

Understanding Occupational Aspirations among Indian School Students: The Role of School Climate, Family Influence, and Value Orientation

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ABSTRACT

The present study delves into the multifaceted concept of Vyavsayik Akanksha (Occupational Aspiration), which plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's career trajectory and personal development. With growing socio-economic challenges and rapid transformations in education and employment landscapes, understanding the nature, determinants, and implications of occupational aspirations among students, particularly at the middle and higher secondary levels, has become crucial. This paper investigates how factors such as school environment, family background, social and emotional intelligence, and value systems influence the occupational aspirations of students.

Special emphasis is placed on the role of educational institutions and the school climate in nurturing or hindering these aspirations. Additionally, the study explores the significance of personal traits like ambition, self-efficacy, and value orientation in developing occupational goals. The research employs a mixed-method approach, incorporating surveys and interviews to derive insights from a diverse sample of students. The findings underscore the importance of a supportive school environment, effective guidance, and socio-emotional learning in empowering students to make informed and realistic occupational choices. This paper aims to contribute to educational policy and practice by advocating for value-based education and personalized career guidance, especially in developing regions of India.

Keywords: APH, Maternal outcomes, Fetal outcomes

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, education is not merely a means to acquire knowledge but a fundamental instrument for human development and national progress. A person's identity, decision-making abilities, professional conduct, and life choices are deeply rooted in the quality of education they receive. In India, a country with a rich cultural heritage and diverse socio-economic realities, education holds the transformative power to uplift individuals and communities. Among the many outcomes of education, one of the most significant is the cultivation of occupational aspirations, particularly during adolescence—a phase marked by identity formation, cognitive expansion, and emotional maturity.

Occupational aspiration refers to an individual's desired profession or vocation that reflects their personal interests, abilities, and goals, influenced by both internal values and external circumstances. It is not a fixed entity but a dynamic and evolving construct shaped by social, psychological, and environmental factors. The significance of occupational aspiration lies in its predictive power over future educational attainment, career planning, and long-term job satisfaction. Understanding this construct, therefore, is essential for educators, parents, and policymakers aiming to guide the youth effectively.

In the Indian context, students often face pressure from multiple directions: societal expectations, familial obligations, peer influence, and personal ambitions. While some are able to navigate these forces with clarity, many others struggle due to lack of awareness, inadequate guidance, and insufficient support structures. The middle school and secondary levels represent a critical stage in this journey, as students begin to form concrete ideas about their futures. At this stage, the role of school climate becomes particularly crucial. A school's environment—including teacher behavior, peer relationships, extracurricular activities, physical infrastructure, and disciplinary norms significantly influences how students perceive their own abilities and opportunities.

In many Indian schools, however, education is still confined to rote learning and academic performance, with little emphasis on emotional well-being, value inculcation, or career exploration. As a result, students may perform well in exams yet remain confused or anxious about their future careers. A school climate that fosters mutual respect, autonomy, democratic decision-

making, and value-based engagement can play a transformative role in helping students realize their potential and shape their occupational choices meaningfully.

Family background also plays a significant role in shaping occupational aspirations. Parents' education levels, occupations, income, and attitudes towards work and education deeply influence children's aspirations. In nuclear and joint family systems, differing expectations and exposure levels often create disparities in students' ambitions. Additionally, the presence or absence of role models in a student's immediate environment can either expand or limit their occupational horizon.

Personal characteristics, such as confidence, decision-making ability, value clarity, and emotional regulation, further define how students internalize occupational goals. A student who is self-aware, emotionally stable, and socially active is more likely to aspire towards meaningful and attainable professional goals than one who is unsure or directionless. This makes it essential to integrate emotional and social learning within school curricula, allowing students to reflect on their interests, values, and long-term goals in a structured manner.

Another crucial yet often overlooked dimension is the concept of *Lookik* (worldly) versus *Adhyatmik* (spiritual) values in educational settings. While schools emphasize academic excellence, there is a growing need to integrate ethical and moral values that guide students in making responsible life and career choices. Education should aim not just at producing successful professionals but also compassionate, value-driven individuals who contribute positively to society. In this regard, occupational aspiration becomes not just a career choice but a reflection of a student's holistic development.

The importance of vocational guidance and counseling also cannot be overstated. Career guidance should not be a one-time intervention but a continuous, interactive process that begins early and evolves with the student's maturity. Unfortunately, in many Indian schools, structured counseling services are either absent or poorly implemented. Teachers, despite being central to students' development, often lack the training or time to address students' emotional and vocational concerns. Therefore, capacity-building initiatives for teachers and the integration of career education within the curriculum are essential to support students' aspirations effectively.

Moreover, the influence of media, particularly social media, is growing rapidly in shaping students' occupational desires. Media often glamorizes certain professions while ignoring others, leading to skewed perceptions about success, fame, and job satisfaction. Students may aspire to become influencers, actors, or entrepreneurs without fully understanding the demands or pathways of these careers. Schools, therefore, must equip students with critical media literacy skills to navigate such influences intelligently.

Another relevant concept discussed in this study is "occupational awareness," which denotes the extent to which students are informed about different career options, the skills required, and the realistic opportunities available. A lack of occupational awareness often results in uninformed decisions, career mismatches, and frustration. Promoting occupational awareness through career fairs, field visits, alumni interactions, and digital platforms can expand students' understanding and motivate them to align their choices with both personal interests and market demands.

The pandemic era further highlighted the urgent need for rethinking educational strategies, especially in terms of future readiness. The disruptions caused by COVID-19 forced schools to adapt to online platforms, bringing both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, digital education widened access to resources; on the other, it exposed glaring gaps in infrastructure, teacher preparedness, and student engagement. The crisis emphasized that future education systems must be resilient, inclusive, and aligned with real-world demands.

In summary, the present research on *Vyavsayik Akanksha* examines occupational aspiration not as an isolated trait but as a multidimensional construct influenced by personal values, school environment, family background, social exposure, and vocational guidance. The purpose is to identify the patterns, challenges, and enabling conditions that shape the occupational goals of students in middle and secondary school, particularly within the Indian socio-cultural framework. The study hopes to offer insights for improving educational policy and practice, promoting value-based learning, and enabling students to become self-reliant, socially responsible professionals who can contribute to the nation's progress.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of occupational aspiration (*Vyavsayik Akanksha*) has evolved over decades, drawing attention from psychologists, sociologists, and educationists worldwide. Occupational aspiration reflects a person's desired career path and is strongly tied to their identity, self-perception, and societal positioning. Numerous studies have explored how this aspiration is shaped by a range of factors: socio-economic background, educational experiences, parental influence, school climate, values, and psychological traits such as self-efficacy and emotional intelligence.

Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise (1981) remains foundational in explaining how children and adolescents form occupational preferences. According to Gottfredson, individuals start eliminating career options based on perceived social barriers such as gender roles, social prestige, and accessibility. As they mature, they begin to compromise based on external limitations and internal priorities. In the Indian context, this framework aligns well with how students' aspirations are filtered through social expectations and resource availability.

Super's developmental theory of vocational behavior (1990) also contributes significantly by suggesting that career development is a lifelong process. It identifies stages such as growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline. During the exploration stage (typically adolescence), individuals crystallize, specify, and implement occupational preferences. This process is often influenced by the individual's personality, self-concept, and social context. In India, where early career decisions are influenced by family and social pressures, the exploration stage is often rushed or improperly guided, highlighting the relevance of this theory in present research.

Indian scholars have also contributed richly to this field. A study by Sharma and Joshi (2015) observed that students from urban schools in India displayed broader occupational aspirations than their rural counterparts, owing to better access to career guidance, exposure, and digital resources. Similarly, Verma and Saxena (2018) found that parental education and occupation significantly influenced students' ambition levels, with children of government employees and professionals showing higher career certainty and direction.

Research by Kumari and Tripathi (2016) emphasized the role of school climate in promoting occupational clarity. Schools with supportive teachers, participative classroom environments, and extracurricular engagement encouraged students to explore diverse career options. Furthermore, schools that actively promoted value education and moral reasoning were seen to produce students with more socially responsible and balanced career goals.

The emergence of emotional and social intelligence as factors in career development has also shaped recent research. Goleman (1995) argued that emotional intelligence is critical not only in personal well-being but also in decision-making and leadership key components of occupational success. Studies in India by Singh and Kaur (2019) found that students with higher emotional regulation and interpersonal skills demonstrated stronger clarity and commitment towards occupational goals.

In addition to internal traits and institutional environments, the influence of mass media and digital platforms has become a notable area of study. With the growing popularity of social media, students are increasingly influenced by online content that glamorizes specific professions such as influencers, entrepreneurs, or content creators. Research by Khan et al. (2020) showed that while social media can provide awareness about emerging careers, it also creates unrealistic expectations, often leading to confusion or dissatisfaction.

Another emerging theme is the integration of career guidance into mainstream education. Studies have shown that in schools where students received structured vocational counseling from trained professionals, there was a significant increase in informed career decision-making and long-term planning. However, as pointed out by Mehta and Iyer (2021), the availability of such services in government and semi-urban schools remains limited, resulting in a gap between aspiration and actual achievement.

Overall, the literature underscores the multidimensional nature of occupational aspiration. It is not solely an outcome of academic performance or family background but a complex interplay of individual traits, social influences, educational experiences, and systemic opportunities. The current study aims to extend this understanding by incorporating the often-overlooked roles of school environment, value-based education, and socio-emotional development within the Indian context.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

school students and to understand the role of school environment, family background, personal values, and emotional-social. The objective of this study is to investigate the factors influencing *Fyavsayik tkanksha* (Occupational Aspiration) among competence in shaping their career decisions. To ensure a comprehensive and objective analysis, a structured research methodology was adopted, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods.

1. Research Design

This study follows a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive aspect helps in understanding the existing levels and patterns of occupational aspirations among students, while the analytical part examines the relationship between various influencing factors (such as school climate, emotional maturity, value orientation, and family background) and the levels of aspiration.

2. Population and Sample

The population of this study includes students of middle and secondary school levels (classes 8th to 12th) across urban, semi-urban, and rural schools. The geographical scope is limited to selected districts to maintain logistical feasibility, while ensuring demographic diversity. Stratified random sampling was used to select a representative sample of 300 students (150 boys and 150 girls) from various types of schools—government, aided, and private institutions.

The stratification ensured fair representation across gender, economic background, and type of school. Additionally, 30 teachers and 20 parents were also interviewed to gain insights from different stakeholders influencing students' career development.

3. Research Tools

To gather reliable data, the following research tools were used

Occupational Aspiration Scale (OAS): A standardized questionnaire was developed to measure students' career goals, clarity of aspiration, and alignment with their skills and interests.

School Climate Inventory (SCI): A tool used to evaluate the school environment across domains such as teacher-student relationship, academic encouragement, peer support, discipline, and value-based activities.

Value Orientation Scale (VOS): This scale measures the ethical and cultural values guiding students' choices, covering aspects like altruism, social responsibility, ambition, and self-discipline.

Socio-Emotional Competence Questionnaire (SECQ): This tool captures students' ability to regulate emotions, build interpersonal relationships, and manage social challenges effectively.

Interview Schedule: Semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents to gain qualitative data on their perceptions of students' aspirations and influencing conditions.

4. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was conducted in three phases:

Phase I-Pilot Study: The research tools were tested on a small group of 30 students to ensure clarity, validity, and reliability. Based on feedback, necessary modifications were made.

Phase II- Main Data Collection: The final tools were administered to the selected student sample in their respective schools. Questionnaires were completed in a monitored environment to ensure authenticity.

Phase III-Interviews: Face-to-face and telephonic interviews with selected teachers and parents were conducted to gather complementary data and triangulate findings.

All participants were assured of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation. Proper ethical guidelines were followed, with permission taken from school authorities and informed consent obtained from students and parents.

5. Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected from questionnaires were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics:

Descriptive Statistics: Mean, median, mode, and standard deviation were used to identify general trends and patterns in aspiration levels.

Inferential Statistics: Techniques such as correlation analysis, chi-square tests, and t-tests were applied to examine relationships between variables like school climate and occupational aspiration, or value orientation and gender-based differences.

Qualitative Analysis: The interview data were thematically analyzed to identify recurring themes, stakeholder perceptions, and contextual insights.

6. Limitations of the Study

While the study is comprehensive, it is not without limitations. The sample size, though diverse, is geographically limited and may not fully represent the vast cultural differences across all Indian regions. Additionally, self-reported data may carry biases, and external factors such as media influence, which are difficult to quantify, may have impacted responses.

4. RESULTS

The findings of the study offer rich insights into the dynamics of occupational aspirations among school students and highlight key influencing factors such as school climate, family background, value orientation, socio-emotional competence, and gender.

1. Distribution of Occupational Aspirations among Students

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of students' occupational preferences. Engineering emerged as the most preferred career choice, with 24% of students opting for it. Government jobs ranked second (21.3%), followed by medical (19.3%) and teaching (13.3%). Entrepreneurship (12%) and other miscellaneous careers (10%) formed the remaining categories. These findings reflect societal trends where traditionally secure and prestigious professions continue to dominate students' aspirations, indicating a possible alignment with parental and societal expectations.

2. Role of School Climate

A critical variable influencing students' aspirations is the school climate. Table 2 reveals a strong positive correlation between

favorable school environments and higher occupational aspiration scores. Students from schools with an "Excellent" rating recorded an average aspiration score of 8.5, while those in "Poor" environments averaged only 4.2. This clearly underscores the significance of nurturing, resource-rich, and emotionally supportive school settings in inspiring students to aim higher and think clearly about their futures

3. Family Income and Aspiration Clarity

Table 3 highlights the relationship between family income and aspiration clarity. Students from higher-income families (>50,000/month) showed 75% clarity in their career goals, whereas those from lower-income groups (10,000/month) showed only 35%. The trend indicates that economic stability provides students not only with better access to information and resources but also reduces uncertainty and stress that may hinder career planning. Higher income families can afford private tuitions, internet access, and career counseling which are often out of reach for low-income households.

4. Gender-Based Trends in Career Preferences

Gender continues to be a significant determinant in the kind of occupational goals students set. As shown in Table 4, 28% of boys preferred engineering, while only 20% of girls opted for it. Conversely, 23% of girls showed a preference for medical careers as compared to 17% of boys. Girls also expressed greater interest in teaching (17%) than boys (10%). Interestingly, a greater percentage of boys preferred entrepreneurship (15%) than girls (9%). These results align with broader cultural norms, reflecting persistent gender role expectations that subtly influence students' self-perception of suitability for certain careers.

5. Influence of Value Orientation on Aspiration Levels

Students with a high level of value orientation such as a strong sense of purpose, ethics, and self-discipline-also exhibited higher occupational aspiration scores. As per Table 5, students with high value orientation scored an average of 8.2 on the aspiration scale, while those with low value alignment scored just 4.3. This suggests that students who internalize strong value systems are more likely to pursue meaningful and goal-oriented careers, indicating the need for value-based educational interventions in schools.

6. Socio-Emotional Competence and Aspiration Alignment

Finally, socio-emotional competence (SEC) was examined to determine its role in aligning aspirations with abilities and reality. Table 6 shows that students with high SEC had 78% alignment between their aspirations and actual capabilities, compared to 42% among those with low SEC. This alignment is vital, as it indicates whether students are making informed, realistic career choices based on their emotional awareness, self-regulation, and interpersonal skills. Programs that develop SEC through mentoring, life skills training, and counseling can thus play a pivotal role in enhancing students' decision-making and confidence.

Table 1: Distribution of Students Based on Occupational Aspirations

| Occupational Category | No. of Students | Percentage (%) |

Engineering	72	24.0	
Medical	58	19.3	
Teaching	40	13.3	
Government Jobs	64	21.3	
Entrepreneurship	36	12.0	
Others	30	10.0	

Table 2: Influence of School Climate on Occupational Aspiration Levels

| School Climate Rating | Average Aspiration Score (out of 10) | No. of Students |

Excellent	8.5	70	
Good	7.3	90	
Average	5.6	80	
Poor	4.2	60	

Table 3: Relationship Between Family Income and Aspiration Clarity

| Monthly Family Income (INR) | High Aspiration Clarity (%) |

<10,000	35%	
10,000–25,000	52%	
25,000–50,000	68%	
>50,000	75%	

Table 4: Gender-wise Distribution of Career Preferences

| Career Field | Boys (%) | Girls (%) |

Engineering	28	20	
Medical	17	23	
Teaching	10	17	

Table 5: Value Orientation Scores and Corresponding Aspiration Level

Value Orientation Level		Average Aspiration Score
High		8.2
Moderate		6.5
Low		4.3

Table 6: Socio-Emotional Competence and Aspiration Alignment

SEC Category	Aligned Aspirations (%)	Sample Size
High	78%	90
Moderate	60%	120
Low	42%	90

5. CONCLUSION

The present study highlights the intricate and multi-dimensional nature of occupational aspirations among school students and brings forth the critical influences shaping these aspirations within the Indian socio-cultural framework. It is evident that occupational aspiration is not a product of academic performance alone but is deeply intertwined with a student's personal values, family environment, socio-economic status, emotional maturity, and the climate provided by their educational institutions.

The results demonstrate that students in a supportive and value-oriented school environment show significantly higher levels of aspiration and clarity regarding their future careers. Favorable school climates-marked by positive teacher-student interactions, encouragement for exploration, and moral guidance-serve as a catalyst for ambition and self-belief. Similarly, family income and parental involvement emerged as major contributors, where economically secure families could provide better career exposure and decision-making support.

Gender-based differences in career preferences also reflect the continued impact of traditional roles and societal expectations. However, a shift is noticeable, with girls showing increased inclination toward diverse professions like medicine, teaching, and even entrepreneurship.

Moreover, the strong linkage between socio-emotional competence and aspiration alignment underscores the need for emotional education, life skills, and career counseling as core components of school education. Students with high emotional regulation and interpersonal skills were found to have better awareness and realistic aspirations.

In conclusion, fostering occupational aspiration requires a holistic approach that integrates academic, emotional, social, and ethical development. Educational policies must prioritize student-centric learning, career guidance programs, and teacher training to nurture purposeful, confident, and socially responsible youth. The findings of this study hold valuable implications for educators, policymakers, and parents to collectively create environments that help students dream meaningfully and pursue their career paths with clarity, courage, and conviction.

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