The Relationship between Students' Career Aspirations and their Academic Performance among Secondary School Students in Bungoma South Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract: **Career aspirations and academic performance are of ultimate importance to the learning process. When students know more about available career opportunities, they will be able to focus more on their academic performance. Despite numerous changes in policy and legislation, issues of gender equity in Kenyan Education system and labour market remain a concern of the Kenyan public. It is against this background that the current study focused on the relationship between career aspirations and academic performance among Form three students in Bungoma South sub- County in Kenya. The research was quantitative using expost facto research design. The sample size was 420 participants from 27 schools. Both stratified and random sampling techniques were used to select the sample for the study. The results from spearman rho correlation coefficient indicated a weak positive relationship between career aspirations and academic performance (rho (418) = 0.265, p < .01). Based on the findings, it was recommended that career mentorship programs should properly be integrated in secondary school curriculum to enable students acquire necessary information about the nature of jobs and develop interest in their aspired careers at an early stage. This might inform students' subject selection, enhance their academic performance and increase chances of attaining their aspired careers.**

Key terms**: Career aspirations; Academic performance**

I. BACKGROUND

Career aspirations of high school students are an important determinant of educational choices which are regarded as short term and career choices which are regarded as long term (Mau & Biko, 2000). According to Hirschi (2010), the substance of who the learner is spins around how the learner needs to manage their life, yet profession direction actually stays an extremely frail part at all levels of the framework of education. According to Rukwaro (2012), career programmes in most secondary schools are attempted in a random way since educators distinguished for this reason have not been prepared hence lack professional competence in career guidance and counselling.

A number of factors do influence students' career aspirations. This includes among others academic performance, parental influence, social economic status and gender (Goffredson, 2005). Concerning gender, Omotere (2011), contends that conventional roles of gender have had a critical influence in deciding people's aspirations in careers. Thus, youths do wipe out professional decisions dependent on sexual orientation and esteem levels (Goffredson, 2005). According to Rukwaro (2012), many women continue to be overrepresented in careers that offer low pay, limited benefits and few opportunities for upward mobility. The reason for this disparity is still inconclusive. Apart from gender, students' academic performance influences their career choices (Migunde et al., 2011). Good academic performance is therefore important for the successful career development of young people in this fast-changing and challenging twenty-first century (Redd et al, 2002) and it is crucial for students to seriously uphold the part played by performance in academics in enhancing or restraining their future opportunities in careers. Despite this, research has revealed that a disconnect amid aspirations in career and achievement in academics exists. For example, studies done by Gorard et al. (2012), Goodman et al. (2011) and Rose and Baird (2013) found out that evidence that interface raising desires with further developing school accomplishment is extremely thin or profoundly sketchy. To Gorard, et. al. (2012), having aspirations in career that are very high without having the option to accomplish them would contrarily impact learners by causing dissatisfactions, disappointments and withdrawal socially. This results to skewed goals or goal accomplishment paradox yet to be completely exposed and investigated by research (Rose & Baird, 2013).

Research on educational aspirations show that educational aspirations and academic achievement are highly positively correlated. Aspirations in career have been associated to performance academically since no less than 1923 when tests that were standardized was utilized in secondary schools (Linderman, 2010). In Feingold's research, the intelligence of 1200 secondary school fresh men was tested and contrasted with the professional decision of each particular learner. It was accounted for that 46% of the learners settled on a professional decision consistent with their grade, while 47% settled on decisions that were considered past their mental ability. As per Linderman (2010), just 7% of the learners

appeared to underestimate their intelligence by picking a profession that was thought about fundamentally underneath their tested potential. From this information, one could infer that in light of the fact that practically 50% of the learners misjudged their own capacity (as indicated by their test scores) while picking a profession, this investigation didn't track down a critical connection between aspirations in career and academic achievement.

Likewise, Linderman (2010) posited that the academic capacity of British adolescents (as dictated by accomplishment on an IQ test) was simply marginally identified with their career goals including the scope of profession decisions that they considered. Additionally, Mau (2003) asserted that academic achievement that is high was a typical factor among eighth grade engineering and science learners in their career goals. Then again, an investigation led done in Australia by Creed et al. (2007) discovered that capacity, as pegged on accomplishment on state standardized testing, was not identified with the career desires of seventh grade learners. The greater part of the learners investigated sought to high status careers paying little mind to test accomplishment (Creed et al., 2007).

Bakar and Mohamed (2004) found a similar situation in Malaysia. They completed an examination in Malaysia on the connection between performance academically, aspiration in education and career in learners in technical secondary. In this study, Bakar and Mohamed found that even though students enrolled in technical schools, they had different career aspirations, not necessarily linked to technical careers yet these schools are to prepare students to take up technical occupations. In their study, Bakar and Mohamed (2004) suggested that schools ought to give more opportunity to profession advice and career openness to learners as right on time as conceivable essentially before enrolment in schools that are technical. Another study was carried out by Gutman & Schoon (2012) in the UK on outcomes of doubt in profession yearnings and sexual orientation contrasts among teenagers. Their discoveries demonstrate that youths who had lower accomplishment and were from lower financial foundations were bound to have doubts in their profession yearnings (Gutman & Schoon, 2012).

According to Obura and Ajowi (2012), the Kenyan framework of education is oriented on exams, as in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education assessment scores in a huge part decide the future profession yearning of learners. Moreover, the current educational plan doesn't give adaptable schooling pathways to recognizing and supporting the abilities and interests of students adequately early to set them up for the universe of work, progression in career and feasible turn of events (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), 2017). This has prompted a circumstance where there is savage rivalry in learning rather than an attention on the securing of essential information and abilities. To KICD (2017), the educational program makes little arrangement for the acknowledgment of the student's latent capacity, gifts and abilities because of a pointless spotlight on examining. Moreover, Kisilu et al. (2012) observe that lack of emphasis on acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills has made students go through their four years of high school without making a clear career choice. The learner may face the problem of making career choices because; they are ignorant about their career prospects (Skorikov, 2007).

With regards to review of literature, various investigations have been done to find out the connection between aspirations in career and academic. Although, doubts actually exist about the connection between aspirations in career and performance academically and the proof for this relationship is as yet begging to be proven wrong and uncertain. The current examination in this manner stretches out the observational proof identified with aspirations in career by testing the relationship between aspirations in career, attitude in relation to roles that are gender specific and performance academically among Form three secondary school learners in the sub county of Bungoma South.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted quantitative research method which reflects post positivist assumptions. Post positivist world view holds a deterministic approach in which causes probably determine the effects (Creswell, 2009). An ex-post facto research design was adopted. The study was conducted in Bungoma South Sub- County which is one of the nine sub- counties of Bungoma County in Kenya. Purposive, stratified and simple random sampling procedures were used to select the respondents for the study where the sample size was 420 form three students comprising 11% of the target population of 3,683 students. Questionnaire was the main data collection instrument which was adapted from the Career aspirations barriers scale developed by Howell Frese and Sollie (1977).

III. RESULTS

Students' career aspirations

Students' career aspirations were categorised according to perceived levels of preparation needed. Students were asked which course they would take at university or college level. Table 1 shows students' career aspirations by gender and perceived levels of preparation needed.

Table 1: Students' career aspirations

Level of preparation needed	Career	Male		Female		Total	
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Little preparation		0	0	0	0	0	0
Some preparation	Electrician	11	4.1	0	0	11	2.6
	Mechanic	3	1.1	0	0	3	0.7
	Actor/actress	2	0.7	1	0.7	3	0.7
	Receptionist	0	0.0	1	0.7	1	0.2
	Secretary	0	0.0	1	0.7	1	0.2

	Fashion designer	0	0.0	1	0.7	1	0.2
Sub- total		**16**	**6**	**4**	**2.6**	**20**	**4.8**
Medium preparation	Journalist	12	4.5	10	6.6	22	5.2
	Police officer	13	4.9	3	2	12	2.9
	Nurse	1	0.4	11	7.2	12	2.9
Sub-total		**26**	**9.7**	**24**	**15.8**	**50**	**11.9**
Considerable preparation	Accountant	30	11.2	26	17.1	56	13.3
	Teacher	14	5.2	12	7.9	26	6.2
	Land surveyor	3	1.8	2	1.3	5	1.2
	Clinical officer	3	1.1	1	0.7	4	1.0
Sub-total		**50**	**18.7**	**41**	**27**	**91**	**21.7**
Extensive preparation	Lawyer	42	15.7	37	24.3	79	18.8
	Doctor	40	14.9	20	13.2	60	14.3
	Engineer	50	18.7	9	5.9	59	14.0
	Pilot	13	4.9	4	2.6	17	4.0
	Architect	11	4.1	5	3.3	16	3.9
	Pharmacist	8	3.0	5	3.3	13	3.1
	Programmer	10	3.7	2	1.3	12	2.9
	Lecturer	2	0.7	1	0.7	3	0.7
Sub-total		**176**	**65.7**	**83**	**54.6**	**259**	**61.6**
GRAND TOTAL		**268**	**100**	**152**	**100**	**420**	**100**

Results from table 1 indicate that the most popular careers among male respondents was Engineering since a total of 50 (18.7 %) male students preferred it. This was closely followed by Law which was identified by 42 (15.7%) students. The least popular careers among male participants were secretarial, receptionist and fashion design since they didn't attract any of them. This was followed by nursing which was chosen by only 1 (0.4%) male respondent. The most popular career for female participants was Law, since it attracted 47 (30.9%) students. This was closely followed by Accounting and Medicine which was identified by 26 (17.1%) and 20 (13.2%) female students respectively. The least preferred careers for females were mechanic, electrician, Actress, Lecturer and computer programming since they were all chosen by 1 (0.7%) each. Female respondents who preferred pursuing a career in nursing were 15 (9.9%) compared to 1 (0.4%) male respondent. Career in the field of Engineering was the most favorite among male participants since it attracted 50 (18.7%) of them as compared to 9 (5.9%) female respondents. Regardless of gender the three most popular careers were Law (21.2%), Engineering (14.3%) and Medicine (14%).

From this analysis it can be observed that female respondents generally were more inclined towards careers that are social-science based whereas male students' preferences leaned more heavily towards the physical sciences. None of the female respondent aspired to be a pilot, mechanic or an electrician. On the other hand, only one male respondent aspired to be a nurse. Careers such as secretarial, fashion design and receptionist were least preferred male respondents. The list of career preferences therefore points out marked gender disparity in certain careers. This alludes that career aspirations are somewhat divided along gender lines in the current study.

Students' academic performance

Students' academic performance was based on the aggregate points (AGP) scored in a form three County joint examination. The results for the joint exams were obtained from their schools' academic offices after analysis had been done. To obtain the results of each participant, students' registration numbers from their questionnaire were used to match their scores. The summary of students' performance in this exam was obtained from Bungoma South Sub -County education office. The points were calculated on the basis of grades obtained from seven subjects based on Kenya national examination council grading system.

Each subject was graded on the basis of a twelve-point scale, with 12 points being the highest score and 1 the lowest per subject. The students' academic performance scores (based on cumulative points of the grades) in the county joint examination ranged between 11 and 78 with a mean of 40.16 (SD. = 14.391). Their academic performance was categorized into 5 categories namely: Low (score of 0 - 28), below average (score of 29 - 39), average (score of 40 - 49), above average (50-69 and excellent (score of 70-84) points. Each category was assigned a score ranging from 1 for students in low performance category and 5 for those in excellent category as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Students' academic performance

Performance levels	AGP	Male		Female	
		N	%	N	%
Low	0-28	49	18.3	43	28.3
Below average	29-39	98	36.6	44	28.9
Average	40-49	77	28.7	35	23
Above average	50-69	34	12.7	26	17.1
Excellent	70-84	10	3.7	4	2.6
TOTAL		268	100%	152	100%

Table 2 indicates that a higher percentage of girls (28.3%) scored low points compared to boys (18.3%). In total 92 students (21.9%) had low scores. This category of students scored between 11 – 28 points. More boys (36.6%) than girls (28.9%) scored below average (29-39 points). This category recorded the highest number of students (142). This constitutes 33.8% of the total number of respondents. Together, students with low performance and those who scored below average make up 55.7% of the students. In the average category (40-49 points) there were more boys (28.7%) than girls (23%). A total of 112 (26.7%) students had

an average performance. A higher percentage of girls (17.2%) scored above average (score of 50-69 points) than boys (12.7%). Lastly, a total of 14 (3.3%) students attained excellent performance (above 70 points). At this level girls were 4 (2.6%) while boys were 10 (3.7%).

Relationship between students' career aspirations and academic performance

In tackling this, the participants were required to state the kind of occupation they wished to undertake in future. A cross tabulation of academic performance and career aspiration as indicated in table 3 shows students' career aspirations according to the perceived levels of preparation and academic performance.

Table 3: Students' career aspirations and levels of academic performance

Career aspirations	Levels of Academic performance										
	Low		Below Average		Average		Above Average		Excellent		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Little preparation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Some preparation	4	4.3	9	6.3	4	3.6	3	5	0	0	20
Medium preparation	24	26.1	13	9.9	9	8.9	2	3.3	2	14.3	50
Considerable prep	22	23.9	31	21.8	25	21.4	11	18.3	2	14.3	91
Extensive preparation	42	45.6	89	62	74	66.1	44	73.3	10	71.4	259
TOTAL	**92**	**21.9**	**142**	**33.8**	**112**	**26.7**	**60**	**14.2**	**14**	**3.3**	**420**

Results from table 3 revealed that none of the students regardless of the academic performance aspired to career that requires little preparation. From the table, a total of 92(21.9%) had a low academic performance (11-28 points). Out of this, 42 (45.6%) students aspired to careers that require extensive preparation, 22(23.9%) considerable preparation and only 4 (4.3%) students aspired to careers that require some preparation. None of the students with excellent performance aspired to careers in the first two levels such as. careers that require little and some preparation. It is observed that out of 14 student who attained excellent performance, 10 (71.4%) of them aspired to career that require extensive preparation.

Results also indicate that a majority (33.8%) of students score below average. Out of this 74 (66.1%) aspired to careers that require extensive preparation while 4 of them (3.6%) aspired to career that require some preparation. Generally, most students regardless of their academic performance aspired to careers that require extensive preparation. This category of careers attracted a total of 259 (61.7%) students. A majority (51.2%) of those whose yearning were inclined towards careers that require extensive preparation scored below average points. Only 10 (3.9%) of those students whose career preference were in this category attained excellent performance. The analysis indicates that regardless of academic performance most form three students in Bungoma South Sub-County aspired to prestigious careers that demand extensive preparation.

Students' academic performance averages (mean, mode, medium and rage) were also computed. These averages were computed for every category of careers according to perceived levels of preparation. The main aim was to have general feel of how the scores are spread at every level of career in order to come up with a conclusive analysis of the relationship between career aspirations academic performance. Table 4 shows students' academic averages and career aspirations.

Table 4: Academic performance averages and career aspirations

Career aspirations	Academic performance averages			
	Mean	Mode	Median	Range
Little preparation	0	0	0	0
Some preparation	34.93	33	37	29
Medium preparation	31.63	18	26	36
Considerable preparation	37.59	28	38	59
Extensive preparation	42.97	51	43	67

Results from table 4 reveal that careers that require extensive preparation contained the highest mean, median, mode and range of all the 5 categories of careers. The second highest AGP averages were found in careers that require considerable preparation. Students' mean in this category of careers was 37.59, median 38 and the range was 59 points. The lowest overall AGP averages were found in the category of careers under medium preparation. Besides, careers that require little preparation contained 0 AGP averages. A look at considerable preparation and extensive preparation together, the resultant means of the GPAs equals' 40.3. The resultant mean of the combined AGPs of careers that require some and medium preparation is 7.02 points lower than that of considerable and extensive preparation needed at 40.3. The data was further subjected to Spearman *rho* correlation coefficient to determine whether there is a significant relationship between career aspiration and levels of students' academic performance. The results of this analysis are presented on table 5.

Table 5: Relationship between career aspirations and levels of academic performance

Variable		*Correlations*	
		Career aspirations	Levels of Academic performance
	Spearman correlation		0.263
	Sig.(2-tailed)		0.001
N			420

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2- tailed). P is 0.001.

A weak positive correlation was found (*rho* of 418) = 0.263, $p < .01$), indicating a significant weak relationship between the two variables. Career aspiration to some small extend related to students' levels of academic performance. The null hypothesis (Ho_2) that states that there is no significant relationship between career aspirations and academic performance was therefore rejected.

This finding tallies with that of a study by Kisilu et al. (2012) who revealed that there was a significant correlation between the learner's academic performance and occupational aspirations. They attributed this to the structure of the Kenyan school curriculum that requires one to obtain high academic achievement if one aspires to join the prestigious occupations. According to Patton and Creed (2007) study, adolescents who experienced minimal academic risk expected occupations of greater prestige while those who experienced substantial risk of academic failure were more likely to report lower occupational aspirations.

IV. CONCLUSION

It was established that there was a weak positive significance between career aspirations and academic performance exists. As a result, certain career groups attracted students with highest test scores and others career groups attracted students with the lowest test scores. Data revealed a wide range of academic performance within the proposed career groups.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that career mentorship programs should properly be integrated in secondary school curriculum to enable students acquire necessary information about the nature of jobs, and develop interest in their aspired careers at an early stage. This will inform their subject selection, enhance students' academic performance and increase chances of attaining their aspired careers. Further, secondary schools in Bungoma County should link up with institutions of higher learning to obtain more information on career opportunities offered. This can shade more light on the available career opportunities and it may act as an impetus to improved academic performance among secondary school students.

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