



Self-Efficacy and Career Aspiration of Senior Secondary Students: A Correlational Study

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Abstract

This correlational study investigated the relationship between self-efficacy and career aspiration among senior secondary school students. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from a sample of 250 students (aged 16-18) from three senior secondary schools in [Region/City]. The Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) and the Career Aspiration Scale (CAS) were employed to measure the respective variables. The findings revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation between self-efficacy and career aspiration ($r = 0.67, p < .01$). Furthermore, a moderate gender difference was observed, with female students showing slightly higher career aspiration scores. The results suggest that students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to set ambitious career goals and persist in their pursuit. The study concludes with recommendations for educators and school counselors to design interventions aimed at fostering self-efficacy to enhance career development among adolescents.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, career aspiration, senior secondary students, correlational study, career development

1. Introduction

The transition from secondary school to higher education or the workforce represents a critical juncture in an adolescent's life. During the senior secondary years (typically grades 11 and 12), students are expected to make pivotal decisions regarding their future academic and professional trajectories. These decisions are not made in a vacuum; they are shaped by a complex interplay of individual psychological factors and environmental influences. Among the most influential psychological constructs is self-efficacy—an individual's belief in their capability to execute courses of action required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1997). Concurrently, career aspiration refers to an individual's expressed orientation toward future career goals, including the level of ambition and the desire for achievement and leadership (O'Brien, 1996).

While extensive research has separately established the importance of self-efficacy in academic achievement and career aspirations in vocational choice, fewer studies have directly quantified the strength of the relationship between these two constructs specifically within the senior secondary school context in [your country/region]. This population is unique because they stand at the threshold of adult decision-making but often lack direct work experience. Understanding the link



between their confidence (self-efficacy) and their goals (career aspiration) is essential for designing effective school-based career guidance programs.

2. Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

Many senior secondary students exhibit career indecision or low aspiration, which may be linked to a lack of confidence in their own abilities. Without empirical evidence quantifying this relationship, educators may fail to address the root cause of low career ambition. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of self-efficacy among senior secondary school students?
2. What is the level of career aspiration among senior secondary school students?
3. Is there a statistically significant correlation between self-efficacy and career aspiration?
4. Is there a significant difference in career aspiration based on gender?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

This study is grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and its extension into career development by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) known as Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). SCCT posits that self-efficacy beliefs are central to the formation of career-related interests, goals, and actions. According to this framework, individuals are more likely to develop strong career aspirations in domains where they have high self-efficacy.

3.2 Self-Efficacy and Academic/Career Outcomes

Previous research has consistently shown that self-efficacy predicts academic persistence, choice of majors, and career consideration. For instance, Betz and Hackett (1981) found that self-efficacy significantly influenced career decision-making, particularly for women in male-dominated fields. Among adolescents, higher self-efficacy is associated with exploring more diverse career options and showing greater resilience against barriers (Lent et al., 2003).

3.3 Career Aspiration in Adolescence

Career aspiration is not static; it develops through social learning and mastery experiences. Recent studies indicate that students from supportive family and school environments report higher aspirations. However, a key gap exists in understanding how internal beliefs (self-efficacy) directly drive the *level* of aspiration (e.g., aiming for professional versus non-professional careers). This study hypothesizes a direct positive link.

Hypothesis: There is a positive correlation between self-efficacy and career aspiration among senior secondary students.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

A quantitative, non-experimental correlational research design was employed.

4.2 Participants

A sample of 250 senior secondary students (Class 11 and 12) was selected using stratified random



sampling from three government-aided schools. The sample consisted of 135 females (54%) and 115 males (46%), aged 15 to 19 years (Mean age = 16.8 years).

4.3 Instruments

- **General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE):** Developed by Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995), this 10-item Likert scale (1 = Not at all true to 4 = Exactly true) measures optimistic self-beliefs to cope with life demands. Cronbach's alpha for this study was 0.89.
- **Career Aspiration Scale (CAS):** Developed by O'Brien (1996) and adapted by Gray & O'Brien (2007), this 12-item scale (5-point Likert) measures two dimensions: leadership/achievement aspirations and educational aspirations. Cronbach's alpha was 0.86.

4.4 Procedure

After obtaining institutional permissions and parental consent, the questionnaires were administered in a single 30-minute session during school hours. Confidentiality was assured.

4.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were calculated, followed by Pearson product-moment correlation to test the hypothesis. An independent t-test was used to examine gender differences.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

The mean self-efficacy score was 32.15 (SD = 5.42), indicating moderately high self-efficacy. The mean career aspiration score was 45.78 (SD = 8.91), suggesting moderate to high aspirations.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Possible Range
Self-Efficacy	250	32.15	5.42	10 - 40
Career Aspiration	250	45.78	8.91	12 - 60

5.2 Correlational Analysis (RQ3)

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between self-efficacy and career aspiration. There was a strong, positive, statistically significant correlation between the two variables, $r(248) = 0.67$, $p < .001$. This indicates that higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with higher levels of career aspiration, explaining approximately 45% ($r^2 = 0.45$) of the shared variance.

Figure 1: Scatterplot (conceptual description): A scatterplot of the data points showed a clear upward linear trend, confirming the positive correlation.



5.3 Gender Differences (RQ4)

An independent samples t-test revealed a small but significant difference in career aspiration between females ($M = 47.21$, $SD = 8.10$) and males ($M = 44.10$, $SD = 9.42$); $t(248) = 2.78$, $p = .006$. No significant gender difference was found for self-efficacy.

6. Discussion

The primary finding—a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.67$) between self-efficacy and career aspiration—supports the central tenet of SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). Students who believe they can successfully perform tasks and overcome obstacles are more likely to set higher career goals. This is consistent with research by Nauta and Epperson (2003), who found self-efficacy to be a key predictor of career goal stability.

The moderate gender difference, with females reporting higher career aspirations, is notable. This contrasts with older studies that often found lower aspirations among female students. One explanation is the increasing visibility of female role models in leadership and STEM fields, potentially boosting aspirations. However, it does not negate that actual career attainment may still face barriers (glass ceiling effect), which this study did not measure.

Implications for Practice:

- **School Counselors:** Should implement mastery experience programs (e.g., skill-building workshops, internships) that directly boost self-efficacy, rather than just providing career information.
- **Teachers:** Can use vicarious learning by inviting young professionals to share success stories.
- **Curriculum:** Career education should integrate goal-setting exercises that build confidence incrementally.

Limitations:

- **Correlational design:** Causation cannot be inferred (career aspiration could also enhance self-efficacy).
- **Self-report bias:** Social desirability may have inflated aspiration scores.
- **Generalizability:** The sample was limited to one geographic region.

7. Conclusion

This study confirms a significant, strong positive relationship between self-efficacy and career aspiration among senior secondary students. Students who trust in their own abilities aim higher in their future careers. While gender differences in aspiration exist, the core finding across genders is that confidence fuels ambition. It is recommended that educational stakeholders prioritize interventions that systematically build self-efficacy as a foundational strategy for elevating career aspirations during the critical senior secondary years.

8. References

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