

Aspirations of Primary School Students: A Study of a Government School in Delhi

Diksha Anjan

TGT English, Fatima Convent School, Ghaziabad

Abstract

The paper 'Aspirations of primary school students: A study of a government school in Delhi' posits that when children are motivated to dream and aspire, they become aware of a world full of opportunities, choices and the world itself. The research is based on the various aspirations that the learners of age ten to twelve years have. The purpose of the paper was not just to inquire about the aspirations of the students of a government school of Delhi but also to introduce them to a pool of career options that they could choose from, irrespective of gender, post or income. A mixed approach, both qualitative and quantitative, has been employed throughout the whole study. The objectives of this paper have been fulfilled by activities like, 'drawing oneself after fifteen years from now', 'using circle of influence worksheet', role-play, using flashcards for portrayal of different occupation, and survey questionnaire. A range of literature has been the foundation of this research work. It has been found that children aspire on the basis of their current lifestyle and past experiences. Their aspirations, influenced by parents and neighbours, are often gendered. Their aspirations change over time and often revolve around earning a handsome salary. Children strive for a change in their lifestyle and in their societies as well. They believe that their status in the society shall be uplifted by learning and speaking English language and attaining a government job. The research concludes on a note that children should be encouraged to dream and to aspire. They should be supported by their parents and facilitators and also the choice of profession should essentially be based on interest rather than the income or the post.

Keywords: *Aspirations, Scaffolding, Profession*

Introduction

The postulate of this research paper is that when children are encouraged or motivated to aspire, they become familiar with a world full of choices, opportunities and the world itself. Scaffolding should be provided to children to dream and to aim throughout their lives.

There are certain processes that don't require efforts, those that begin from early childhood and are continued till the last breath. We watch others playing, working for survival, loving and dream all of them on our part. The children don't just watch but also observe and internalize the various tasks their caretakers do.

From the pre-school days, children begin to dream and aspire. Primarily, as the children are around their families, they may aspire for the profession of a family member but as the social sphere of the child enlarges, she/he may choose the profession that best suits her/him.

This study has been chosen to widen the scope of some jobs in the market, that is, to introduce the V graders to various career options available for them as per their passion and talent but also

introduce to them the vast pool of occupations, they could choose from. Also, I hope to eliminate certain gender stereotypes like a nurse or a teacher is a lady and only a father can go out to earn. In 'Neighbourhood attributes as determinants of children's outcomes: How robust are the relationships?', a process was suggested by Wilson (1987) according to which the status, choices or values of the neighbours helps in the attribution of positive and negative attributes in those particular neighbourhoods, which affects the aspirations and motivations of individuals in these areas and thus their achievements.

In the study, 'Elementary school pupils' aspirations for higher education: The role of status attainment, blocked opportunities and school context' explains about the term *educational aspirations*. These are the goals or ambitions which pupils and their parents hold with regards to their educational experiences, developments and outcomes. The role of family has been emphasised by the status attainment model which leads to the formation of a child's aspirations related to education and career. The blocked opportunities model emphasises the role

of school experiences of children in forming educational aspirations. Besides these models, other variables have also been used in predicting the educational and career aspirations of pupils like the peers' influence, parental involvement, social support from teachers, neighbourhood and social capital.

'Capabilities and aspirations' talk about one's capacity to aspire as unevenly distributed among different groups which depends on the pre-existing capabilities and practices. Modifications in the aspirations can be made by consciously intervening in the nature of education and the widening world. Aspirations help individuals relate to what kind of life they want to live. The capability set determines the ability of individuals to live different kinds of lives and to work upon their capabilities to live those chosen lifestyle. In a traditional system, one might say that parents expect their children to be as they have been but now-a-days there is a dissatisfaction with the way they have been, leading parents to want something different for their children. Aspirations are realistic, not fantasy ones that are clearly beyond reach. The capacity to aspire is related to the past, the history of the group. It is also a link between the past and the future - since it is determined by past capabilities.

According to Hart, 'How do aspirations matter?' describes that children aspire for a better future and that their intentional and unintentional motivations drive them. The aspirations may be short, medium or long and may vary in importance to the individual as well as their significant others. They vary in importance and time scale, that is, aspirations change. Some aspirations may provoke criticisms. Some may be harmful for the society but, some individuals may aspire in a non-specified way for wanting a 'better life' whereas others might strive for a transformative change in their society. Habitus, as mentioned by Bourdieu, also influences the aspirations of the learners. It relates to the roots, both cultural and familial, from which an individual grows. Aspirations may be altered and adapted pertaining to different histories, cultures and power dynamics.

The book 'Constructing School Knowledge: An ethnography of learning in an Indian village' mentions that the contents of schooling are in relation to the hierarchy of the aims of schooling. Literacy and numeracy, both more

functional skills are in order to get jobs. Additional skills and knowledge, acquired with increased years spent in school, provide advantage in getting jobs, in securing promotions and ultimately becoming a '*bada admi*'. Children in the village were also very sensitive to the school as a source of 'cultural capital', providing access to the knowledge of English, General knowledge and social adeptness. They were aware that it was possible to convert cultural capital – especially the knowledge of English into social capital through government employment.

Subsequent to these articles, there is a list of questions that were inquired for the fulfilment of this paper's objectives.

Objectives

This paper had been carried out based on the following objectives:

- To inquire about the dreams and aspirations of young children.
- To introduce different professions the learners could choose from, irrespective of gender, post or income.
- To assist in understanding the relation of the nature of aspirations with the development of the human being.

Methodology

This section addresses the sample size and the procedure for data collection. A mixed approach (both qualitative and quantitative) was employed throughout the whole study.

Sample

The participants in this paper are 28 girls from class V of Sarvodaya Kanya Vidhyalaya, Delhi. Their age range was between ten to twelve years. The sample had been selected based on the regularity of learners.

Data collection

The data for this paper was obtained during the activities planned in the Environmental Studies for the theme – 'Work and Play'. These activities were drawing how the children see themselves after 15 years, introducing occupations on flashcards, mentioning reasons on 'circle of influence', role-play and the survey questionnaire. Data obtained from the above-mentioned activities were analysed in the form of tables, pie charts and bar graphs.

Data analysis

The data collected through survey questionnaires and different activities has been analysed with respect to literature reviewed earlier.

The survey question was:

Do you feel inspired by any of your neighbours? If yes, how? Figure 1 indicates the responses of the children. 89% are not inspired by the neighbour whereas only 11% are inspired.

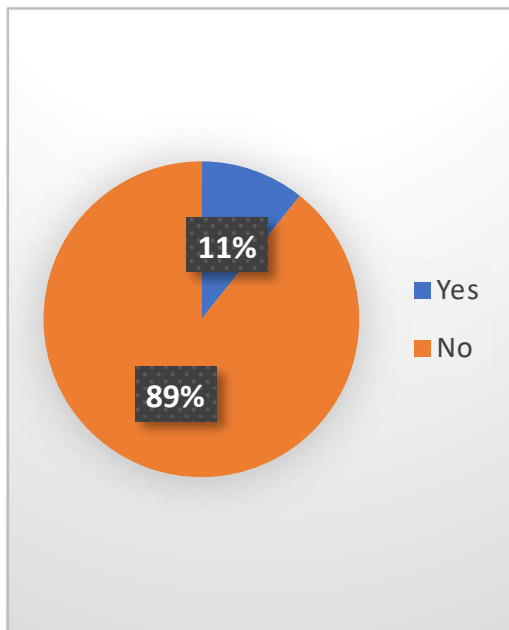


Figure 1: Availability of an inspiring neighbour

Another survey question which relates to parental influence for children’s aspirations was to choose between the profession of mother and father. Figure 2 mentions the responses of the children.

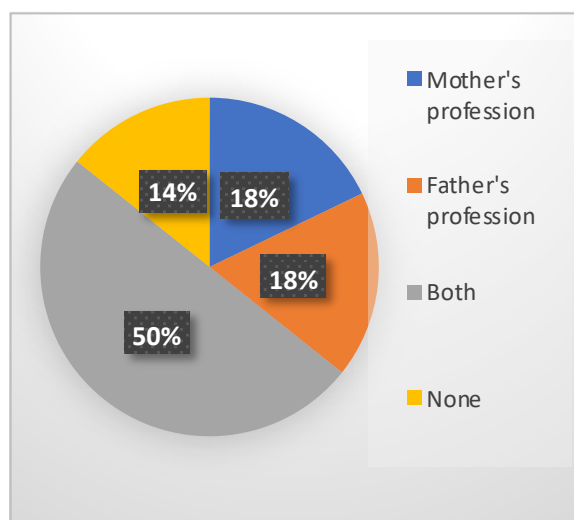


Figure 2: Student’s choice of profession

As John Dewey states that a school is a society in miniature and that the role of a teacher is to relate home environment with the school

environment, an activity – role-play was planned with the learners. With the class of 34 students, seven groups were formed – six groups of five students each and one group of four students. The groups performed a role-play on one of the professions: cobbler, taxi-driver, rickshaw-puller, sweeper, peon, florist and vendor. The objective of this activity was to respect all sorts of labour and develop empathy towards labour classes.

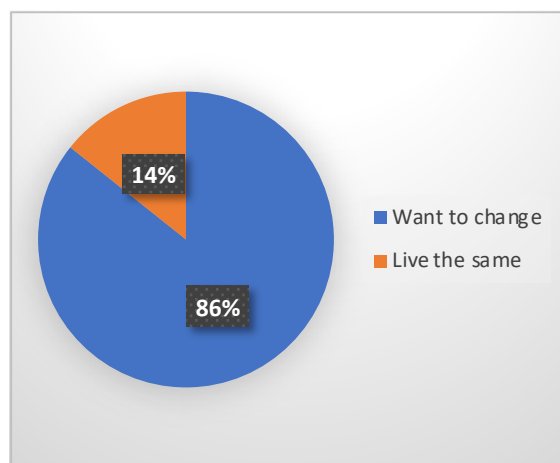
‘Khushbu’ (the name has been changed), a student of V grade was a member with four other classmates and performed a role-play over the struggles of a rickshaw-puller. Co-incidentally, this matched with her father’s profession and this was what made their performance different from the rest. Khushbu was able to narrate several incidents which not only melted our hearts but also raised awareness about the difficulties faced by the rickshaw-pullers and daily wage earners, like the nights spent on the roadside, unpaid journeys covered, travelling and pulling rickshaw in mid-days with sun at the horizon and also irrespective of rain and fog. The survey questions and role-play together were in light of the fact that parents and school influence children’s aspirations.

The survey questions based on ‘Capabilities and Aspirations,’ was-

Do you wish to live like your parents lived or are living (in terms of facilities and opportunities available to them)? What is it that you wish to change?

The survey showed that most students wanted to change their life-style and attain higher educational qualifications in comparison to their parents.

Figure 3: Lifestyle students would like to have.



An activity was done in which students were asked to ‘draw how they see themselves after 15 years from now’. Various responses were given as shown in the table below:

T1: Table showing the aspirations of the

Profession	Frequency
Doctor	5
Police inspector	3
Dancer	2
Engineer	1
Air hostess	1
Artist	1
Singer	1
Skating coach	1
Magician	1
Astronaut	1
Prime Minister	1
Actor	1
Ice-cream seller	1
Carom player	1
Teacher	7

students.

This table shows that the majority of the learners aspire to become a teacher and also doctors. However, the aspirations range from becoming an ice-cream seller to becoming the prime minister of the country.

Another noteworthy thing was the change in the aspirations, when students were given a survey question – What do you aspire for?

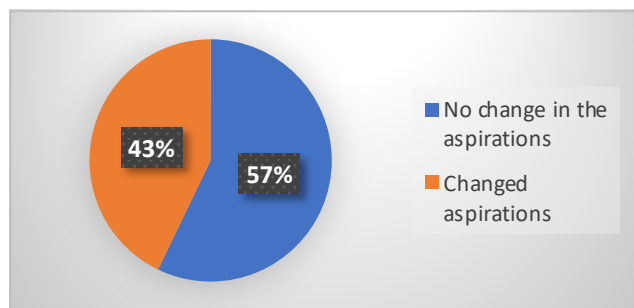


Figure 4: Changes observed in the aspirations over three months.

The article – ‘How do aspirations matter?’ also states that the aspirations may vary with importance and time-scale. The survey question under this article also includes a choice between a better society and a better lifestyle. The survey

holds the same opinion as the article does, as about 43% of the learners aspire for a better life-style.

Based on Padma Sarangapani’s ‘Constructing School Knowledge’, following questions were taken up for survey.

Choose one of the following:

- Good person/ Rich person
- Hindi/ English
- Private job/ Government job

This book shows that students aspire being a bada admi by learning English language and attaining a government job.

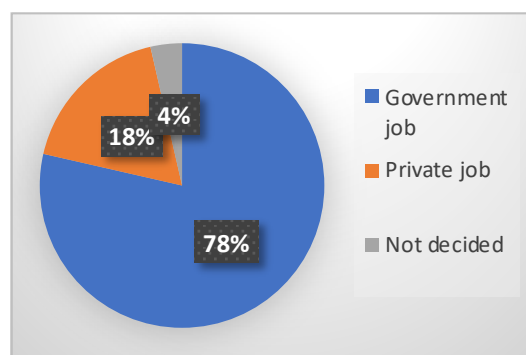


Figure 5: The type of job students aspire to have.

According to figure 5, 78% students were not decided on the type of job. 18% wanted a private job. 4% wanted a government job. Figure 6, mentions about the type of person student aspires to become.

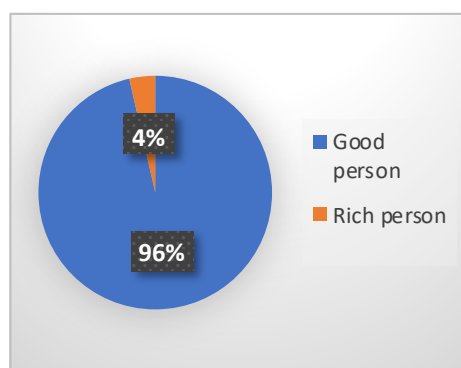


Figure 6: The type of person student aspires to become

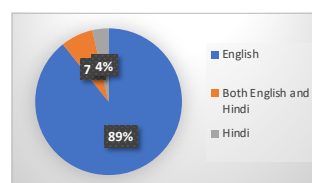


Figure 7: To represent the most influencing language that students wish to master.

The study by Padma Sarangapani does not apply to the V graders as students aspire to be a good person. Figures 6 and 7 are in consonance with the text ‘Constructing School Knowledge’ as students of the author’s study claim to learn English and aspire for a government job, like the sample of this paper.

Another activity called ‘Circle of Influence’ was executed to find out the reason or factors affecting the choice of professions.

T2: Table showing the frequency of the reasons

Factors	Frequency
Money	24
Fame	3
Helping poor people	4
Parental pride	3
Revision of Content	5
Parental aspirations	2
Inspirations from external sources	9

for selecting a profession

From this table, it is clear that students chose professions which could give them good income. This is much against figure 7 which showed that students aspire for becoming a good person than becoming a rich person. Hence, it can be said that Padma Sarangapani’s study stays valid in this aspect as well.

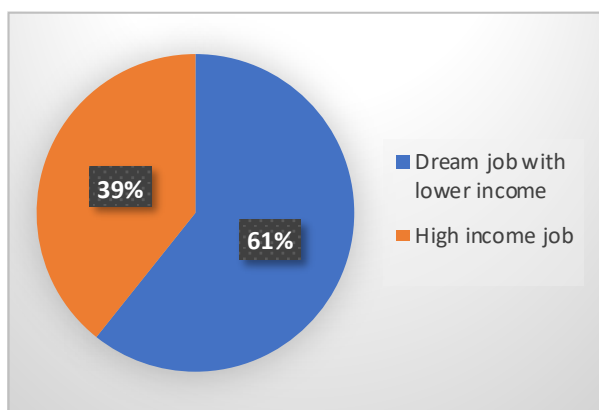


Figure 8: To represent the choice of job in relation to income.

Money factor and inspiration from teachers, parents and relatives play a dominant role in

choosing a profession. Another question in the survey was to choose between Job with higher income/ Dream job with lower income

The result is as follows:

Key findings

- Children aspire on the basis of their current life-style.
- Aspirations are influenced by parents and neighbours too.
- Aspirations change with time.
- They revolve around earning a handsome salary.
- Status in the society shall be uplifted by learning and speaking English language and attaining a government job.
- Children strive for a change in their society and in their life-styles as well.
- Gendered choices are made for the selection of profession.
- Money factor and inspiration from teachers, parents and relatives play a dominant role in choosing a profession.
- It is found that students would take up their dream job even if they are paid little.

Further research

- Upon assisting the learners in designing path towards fulfilment of occupations.
- Scope for a comparative study of aspirations among boys and girls.

Educational implications

- Students should be encouraged to dream and aspire
- Support from parents and teachers is essential
- Choice of profession should not be gender stereotypical but based on interest.

Conclusion

This paper has acted as a stimulus upon which the formation of aspirations, its refinement and adaptation of individual or group practices could be reflected and evaluated. To fulfil the objective – ‘to inquire about the dreams and aspirations of young children,’ an activity was taken up where the children had to draw (or simply write) how they see themselves after 15 years. Theories by Ginther, Haveman and Wolfe (2000); Sabic and Jokic (2019); Elsom, Terton and Greenaway

(2017) and Hart (2016) suggest that feasibility is subjective and socially situated. It varies as per the agent which can be their resources like some form of capital or their significant others and problem solving will differ.

After 3 months, when in survey students were again asked about their aspirations, 43% changes were noted, thereby proving the theorists correct. The activity 'Circle of Influence' was executed with the objective of enlisting the factors that affect students' choice of profession. T2 shows the reasons with 'money' as the most common factor of influence. Padma (2003) entails that students in her sample aspire for a government job and to become a rich person but in this study only one learner aspires to be a rich person, when asked directly to choose between becoming a rich person or a good person. However, 78% aspires for attaining a government job.

For the objective which demanded 'to introduce different occupations irrespective of gender or post or income', several professions were introduced in the form of flashcards. This investigation confirms that there are certain factors which affect the capacity of individuals to be a part of primary and higher education. It

means that the pupils' aspirations can expand as they gain cognition of the various opportunities or chances available to them.

On a concluding note, I suggest that aspirations are of vital importance to human development. Children should be provided autonomy to aspire and we should also support them in the process of conversion of aspirations into capabilities, especially for the underprivileged.

'To build understanding of the nature of aspirations in relation to human development', role-play was conducted. Students showcased empathic conditions of 'cobblers', 'rickshaw-pullers', 'florists' and other jobs which are considered to be of lower dignity. The research goes in hand with Nathan (2005) stating that the capacity to aspire is related to the past, the history of the group.

This research also included discussion with children about the aspirations of their parents, the difficulties and formation of the pathways to achieve their aspirations. Gary Crew (1997) has mentioned the future of children as limitless as stars. Children should be encouraged to face the starry sky and should never be criticized. They should dream from a young age.

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