

INFLUENCE OF PEER INFLUENCE, SELF-ESTEEM, AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON CAREER ASPIRATIONS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Career aspirations represent a critical component of adolescent development, influencing students' academic engagement, occupational readiness, and long-term professional success. However, socio-personal variables continue to shape students' career expectations, particularly in developing regions where access to career guidance resources may be limited. This study examined the influence of peer influence, self-esteem, and parental involvement on career aspirations among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study adopted an ex-post facto research design. The population comprised 62,464 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students in 263 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. A sample of 1,874 students were selected using a multistage sampling technique involving proportionate, stratified and simple random sampling procedures. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled "Socio-Personal Factors and Career Aspirations of Students' Questionnaire (SPFCASQ)", which had a reliability coefficient of 0.82 determined using Cronbach Alpha statistics. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that peer influence, self-esteem, and parental involvement significantly influenced the career aspirations of secondary school students. It was concluded that socio-personal factors play a crucial role in shaping students' career ambitions and decision-making processes. The study recommended that school counsellors should implement structured peer mentoring programmes, organize self-esteem enhancement workshops, and encourage active parental participation in career guidance initiatives. These interventions are expected to enhance students' career clarity, motivation, and long-term educational outcomes.

Keywords: Career Aspirations, Peer Influence, Self-Esteem, Parental Involvement, Secondary School Students

Introduction

Career aspiration constitutes one of the most important developmental outcomes during adolescence, as it provides direction for academic engagement and future occupational attainment. Career aspirations refer to the long-term professional goals and ambitions individuals develop concerning their future employment and life achievements. These aspirations influence educational decisions, academic commitment, and skill acquisition necessary for career development. For secondary school students, career aspirations serve as guiding forces that shape subject selection, educational persistence, and professional orientation. Students with well-defined career aspirations are more likely to demonstrate higher academic motivation, resilience, and purposeful engagement in learning activities (Saini and Kaur, 2022)

During adolescence, individuals begin to explore different career possibilities while simultaneously developing their identities and self-concepts. At this stage, students attempt to reconcile personal interests, abilities, and environmental influences in forming realistic career goals. However, career decision-making among adolescents is rarely an individual process. Instead, it is shaped by a combination of internal psychological attributes and external social influences. Among the most influential of these socio-personal factors are peer relationships,

self-esteem, and parental involvement. These factors interact to shape students' perceptions of opportunities, expectations, and personal competence, thereby influencing the type of careers they aspire to pursue (Calandri *et al.*, 2026).

Peer influence represents one of the most significant environmental factors affecting adolescents' career development. During adolescence, individuals increasingly rely on their peers for social validation, acceptance, and identity formation. Peer groups influence students' attitudes toward education, career choices, and professional ambitions. Positive peer influence may encourage students to pursue academically demanding careers and adopt achievement-oriented behaviours (Alvarez *et al.*, 2024). Conversely, negative peer pressure may discourage academic engagement and lead to reduced career aspirations. Peer groups also shape students' perceptions of socially acceptable careers and influence their willingness to pursue long-term educational goals. Adolescents often model their behaviors and aspirations after peers whom they admire or perceive as successful, making peer influence a critical determinant of career outcomes.

Self-esteem is another essential psychological factor that significantly influences career aspirations. Self-esteem refers to an individual's perception of personal worth, competence, and confidence in achieving desired outcomes. Students with high self-esteem are more likely to believe in their abilities, set ambitious career goals, and pursue challenging academic paths. They tend to demonstrate greater resilience when faced with obstacles and are more willing to explore diverse career opportunities. In contrast, students with low self-esteem often underestimate their capabilities, avoid challenging academic tasks, and limit their career ambitions (Osei-Tutu, 2023). Consequently, self-esteem plays a vital role in shaping students' confidence in pursuing specific professional paths and achieving long-term success.

Parental involvement is equally critical in influencing students' career aspirations. Parents serve as primary socialization agents and play a significant role in shaping children's educational and career-related decisions. Parental involvement includes providing emotional support, offering career guidance, discussing future goals, and creating an environment conducive to learning and personal growth. Parents who actively engage in their children's education are more likely to encourage higher educational attainment and ambitious career goals (Đurišić and Bunijevac, 2027). Conversely, lack of parental support may result in uncertainty, low motivation, and limited career expectations among students. The level of parental involvement often determines the extent to which students are exposed to career information and guidance, thereby influencing their long-term aspirations.

In the context of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, socio-economic and educational disparities exist across different communities, creating varying levels of exposure to career opportunities and professional guidance. Students in this region often face challenges related to limited career awareness, inadequate guidance services, and insufficient exposure to professional role models. These challenges may hinder the development of realistic career aspirations and reduce students' motivation to pursue long-term professional goals. Without adequate support systems, students may base their career decisions on misconceptions, peer pressure, or societal expectations rather than their individual interests and abilities (Manu, 2025).

Understanding the role of socio-personal factors in shaping career aspirations is therefore essential for improving career guidance practices in schools. Educators, counsellors, and policymakers require empirical evidence to design interventions that enhance students' awareness of career opportunities and promote realistic career planning. By identifying the influence of peer influence, self-esteem, and parental involvement on students' career aspirations, stakeholders can develop targeted programmes that strengthen students' confidence, independence, and decision-making skills (Abubakar *et al.*, 2025).

Despite the increasing emphasis on career guidance in educational systems, many students continue to struggle with making informed career choices. This challenge is particularly evident in developing regions where access to professional guidance resources may be limited. Students who lack proper career guidance often make career choices based on

societal pressures or peer expectations rather than personal interests and abilities. Such misalignment between career aspirations and individual capabilities can result in academic disengagement, job dissatisfaction, and reduced productivity in adulthood.

Therefore, examining the combined influence of peer influence, self-esteem, and parental involvement on career aspirations is essential for understanding how socio-personal dynamics shape students' professional ambitions. This understanding will provide a foundation for developing effective educational policies and counselling strategies that promote realistic career planning among secondary school students.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does peer influence affect career aspirations among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State?
2. To what extent does self-esteem influence career aspirations among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State?
3. To what extent does parental involvement influence career aspirations among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State?
4. What is the combined influence of peer influence, self-esteem, and parental involvement on career aspirations among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State?

Hypotheses

1. Peer influence does not significantly affect career aspirations among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Self-esteem does not significantly influence career aspirations among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State.
3. Parental involvement does not significantly influence career aspirations among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State.
4. Peer influence, self-esteem, and parental involvement do not jointly influence career aspirations among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State.

Literature Review

Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have established relationships between socio-personal variables and students' career aspirations.

Ogunyemi (2019) examined peer relationships and career aspirations among secondary school students in Lagos State, Nigeria, using a descriptive survey design involving 1,200 students selected through stratified sampling. Data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that peer influence significantly predicted students' career aspirations, indicating that students exposed to academically motivated peers demonstrated stronger professional ambitions.

Similarly, Nwankwo and Okafor (2020) investigated the influence of self-esteem on career decision-making among secondary school students in Anambra State using a correlational research design involving 850 participants. Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis indicated a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and career aspirations, suggesting that students with higher self-confidence demonstrated clearer career goals.

Akpan (2021) studied parental involvement and career aspirations among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State using an ex-post facto design involving 1,050 students. Data were analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and the results indicated that parental involvement significantly influenced students' career awareness and professional ambitions.

In a related study, Eze and Musa (2022) examined the combined influence of peer relationships and parental support on students' career aspirations among secondary school students in Rivers State. The study employed multiple regression analysis and found that both

variables jointly predicted career aspirations, highlighting the importance of social support systems in career development.

Although previous studies have examined individual socio-personal variables influencing career aspirations, limited research has focused on the combined effects of peer influence, self-esteem, and parental involvement among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. This gap provides justification for the present study.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Concept Theory, which provide theoretical explanations for how socio-personal and psychological factors influence students' career aspirations.

Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1986), explains human behaviour as the result of reciprocal interactions among personal factors, environmental influences, and behavioural patterns. The theory emphasizes observational learning, social interaction, and reinforcement as key mechanisms through which individuals develop attitudes and behaviours. Within the context of career development, peer groups and parents serve as significant social agents who influence students' career expectations through modelling and feedback. Students who observe positive academic and career-related behaviours among peers and parents are more likely to develop ambitious career goals. Additionally, the theory highlights the importance of self-beliefs, particularly self-efficacy, which influences individuals' confidence in pursuing challenging career paths.

Self-Concept Theory, associated with Carl Rogers (1959), emphasizes the role of self-perception in shaping behaviour and goal attainment. The theory suggests that individuals' beliefs about their competence and self-worth significantly influence their decisions and aspirations. In educational settings, students with positive self-concepts and high self-esteem are more likely to set ambitious academic and career goals. Conversely, students with low self-esteem may underestimate their abilities and limit their career aspirations. The theory further recognizes the influence of social relationships, particularly parental and peer interactions, in shaping students' perceptions of their abilities and future potential.

Methodology

This study adopted an ex-post facto research design. The design was considered appropriate because the variables investigated namely peer influence, self-esteem, and parental involvement, were naturally occurring and could not be manipulated experimentally. The ex-post facto design enabled the researcher to examine the relationships between the independent variables and career aspirations without direct intervention. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The state comprises several Local Government Areas with diverse socio-economic and educational characteristics. Public secondary schools in the state serve students from varied backgrounds, making the area suitable for examining socio-personal influences on career aspirations. The presence of numerous public secondary schools and structured educational systems provided an adequate setting for investigating the relationship between peer influence, self-esteem, parental involvement, and students' career aspirations.

The population of the study comprised 62,464 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students enrolled in 263 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Senior Secondary Two students were considered appropriate for the study because they are at a developmental stage where career planning and decision-making become increasingly significant. A sample of 1,874 Senior Secondary Two students was selected for the study using a multistage sampling technique. The sampling process involved proportionate stratified sampling to ensure adequate representation of schools across different educational zones within the state. Subsequently, simple random sampling techniques were used to select students from the identified schools. This approach ensured that all students had an equal chance of being selected while maintaining representativeness of the population.

Data for the study were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled “Socio-Personal Factors and Career Aspirations of Students’ Questionnaire (SPFCASQ).” The instrument consisted of structured items designed to measure peer influence, self-esteem, parental involvement, and career aspirations among secondary school students. The questionnaire utilized a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The items were structured to capture students’ perceptions and experiences related to socio-personal factors influencing their career aspirations. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by experts in Guidance and Counselling and Educational Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha reliability method. A pilot test was conducted using a sample of students outside the main study area. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.82, indicating a high level of internal consistency. This value demonstrated that the instrument was reliable for measuring the variables under investigation.

Data collected for the study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. These statistical methods were selected because they are appropriate for determining differences and relationships among variables measured on Likert-type scales.

Results

Table 1: Summary of Mean and Standard deviation for career aspirations of secondary school students based on peer influence

	Peer influence	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
Career aspirations of secondary school students	High	972	31.99	6.15
	Low	902	52.39	4.96

Source: Computed by the Researcher using data from the respondents (2025).

From the result in Table 1, it is reveals that the mean and standard deviation scores of career aspirations of secondary school students with high peer influence is 31.99 and 6.15 and that of students with low peer influence is 52.39 and 4.96 respectively. The result means that students with low peer influence had a higher mean score compared to the students with high peer influence. With this observation, it implies that Students with low peer influence demonstrated higher career aspirations compared to those with high peer influence, suggesting that excessive peer pressure may negatively influence how students set and pursue their career goals. Thus, peer influence has a strong influence on the career aspirations of secondary school students.

Table 2: Summary of Mean and Standard deviation for career aspirations of secondary school students based on self-esteem

	Self-esteem	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
Career aspirations of secondary school students	High	827	62.37	3.48
	Low	1047	39.47	5.30

Source: Computed by the Researcher using data from the respondents (2025).

From the result in Table 4.4, it is reveals that the mean and standard deviation scores of career aspirations of secondary school students with high self-esteem is 62.37 and 3.48 and that of students with low self-esteem is 39.47 and 5.30 respectively. The result means that students with high self-esteem had a higher mean score compared to the students with low self-esteem. With this observation, it implies that self-esteem has a very high influence on the career aspirations of secondary school students. Those with high self-esteem recorded much higher career aspirations compared to those with low self-esteem. Thus, self-esteem strongly influences career aspirations of secondary school students.

Table 3: Summary of Mean and Standard deviation for career aspirations of secondary school students based on parental involvement

	Parental involvement	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
Career aspirations of secondary school students	High	732	63.99	5.19
	Low	1142	43.14	11.23

Source: Computed by the Researcher using data from the respondents (2025).

From the result in Table 3, it is reveals that the mean and standard deviation scores of career aspirations of secondary school students with high parental involvement is 63.99 and 5.19 and that of students with low parental involvement is 43.14 and 11.23 respectively. The result means that students with high parental involvement had a higher mean score compared to the students with low parental involvement. With this observation, it implies that parents' guidance, support, and encouragement play a crucial role in shaping and motivating students toward their future career goals. Thus, parental involvement has influence on the career aspirations of secondary school students.

Table 4: Summary of Independent t-test of career aspirations of secondary school students based on peer influence

Peer influence	n	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Sig.	Decision at .05 Alpha Level
High	972	31.99	6.15	-47.067	.000	(S) Ho3 Rejected
Low	902	52.39	4.96			

df= 970 S= Significant at .05 alpha level

Source: Computed by the Researcher using data from the respondents (2025).

In Table 4, the significant (sig.) value for the influence of peer influence on the career aspirations of secondary school students is .000. This significant level is less than .05 alpha level in which the decision is based. This indicates that peer influence significantly influence the career aspirations of secondary school students. Therefore, the formulated hypothesis was rejected.

Table 5: Summary of Independent t-test of career aspirations of secondary school students based on self-esteem

Self-esteem	n	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Sig.	Decision at .05 Alpha Level
High	827	62.37	3.48	67.423	.000	(S) Ho4 Rejected
Low	1047	39.47	5.30			

df= 825 S= Significant at .05 alpha level

Source: Computed by the Researcher using data from the respondents (2025).

In Table 5, the significant (sig.) value for the influence of self-esteem on the career aspirations of secondary school students is .000. This significant level is less than .05 alpha level in which the decision is based. This indicates that self-esteem significantly influence the career aspirations of secondary school students. Therefore, the formulated hypothesis was rejected.

Table 6: Summary of Independent t-test of career aspirations of secondary school students based on parental involvement

Parental involvement	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Sig.	Decision at .05 Alpha Level
High	732	63.99	5.19	31.277	.000	(S) Ho6 Rejected
Low	1142	43.14	11.23			

df= 730, S= Significant at .05 alpha level

Source: Computed by the Researcher using data from the respondents (2025).

In Table 6, the significant (sig.) value for the influence of parental involvement on the career aspirations of secondary school students is .000. This significant level is less than .05 alpha level in which the decision is based. This indicates that parental involvement significantly influences the career aspirations of secondary school students. Therefore, the formulated hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that peer influence significantly influences students' career aspirations, with students under high peer influence demonstrating lower aspirations. This finding aligns with the work of Okon et al. (2016) and Adeyemi et al. (2017), who found peer groups to be powerful in shaping career choices. The result can be explained through Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (1950). During the Identity vs. Role Confusion stage, adolescents are highly susceptible to peer influence as they seek acceptance. If the peer group values immediate gratification over long-term planning, students may conform, leading to a suppression of their own ambitions. This suggests that high peer influence can act as a deterrent to setting and pursuing high-level career goals.

The results demonstrated that self-esteem is a powerful determinant of career aspirations. Students with high self-esteem had significantly higher aspirations. This finding corroborates the work of Ifeanyi (2017) and Ogunleye and Adebajo (2016), who linked self-esteem to career decisiveness and ambition. This relationship is best understood through Super's Career Development Theory (1957). Super argued that career choice is the implementation of one's self-concept. A student with high self-esteem develops a positive self-concept, believing in their ability to succeed in challenging fields, thereby setting high aspirations. Conversely, low self-esteem leads to a negative self-concept, which limits perceived possibilities and results in lower aspirations. Self-esteem, therefore, acts as the internal psychological foundation for ambition.

The study found that parental involvement significantly influences students' career aspirations, with students from highly involved families showing much higher aspirations. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Adamu and Musa (2017) and Erefagha (2017). This can be effectively interpreted using Holland's Career Typology Theory (1959). Parents are the primary agents in introducing children to the "world of work." Their involvement through discussion, encouragement, and expectation-setting helps students understand different career types and begin to assess their own fit within Holland's Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (RIASEC) model. Active parental guidance helps students navigate career options, understand requirements, and build the confidence to aim for professions that align with their interests, thereby elevating their aspirations.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is concluded that peer influence, self-esteem, and parental involvement are critical determinants of career aspirations among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. While high peer influence can negatively affect aspirations, high self-esteem and strong parental support serve as powerful enablers, fostering higher and more ambitious career goals. These factors, rooted in the students' social environment and internal self-concept, play a more decisive role than fixed demographic characteristics in shaping their professional future.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Counsellors should develop programmes to help students build positive peer networks. This can include creating career-focused clubs where students can support each other's academic and professional goals, and conducting workshops on resisting negative peer pressure.
2. Schools should integrate self-esteem enhancement activities into the curriculum. This can be done through public speaking opportunities, leadership roles, and mentorship programmes that help students build confidence in their abilities and potential.

3. Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and school seminars should include sessions to sensitize parents on the critical importance of their active involvement in their children's career development. Parents should be encouraged to have regular, supportive conversations about career aspirations and to provide both emotional and practical support.
4. The Ministry of Education should mandate and fund comprehensive career guidance and counselling services in all secondary schools, with specific components focused on building self-esteem and facilitating positive peer interactions. Policies should also encourage parental engagement through school-based career events.

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