Predicting Adolescents' Career Aspirations Based on Their Self-Efficacy and Socioeconomic Status

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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to predict adolescents' career aspirations based on their self-efficacy and socioeconomicstatus. The statistical population of this research, conducted during the 2021–2022 academic year, consisted of female ninth-grade students from three schools in District 2 of Kerman. From this population, 127 individuals were selected through simple random sampling. The measurement tools included the Children and Adolescents' Self-Efficacy Questionnaire with 23 items and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, the Socioeconomic Status Questionnaire with 11 items and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83, and the Career Aspirations Questionnaire with 25 items and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93. The research method was descriptive and correlational. The results indicated that self-efficacy and socioeconomic status, with beta coefficients of 0.856 and 0.903 respectively, could positively and significantly predict adolescents' career aspirations. Furthermore, adolescents' self-efficacy was able to positively and significantly predict their socioeconomic status as well.

Key Words: Career aspirations, Socioeconomic status, Adolescents, Self-efficacy, Lower secondary education.

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Introduction

Career aspirations represent an effort to actualize one's self-concept through activities that lead to obtaining a job (Watson, McMahon, Foxcroft, & Els, 2010). This image enables individuals to aspire to careers without regard to external limitations and pressures (Domenico & Jones, 2007); therefore, career aspirations refer to the desire and decision to pursue a series of purposeful career-related activities to achieve effective employment (Greenhaus & Callanan, 2006).

The process of career choice begins years before completing high school and continues until an actual job is selected. Evidence suggests that career selection occurs in early childhood (Trice & McClellan, 1993). As children begin to learn about the world of work and occupations, they essentially start making career choices. As they progress through the educational system, they learn more about job requirements and also develop and diversify their understanding of occupations and the world of work through their career aspirations.

Career aspirations appear to be the motivation for initiating movement and creating needs related to employment, as well as future academic and career success (Rojewski, 2005). Aspirations have long-term impacts and consequences. They significantly influence the formation of later life outcomes such as workplace, place of residence, and acceptable standards for managing life (Creed, Wong, & Hood, 2009). They even play an important role in formulating goals related to marriage, spouse selection, and field of study.

Career aspirations are influenced by various factors, including familial factors. Familial factors include social class, parental education, parental occupation, parental job satisfaction, income level, and parental aspirations for their children (Schoon, 2001). Just as parents bear the important role and responsibility of raising their children and value various aspects of educating children and adolescents, it is necessary for them to address career education as part of overall upbringing (Samiei & Sadeghian, 2016). Research has shown that all childhood and adolescent activities, including computer games, are effective in career education (Samiei, 2015) and career development (Alipour Esfahani & Samiei, 2016), and the role of parents in guiding and enriching this development is significant. The influence of parents on children and their life paths is so profound that even their stress significantly affects supportive care and the quality of interaction with children (Jabbari Far et al., 2009). Among various familial factors, the variable of socioeconomic status is examined due to its important role.

One way society influences career aspirations is through socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status affects both the career aspirations of parents and those of their children (Brook, Whiteman, Peisach, & Deutsch, 1974). Seven-year-old children from a high socioeconomic background have more occupational

information and refer to a wider variety of jobs compared to their peers from a low socioeconomic background (Jordan, 1976; Creed et al., 2009). Socioeconomic status impacts the career aspirations of adolescent girls more than those of adolescent boys (Bardick & Bernes, 2005; Bardick, Bernes, Magnusson, & Witko, 2006).

Another important variable affecting career aspirations is self-efficacy. The term self-efficacy was introduced into career counseling by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2000) when they attempted to view career development from a social-cognitive perspective. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's perception of their confidence or ability to perform tasks (Bandura et al., 2001); in other words, self-efficacy is an individual's belief in how successful they will be in performing a task and how well they will manage it. According to Lent et al. (1994), self-efficacy involves judgments about abilities and talents related to executive and practical domains. This judgment may be realistic or unrealistic. Overall, self-efficacy is an individual's belief in successfully performing a task or duty. An individual's perception of reality is more determinant of behavior than the objective reality itself (Bandura et al., 2001; cited from Betz, Hackett, & Shuttleworth, 1990). Self-efficacy is directly or indirectly related to other variables such as ability, personality, interests, self-concept, and academic and career aspirations; to the extent that in adolescent girls, the correlation between ability and self-efficacy is reduced due to a weak self-concept (Kerr & Sodano, 2003); because even though they were studying in more male-dominated and high-level fields such as mathematics, science, and engineering, their perceived competence was low due to an inaccurate perception of themselves and their skills, and they aspired to low-level jobs (Freeman, 2004). The relationship between self-efficacy and career aspirations is such that girls in childhood and early adolescence show greater readiness and higher interest in non-traditional and high-status occupations. This stems from their high self-efficacy in these areas, but this interest decreases in mid-adolescence or early adulthood (Hartung, Porfeli, Vondracek, 2008 & Obrien, Friedman, Tipton & Linn, 2000). Thus, it can be said that self-efficacy plays a fundamental role in experiences related to career paths and consequently in career aspirations (Arnett, 2000).

Just as factors influence the formation of aspirations, there are also obstacles to their realization. When there is a significant difference between individuals' aspirations and their expectations, as well as between ideal and realistic aspirations, obstacles are undoubtedly perceived. Obstacles refer to individuals, events, occurrences, or conditions within the individual or in the external environment that hinder career path progress (Swanson & Woitke, 1997) and attack the career decision-making process. Obstacles may be active and real or constructed by the individual's mind (Swanson & Gore, 2000). According to Lent et al. (2000), when we see little similarity between interests and goals or between goals and activities, and an individual's efforts reach a dead end, we

must realize that an obstacle exists or that the necessary supportive methods for achieving the goal are lacking.

The existence of various familial, occupational, and social obstacles and their diversity and breadth in adolescents' perceptions indicate their ability for abstract thinking. This is because adolescents have reached more advanced stages of intellectual development and are capable of understanding more complex issues; meaning they not only understand internal obstacles that hinder the realization of their career aspirations but also perceive external obstacles stemming from family and society. Considering these obstacles and their personal abilities, adolescents determine their career aspirations. Understanding these obstacles leads adolescents to differentiate between their ideal aspirations and occupations and realistic ones; because they realize that achieving a good job requires attention to parental expectations, higher education, employment conditions, family circumstances, and job search conditions; consequently, it can be said that employment is not merely a social matter where families wait for their children's education to end and for the government to create jobs, but rather employment is an individual, familial, and social matter. According to Samiei's research (2012), what prevents obtaining employment and increases unemployment in society is the lack of career education for children and adolescents by parents and their inadequate preparation for entering the world of work. Children and even adolescents, who have somewhat reached intellectual maturity, perceive the role of individual obstacles more in not reaching their desired job. Many of these obstacles can be removed through increasing parental occupational awareness and knowledge and proper career education of children.

Among educational levels, this research was conducted at the lower secondary education level (ninth grade). After preschool and primary school, children enter adolescence and high school, and a new chapter opens for their career aspirations. Lower secondary education is a good time for career aspiration interventions; because students at this level have developed the talent for abstract thinking and are on the verge of making academic and career decisions. These children may exaggerate issues related to their career development more than is assumed (Gottfredson & Lapan, 1997). At this level, in addition to many preschool and primary school activities continuing in a more advanced and complex form, it is necessary to administer interest and aptitude tests regularly. An effective career guidance program directs students toward realistic beliefs about further education options, the need for choosing a field of study and higher education for some jobs, and how to prepare for success in various occupations. As students gain a higher understanding of the world of work, their career guidance programs should be advanced and focused on their talents and interests. Since most students have little specialized information about high school and university fields as well as jobs related to these fields, school counselors can regularly form small working groups; through this, students

interact with each other and within that group receive accurate information about high school and university fields of study and career path facilitators. Career guidance activities in lower secondary education prepare students for the later years when they must plan and choose a field of study, thereby increasing their occupational information. Up-to-date information about job search methods, employment projects, and necessary training enhances the sense of responsibility for continuing education (Valadez, 1998).

Since until now not much research has been conducted regarding the career aspirations of lower secondary adolescents and the various factors affecting them, this research sought to explain these factors and the relationship between them.

Research Hypotheses

1. There is a positive and significant relationship between adolescents' self-efficacy and their career aspirations.
2. There is a positive and significant relationship between socioeconomic status and adolescents' career aspirations.
3. There is a positive and significant relationship between adolescents' self-efficacy and their socioeconomic status.

Methodology

Statistical Population, Sample, and Sampling Method

Regarding its purpose, the present study is an applied research project, and concerning the method of data collection, it is a descriptive correlational study. The statistical population consisted of all female ninth-grade students from three schools in District 2 of Kerman, totaling 200 individuals during the 2021-2022 academic year. The sampling method was simple random sampling, and the sample size, determined using Morgan's table, was 127 individuals.

The standard Children and Adolescents' Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (Muris, 2001) was designed and developed to measure self-efficacy. This questionnaire contains 23 questions and three components: social self-efficacy, academic self-efficacy, and emotional self-efficacy. It employs a five-point Likert scale with items such as "How well can you express your opinion when other classmates disagree with you?" to assess self-efficacy. The reliability of the questionnaire, as reported by Tahmasian (2007) based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient, was 0.89. Furthermore, the reliability of this questionnaire for the present statistical population, calculated via Cronbach's alpha, was found to be 0.8.

The Socioeconomic Status Questionnaire, developed by Ghodratnama et al. (2013), was confirmed for face and content validity by 12 sports science experts (Eslami et al., 2013). The reliability of this questionnaire, using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, was reported as 0.83. For the studied statistical population,

the reliability of this questionnaire, calculated via Cronbach's alpha, reached 0.91.

The standard Career Aspirations Questionnaire, designed based on the model by Danziger et al. (2008), includes eight dimensions: technical-functional competence, general managerial competence, security-stability, entrepreneurial creativity, autonomy-independence, service and dedication and sacrifice, pure challenge, and lifestyle. This questionnaire was validated by Fathi et al. (2014). The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for the subscales of this questionnaire are as follows:

- Security-Stability: 0.763
- Autonomy-Independence: 0.752
- Lifestyle: 0.722
- Service and Dedication and Sacrifice: 0.723
- General Managerial Competence: 0.772
- Pure Challenge: 0.701
- Technical-Functional Competence: 0.832
- Total: 0.93

The reliability of this questionnaire for the studied statistical population, calculated via Cronbach's alpha, was also found to be 0.79.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of data analysis, the following method was employed: the use of multiple regression analysis to determine the prediction of adolescents' career aspirations based on their self-efficacy and socioeconomic status, as well as the prediction of socioeconomic status based on self-efficacy.

Research Findings

To analyze the collected data, methods of descriptive statistics—including calculation of mean, standard deviation, and frequency tables—were utilized. Additionally, for more advanced analyses, inferential statistical techniques such as correlation matrices and multiple regression were employed. The results of these analyses are recorded in Tables 1 through 11.

The results from the correlation matrix table indicate that the relationship between self-efficacy and career aspirations ($r = 0.856$) is significant at the $p < .01$ level. This means that as self-efficacy increases, adolescents' career aspirations also increase. Furthermore, the results show that the relationship between self-efficacy and socioeconomic status ($r = 0.801$) is significant at the $p < .01$ level, indicating that as self-efficacy increases, socioeconomic status also increases. As observed, the correlations between the variables are significant at the 0.01 level.

The First Research Hypothesis

The first research hypothesis proposed that "There is a positive and significant relationship between adolescents' self-efficacy and their career aspirations."

To test this hypothesis, regression analysis was employed, with the results presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

The data indicate a regression coefficient (R) of **0.856**. An F-test confirms this value is statistically significant at the **p < 0.000** level, affirming the existence of a strong, positive, and significant relationship between adolescents' self-efficacy and their career aspirations.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for the self-efficacy variable is **0.732**. This signifies that **73.2%** of the variance in career aspirations can be attributed to adolescents' self-efficacy, while the remaining variance is explained by other factors.

Furthermore, the beta coefficient (β) for this variable is **0.856**. This means that for every one standard deviation increase in self-efficacy, there is a corresponding positive increase of **0.856** standard deviations in career aspirations.

Table 1- Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables

Latent Variable	Components	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Participants
Total Scores	Career Aspirations	86.8110	14.33651	127
	Socioeconomic Status	17.7717	3.10450	127
	Self-Efficacy	79.6220	17.66349	127

Table 2- Correlation Matrix of the Research Variables

Factors	Career Aspirations	Socioeconomic Status	Self-Efficacy
Career Aspirations	1		
Socioeconomic Status	0.903	1	
Self-Efficacy	0.856	0.801	1

Table 3- Regression of self-efficacy on career aspirations

Model	Regression Coefficient	Coefficient of Determination	Adjusted Regression Coefficient	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	0.856	0.732	0.730	7.44476

Table 4- Significance Test of Regression between Self-Efficacy and Career Aspirations

Model		Sum of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean of Squares	Analysis of Variance	Significance Level
1	Regression	416.18969	1	416.18969	342.258	0.000
	Residual	6928.049	125	55.424		
	Total	25897.465	126			

Table 5- Calculation of Beta coefficient and its significance level for self-efficacy

Model		Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	Significance Level
1	Constant value	Beta	Standard Error	Beta	10.289	0.000
		31.502	3.062			
	Residual	0.695	0.038	0.856	18.500	0.000

The Second Research Hypothesis

The second research hypothesis proposed that "There is a positive and significant relationship between socioeconomic status and adolescents' career aspirations."

To test this hypothesis, regression analysis was employed, with the results presented in Tables 6, 7, and 8.

The data indicate a regression coefficient (R) of 0.903. An F-test confirms this value is statistically significant at the $p < 0.000$ level, affirming the existence of a strong, positive, and significant relationship between socioeconomic status and adolescents' career aspirations.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for the socioeconomic status variable is 0.816. This signifies that 81.6% of the variance in career aspirations can be attributed to adolescents' socioeconomic status, while the remaining variance is explained by other factors.

Furthermore, the beta coefficient (β) for this variable is 0.903. This means that for every one standard deviation increase in socioeconomic status, there is a corresponding positive increase of 0.903 standard deviations in career aspirations.

Table 6- Regression between Socioeconomic Status and Career Aspirations

Model	Regression Coefficient	Coefficient of Determination	Adjusted Regression Coefficient	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	0.039	0.168	0.481	6.59017

Table 7- Significance Test of Regression between Socioeconomic Status and Career Aspirations

Model		Sum of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean of Squares	Analysis of Variance	Significance Level
1	Regression	416.18969	1	21129.739	533.979	0.000
	Residual	55.424	125	38.142		
	Total		126			

Table 8- Calculation of Beta coefficient and its significance level for self-efficacy

Model		Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	Significance Level
		Beta	Standard Error	Beta		
1	Constant value	12.680	3.197		3.966	0.000
	Socioeconomic Status	4.171	0.177	0.903	23.537	0.000

The Third Research Hypothesis

The third research hypothesis proposed that "There is a positive and significant relationship between adolescents' self-efficacy and their socioeconomic status." To test this hypothesis, regression analysis was employed, with the results presented in Tables 9, 10, and 11.

The data indicate a regression coefficient (R) of 0.801. An F-test confirms this value is statistically significant at the $p < 0.000$ level, affirming the existence of a strong, positive, and significant relationship between adolescents' self-efficacy and their socioeconomic status.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for the self-efficacy variable is 0.642. This signifies that 64.2% of the variance in socioeconomic status can be attributed to adolescents' self-efficacy, while the remaining variance is explained by other factors.

Furthermore, the beta coefficient (β) for this variable is 0.801. This means that for every one standard deviation increase in self-efficacy, there is a corresponding positive increase of 0.801 standard deviations in socioeconomic status.

Table 9- Regression between Self-Efficacy and Socioeconomic Status

Model	Regression Coefficient	Coefficient of Determination	Adjusted Regression Coefficient	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	0.801	0.264	0.963	1.86499

Table 10- Significance Test of Regression between Socioeconomic Status and Career Aspirations

Model		Sum of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean of Squares	Analysis of Variance	Significance Level
1	799.605		1	799.605		
	Residual	434.733	125	3.478	224.142	0.000
	Total	1214.378	126			

Table 11- Calculation of Beta coefficient and its significance level for self-efficacy

Model		Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	Significance Level
		Beta	Standard Error			
1	Constant value	6.559	0.767	Beta	8.551	0.000
	Self-Efficacy	141	0.009	0.801	14.971	0.000

Discussion and conclusion

The results of the regression analysis indicate that the first hypothesis of the study is confirmed, demonstrating a positive and significant relationship between adolescents' self-efficacy and their career aspirations. This implies that self-efficacy can serve as a suitable predictive indicator for career aspirations, meaning that as adolescents' self-efficacy increases, their career aspirations proportionally rise. These findings align with the research of Patton and Creed (2007), who also identified a positive and significant relationship between adolescents' self-efficacy and their career aspirations. Therefore, self-efficacy influences adolescents' career aspirations. Students with higher self-efficacy have a better judgment of their abilities to perform tasks, choose diverse careers, and advance and succeed in various fields. They are more likely to select higher goals and aspirations and strive to achieve them.

Regarding the second hypothesis, the results reveal a positive and significant relationship between adolescents' socioeconomic status and their career aspirations. This indicates that socioeconomic status can be used as a reliable indicator to predict adolescents' career aspirations. These findings are consistent with the research of Hannah & Kahn (1989), who also found a positive and significant relationship between socioeconomic status and students' career aspirations. Additionally, the results align with studies by Betz et al. (1990), Teglasi (1981), Henderson, Heskett, and Tuffy (1988), and Hannah & Kahn (1989), all of whom identified a positive and significant relationship between socioeconomic status and career aspirations. However, these results contradict the findings of Bandura et al. (2001), who did not find a direct relationship between socioeconomic status and career aspirations. Thus, it appears that socioeconomic status affects adolescents' career aspirations. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds choose their career goals and aspirations with greater confidence in their abilities, possess more information about various professions, and have access to more resources to achieve their career-related goals. Consequently, they are more likely to select higher-level occupations.

Concerning the third hypothesis, the findings indicate a positive and significant relationship between adolescents' self-efficacy and their socioeconomic status. This suggests that adolescents' self-efficacy can serve as a suitable predictor of

their socioeconomic status. As adolescents' self-efficacy increases, their socioeconomic status also improves. These results are consistent with the research of Brooks and Van Noy (2008), who also identified a positive relationship between students' self-efficacy and their socioeconomic status. Therefore, socioeconomic status can be influenced by individuals' self-efficacy. High self-efficacy guides behavior and increases the likelihood of success in achieving goals, thereby impacting personal and social life, including socioeconomic status, and improving it.

Thus, the presence of factors that enhance adolescents' career aspirations, such as self-efficacy, socioeconomic status, resources, and societal support, can lead to the selection of more appropriate aspirations and goals by adolescents, contributing to their future success. Additionally, individual personality may play a significant role here, as in some cases, regardless of other conditions and circumstances, individuals choose a suitable career based on their personality type.

The results of the study indicate a positive and significant relationship between adolescents' self-efficacy and their career aspirations. It appears that by strengthening self-confidence and self-efficacy in adolescents, they will be able to choose their career goals more accurately and appropriately. It is recommended that educational environments, such as schools, implement programs to teach and enhance self-efficacy skills so that students can better understand their abilities and move toward their goals with greater confidence.

Furthermore, this research shows that adolescents' socioeconomic status has a positive and significant relationship with their career aspirations. Since access to social and economic resources and capital plays a key role in shaping students' career aspirations, it is suggested that support programs be developed to improve the socioeconomic status of families, and efforts be made to provide necessary resources and opportunities for students.

Given the results indicating a positive and significant relationship between adolescents' self-efficacy and their socioeconomic status, it is recommended to strengthen self-efficacy skills and provide necessary training in this area to improve and enhance individuals' socioeconomic status.

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