

Assessment of Educational Aspirations of Secondary School Students in Southwestern Nigeria

^{1*}Hassan Kehinde Olasupo & ²Azeez Babatunde Adebakin

^{1*} & ² Department of Educational Management, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Email: hassankehinde37@gmail.com^{1*} & adebakinazeez@oauife.edu.ng²

Abstract

Educational aspirations are the future oriented academic goals, hopes and specifically, the level of formal schooling or individual intends to achieve. It is a predictor of academic engagement, persistence and eventual educational attainment. Therefore, this study examined the level of educational aspirations of secondary school students in Southwestern Nigeria using descriptive survey design. The population comprised of 2,131 school and 926,755 students in Southwestern Nigeria. The study selected 342 respondents as sample of the study and used questionnaire for data gathering. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study indicated that the students in the study area had plan to further education to higher institution after their secondary school education and desired to have good certificate. This implies that the students in the study area have good educational aspiration for themselves. The study concluded that strengthening school guidance systems and supportive learning environments can further enhance students' educational aspirations. The study recommended increased parental involvement, effective career guidance, and supportive educational policies to promote higher educational aspirations among secondary school students.

Keywords: Educational aspiration, Academic goals, Student motivation

Cite this as: Olasupo, H. K., & Adebakin, A. B. (2026). Assessment of Educational Aspirations of Secondary School Students in Southwestern Nigeria. *Rima International Journal of Education*, 5(5), 108—118. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65760/rijessu.v5.5.8>

Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental instrument for national development and individual advancement. Through education, individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and values that enable them to contribute meaningfully to society and improve their quality of life. In developing countries such as Nigeria, education is also considered a key mechanism for social mobility and economic empowerment (Adebayo & Adewale, 2019).

Educational aspiration refers to the level of education that an individual desires or hopes to attain in the future. It reflects students' expectations, ambitions, and long-term academic goals. Students with high educational aspirations are more likely to demonstrate greater academic motivation, persistence, and commitment toward their educational pursuits (Gorard et al., 2017). Educational aspirations influence students' effort, engagement, and eventual educational attainment.

Secondary school represents a critical stage in the development of educational aspirations because students begin to make important decisions about their academic and career pathways. At this stage, students start to envision their future educational goals, including whether they intend to pursue tertiary education or professional careers (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015).

In Nigeria, particularly in the Southwestern region of the country, education has historically been valued due to the region's strong tradition of educational advancement. This region has produced a large number of educated individuals and professionals. Despite this tradition, disparities in access to quality education, socioeconomic inequalities, and institutional challenges may influence students' aspirations toward higher education (Akinsola & Tella, 2017). Educational aspiration among students may be shaped by several factors such as parental background, school environment, peer influence, academic performance, and value orientation. Research suggests that students who perceive greater support from parents and teachers tend to develop higher educational aspirations (Benner et al., 2016). Similarly, exposure to positive academic role models can motivate students to aspire to higher levels of education.

Despite the importance of educational aspiration for educational planning and human capital development, empirical evidence regarding the level of

educational aspiration among secondary school students in Southwestern Nigeria remains limited. Understanding students' aspirations is essential for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders who seek to improve educational outcomes and support students in achieving their academic goals.

Therefore, this study assessed the level of educational aspirations among secondary school students in Southwestern Nigeria.

Literature Review

Educational aspiration refers to the level of education individuals hope or intend to achieve. It reflects students' expectations regarding their academic future and their desire to pursue higher educational qualifications (Khattab, 2015). Educational aspiration is often shaped by personal motivation, social influences, and educational opportunities. According to Gorard et al. (2017), educational aspiration plays a significant role in shaping students' academic decisions and career pathways. Students who aspire to higher levels of education tend to exhibit greater academic effort and persistence in overcoming academic challenges. Similarly, Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2015) noted that educational aspiration is closely linked with students' perceptions of their abilities and opportunities. Students who believe they have access to educational resources and support systems are more likely to aspire to higher education.

In the Nigerian context, educational aspiration is often influenced by cultural values that emphasize education as a means of achieving social mobility and economic success (Akinsola & Tella, 2017). Secondary school students are at a critical stage in their educational development. At this level, students begin to develop aspirations related to tertiary education and career pathways. Research indicates that students' educational aspirations are influenced by multiple factors including family background, peer influence, teacher expectations, and school environment (Benner et al., 2016). Students who receive encouragement from parents and teachers are more likely to aspire to higher levels of education.

In addition, socioeconomic status has been identified as an important determinant of educational aspirations. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have higher educational aspirations due to greater access to educational resources and opportunities (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). In Nigeria, educational aspiration is also influenced by societal expectations and

the perceived value of higher education in securing employment opportunities (Adebayo & Adewale, 2019). However, economic challenges and limited access to quality education may hinder some students from aspiring to higher education.

Hashmi and Shakir (2023) conducted study on educational aspiration and school climate of secondary school students: A study of district Lucknow. The study was conducted with the objective of studying the educational aspiration and school climate of secondary school students. In addition to this, relationship between educational aspiration and school climate has also been studied. The researchers focused the study basically on sample of 250 (129 males, 121 females) of secondary school students which was selected through simple random sampling technique and analysis of the collected data was done with the help of t-Test and Pearson's product moment correlation. According to the analysis of the investigators, there was no significant difference in the educational aspiration and school climate of secondary school students on the basis of gender. Further, the correlation analysis revealed a significant and positive correlation between educational aspiration and school climate of secondary school students. The result of the study connotes that the school climate supported educational aspirations of the students. However, the study did not link factors like parental support and value orientation to educational aspiration of the students. More also, the present study involved parents as part of sample of the study.

Khampirat (2020) conducted his own research on career aspirations are considered to be one of the most important motivation variables in the study of psychology and career development, as well as being connected to an individual's career-related goals, intentions or options. The researcher study aimed to: develop and validate a model for predicting career aspirations; investigate direct and indirect links between paternal education, self-esteem, resilience, future orientation, and career aspirations of university students. The participants of the study were 445 students from two universities in Thailand. Results of the study showed that paternal education, resilience, and future orientation have significant direct effects on students' career aspirations, while self-esteem has an indirect effect. Looking at the study, it mainly focused on career aspiration which is related to educational aspirations of the students. However, the study focused on the students in the university in Thailand, while the present study focused on students in secondary in Nigeria.

Chen and Hesketh (2021) investigated research on educational aspirations and expectations of adolescents have implications for educational and psychological outcomes. Basically, the researchers aimed to determine factors associated with educational aspiration–expectation discrepancies and to examine the associations between the discrepancies and psychological and academic outcomes in rural left-behind children and non-left-behind children aged 14–16 in mainland China. According to the study, cross-sectional data from a self-report survey were collected in 2020 among 606 rural students (mean age = 14.85 years) in two public middle schools in Songzi county, Hubei Province. The investigators found out that more than half of the participants reported that they felt they were not likely to attain the level of education to which they aspired. From the study, parental migration, academic performance, mother’s educational aspirations for children, and close friends’ educational aspirations were the main factors associated with students’ educational aspiration–expectation discrepancies. Meanwhile, the study similar to the present study in area where the study elaborated on the factors that determined and contributed to educational aspirations. However, the study was conducted in two public middle schools in Songzicounty, Hubei Province while the present study was conducted in most of the public secondary schools in south western Nigeria.

Kalita and Patil (2023) conducted similar study on educational aspirations are pre-requisite for higher education and family is one of the significant factors that fundamentally affect the educational development of an individual. The researchers investigated the study at University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad to know the influence of familial factors i.e., family type, socioeconomic-status and home environment on academic aspirations, whereas 180 adolescents were drawn from urban and rural areas of Dharwad and Hajotaluks of Dharwad district of Karnataka and Kamrup district of Assam. Results of the researchers indicated that there were significant positive correlations of SES and home environment with academic aspirations in both the regions. Also, regression analysis showed significant combined effect of the familial factors. This implies that adolescence has its own set of developmental milestones like more concern towards future education and career plan that must be reached in a timely manner for which they should be provided with a good family environment. The study was conducted in Dharwad district of Karnataka and Kamrup district of Assam whereby the present study was conducted in public secondary schools in south western Nigeria.

Empirical studies have shown that many Nigerian secondary school students express a desire to obtain university education, though the realization of these aspirations often depends on available resources and support systems (Akinsola & Tella, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Secondary education represents a crucial stage where students begin to make decisions concerning their academic and career futures. Ideally, students at this level should aspire to higher education and professional development. However, several factors such as socioeconomic constraints, inadequate school resources, poor academic guidance, and limited exposure to career opportunities may influence students' aspirations.

Although, the Southwestern region of Nigeria has historically been recognized for its educational advancement, emerging socioeconomic challenges, educational inequalities, and changing societal expectations may influence the aspirations of secondary school students. Some students may aspire to university education, while others may have limited aspirations due to financial difficulties, lack of motivation, or insufficient academic support.

Furthermore, policymakers and educational administrators often focus on improving academic performance without adequately examining students' educational aspirations, which serve as an important driver for academic achievement. Without a clear understanding of students' aspirations, educational interventions may fail to address the underlying motivational factors that influence students' educational pursuits.

Previous studies have examined factors influencing academic achievement among Nigerian students; however, limited studies have specifically assessed the level of educational aspirations among secondary school students in Southwestern Nigeria. This creates a gap in empirical knowledge regarding students' academic ambitions and future educational goals within the region. It is therefore necessary to assess the level of educational aspirations among secondary school students in Southwestern Nigeria in order to provide empirical evidence that can guide educational planning, counseling services, and policy formulation.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to determine the level of educational aspirations among secondary school students in Southwestern Nigeria.

Research Question

The following research question was drawn from objective:

What is the level of educational aspirations among secondary school students in Southwestern Nigeria?

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive cross-sectional survey design using quantitative approach. The population of the study consist of 926,755 public secondary school students in Southwestern Nigeria. Using the multistage approach, the sample of the study consisted of 342 respondents using Research advisor table from 21 senior secondary schools across three states in Southwestern Nigeria. Proportionate sampling technique of 10% was used to select 3 local governments from 30 in Osun, 2 local governments from 18 in Ondo and 2 local governments from 20 in Lagos state making 7 local governments in order to have equal, even and enough representation from the sampled states. From each local government, simple random sampling technique was used to select 3 secondary schools while others also have equal chance of being selected. From each school, 16 secondary school students were selected using stratify sampling techniques (SSS3) because they are the terminal class read to transit to tertiary education. The validity of instrument was done (face, content and construct) by research experts and further subjected to reliability test through Cronbach's Alpha and Guttman Split-Half with 0.81 reliable coefficients. Questionnaire was self-administered and data collected were analysed descriptively, using mean and standard deviation (Sd) to answer the research question. The decision level was determined by the use of criterion mean of 2.50; any mean of 2.50 and above was regarded as Agree while below 2.50 was regarded as Disagree.

Results

Research Question: What are the levels of educational aspirations among the secondary school students in southwestern Nigeria?

To answer research question one, 10 items were raised on the levels of educational aspirations among the secondary school students in southwestern Nigeria. The interpretations of the mean scores reveal that the minimum mean was one and the highest was four. Therefore, mean score between 0.1-1.4. was regarded as “Low”, mean score between 1.5 to 2.9 was adjudged to be “Moderate” and mean score between 3.0 to 4.0 was categorized to be “High” levels to enhance clarity, facilitate interpretation, and enable meaningful discussion of findings. When 4 point Likert scale is used, the total scale ranging from 1.0-4.0 is divided into approximately equal intervals to represent meaningful categories of magnitude (Boone & Boone, 2012).

Table 1: Level of Educational Aspirations of Secondary School Students

SN	Educational Aspiration	N	$\bar{x}$	Sd	Decision
Aspiration Goals					
1	I hope to complete my secondary school education.	330	3.16	0.75	High
2	I plan to pursue university or higher education after secondary school	330	3.19	0.755	High
3	I would like to get a professional qualification	330	3.19	0.682	High
4	I have already thought about what I want to study in the future.	330	3.16	0.716	High
5	I hope to reach a level of education higher than my parents.	330	3.25	0.731	High
Aspirational Motivation					
6	I work hard in school because I want to achieve my future goals	330	3.23	0.671	High
7	I believe I can achieve whatever level of education I set my mind to.	330	3.26	0.631	High
8	I stay focused in school because I want a better life.	330	3.3	0.596	High
9	I am willing to make sacrifices now to succeed in the future.	330	3.18	0.716	High
10	I feel confident in my ability to reach my educational goals.	330	3.19	0.714	High
	Average Mean	330	3.21	0.696	High

The findings reveal a consistently high level of educational aspirations among secondary school students in Southwestern Nigeria. All ten items recorded mean scores above the 3.0 benchmark for the “High” category, with an overall average mean of 3.21 (Sd = .696). The direction of the results is uniformly positive, indicating strong agreement with statements reflecting both aspiration goals and aspirational motivation. Students not only express intentions to complete secondary education and pursue university studies, but also demonstrate a desire to attain professional qualifications and even exceed

their parents' educational levels. The relatively low standard deviations further indicate a high degree of consensus among respondents, suggesting that strong educational aspirations are widely shared across the sample.

Discussion

These results suggest that students possess clear academic goals, strong future orientation, and high self-belief in their capacity to achieve educational success. The highest-rated item staying focused in school to secure a better life highlights the instrumental value students attach to education as a pathway to socioeconomic mobility. Their willingness to make sacrifices and confidence in reaching their goals indicate not only ambition but also resilience and goal commitment. This pattern reflects a student population that is psychologically motivated and achievement-driven, with education perceived as a transformative tool for personal and social advancement. The findings imply that the major challenge may not lie in low student aspiration but in ensuring that structural and institutional systems are capable of supporting these ambitions. Educational planners and policymakers should therefore prioritize access to tertiary education, career guidance services, and scholarship opportunities to prevent aspiration frustration. Schools should strengthen mentoring and counselling programmes to help students translate their high aspirations into realistic and attainable pathways. Sustaining these aspirations will require coordinated support from families, schools, and government institutions to ensure that students' strong motivation is matched with adequate opportunity. The result is supported the study of Kalita and Patil (2023) who concurred that adolescence has its own set of developmental milestones like more concern towards future education and career plan that must be reached in a timely manner for which they should be provided with a good family environment. The result also corroborated the study of Hesketh (2021) who reported that academic performance, mother's educational aspirations for children, and close friends' educational aspirations were the main factors associated with students' educational aspiration. Furthermore, the findings also agreed with study of Khampirat (2020) who established direct and indirect links between paternal education, self-esteem, resilience, future orientation, and career aspirations of the students. Results of the study showed that paternal education, resilience, and future orientation have significant direct effects on students' career aspirations, while self-esteem has an indirect effect.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study assessed the level of educational aspirations among secondary school students in Southwestern Nigeria. The findings revealed that most students possess high educational aspirations, with many intending to pursue tertiary education. Educational aspirations play a crucial role in shaping students' academic behaviour and future career paths. The high level of aspiration observed among students suggests that they recognise the importance of education for achieving personal and professional success. However, sustaining these aspirations requires supportive educational environments, adequate learning resources, and effective academic guidance. Stakeholders in education must therefore continue to provide support systems that encourage students to pursue their educational goals.

Based on the findings of the study, schools should strengthen career guidance and counseling programs to help students develop clear educational and career goals also teachers should encourage and motivate students to pursue higher education through academic mentoring and support.

Reference

- Adebayo, F., & Adewale, A. (2019). Educational aspiration and academic achievement among secondary school students in Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 7(2), 45–53.
- Akinsola, M., & Tella, A. (2017). Correlates of students' educational aspirations in Nigerian secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Development*, 21(1), 89–98.
- Benner, A. D., Boyle, A. E., & Sadler, S. (2016). Parental involvement and adolescents' educational success. *Educational Psychology Review*, 28(2), 1–25.
- Boone, H. N., Jr., & Boone, D. A. (2012). Analysing Likert data. *Journal of Extension*, 50(2), 1-5
- Chen, X.; Hesketh, T.(2021). Educational Aspirations and Expectations of Adolescents in Rural China: Determinants, Mental Health, and Academic Outcomes. *International Journal of Environ. Res. Public Health*, 18, 115-240. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182111524>

- Gorard, S., See, B. H., & Davies, P. (2017). The impact of attitudes and aspirations on educational attainment and participation. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Hashmi and Shakir (2023). Educational aspiration and school climate of secondary school students: A study of district Lucknow. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 9(6), 107-110
- Kalita, L., & Patil, M. (2023). Academic aspirations among adolescents for higher education: Family correlates. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 13(03), 49-55.
- Khampirat B (2020). The relationship between paternal education, self-esteem, resilience, future orientation, and career aspirations.plos one 15(12). [https:// doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0243283](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0243283)
- Khattab, N. (2015). Students' aspirations, expectations and school achievement. *British Educational Research Journal*, 41(5), 731–748.
- Sirin, S. R., & Rogers-Sirin, L. (2015). The educational and mental health needs of immigrant adolescents. *Educational Psychology Review*, 27(1), 1–19.