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Examination of High School Students' Aspirations and the Related Contextual Variables

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Abstract: As part of the studies conducted to investigate the career development of high school students. In this study, the researchers are interested in investigating the field of study aspired by students' higher school and associated contextual factors. Finding may be useful to design programs appropriate to help students in their vocational development. Participants were randomly selected from students' high school following their study in Azilal city Morocco. 75 students responded to the questionnaire, our sample consists of 24 men and 51 females with an average age of 17.91 ± 1.09 . Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tests by SPSS 26.00 software. The results show the post-secondary education courses preferred by students and a significant rate of undecided. Results show that educational aspirations are formed based on students' interests and academic performance, and regional and international labor market conditions are also considered. The finding provides sociological information on the context of the shaping of educational aspirations in higher school.

Keywords: higher school, contextual factors, educational aspiration, field of study.

高中生志向及相关情境变量的检验

摘要：作为调查高中生职业发展的研究的一部分。在这项研究中，研究人员有兴趣调查学生的高中所追求的研究领域和相关的背景因素。这些发现可能有助于设计适合帮助学生职业发展的课程。参与者是在摩洛哥阿齐拉尔市学习后从高中学生中随机抽取的。75名学生回答了问卷，我们的样本由24名男性和51名女性组成，平均年龄为 17.91 ± 1.09 。收集的数据使用社会科学26.00软件统计包的描述性和推论性统计测试进行分析。结果显示，学生更喜欢的高等教育课程和未定的显著比率。结果表明，教育愿望是根据学生的兴趣和学业成绩形成的，同时还考虑了区域和国际劳动力市场状况。该发现提供了有关高中教育期望形成背景的社会学信息。

关键词：高中、情境因素、教育志向、研究领域。

Introduction

In the 21st century, human capital is a factor of competitiveness and a pivotal element for economic development in the knowledge economy. To match the labor market and the 5.0 society, today's employees must be highly skilled and with high aspirations. Setting high aspirations recognizes that career development is an active, lifelong process.

The role of education in improving labor productivity is mentioned more than 50 years ago by Gary Becker, a Nobel Prize nominee [1], in this regard, education and training are at the center of the interest of the countries' policies to ensure the proper investment in human capital [2].

Students' educational aspirations and the associated considerations have been the subject of several studies [3–5]. The common issue of concern in these studies is the significant number of students unable to express a vocation or make inappropriate decisions [6]. Inappropriate choices can lead to high unemployment rates and poor labor market integration among youth. In many cases, graduates find themselves working in fields unrelated to their study areas. Their career goals do not always match job opportunities or even find themselves unemployed or underemployed because they do not meet the requirements of the labor market. Career guidance programs for high school students can be beneficial in addressing the complexity of this situation. Helping young people to formulate realistic educational aspirations aligned with the labor market supply can also help in the post-secondary transition and the transition from training to employment.

1. Literature Review

Educational aspiration is a complex process involving many factors. Educational aspiration was defined as the number of years of studies and the fields of studies that a person aspires to pursue [5]. There are often associated with academic achievement, vocational interests, social capital, and influence of the context often presented by the family and the school.

Students' aspirations for their education are significantly influenced by their academic performance. Students who perform well in school are motivated to set ambitious aspirations for their future education and careers [7]. Because of the importance of life decisions formulated in high school on an individual's educational and professional future, aspirations are an extensively discussed subject in adolescence. Educational aspirations are related to socio-economic status and opportunities, and also to academic performance. Students with a low academic performance show low aspirations. Even for students with equal academic performance, we found

differences in their aspiration levels, differences explained by other variables such as parental education and many other socio-demographic variables [6].

In discussing factors associated with aspirations, there should also be mentioned constraints that attenuate the level of aspirations, such as funding and geographical distance. Multiple theoretical models such as the status attainment model incorporate other variables in the process of aspirations development [8]. Multiple theoretical models such as the status attainment model explain the process of aspirations development and mention the missing opportunities that weaken the student's connection to school such as a poor school experience and recognized the influence of socio-economic status on educational aspirations [8].

Social capital, environmental opportunities, income, and parental education are all associated with a key variable in the development of a person's career which is an aspiration.

Often, especially in isolated geographical areas, students form their aspirations based on their residence. Their post-secondary choices are limited to the opportunities offered by the region, especially if they come from a low socio-economic background [9].

Some students prefer to stay with their families and peers. Students in rural and isolated areas benefit less from institutional support, guidance programs, and campus information than other regions. Difficulties in accessing post-secondary information affect their motivation and academic preparation for higher education study [9].

In this work, researchers focused on students' preferences in post-secondary education. Then, they describe some factors that contribute to educational aspirations and how they are associated.

2. Method

2.1. Sampling and Procedure

The sample consisted of 75 students from a high school in the city of Azilal in a mountainous region of Morocco. The students are from the same high school and were randomly selected. The sample consists of 75 students from a high school in the city of Azilal in a mountainous region of Morocco. The students are from the same high school and were randomly selected.

The participants are in the adolescent phase, their age varies between 15 and 20 years with an average of 1.079. Girls constitute 68% of the sample (51 girls) and boys 32% (24 boys). 45 of the participants reside in an urban area (61.3%), while 15 subjects are from rural areas and 14 are from semi-urban areas. The fields of study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Field of study

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Scientific	39	52,0	52,7	52,7
Economic	7	9,3	9,5	62,2
Literature	28	37,3	37,8	100,0
Missing	1	1,3		
Total	75	100,0		

2.2. Measurement Tool

The data was collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire distributed consists of questions on socio-demographic status, personal characteristics such as age and field of study, and items to explore students' post-secondary aspirations and environmental factors. The environment variables are measured by a 5-point scale ranging from (not at all true of me = 1) to (extremely true of me = 5), participants indicated the status they were comfortable with.

2.3. Data Analysis

In the first step, we performed a descriptive analysis of the characteristics of the sample, then we performed the spearman test to study the relationship between the studied contextual variables. The analysis was performed by SPSS 26.

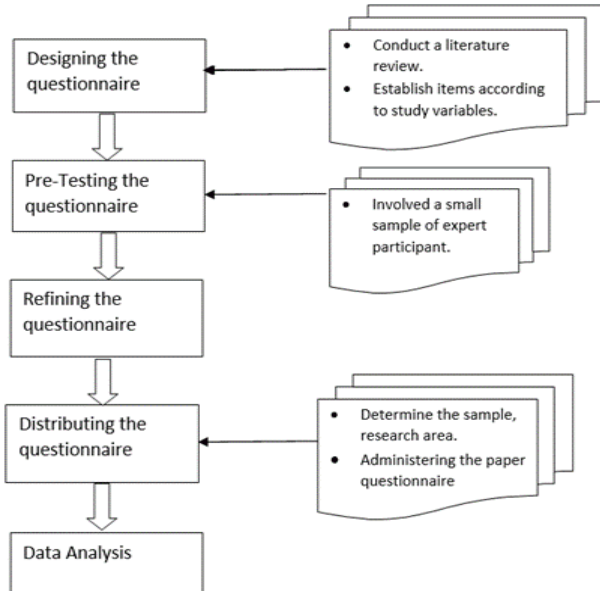


Fig. 1 Methodological flowchart (Developed by the authors)

3. Results

Based on the results found, students' preferences are distributed over the different post-secondary fields of study. Descriptive and inferential tests are applied to the variables that test the association between the context's variables. Figure 2 shows the distribution of postsecondary student preferences.

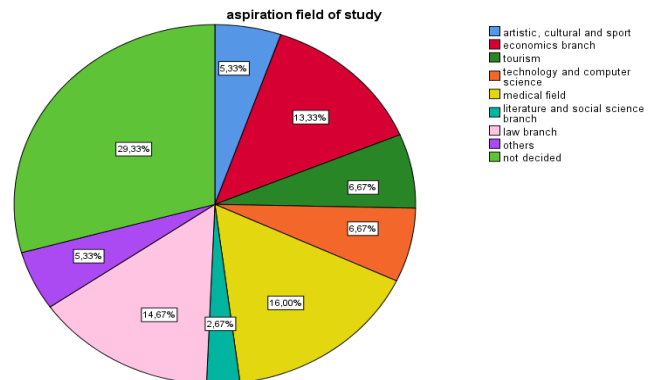


Fig. 2 Students' selected field of study for postsecondary education

Figure 2 shows that a significant proportion of the students (29.33%) are still undecided, followed by 16% who prefer medical subjects, 14.67% who choose the law, and 13.33% who have selected economics. Tourism and technological subjects and computer science with the same percentage of 6.67% come next, followed by sport, cultural subjects and other subjects not mentioned in the questionnaire with a rate of 5.33%. Only 2.67% have chosen literature and social sciences.

Table 2 presents the descriptive analysis carried out on the variables of the study.

Table 2 Means and standard deviation of variables of the context

Items	Mean	Std. D.	Variance
Academic Performance	3,15	1,14	1,31
Life interest	3,32	,84	,70
Educational regional opportunities	1,49	1,31	1,733
Professional regional opportunities	1,45	1,31	1,73
Moroccan market's opportunities	2,58	1,19	1,42
International market opportunities	2,48	1,37	1,90
All factors above mean to me	1,59	1,16	1,36

According to table 2, we constate that the higher means are recorded to the individual factors of interest ($M = 3,21$; $SD = 0,84$) and Academic performance ($M = 3,15$; $SD = 1,14$), then we have labor Market opportunities in Morocco ($M = 2,58$; $SD = 1,19$) and in International Markets ($M = 2,48$; $SD = 1,37$). At least we have educational regional opportunities ($M = 1,49$; $SD = 1,31$) and professional regional opportunities ($M = 1,45$; $SD = 1,31$).

= 1,45; SD = 1,31) which are of the least students interest. In the following phase, we will test the

association between the study's various variables; the results of the test are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Correlations between study variables

		Academic Performance	Life interest	Educational regional opportunities	Professional regional opportunities	Moroccan market's opportunities	International market's opportunities
Academic Performance	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	-,102	,192	,197	,087	-,146
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,385	,100	,093	,459	,212
	N	75	75	74	74	74	75
Life interest	Correlation Coefficient	-,102	1,000	-,024	-,040	,052	,051
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,385	.	,836	,732	,660	,664
	N	75	75	74	74	74	75
Educational Regional Opportunities	Correlation Coefficient	,192	-,024	1,000	,556**	,017	-,145
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,100	,836	.	,000	,885	,218
	N	74	74	74	73	74	74
Professional Regional Opportunities	Correlation Coefficient	,197	-,040	,556**	1,000	-,012	-,242*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,093	,732	,000	.	,921	,038
	N	74	74	73	74	73	74
Moroccan Market Opportunities	Correlation Coefficient	,087	,052	,017	-,012	1,000	,329**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,459	,660	,885	,921	.	,004
	N	74	74	74	73	74	74
International Market Opportunities	Correlation Coefficient	-,146	,051	-,145	-,242*	,329**	1,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,212	,664	,218	,038	,004	.
	N	75	75	74	74	74	75

Educational regional opportunities and professional regional opportunities are significantly correlated ($r = 0,556$; $p = 0,00$), also there is a significative correlation between the international market's opportunities and Moroccan markets' opportunities ($r = 0,329$; $p = 0,00$) and a negative and weak correlation between Professional regional opportunities and international markets' opportunities ($r = -0,242$; $p = 0,04$).

4. Discussion

This study sought to 1) study Students' preference for higher education field of study, 2) measure the influence of school performance, interest, and other environmental factors, and 3) study the relationship between the study variables.

The finding shows that 69.66% of the participants planned to access a specific course of study in higher education while 29.33% of the students surveyed remained undecided.

Investing in the education sector, especially at the tertiary level, is a policy adopted by many countries given the role of graduates as a vehicle for socio-economic development and improved international competitiveness [10]. For individuals, access to tertiary

education offers the opportunity to improve their socio-economic situation. a high level of education is associated with higher income, better jobs, and higher employability. The transition to adulthood is a process of vocational development leading to occupational choice [11]. It is necessary to understand this mechanism and the associated factors to better assist the career development of young people [8].

Theories that have addressed career development in adolescence and research conducted by Strand and Winston in 2008 in this sense classify the factors involved in the formation of aspirations according to two categories: individual factors and social factors [7]. In the present study, we have considered the academic performance and interests of students as an individual factor and the educational and working conditions existing in the region, and the relationship with the labor market as a socio-contextual factor.

Academic success is one of the key factors in shaping student aspirations. Indeed, the relationship between academic achievement and the level of aspirations is supported by several studies [5, 6, 12]. In general, students with good academic achievement show high aspirations and inversely having high aspirations is a motivating factor for success [6, 7].

According to some studies, labor market circumstances and possibilities available in proximity are considered in shaping young students' aspirations [6, 8, 13]. A context with limited opportunities has a negative impact on youth aspirations [12]. In our case, participants show minimal curiosity about national and international labor market opportunities. This can be explained by the involvement of secondary school students in their study programs.

According to some studies [5, 6, 13], young people are dissatisfied with the educational and professional opportunities provided by their communities; this is especially true for young people from rural or isolated areas; others prefer to stay close to their families and take advantage of the best opportunities available in their region; their educational and professional aspirations are formulated following the conditions of their context.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, educational aspirations are shaped by a complex process that combines social, economic, contextual, and individual factors (such as gender, academic performance, location of residence, etc.). It is difficult to study the influence of each factor in isolation since they are associated. The post-secondary pathways preferred by students provide insight into the future labor supply and skills that will be available in such a changing labor market and make it worthwhile to conduct programs to align students' aspirations with labor market demand and to sensitize students to train for a job that does not yet exist.

Student aspirations are a pivotal element in supporting economic and social change in countries. There is a need to think about programs that support students' aspirations and help them realize their ambitions. However, there is little research conducted in this area. Given the importance of aspirations as a key variable in students' vocations, we have focused on students' aspirations and their context.

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