the total sample

Sl. No	Statistic	Value
1.	Arithmetic mean (M)	51.64
2.	Median	52.21
3.	Mode	53.35
4.	Standard deviation (σ)	8.02
5.	Kurtosis	0.279
6.	Skewness	-0.213

From the Table 1 it is evident that the arithmetic mean, median, mode, standard deviation, kurtosis, and skewness are 51.64, 52.21, 53.35, 8.02, .279, and -0.213 respectively. Since the mean (51.64) is less than the median (52.21) and the median is less than mode (53.35), it can be said that the distribution of career aspiration scores is negatively skewed. The negative value of skewness (-0.213) indicates the non-symmetrical nature of the distribution; the scores tend to be clustered at the high end of the scale and are spread out more gradually towards the low end. The kurtosis value (.279) is slightly greater than (.263), the kurtosis value characteristic of a normal distribution (Garrett, 1966, p. 102). Hence, the

variation of the distribution from mesokurtic nature is negligible. Since the mean score obtained by the higher secondary school students (51.64) is not much different from the mean score (51.38) and P_{50} score (52) of the standardization sample, it can be interpreted that the higher secondary school students possess average level of career aspiration.

The students in the total sample were categorized into three groups such as high, average and low based on the numbers of students obtained scores above $M + s$, between $M + s$ and $M - s$, and below $M - s$ respectively. The number and percentage of students belong to each category is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Level of career aspiration of higher secondary school students

Sl. No.	Level of Career Aspiration	Number	%
1	Low	34	13.60
2	Average	173	69.20
3	High	43	17.20
	Total	250	100

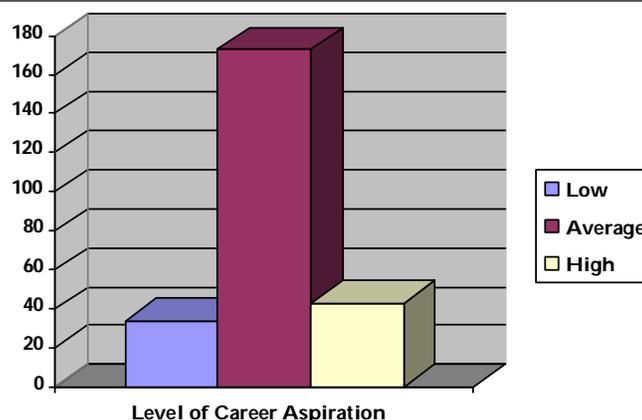


Fig. 1: Level of career aspiration of the higher secondary school students

Table 3: Data and result of the test of significance of the difference between mean career aspiration scores of male and female higher secondary school students

Gender	Number of Students	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Critical Ratio
Male	125	49.31	7.98	
Female	125	53.97	8.29	4.53**

** $p < .01$

Table 4: Data and result of the test of significance of the difference between mean career aspiration scores of rural and urban higher secondary school students

Locale	Number of Students	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Critical Ratio
Rural	132	49.59	8.46	4.21**
Urban	118	53.93	7.87	

** $p < .01$ **Table 5:** Data and result of the test of significance of the difference between mean career aspiration scores of higher secondary school students belong to different socioeconomic status groups

Sl. No.	Comparing Groups	Number of Students	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Critical Ratio
1	High SES	48	57.01	5.99	**5.01
	Medium SES	123	51.23	8.46	
2	High SES	48	57.01	5.99	**7.15
	Low SES	79	49.02	6.28	
3	Medium SES	123	51.23	8.46	2.13
	Low SES	79	49.02	6.28	

** $p < .01$

It is obvious from the Table 2 that 13.60% of the students have low, 69.20% of them have average, and 17.20 of them have high level of career aspiration. The results have been shown in Figure 1.

Comparison of Career Aspirations of Higher Secondary School Students Based on Gender

To study the influence of gender on career aspiration of higher secondary school students, the career aspiration scores of the two categories were considered separately and the difference between the mean scores was subjected to the test of significance. The details are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that the critical ratio calculated (4.53) is much greater than (2.58) the table value corresponding to .01 level of significance. This indicates that there exists significant difference between the two mean values at .01 level. Hence, it can be interpreted that there is significant difference between the career aspiration of male higher secondary school students and that of female higher secondary school students. Since the mean score of female students (53.97) is higher than that of male students (49.31) and the difference is statistically significant at .01 level, it can be concluded that the female students possess greater career aspiration than that of male students. These findings are analogous to that reported in Sundararajan and Bai (1990) and in Mau and Bikos (2000).

Comparison of Career Aspirations of Higher Secondary School Students Based on Locale

To study the influence of locale on the career aspiration of higher secondary school students the difference between the mean score of rural students and that of urban students was subjected to the test of

significance. Table 4 presents the data and the result of the test of significance of the difference between mean career aspiration scores of rural students and that of urban students.

Table 4 shows that the critical ratio calculated (4.21) is greater than (2.58) the table value corresponding to .01 level of significance. This implies that there is significant difference between the two mean values at .01 level. Hence it can be interpreted that there is significant difference between the career aspiration of rural and urban higher secondary school students. Since the mean score of urban students (53.93) is higher than that of rural students (49.59) and the difference is statistically significant, it can be concluded that the urban students possess greater career aspiration than that of their rural counterparts. The findings are consistent with that reported in Huern, et al. (2015) and in Sundararajan and Bai (1990).

Comparison of Career Aspirations of Higher Secondary School Students Based on Socioeconomic Status

The students were categorized in to three groups based on the scores obtained for the socioeconomic status scale. The mean career aspiration scores of these three groups were calculated. The significance of the differences among the means was tested for significance. The details are shown in Table 5.

From the Table 5 it is clear that there is significant difference between the career aspiration of high SES group students and that of medium SES group students (CR = 5.01; $p < .01$). Also the difference is significant for the comparison of high and low SES groups (CR = 7.15; $p < .01$). However, for the comparison of career aspiration of medium and low SES groups, the critical ratio, 2.13, does not exceed the table value 2.58. Thus the groups do not differ

significantly (at .01 level) with regard to their career aspiration.

Previous researches show that socioeconomic status is a major determinant of career aspiration (Bergen, 2006; Shukla & Agarwal, 1997; Herr & Cramer, 1996). In the present study also it was found that socioeconomic status influences one's career aspiration.

Conclusion

Present study was an attempt to assess the level of career aspiration among higher secondary school students of Kerala. The level of career aspiration can be considered as an indicator of future accomplishment of students. The findings of the study reveal that the higher secondary school students possess an average level of career aspiration. This indicates the need for providing career guidance and motivation enhancing programmes for higher secondary school students. Career conferences and career talks should be arranged in the institutions. Aptitude assessment of students may help them in career decision making. From the study it was also found that male students, rural students, and students belong to low SES category have low levels of career aspiration. Therefore, special attention should be given for such students which require an integrated action from the part of academicians, administrators, policy makers and researches.

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