

# Career Aspirations of Selected Senior High Schools Students' in Ghana

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**Received:** 16 January 2022; **Accepted:** 18 February 2022; **Published:** 28 February 2022

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## Abstract:

The study adopted the Explanatory Mixed Method approach to answer the research question of the study. The population of the study consist of six thousand and thirty (6030) students from The Tema (TEMASCO), Chemu, Methodist Day (MEDASS), Presbyterian (TEMA PRESEC), Our Lady of Mercy (OLAMS) and Manhean (MANSEC). Senior High Schools in Tema metropolis of Ghana. Stratified, simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to sample three hundred (300) students fifty (50) from each of the six (6) selected schools. The main instruments used for data collection were Structured Questionnaire and Semi-Structured Interview guide. The quantitative data entry and analysis was done by using the SPSS software package version 23. The data was edited, coded and analysed into frequencies, percentages with interpretations. The qualitative data was analysed with the aid of Atlas.ti 7.5.18 version and use of the interpretative method based on the themes arrived at during the data collection. The study revealed that students aspired for careers in various fields of their programmes, i.e. Science, Home Economics, General Arts, Visual Arts, and Business. Their career aspiration was formed during childhood and crystallised into actual specific careers over time. They were motivated by their interest, abilities, attitudes and parental demands. If career information is made available for students to consider their strength and weakness, participants would have a better appreciation of the field of career. It is recommended that, the Tema Metropolitan Assembly, Tema Educational Directorate and the Head teachers of the sampled schools should organize career guidance and outreach programmes for their students on the various career types, entry requirement/qualifications and available institutions for training and sponsorship to fully educate the students on the various aspects of their aspired careers and the corresponding demands.

## Keywords:

Career, Aspirations, Senior High Schools, Ghana

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## 1. Introduction

Career development and aspiration process is perceived as life-long; tough choices made during High School are critical in laying the foundation of future vocation [1]. Adolescence is a time of rapid physical emotional and mental development, which is occasionally complicated by high school setting, increased responsibilities and the desire to become an adult. Problems of emancipation, independence and freedom from the family occupy the early stage, while problems of social role and personal development task are to integrate earlier elements into a true sense of identity [2]. What we observe in the high school students career development is that many factors are evolved such as environment, personality, and opportunity that parents and students need to consider in their view of career aspiration.

Choosing a career is a landmark decision as it affects the rest of a person's life [3]. It is not surprising therefore that the first institution to lay the foundation for career choice is the family where domestic chores are prescribed from a very tender age. Thus, career aspirations start early in life and is culturally embedded. An early age, children are keen to identify themselves as either a boy or a girl. The authors further noted that the gender role fantasies are influenced by parents, local communities, early years' professionals (teachers and caregivers) and media [4]. The early manifestations of sex typing are evident in stereotypic play [5]. Girls prefer basic family roles of mother, child and domestic activities like food preparation while boys choose masculine roles during pretend play [6]. The girls play with feminine toys like dolls and kitchen utensils whereas boys prefer toys associated with maleness like toy gun, sword and car.

Some studies suggest that individuals choose careers that give them the latitude to attend to family's demands or career choices to meet the expectations of their family [7, 8]. Women were found to have a stronger inclination to family motives [9]. The major influences on women's career decisions appear to come from what is referred to as "care responsibilities", such as childbirth and childcare, being a single mother, sharing roles and responsibilities with partner in a "dual earner" family or caring for aging parents [10]. By the same token, despite strides in gender equity, it seems that young people are expected to follow the traditional interrupted employment pattern, which allows bearing and nurturing of children during their early ages [11]. Preparations for and implementation of, career related choices is one of the critical challenges inherent in the normative shift from adolescence to early adulthood [12]. High school is an opportunity for individuals to crystallize educational and career aspirations; thus, decisions made during this time have profound consequences for either limiting or optimizing future endeavours. The purpose of this study was to examine career aspirations of selected Senior High Schools students in the Tema metropolis in Ghana. The study seeks to answer the research question - What are the career aspirations of Senior High School students in selected Senior High Schools in the Tema Metropolis?

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study adopted the Explanatory Mixed Method approach to answer the research question of the study. The population of the study consist of six thousand and thirty (6030) students from The Tema (TEMASCO), Chemu, Methodist Day (MEDASS), Presbyterian (TEMA PRESEC), Our Lady of Mercy (OLAMS) and Manhean (MANSEC). Senior High Schools in Tema metropolis of Ghana. Stratified, simple

random and purposive sampling techniques were used to sample three hundred (300) students fifty (50) from each of the six (6) selected schools. Purposive sampling was used to sample 12 participants who formed a part of the 300 participants sampled for the study to participate in the one on one interview. This comprised of six females and six males' students from the six selected schools for the study. The students were sampled because they formed a part of the initial participants for the quantitative study. The main instruments used for data collection were Structured Questionnaire and Semi-Structured Interview guide. A Likert scale questionnaire with options presented in four-point scale ranging from: Strongly agree (SA) (4), Agree (A) (3), Disagree (D) (2) and strongly Disagree (SA) (1) respectively were used for the quantitative data

The quantitative data entry and analysis was done by using the SPSS software package version 23. The data was edited, coded and analysed into frequencies, percentages with interpretations. The qualitative data was analysed with the aid of Atlas.ti 7.5.18 version and use of the interpretative method based on the themes arrived at during the data collection. The themes were related to the research question and interpreted on the number of issues raised by respondents. These were based on question on the semi structured interviews.

### **3. Results on the Career Aspirations of Senior High School Students**

Table 1 shows a description of the career aspiration of participants sampled from the selected schools in the Tema Metropolis. There was a fair distribution of the participants over the various career options available. With regards to career options in Business, eleven of the participants representing 3.7% also aspired to become businessmen. Table 4.4 reveals that, 13(4.3%) of the participants opted for accountancy, 12(4.0%) selected administrative work as the aspired career whilst 11(3.7%) opted to become economists in the near future. With regard to careers in Visual Arts, in relation to artistic task, 9(3.0%) of the participants opted it as their aspired career. In relation to careers in private industry (i.e. working in a private industry), 19(6.3%) of the participants aspired to work in such environment whilst 12(4.0%) opted to work in private trade (i.e. self-employment) whilst 2(0.1%) of the participants selected factory work as their future aspired career.

Concerning careers in Agriculture Science, eight of the participants representing 2.7% opted to become famers. Nineteen of the participants representing 6.3% selected nursing as their aspired career in the future. Seventeen participants representing 5.7% selected medicine or medical science as their aspired career in the future. Twenty representing 6.7% of the participants aspired to become information communication technologist. With regards to engineering, 6(5.3%) of the participants opted to pursue engineering in the future. With careers in General Arts, fourteen participants representing 4.7% aspired to work for religious institutions. Nineteen of the participants representing 6.3% opted for careers in law/legal practice, 13(4.3%) chose to become members of the military/security in the near future whilst 20(6.7) opted for careers in university teaching. Twenty-seven representing (9.0%) of the participants aspired for careers in basic/secondary teaching. Eleven of the participants representing 3.7% aspired for careers in social work whilst 4(1.3%) also selected politics as their aspired career. Nine (3.0%) also selected historian as their future aspired career whilst, 14(4.7%) of the participants aspired to become civil service workers.

Career aspirations with the highest frequencies were basic/secondary teaching, information communication technologist, university teaching, business, engineering, law/legal practitioner, medicine, nursing, private industry, civil service, religious institutions, accountancy, member of the military/security and private trade. Career aspirations with the lowest frequencies were administration, artistic tasks, businessman/woman, economics, factory worker, farmer, historian, politics and social work. Themes relating to the career aspiration of participants were related to; career aspirations, reasons of interest and motivation to pursue aspired career.

*Table 1. Career aspiration of participants.*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Business</b>		
Accountancy	13	4.3
Administration	12	4
Businessman/woman	11	3.7
Economics	11	3.7
<b>Visual Arts/Home Economics</b>		
Private Industry	19	6.3
Private Trade	12	4
Artistic Tasks	9	3
Factory Worker	2	0.7
<b>Agriculture/General Sciences</b>		
Engineering	16	5.3
Farmer	8	2.7
Information communication Technologist	20	6.6
Medicine	17	5.7
Nursing	19	6.3
<b>General Arts</b>		
Civil Service	14	4.7
Historian	9	3
Member of the Military/Security	13	4.3
Politics	4	1.3
Social Work	11	3.7
Basic/Secondary Teaching	27	9
Law/Legal Practitioner	19	6.3
Religious Institutions	14	4.7
University Teaching	20	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

### **3.1. Career Aspiration**

According to the interview data, the participants expressed their interest in diverse careers ranging from accountancy, administration, information communication technologist to engineering, farming and the like. The data revealed that many of the participants were following their childhood dreams. They were also willing to put in the necessary and required effort to make their career aspiration come to pass. They expressed their passion for their aspired career and were firm about their decision to eventually enter into their aspired career. They also appeared to have selected courses in the senior high school that reflect their career aspiration and were comfortable with the nature and demands of the course selected. Participants were also enthusiastic about the prospects of the aspired career and the conditions of service associated with their aspired career.

A participant commented:

*I always wanted to be an accountant when I grow up, that is why am now pursuing business currently in Senior High School. I'm positive that I will make it during the WASSCE and make it to University of Ghana to pursue my dream. Most of my family members are into accounting and they all work in very nice environment and offices (Participant # 1, Form 2, female, Business, June 5, 2017).*

Another participant also articulated that:

*Personally, I have very great passion for electronic equipment, and I want to go for computer related course in the University. Any one of them will do, I just want to work in the computer industry. I feel competent working in such environment, well decorated and fully air conditioned. Even the prestige that comes with it makes me want to work there the more (Participants # 6, Form 2, male, Science, June 5, 2017).*

Participant # 12, also shared her views and said that:

*I want to be a politician, I love to lead and serve people, and I want to set an example of good leadership and selfless commitment to my nation Ghana. Though I will face some oppositions, I am very convinced and prepared to face all the obstacles squarely. If I'm able to achieve this dream, things will automatically fall into its place, I will be well connected (form 3, female, General Arts, June 5, 2017).*

The interview data suggests that participant's aspired careers were related to accountancy, administration, politics, information communication technologist to engineering, farmer, and the like. Most of the participants' career aspiration was formed during their childhood ages and have developed and crystallised into actual specific they are pursuing careers over time. Participants were aware of the academic demands and institutional requirement associated with their aspired career. They were prepared to achieve these dreams through hard work and devotion. They were also interested in the environment of their aspired career.

### **3.2. Motivation to pursue Aspired Career**

Data gathered from the interview further reveals that, participants were motivated by their personal desire and passion in their aspired career. The data further showed that, participants were also influenced by the demands of their parents and their upbringing and home conditioning. The influence from the home seem to be prevailing in influencing the aspired career of the participants. Many of them appear to have a significant confidence in becoming like their parents or some relatives in relation to career. Participants were also motivated by their abilities and talents. They were conscious about these strengths and were willing to work hard to maximise them for their future prospects. They had a positive attitude towards their aspired career and were poised towards achieving their goal. Participants stated:

*“My parents feel that becoming a medical doctor commands some respect and changes the social class of the family. My uncle is a surgeon and he always motivate me to do my best. Personally, I love the medical field so much, maybe because of the previous stories of my parents. currently I am pursuing Science and hopefully I will accomplish my desire. Working in a field you don't like would be very hurtful. I know for sure that with perseverance and dedication, I*

*will definitely become a medical doctor one day. God be my helper (Participant # 11, Form 3, Science, female, June 5, 2017”).*

Participant #3 also stated that:

*“I want to become an artist because everyone says it is my talent. I can draw and paint. It’s like I have been taught for a long time. Naturally, it something I enjoy doing and I wish I will do something relating to art in the university so as to get the chance to work as an artist in a good firm. Even when I don’t receive salary for the works I do, I will be just okay because it gives me joy and fulfilment. My dad also supports me a lot (Form 2, male, Visual Arts, June 5, 2017)”.*

Another participant noted:

*“For me, the idea that I can assist someone in need makes me want to become a nurse. I love to assist people especially the sick. My mother is a nurse and I believe I have been indoctrinated to also become same. My interest is towards assisting people who are suffering. Nursing is a good alternative to God’s work. Because of this, I’m a Science student, though the course is difficult, I know I will go through and assist people (Participant # 10, Form 3, female, Science, June 5-9, 2017)”.*

One participants also said:

*“I am from an average home and I would want to get into a career that pays well. My interest is in Mathematics and I hope to become a professor of Mathematics one day. My parents motivate me a lot. As at now, they call me professor and I’m glad they do. I love Mathematics and want to pursue it to the highest level. I also believe that there can be easier ways of learning Mathematics which I would love to share with the world. So personally, I am motivated (Participant # 5, form 2, Business, male, June 5-9, 2017)”.*

It could be inferred from the interview data that participants are self-motivated based on their interest, abilities, attitudes, parental demands and home conditioning. They had a positive conviction that they will achieve their goal. Parental influence and home conditioning appeared to have greater influence on the participants’ career aspirations.

#### **4. Discussion**

The study revealed that participants aspired to careers relating to basic/secondary teaching, information communication technologist, university teaching, business, engineering, law/legal practitioner, medicine, nursing, private industry, civil service, religious institutions, accountancy, member of the military/security and private trade. These findings are consistent with literature. During the Growth Stage (birth to 14 or 15 years), concept of self, attitudes and interests develop whilst the Exploratory stage (15- 24 years) is marked by the development of skills and the making of tentative choices. The third phase is Establishment (25-44 years) during which skills are further developed and individuals begin to stabilize as work experience is gained. To Super, Maintenance occurs from ages 45 to 64, a period characterized by adjustments to improve work positions. It is during the Decline phase (ages 65 and above) that individuals begin to prepare for retirement according to Super’s theory [13]. An individual progresses through five vocational development stages: Crystallization (14-18 years), during which individuals develop and plan tentative vocational goals,

Specification (18-21 years), during which individuals develop a firmer understanding of their vocational goals, Implementation (21-24 years), during which individuals are trained for and obtain employment, Stabilization (24-35 years), during which individuals continue to work and corroborate their career choice and Consolidation (35 years and above) during which individuals get ahead in their careers [14].

A study to investigate the vocational needs and aspirations of in-school and out-of-school secondary school females in Ankpa Education Zone of Kogi state, Nigeria postulates that in-school and out-of-school secondary school females in Ankpa Education Zone have relatively high vocational needs in areas like manipulation of tools, communication skills, artistic tasks, social work and mathematical tasks. The study found that in-school and out-of-school secondary school females aspires vocations such as law, administration, nursing, medicine and accountancy [15]. A similar study revealed that participants aspired to work as office worker, intellectual, leading cadre, skilled worker, factory worker, farmer, businessman and member of the military to better their future career [16]. A study on “A conceptual review for the study of aspirations” published in *Research in Rural Education* also concluded that 28.3% of participants indicated that they aspired to careers in the civil service; 21.4% indicated that they aspired to careers in medicine; and 12.0% aspired to careers in private industries. The lowest career aspirations expressed by students were being lawyers (1.7%) and political party officers (2.4%) [17].

The interview data suggests that participant’s aspired careers were related to accountancy, administration, information communication technologist to engineering, farmer, and the like. Participant’s career aspiration was formed during their childhood ages and have developed and crystallised into actual specific careers they are pursuing over time. Participants were aware of the academic demands associated with their aspired career and the institutional requirement. They were prepared to achieve these dreams through hard work and devotion. They were moved by the working conditions of their aspired career. From the interview data, it could be inferred that, participants are motivated by their interest, abilities, attitudes, parental demands and home conditioning. They had a positive conviction that they will achieve their goal. Parental influence and home conditioning appeared to have greater influence on the participants’ career aspiration. These findings are consistent with literature, in general, students tended to aspire to as much higher a career as possible as that of their parents. A research supported the current study that there was a significant difference between student origin and three types of aspirations (vocational, academic and collegiate). Students from the rural areas are likely to have both higher vocational ( $F = 16.58$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and higher collegiate ( $F = 5.17$ ;  $p < 0.06$ ) aspirations than those from urban areas. Meanwhile, students from urban areas are likely to have higher academic aspirations than those from rural areas ( $F = 14.90$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Also, parental educational background and grade point average show significant differences when combined with vocational, academic and collegiate aspirations. For example, the higher the father’s educational background, the higher the vocational and collegiate aspirations of the student; and the lower father’s educational background the higher the academic aspirations of the student [18].

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study revealed that students aspired for careers in various fields of their programmes, i.e. Science, Home Economics, General Arts, Visual Arts, and Business. Their career aspiration was formed during childhood and crystallised into actual

specific careers over time. They were motivated by their interest, abilities, attitudes and parental demands. If career information was made available for students to consider their strength and weakness, participants would have a better appreciation of the field of career.

It is recommended that, the Tema Metropolitan Assembly, Tema Educational Directorate and the Head teachers of the sampled schools should organize career guidance and outreach programmes for their students on the various career types, entry requirement/qualifications and available institutions for training and sponsorship to fully educate the students on the various aspects of their aspired careers and the corresponding demands. The above-mentioned institutions should organize field trips to companies and institutions in the nation to expose students to the various working environment.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

### **Funding**

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

### **Acknowledgments**

The author would like to acknowledge the Dr. Anthony Bordoh for his input and suggestions.

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