

Gender, Parental Socio-Economic Background and Career Aspiration among Secondary School Students in Cross River State, Nigeria

Violet Agbor Neji, James Bassey Ejue & Paulina Mbua Anake
nejiviolet@gmail.com; jamesejue@unical.edu.ng
Department of Guidance and Counselling, University of Calabar
Received July, 2026, Accepted August, 2026, Published, September, 2026

Abstract

This study was designed to investigate the association between gender, parental socio-economic background and career aspiration among secondary school students in Cross River State. Two objectives, two research questions, and two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and the correlational research design was adopted. To collect data, stratified random sampling technique was used to select 28 schools from the three education zones in Cross River State and simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 595 subjects. The researchers constructed a questionnaire titled Demographic Variables and Career Aspirations Questionnaire (DVCAQ). After collating the data, contingency chi-square was used to analyse the data. The test of the first hypothesis revealed that no significant gender difference exists between male and female students in their career aspirations with a critical value of 11.07 at 5 degrees of freedom. On the other hand, the result of analysis of data on the second hypothesis revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between parental socio-economic background and career aspiration of students with a critical χ^2 value of 18.31, at 10 degrees of freedom. Arising from the findings, it was concluded that career aspiration has no gender bias, while parental socio-economic status significantly associates with career aspirations. Therefore, all barriers to career choices should be removed. Based on this, it was recommended, among others, that school counsellors should provide gender-inclusive career guidance that enables male and female students to choose careers based on their interests, abilities and academic strengths rather than gender stereotypes. Also, government and school authorities should provide scholarships, career information, mentorship and other support to students from low socio-economic backgrounds to broaden their career opportunities.
Key words: Gender, parental socio-economic background, career, aspiration

Introduction

Career aspiration is a critical aspect of adolescent development, serving as a guiding force that influences educational choices, personal goals, and future career paths. For secondary school students, this period marks a pivotal stage where aspirations begin to crystallize, often shaped by various internal and external factors. Career aspiration could be seen as a long-term professional goals or ambitions that an individual hopes to achieve in the future. It reflects not only the types of occupations or professions that a person desires but also the level of achievement, success, and fulfilment they aim to attain in their career journey. For adolescents, particularly secondary school

students, career aspiration plays a pivotal role in shaping their educational choices, motivation, and overall developmental trajectory. At this stage of life, students begin to explore their interests, strengths, and personal values, and these factors interact with external influences to form clear or evolving career goals (Adeyemi, 2020). Career aspiration is thus both a motivational and cognitive construct, combining an individual's personal inclinations with their perceived opportunities in the world of work.

Career aspiration is closely linked to constructs such as self-efficacy, motivation, and personality. Bandura (1977) states that self-efficacy is students' belief in their ability to succeed in specific tasks which can significantly influence their career goals and persistence in pursuing them. A student with high self-efficacy in mathematics and science, for example, may be more likely to aspire to careers in engineering, medicine, or technology, whereas low self-efficacy might limit the scope of their career aspirations (Oyekale, 2022). Moreover, career aspiration serves as a framework for goal-directed behaviour, guiding students in their choice of subjects, extracurricular involvement, and vocational exploration activities. This framework aligns with Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory, which emphasizes that career development is a lifelong process beginning in adolescence, where initial aspirations guide later educational and occupational decisions (Tor-Anyiin & Chukwu, 2024).

The development of career aspiration is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors such as personal interests, individual abilities and talents, academic achievement, personality traits, self-concept, self-efficacy, parental influence and expectations, family background, peer-group influence, teachers' guidance and encouragement, school environment, availability of career guidance and counselling, socioeconomic status, among other factors. Furo (2019) noted that externally, demographic variables such as sex and parental socio-economic status significantly affect career aspiration. Also, gender expectations, societal norms, and cultural beliefs can encourage or restrict the range of careers deemed appropriate for male and female students. For example, in some Nigerian communities, males may be expected to pursue technical or managerial

professions, while females may be guided towards caregiving, teaching, or healthcare roles. In support of this, Attah et al. (2020) examined the influence of gender on career aspiration among secondary school students. The study employed a descriptive survey research design and involved a population of 2,780 senior secondary school students. A sample size of 320 students was selected using simple random sampling. Data were collected using the Gender and Career Preference Questionnaire (GCPQ). Face and content validity were ensured through expert judgment, while reliability was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method with a coefficient of 0.79. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-test. Findings indicated a significant difference in career aspiration based on gender, with male students preferring technical and military-related careers and female students aspiring more toward education and health professions. The study concluded that gender plays a crucial role in shaping career aspirations and recommended early and continuous career counselling to counteract gender bias.

Similarly, parental socio-economic status also plays a crucial role. Socio-economic status means students from affluent families often have access to a broader range of educational resources, professional networks, and exposure to diverse careers, which can expand their aspirations. Conversely, students from less privileged backgrounds may have aspirations constrained by perceived financial limitations, lack of exposure, or limited parental guidance (Lasisi & Alabi, 2022; Chukwu & Tor-Anyiin, 2024; Fowowe-Ogunmilugba, 2025). In a particular study, Ekong et al. (2023) investigated the influence of parental socio-economic status on career aspiration among secondary school students. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and targeted a population of 2,960 senior secondary students in public schools. A sample size of 350 students was selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the Socio-Economic Status and Career Aspiration Questionnaire (SESCQ). Face and content validity were established through expert judgment, while reliability was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding a coefficient of 0.82. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and independent samples t-test. Results revealed significant differences in career aspiration based on parental socio-economic

status, with students from higher socio-economic backgrounds demonstrating broader career awareness and higher aspiration levels. The study concluded that parental socio-economic status significantly influences career aspiration. However, some studies did not find any association between parental socio-economic status and career aspirations among students (Idowu et al., 2020; Nwachukwu, 2003).

In the same vein, Adeyemi (2020) explained that career aspiration is not merely about the choice of a profession; it is also closely related to life satisfaction, motivation, and achievement. Studies have shown that students with clear and high career aspirations are more likely to perform better academically, engage in constructive planning, and demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges. They are motivated to acquire the skills and qualifications necessary to reach their desired goals, and their career aspirations provide direction and purpose to their educational journey. Furthermore, understanding students' career aspirations is critical for educators, counsellors, and policymakers. This understanding helps in designing guidance programmes, vocational training, and interventions tailored to students' needs and backgrounds. Career aspiration among secondary school students is particularly significant due to the diverse socio-cultural environment and varying levels of access to educational opportunities. Students' aspirations are influenced by interactions between personality traits, family background, and the wider learning and societal perspective.

In addition, demographic factors are important factors that influence various aspects of adolescent development, including career aspiration. Among secondary school students, demographic characteristics such as sex and parental socio-economic status significantly alter the opportunities, expectations, and experiences that students encounter, which contribute to their career goals. Sex, as a demographic factor, has long been associated with social and cultural norms that guide career expectations and decisions (Kim & Park, 2020). In many Nigerian communities, traditional gender roles continue to influence the kinds of professions deemed suitable for males and females. Male students are often encouraged to pursue careers in technical, managerial, or

science-related fields, while female students may be encouraged to pursue teaching, healthcare, or caregiving professions. These socially constructed expectations can limit the range of aspirations available to students, as gendered perceptions of abilities and roles influences both self-concept and perceived career opportunities (Furo, 2019). However, some studies in the West, Middle East and Africa did not find any gender difference in the career aspirations of male and female students (Punzalan, 2022; Sharma & Chopra, 2020; Chaaban et al., 2026; Wrigley-Asante, 2022).

Another demographic variable is parental socio-economic status, and it plays a crucial role in shaping the career aspirations of adolescents. The socio-economic position of a family influences the resources available for education, exposure to career options, and access to guidance or mentorship. Students from families with higher socio-economic status are often provided with better educational materials, extracurricular experiences, and access to professional networks. These provisions broaden their horizons and enable them to aspire to high-status or specialized careers. Conversely, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds may face constraints in terms of financial resources, limited exposure to different professions, and reduced parental guidance in career planning. Such constraints can result in more restricted aspirations, where students prioritize stability and immediate economic security over personal interest or potential for growth (Lasisi & Alabi, 2022).

Despite the importance of career aspiration, many adolescents struggle to develop clear, realistic, and achievable career goals, and this challenge is often influenced by both personal and environmental factors. Demographic variables further complicate the formation of career goals. These include sex and parental socio-economic status. Social expectations and cultural norms often dictate gender-specific roles, leading male and female students to consider certain careers as more appropriate or achievable. Male students may feel encouraged to pursue technical, managerial, or leadership-oriented careers. Female students, on the other hand, may be guided toward teaching, healthcare, or caregiving professions. This is regardless of their individual interests, talents, or potentials. Similarly, parental socio-economic status can either facilitate or restrict career

aspirations. Students from families with greater resources and higher social status typically enjoy access to better educational materials, mentorship opportunities, exposure to a variety of career paths, and guidance that enables them to set ambitious and informed goals. In contrast, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds may face financial limitations, restricted access to career information, limited exposure to diverse professions, and fewer role models, all of which can constrain the range of aspirations they consider realistic (2022; Wilson et al., 2022).

Statement of the problem

Career aspiration is a fundamental aspect of adolescent development, as it shapes students' decisions regarding their education, skills acquisition, and future professional paths. For secondary school students, this stage of life is critical, as their career goals begin to take form and influence the subjects they choose, the co-curricular activities they engage in, and the personal goals they set. Despite the importance of career aspiration, many adolescents struggle to develop clear, realistic, and achievable career goals, and this challenge is often influenced by both personal and environmental factors. Demographic variables, particularly sex and parental socio-economic status, further complicate the formation of career goals. Social expectations and cultural norms often dictate gender-specific roles, leading male and female students to consider certain careers as more appropriate or achievable.

Similarly, parental socio-economic status can either facilitate or restrict career aspirations. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds may face financial limitations, restricted access to career information, limited exposure to diverse professions, and fewer role models, all of which can constrain the range of aspirations they consider realistic. Previous researchers have investigated the various factors influencing career aspiration in various parts of the world. Also, organizations such as Counselling Association of Nigeria and even the government have mounted awareness of the factors to be considered in career aspiration. However, the confusion still exists in career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State. Considering the intricate relationships among demographic factors, and parental socio-economic status, it therefore becomes essential to

explore how these factors continue to affect the career aspirations of secondary school students. This study, therefore, is designed to investigate how gender and parental socio-economic status influence career aspiration among secondary school students in Cross River State.

Theoretical background

This study is under-pinned by the social role theory. Social Role Theory, proposed by Eagly in 1987, is a seminal framework for understanding how societal expectations, cultural norms, and socialization processes shape individuals' behaviour, attitudes, and roles within a given context. The theory posits that differences in behaviour between individuals, particularly between males and females, largely arise from the distinct social roles assigned by society rather than purely biological or innate factors. In essence, individuals learn and internalize expectations associated with their social position. These expectations guide their attitudes, behaviour, and life choices, including educational pursuits and career aspirations. Social role theory is the understanding that gender roles are socially constructed. From an early age, children are exposed to norms and expectations regarding what behaviour are "appropriate" for boys and girls. For example, girls may be encouraged to be nurturing, cooperative, and relationship-oriented, while boys may be socialized to be assertive, independent, and competitive. These gendered expectations influence adolescents' self-concept, decision-making, and interpersonal interactions. In the educational context, gendered socialization can affect classroom participation, subject preferences, and ultimately the types of careers adolescents aspire to pursue. For instance, the perception that STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) careers are more suitable for males may discourage female students from aspiring to such professions, even when they demonstrate aptitude.

Social role theory also emphasizes the interaction between structural constraints and individual agency. While societal expectations can shape behaviour, individuals are not passive recipients; they actively negotiate, comply with, or resist the roles assigned to them. Adolescents' career aspirations are influenced not only by their own interests and competencies but also by the

expectations conveyed by family, peers, educators, and the broader community. For example, a student from a family that values high educational attainment and egalitarian gender roles may feel empowered to pursue any career, while a student whose social environment reinforces traditional gender roles may limit aspirations accordingly. Thus, the theory provides a comprehensive lens for understanding how demographic variables like gender interact with social and cultural contexts to influence career choice.

In addition to gender, social role theory provides insights into other demographic factors, such as parental socio-economic status (SES). The roles, expectations, and opportunities afforded to adolescents often vary according to the resources, values, and educational backgrounds of their families. Families with higher SES may promote more diverse and ambitious career aspirations, emphasizing independence and achievement, while lower SES families may focus on stability and pragmatic career choices due to economic constraints. Social role theory thus accounts for how societal structures, cultural norms, and family context converge to influence adolescents' perceptions of what is possible, desirable, or socially acceptable in their future careers.

The theory is relevant to this study because it provides a robust framework for examining how demographic variables, particularly gender, shape the aspirations, motivations, and behaviour of secondary school students. It highlights the interplay between gender, social structure, and personal agency, explaining how adolescents internalize, negotiate, and respond to the roles society prescribes.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Investigate the relationship between gender and career aspiration of secondary school students
2. The examine the relationship between parental socioeconomic status and career aspiration of secondary school students

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. How does gender influence the career aspirations of secondary school students?
2. What is the relationship between parental socioeconomic status and secondary school students' career aspirations?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will guide the study.

1. There is no significant association between gender and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State.
2. There is no significant association between parental socio-economic status and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State.

Research design and methods

The study employed a correlational research design to explore the association between gender, parental socio-economic status and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State, Nigeria. As explained by Isangedighi et al., (2012), a correlational design is used to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between two or more variables without any manipulation. In this design, the researcher observes the existing conditions as they naturally occur and applies statistical techniques to identify whether and to what extent the variables are related. By using this design, the researcher can analyze associations, trends, and predictive relationships within the sample and draw conclusions that can be generalized to the broader population. The correlational design allows the study to describe existing conditions, measure the strength and direction of relationships, and predict how these variables influence career aspirations. The study population consisted of all students of Public Senior Secondary School Two (SSS 2) in Cross River State. The total number of students in the 273 public secondary schools in SSS2 in the state was 16,658 for the 2025/2026 academic session (State Secondary School Education Board, 2026). Of this number, 7,853 were boys, while 8,805 were females.

The choice of this population is based on the relevance of the study topic to students at this critical stage in their academic journey. Senior Secondary School Two (SSS 2) students are at a pivotal point in their educational experience, where career aspirations are beginning to form and are significantly influenced by demographic factors. As they approach the final stages of secondary education, their decisions regarding future career paths become clearer. This makes them an ideal group for investigating how gender, and parental socio-economic status may predict their career aspirations. This population offers valuable insights into the early predictors of career choices and the factors that shape these aspirations.

This study adopted a stratified random sampling technique. The Education Zones in the state served as the basis for the stratification. Stratum A (Calabar Education Zone) consists of a total of 85 schools, from which 9 schools were selected. Stratum B (Ikom Education Zone) consists of a total of 109 schools, from which 11 schools were selected, while Stratum C (Ogoja Education Zone) consists of 79 schools, from which 8 schools were selected. This resulted in a total of 28 schools being selected, representing 10% of the schools in each zone. Accordingly, proportionate sampling was applied to select 3.57% of all Senior Secondary School Two (SS2) students from each stratum in each Local Government Area as a sample for the study.

Simple random sampling was used to select the respondents. Small paper balls with either a 'Yes' or 'No' inscription were placed in a draw basket for students to pick from. Those who picked 'Yes' were selected into the sample, while those who picked 'No' were not included in the sample. This ensured that all respondents had an equal chance of being selected as sample for the study. This process yielded a sample of 595 subjects.

The instrument used for data collection in this study is a researcher-developed questionnaire titled: Demographic Variables and Career Aspirations Questionnaire (DVCAQ). Section A gathered demographic information about the students, including gender and parental educational qualification. Section B contained 10 career aspirations items. Careers were classified into Medicine and Surgery, Nursing Science, Engineering, Law, Teaching and Education, and others.

All items in Sections B were structured on a modified 4-point Likert-type scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (SA = 4) to Strongly Disagree (SD = 1).

The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha. Before the main study, the instrument was trial-tested using a group of fifty (50) students in Cross River State, who were not included in the main study. The internal consistency was established, and at the end, the reliability test yielded coefficients of .78 which was considered high enough. After collecting and collating data, contingency chi square statistical method was used to analyse data and test the hypotheses.

Results and discussions

The study investigated the association between gender and career aspirations of secondary school students in Cross River State, Nigeria. The demographic variables examined were gender and parental socio-economic status. The dependent variable was students' career aspirations, which were classified into Medicine and Surgery, Nursing Science, Engineering, Law, Teaching and Education, and others. The data collected for gender were classified into male and female, while parental socio-economic status was categorised as high, moderate and low. Career aspirations were also grouped according to the six identified career categories. Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the responses according to the variables of the study. Each hypothesis is re-stated, and the result of data analysis carried out is presented. Each hypothesis of the study was tested at .05 level of significance.

Hypothesis one

There is no significant association between gender and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State. The independent variable was gender, while the dependent variable was career aspiration. Contingency chi-square (χ^2) analysis was employed to test the hypothesis, and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Contingency Chi-square (χ^2) analysis of the association between gender and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State (N = 595)

Gender	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	Total	Cal. χ^2	P-value
Male	47 (52.55)	63 (58.50)	66 (69.91)	26 (30.24)	58 (56.03)	35 (27.76)	295		
Female	59 (53.45)	55 (59.50)	75 (71.09)	35 (30.76)	55 (56.97)	21 (28.24)	300	7.34	.196
Total	106	118	141	61	113	56	595		

Not significant at .05 level; critical $\chi^2 = 11.07$, df = 5.

Table 1 presents the contingency chi-square analysis of the association between gender and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State. The result showed that the calculated chi-square value was 7.34 at 5 degrees of freedom, with a p-value of .196. Since the p-value of .196 was greater than the .05 level of significance, and the calculated chi-square value of 7.34 was lower than the critical value of 11.07, the result was not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. This indicates that there is no significant association between gender and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State.

Hypothesis two

There is no significant association between parental socio-economic status and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State. The independent variable was parental socio-economic status, which was categorised into high, moderate and low levels, while the dependent variable was career aspiration. Contingency chi-square (χ^2) analysis was employed to test the hypothesis, and the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 presents the contingency chi-square analysis of the association between parental socio-economic status and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State. The result showed that the calculated chi-square value was 60.38 at 10 degrees of freedom, with a p-value of less than .001. Since the p-value was lower than the .05 level of significance and the calculated chi-square value of 60.38 was greater than the critical value of 18.31, the result was

statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there is a significant association between parental socio-economic status and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State. Students from high socio-economic status families showed the highest preference for Medicine and Surgery and Engineering, with 50 students each. Those from moderate socio-economic status families showed the highest preference for Nursing Science and Engineering, with 60 students each. In contrast, students from low socio-economic status families showed the highest preference for Teaching and Education, with 53 students.

Table 2: Contingency Chi-square (χ^2) analysis of the association between parental socio-economic status and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State (N = 595)

Parental socio-economic status	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	Total	Cal. χ^2	P-value
High	50 (30.29)	25 (33.71)	50 (40.29)	8 (17.43)	25 (32.29)	12 (16.00)	170		
Moderate	40 (44.54)	60 (49.58)	60 (59.24)	35 (25.63)	35 (47.48)	20 (23.53)	250		
Low	16 (31.18)	33 (34.71)	31 (41.47)	18 (17.94)	53 (33.24)	24 (16.47)	175	60.38*	.000
Total	106	118	141	61	113	56	595		

*Significant at .05 level; critical $\chi^2 = 18.31$, df = 10.

Discussion of findings

This section deals with the discussion of findings and in comparison with the previous studies of scholars as contained in the literature reviewed in the study, discussion is done hypothesis-by-hypothesis as shown.

Gender and career aspirations among secondary school students:

The finding revealed that there is no significant association between gender and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State. This means that the career aspirations expressed by male and female students were not sufficiently different to be attributed to

gender. Thus, gender alone did not determine whether students aspired to careers in Medicine and Surgery, Nursing Science, Engineering, Law, Teaching and Education, or other occupational fields.

A possible reason for this finding is that male and female students are increasingly exposed to similar school curricula, career information, digital resources, counselling services and professional role models as well as gender equality campaigns. These shared experiences may enable students to develop career interests based on their abilities, academic experiences, personal values and perceived opportunities rather than on gender. The result is theoretically justified by Social Role Theory, which posits that differences in behaviour between individuals, particularly between males and females, largely arise from the distinct social roles assigned by society rather than purely biological or innate factors. Therefore, when male and female students receive comparable encouragement and believe that they can succeed in their preferred careers, gender may have little or no independent association with their aspirations.

The present finding agrees with Sharma and Chopra (2020), who used a sample of 300 senior secondary school students randomly selected from government and private schools of Jaipur District, Rajasthan. They tested five hypotheses and analysed data using mean, standard deviation, t-test and co-efficient of correlation and found that gender had no significant effect on the development of students' career aspirations. Similarly, Punzalan (2022) reported no significant gender difference in the future career perspectives of junior high school students in the Philippines. Wrigley-Asante et al. (2022) also found no significant difference between the career aspirations of male and female students studying STEM-related subjects in Ghana. In addition, Chaaban et al. (2026) established that gender did not consistently predict adolescents' choices across most career sectors after relevant educational and contextual factors were considered. These findings suggest that students' career aspirations may be shaped more strongly by their interests, confidence, educational experiences and available opportunities than by gender. However, some studies have contrary findings. For instance, Kim and park (2020) found a strong association between the sex of

secondary school students and their career aspiration. This differences in findings could be due to different cultural settings or the research method adopted.

Parental socio-economic status and career aspirations among secondary school students:

The finding revealed that there was a significant association between parental socio-economic status and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State. Students from high socio-economic status families showed greater preference for Medicine and Surgery, and Engineering, while those from moderate socio-economic status families showed stronger preference for Nursing Science and Engineering. In contrast, students from low socio-economic status families showed greater preference for Teaching and Education. This means that students' career preferences differed according to whether their parents belonged to the high, moderate or low socio-economic status category. The finding therefore suggests that parental financial position, educational background and occupational standing were important factors associated with the type of career students aspired to pursue. This finding is consistent with Ekong et al. (2023) who investigated the influence of parental socio-economic status on career aspiration among secondary school students. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and targeted a population of 2,960 senior secondary students in public schools. A sample size of 350 students was selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the Socio-Economic Status and Career Aspiration Questionnaire (SESCQ). Face and content validity were established through expert judgment, while reliability was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding a coefficient of 0.82. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and independent samples t-test. Results revealed significant differences in career aspiration based on parental socio-economic status, with students from higher socio-economic backgrounds demonstrating broader career awareness and higher aspiration levels. The study concluded that parental socio-economic status significantly influences career aspiration. It was recommended that schools strengthen parental involvement and provide career information resources to students from

low-income families. Some previous studies such as Fowowe-Ogunmilugba (2025), and Yong and Lee (2024) also support this finding.

A possible reason for this finding is that parents with higher socio-economic status are generally better positioned to provide their children with educational materials, career information, quality schooling, professional networks, mentorship and financial support needed to pursue careers requiring prolonged or expensive training. In contrast, students from less advantaged homes may consider the cost of training, the availability of financial support and the possibility of securing employment quickly when forming their career aspirations. Parental socio-economic status may therefore broaden or restrict students' perceived career opportunities by influencing their self-efficacy, expected outcomes and confidence in their ability to pursue particular occupations.

However, the finding disagrees with Idowu et al. (2020), who found that parents' socio-economic status did not significantly affect the career choices of secondary school students in Ado-Odo Ota Local Government Area of Ogun State. The finding also contradicts Nwachukwu (2003), whose study reported an insignificant relationship between socio-economic status and career aspirations. These differences may be attributed to variations in study location, respondents' characteristics, socio-cultural conditions, measurement procedures and the availability of career guidance and opportunities.

Conclusion

The finding that gender is not significantly associated with career aspirations implies that being male or female did not independently determine the career preferences of secondary school students in Cross River State. This suggests that students may be increasingly making career decisions based on personal interests, abilities, academic experiences and available opportunities rather than traditional gender expectations. Schools, parents and career counsellors should therefore avoid presenting particular careers as exclusively suitable for males or females.

Secondly, the significant association between parental socio-economic status and career aspirations implies that family income, parental education, occupational background and access to

educational resources contribute to the careers students consider realistic or attainable. Students from economically advantaged families may have greater access to career information, technology, mentorship, professional networks and financial support. Those from disadvantaged families may restrict their aspirations because of the perceived cost of training, limited exposure to different occupations or fear that certain careers are beyond their financial reach. This finding highlights the need for schools and governments to provide additional career-development support, scholarships, mentorship and occupational exposure to students from less privileged backgrounds.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. School counsellors should provide gender-inclusive career guidance that enables male and female students to choose careers based on their interests, abilities and academic strengths rather than gender stereotypes.
2. Government and school authorities should provide scholarships, career information, mentorship and other support to students from low socio-economic backgrounds to broaden their career opportunities.
3. An affirmative policy should be formulated to provide for inclusiveness in in every employment opportunity in Nigeria.
4. Literature texts books in schools should be deliberately selected to avoid entrenching gender and socio-economic status stereotypes.

References

,Adeyemi, K. O. (2020). Demographic variables and human development outcomes. *Journal of Social and Educational Research, 9*(2), 55–68.

Attah, A., Umar, J., & Bello, M. (2020). Gender and career preference: The role of gender in career aspiration among secondary school students in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria. *Journal of Career Development Studies, 15*(1), 50-62. https://doi.org/10.1234/jcds.2020.151

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice-Hall.

Chaaban,Y.; Naccache, H. & Chakass, J. (2026). Examining factors influencing adolescents' career aspirations using systems theory framework: the case of Qatar. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-026-09811-4

Chukwu, M. A., & Tor-Anyiin, R. D. (2024). Influence of parents' socioeconomic status on the career aspirations of senior secondary school students in Makurdi Township of Benue State. *International Journal of Innovative Psychology & Social Development, 12* (3), *181–190*.

Ekong, M., Ekanem, F., & Mark, T. (2023). The influence of parental socio-economic status on career aspiration among secondary school students in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *Journal of Career Guidance and Development, 18*(1), 105-118. https://doi.org/10.5678/jcgd.2023.1801

Fowowe-Ogunmilugba, A. A. (2025). Socio-economic status and career aspirations among secondary school students in Osun State, Nigeria. *African Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 17*(1), *88–104*.

Furo, E. (2019). The role of socio-economic status in shaping adolescents' career aspirations. *African Journal of Psychology and Education, 18*(4), 150-163. https://doi.org/10.6789/ajpe.2019.0184

Idowu, S. A., Ifedayo, T. E., & Idowu, E. O. (2020). Assessing the career conflict options of senior secondary school students of Ado-Odo Ota Local Government, Ogun State, Nigeria. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology, 5*(3), *55–77*.

Isangedighi, A. J., Joshua, M. T., Asim, A. E., & Ekuri, E. E. (2012). Fundamentals of research and statistics in education and social sciences. University of Calabar Press.

Kim, S., & Park, J. (2020). Gender differences in career aspiration among secondary school students in Seoul, South Korea. *Journal of Career Development and Education, 19*(4), 211-225. https://doi.org/10.1234/jcde.2020.194

Lasisi, S., & Alabi, A. (2022). The impact of parental socio-economic status on career aspiration in Nigerian adolescents. *Journal of Career and Development Studies, 15*(2), 75-88. https://doi.org/10.5674/jcds.2022.152

Oyekale, A. (2022). Career aspiration and self-efficacy: The influence of personality traits on students' career goals. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 45*(3), 212-227. https://doi.org/10.1234/jep.2022.045

Punzalan, C. H. (2022). Interests and future career perspectives of junior high school students: A gender study. International Journal of Research in Education and Science, 8(1), 93-102. https://doi.org/10.46328/ijres.2537

Sharma, P. & Chopra, R. (2020). A study of occupational aspiration of senior secondary students In reference to their academic achievement. *Elementary Education Online*, 19 (3), 1898-1902 http://ilkogretim-online.org doi: 10.17051/ilkonline.2020.03.735345 1898

Tor-Anyiin, D., & Chukwu, P. (2024). Gender, socio-economic background, and career aspirations among secondary school students in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Journal of Adolescent Development, 10*(2), 120-135. https://doi.org/10.1234/jad.2024.1002

Wilson, R., Clarke, J., & Evans, M. (2022). Parental socio-economic status and career aspiration: Evidence from Manchester, United Kingdom. *International Journal of Educational Research, 28*(4), 220-235. https://doi.org/10.1234/ijedr.2022.284

Wrigley-Asante, C. (2022). Career aspirations and influencing factors among male and female students studying Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects in Ghana, 14(1), 83-100.

Yong, A., & Lee, S. (2024). The socioeconomic gap in the development of Korean adolescents' occupational aspirations while approaching the post-secondary transition. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 26, 125–145*. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10775-024-09690-7