

Educational Aspirations of Secondary School Girls in Rural Areas and Their Incidence on Academic Achievement

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Abstract

The study investigated the educational aspirations of secondary school girls in rural areas and their incidence on academic achievement. The sample consisted of 165 female students from three secondary schools in Fungom Sub-Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used in selecting the sample. Three research questions and a hypothesis guided the study. A questionnaire was used to collect data. Information about their academic performance was obtained from school records. Frequencies, percentages, the t-test and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) were used in analysing the data. The computation of data was done manually and with the aid of a statistical package. The findings showed that: Girls in Fungom feel that education is important; Girls in Fungom have an average self-esteem; about 47% of secondary school girls aspire to secondary high school while 52% aspire to obtain university degrees; secondary school girls in Fungom have a limited range of vocational interests; there is a low correlation between educational aspirations and academic achievement of girls in this study; and girls with high educational aspirations perform better than those with low educational aspirations.

Keywords: Educational aspirations, female students, rural areas, academic achievement, perception, and self-esteem.

INTRODUCTION

Many forces combine to spell an early end to education for girls. Chief among them is poverty. The cost of voluntary contribution, fees, uniform, books, and other fares can make even free education expensive. The difficulties encountered by young graduates in getting good jobs or employment of any sort, tend to discourage many families in rural areas from investing in the education of their children, particularly, the girls. They prefer to keep the girls at home, where they can perform the traditional duties of women in the society - cooking, looking after young children and helping in the house.

Personal experience made this researcher to take a deeper look at the education of the girl child in the Cameroonian society today. In Menchum Division in the North West Region of Cameroon, many girls go to primary and secondary schools, yet, most of them hardly go on to high school. This means that very few are found in universities and/or other institutions of higher learning. The majority drop out at lower levels of secondary school for various reasons. These female students seem to have no ambition to pursue higher studies. It would appear that they have limited educational ambitions. In this regard, McCaul (1989) says that generally, students in rural areas have low expectations and ambitions. Many of them do not realise that education can contribute not just to economic, but also to human development. Kofi Annan (2000), one time Secretary General of the United Nations Organisation, says the education of the girl is a social development policy that works with immediate benefits for family planning, nutrition, health and economic productivity as well as social and political participation. Yet this seems not to be understood by rural schooling girls.

An individual's goals are the road map that guide, and show him what is possible for his or her life. A person with low ambitions probably sets a negative road map for his or her life while one with high goals seems to have no limits to his or her pursuits in life. Considering the role that education plays in the empowerment of the girl child, this researcher decided to investigate this problem of education of girls living in rural areas. This situation affects the academic work of female students because with very low ambitions for further studies, they tend to attach little importance to their performance in school. Most girls have the feeling that they are meant for village life, which encourages marriage and procreation, farming and other house chores. This problem seems to be so acute because it affects the integration of girls in the rural economy and social development in rural areas. In response to this problem, this paper is focused on answering the following questions: "what accounts for this behaviour of girls in rural areas? And can the situation be improved?"

THE PROBLEM

The mainstay of the people of Fungom Sub-Division is agriculture (subsistence farming and cattle rearing). There are a few secondary and high schools, and even fewer technical or vocational institutions. Higher institutions (post-secondary) of learning are absent. Polygamy is the common practice and so there are many large families. Early marriages are common, and therefore, many young girls become mothers even before they are fifteen. Many children, most of them girls, do not attend school. Most parents, too, are not literate. Hence,

they do not see education as a necessity for their children, especially the female ones.

Lack of funds to finance the education of the children is one of the factors responsible for this problem. Life here is principally subsistence. Selling of produce is done to have money with which to provide what they cannot produce and to meet up with social obligations. Another factor is that jobs are not readily available for school leavers in the area and in Cameroon in general. Some parents see their female children as assets, that is, potential wealth (dowry/bride price). For the sons, they need to stay around and take over from their fathers when need arises rather than spend precious time at school. Parents' feelings are transposed onto the community. After all, is the community not composed of these same parents? Parents and community do not see what education will bring to them if children attend school.

Women in Fungom community are seen as would-be mothers - their principal role. Apart from childbearing, they do farming; take care of domestic responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, collecting wood and water, and looking after young children, etc. Traditionally, the woman is not allowed to take part in major decision-matters of the community. She is expected to be very obedient, submissive, respectful, faithful, hardworking and seen but not heard. She recognises and accepts this status accorded her by society. In this state of affairs, the empowerment of Fungom women cannot effectively take place if the girls remain faithful to tradition without education, which can raise their aspirations. Shall such a state of affairs remain despite the global trend towards the emancipation and empowerment of women? There is need for women to develop high ambitions if their status quo has to evolve. This should begin with young girls. This researcher therefore investigated the educational aspirations of girls in rural areas. Personal aspirations and expectations influence an individual's activities towards the attainment of goals. When an individual has ambitions in life, these provide motivation and direction to his activities. Therefore, an individual with set goals experiences some degree of self-confidence and a sense of purpose in life. Most school girls in rural areas are not exposed enough to the wider world and therefore have limited experiences. They tend to limit their expectations to what is found in their environment. Few girls in rural areas dream of going to the university or professional schools. This is a very serious problem that deserves to be investigated.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was three-fold:

- To establish how girls in Fungom Sub Division perceive themselves
- To find out what educational aspirations girls in Fungom sub-Division have, and;
- To examine the relationship between girls' educational aspirations and their academic achievement.

Specifically, the study was to answer the following questions:

- How do girls in Fungom Sub-Division perceive themselves?
- What are the educational aspirations of secondary school girls in Fungom Sub-Division? And;
- What is the relationship between girls' educational aspirations and their academic achievement?

Hypothesis

Female students with high educational aspirations perform better than those with low academic aspirations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

So far, the empirical literature was reviewed under the following heads: educational aspirations, self-concept and aspiration, level of aspiration and achievement, women and achievement, locus of control; and adolescence and vocational choice.

Cobb, McIntire, and Pratt (1989) carried out a longitudinal survey on High School and Beyond (HSB). From data gathered, urban young people in comparison to rural young people felt their parents were much more supportive of their taking full-time jobs, attending trade schools, or entering the military rather than attending college (university). These lower educational aspirations accompanied lower values for making a lot of money, and higher values for simply making a good income, having secured jobs, and maintaining friendships. Environmental factors are therefore a vital determinant of individual aspirations.

In his study designed to examine the phenomenon of school dropout, McCaul (1989) found that rural youth reported that poor grades and the feeling that "school was not for me" were the main reasons they left school early. When the scores are good especially for males they probably would stay longer in school and make efforts to go even higher. Sometimes, teachers do not raise girls' aspirations. They give them low marks and this in turn discourages and lowers their interest for higher academic pursuits. However, those girls who muster courage, and make an effort to pass well, defy the 'fear of success' syndrome.

Sherwood (1989) investigated the factors affecting aspirations of young people and found that the investment of time, energy and resources was important. He then concluded that the way communities mobilize and support, influences young people's lives. It therefore means that conditions in the community interact with

the imaginations of students as they realize their aspirations, be them career or employment.

Besides aspiration which is a driving force in life, self-esteem is one of the most important indicators of the individual's psychological well-being. It seems to influence an individual's goals (aspirations) in life. Kavussanu and Harnisch (2000) conducted an investigation to examine the relationship of goal orientations and perception of athletic ability to global self-esteem. The instrument used for the study was the Perception of Success Questionnaire and the Self-Esteem Scale of Rosenberg (1965), which they administered to 907 children. The researchers found that high tasked – oriented children reported significantly higher self-esteem than low tasked-oriented children. The results of this survey confirm the principle that people with high self-esteem engineer success for themselves while those with low self-esteem appear to arrange for their own failure. Generally, in real day life, people appear to adjust their behaviour to match their self-concept.

In another study, McCaul (1989) found that rural dropouts showed signs of low self-esteem and lacked a sense of control over their own lives compared with peers who stayed in school. Some of the causes of low self-esteem are the poor grades and the feeling that “school was not for me”. This leads to early departure from school. Rural students leave school early for economic (early jobs) and personal (pregnancy, marriage, disability, illness, or an inability to get along with some teachers) reasons, so it may not only be low self-esteem that accounts for poor grades and low aspirations.

In terms of matching aspiration with achievement, the level of aspiration of an individual is a determining factor in achievement motivation. Sears (1940) illustrated the impact of aspiration level in her study of students who worked under success-oriented and failure-oriented conditions. It was found that in “success-condition” pupils set realistic goals for themselves, with a tendency to put them slightly above the actual level of performance. Meanwhile, in the “failure condition” pupils showed much discrepancy, some tending to set consistently lower goals and others setting impossibly higher goals for themselves. She then concluded that success leads to realistic goals while failure leads to varied reactions. This implies that students' success would raise their aspirations while failure may lead to low aspirations.

In the study of Crealock (1979), 592 students were used to investigate the differential educational aspiration levels of undergraduate students. The results showed that male participants had a higher aspiration level than their female counterparts. For certain reasons, such as the fear of being socially rejected, unmarried, unpopular, lonely and isolated, women generally tend not to have very high ambitions. They prefer to be contented with moderate achievements.

Referring to women and achievement, many empirical studies testify that there is a tendency for most women to fear success, that is, fears to achieve. This fear to achieve leads to avoidance of success. Based on the premise that the need for achievement in males seems to be more fully developed than in females, Horner (1968) decided to make this assertion the subject of his terminal degree study. Using the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) technique derived from Atkinson's studies that was administered to 178 university students as respondents, there was fear of the loss of friends, guilt about success, and unwillingness to come to grips with the question of success. All three of these themes reflected a general fear of success in women than in men.

Similarly, another study on behaviour of female adolescents was conducted by Fleming (1980) in New England to explore the relationship between the motive to achieve and achievement-related (as well as non-achievement-related) behaviours in African American female adolescents. It involved a sample of 532 subjects. The McClelland's Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) with 4 cues was used for the study. The results showed that a majority of the students did not pursue education beyond high school diploma for reasons attributed to fear of success. Therefore, the ‘fear of success’ phenomenon is an important factor in women's aspirations.

In conclusion, the reviewed empirical studies done to determine achievement motivation indicated higher need for achievement in “neutral” situations when an “arousal” stimulus was introduced, such as having to compete with a man. Women's need to achieve was lower than men's.

Unlike these previous studies, the focus of the current one is how women strive for a goal rather than wanting to succeed against criteria of excellence. Even though it is agreed that every person strives to achieve, it has been found that some individuals, particularly females in certain situations, may experience a fear of success in the sense that they worry about the possibility that being successful may interfere with positive relationships with others. This may be particularly true in most African societies where women are very submissive to male domination. Women may fear to aspire for success as it may lead to rejection in their current cultural setting.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three major theories inspired this work; these include, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, Murray's “Manifest Needs theory” first presented in 1938 and later amplified and conceptualized by Atkinson in 1964, and the Socio-cultural Theory of Lev Vygotsky (1978).

Hierarchy of Needs Theory

In his theory of growth motivation or need gratification, Maslow (1970) intimates that every individual has a

definite hierarchy of needs for attainment in life. He proposes seven needs - physiological, safety, understanding, belongingness, esteem, aesthetic and self-actualization, each of which must be satisfied before the next becomes prominent. He says that these needs affect every person and influence the individual's choices or decisions. Maslow refers to need gratification as "the most important single principle underlying all development", adding further that "the single, holistic principle that binds together the multiplicity of human motives is the tendency for a new and higher need to emerge as the lower need fulfils itself by being sufficiently gratified".

According to the theory, unless individuals have satisfied their lower or deficiency needs (physiological, safety, belongingness, love, and esteem), they will not feel motivated to satisfy higher, growth/being needs (knowing and understanding, aesthetic and self-actualization. The deficiency needs placed at the bottom of the hierarchy are four: the physiological needs (need for food, sex and air), security or safety needs (adequate housing or shelter, clothing, freedom from worry and anxiety), belongingness needs (essentially social-need for love and affection and acceptance by peers) and esteem needs (need for a positive self-image and self-respect). Higher on the hierarchy are three growth needs; the cognitive or understanding, aesthetic needs and the self-actualization needs at the top. This is the level of achievement for the individual involving the realization of full potentials and becoming all that he is capable of i.e. attainment of aspirations, goals and expectations in life. One would like to know which of the needs are stronger in students, especially female students in Fungom. This theory clearly explains what determines the level of aspiration. A student whose basic needs are not met is unlikely to aspire to acquire knowledge which is further up the hierarchy. It implies that students who indicate interest in studying beyond high school show a higher level of educational aspiration than those who show no such interest.

Manifest Needs Theory (Murray, 1938)

Another very important theory of motivation and achievement is Murray's (1938) "Manifest Needs theory" first presented in 1938 and later amplified and conceptualized by Atkinson (1964). According to this theory, people have a set of needs that motivate behaviour. He argues that people can be classified according to the strengths of the various needs he identified. At the top of Murray's Manifest needs is achievement, which is characterized by an individual's aspiration to accomplish difficult tasks, maintain high standards willingly work toward distant goals, respond positively to competition and willingly put forth effort to attain excellence. The other set of needs include the need for affiliation, aggression, autonomy, exhibition, impulsivity, nurturance, order, power and understanding. Murray holds that multiple needs motivate behaviour simultaneously rather than in some present order, as is the case with Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Murray postulates that needs have two components - direction (object or person expected to satisfy the need) and intensity (importance of the need). According to him, for a need to become manifest, appropriate environmental conditions must be available. While Maslow considers that man has innate desires to satisfy a given set of needs, Murray thinks that all of the manifest needs are learned needs thought to be activated by environmental cues since man is not born with any of them. Therefore, any individual could be regarded as possessing several needs that direct and energize his/her behaviour. A student with high aspirations would among others want to get a terminal degree, to get a highly paid and reputable job and also acquire a comfortable shelter for himself. He/She would make the necessary effort by working very hard at school so that the set goals are attained.

Socio-Cultural Theory

Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory recognizes the influence of cultural background, family background, aspirations, attitudes, values, social class, sex and religious orientation on one's choice of career. As these socio-cultural factors evolve with time, the individual may change his occupation. Gelatt (1992) says that "...we make decisions based upon what is actual and what is actual is never static". Making a choice is therefore becoming dynamic especially with the growing complexity of our world.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This was essentially a descriptive research and partly a correlation research design on the relationship between students' educational aspirations and academic achievement. The use of correlational research approach was to discover relationships between variables through the use of correlational statistics. The correlational method was identified as being highly useful for studying problems in education and in the social sciences. The target population for this research included all female secondary school students in rural areas in Fungom Sub-Division. The accessible population was that of female students in form one, two, three, four and five enrolled in the three secondary schools under study. There were 276 female students distributed as on table one below from which a sample of 165 was drawn.

Table 1: Accessible Population and Sample of the Study

Form/Level	Accessible Population			Sample		
	GHS Bafmeng	GSS Esu	GSS Zhoa	GHS Bafmeng	GSS Esu	GSS Zhoa
One	33	30	27	14	11	9
Two	26	22	20	15	13	13
Three	21	19	18	15	12	15
Four	20	14	-	15	14	-
Five	14	12	-	10	9	-
Sub-total	114	97	65	69	59	37
Total	276			165		

Table one shows an accessible population of 276 from which a sample of 165 was drawn from three government run secondary schools. It is worth noting that the three Government Secondary Schools were high schools but with a relatively small number of females in the second cycle of the schools. So, it was thought inappropriate to consider this insignificant number as participants in the sample.

Sampling Techniques and Construction of Instrument for Data Collection

For the purpose of this investigation, a sample of 165 female students was selected from the three secondary schools with the use of purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposeful sampling was used in selecting only female students from Forms 1-5 from each school since the researcher decided to work only with female students; but the simple random sampling technique was used in selecting girls from each class in the different schools where each girl had the opportunity of being selected. Participation was voluntary but no student selected for the study opted out. In order to assemble data for the study, a questionnaire was constructed. Additional data were gathered through direct personal observation and students' records made available by the school administration. These provided information about their academic achievement. The questionnaire contained structured and open-ended items. Students were assured that their responses would remain confidential and used only for academic purpose. The researcher himself collected the data on the spot in order to pre-empt inherent delays in respondents' reactions, and lessen the chances of instrument mortality in transit. The data collection was carried out in two phases: Administration of the instrument (questionnaire was completed by the students); and compilation of academic performance scores used as a measure of academic achievement from the duplicates of the students' progress reports.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analysed utilizing the t-test where two means were to be compared (the lone hypothesis), and using the 95% confidence interval for the population mean where just one sample was concerned. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used for research question three. Some data were analysed manually and some with the aid of a statistical package (SPSS 7.5). Content analysis was used in analysing responses to open-ended questions. The formula for the t-ratio was given by:

Where \bar{X}_1 is the Mean of Sample I,
 \bar{X}_2 is the Mean of Sample II
 N_1 and N_2 are the Sample sizes.

$$t = \frac{|\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2|}{\sqrt{\frac{S^2}{N_1} + \frac{S^2}{N_2}}}$$

$$S^2 = \frac{\sum X^2 - \left(\frac{\sum X}{N_1}\right)^2}{N_1} + \frac{\sum X^2 - \left(\frac{\sum X}{N_2}\right)^2}{N_2}$$

The number of degrees of freedom is $df = N_1 + N_2 - 2$

The 95% confidence interval for a population μ mean is given by:

$$\bar{X} - 1.96S \bar{x} < \mu < \bar{X} + 1.96S \bar{x},$$

Where \bar{X} is the Sample Mean,

$S\bar{X}$ is the Standard error of the Mean.

$$S\bar{x} = \frac{S}{\sqrt{N-1}}, \quad \text{Where } S \text{ is the Standard Deviation,}$$

N is the Sample Size

$$S = \frac{\sum X^2}{N} - \bar{X}^2.$$

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Research Question One: *How do girls in Fungom Sub-Division perceive themselves?*

Table 2: Female Students' Perception of Themselves (Self-esteem)

No	Statement	Ratings (frequencies)					Weighted Mean \bar{X}_w
		SA(5)	A(4)	NS(3)	D(2)	SD(1)	
	I feel that I'm a person of worth at least on an equal plane with others.	35	35	57	18	11	3.417
	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I'm a failure.	12	25	42	39	33	2.629
	I feel that I have a number of good qualities	51	55	30	10	6	3.888
	I am able to do things as well as most students.	64	48	18	16	7	3.954
	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	53	70	15	8	9	3.967
	I feel that I'm a person of worth at least on an equal plane with others.	35	35	57	18	11	3.417
	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	49	51	16	17	16	3.671
	I wish I could have more respect for myself.	77	58	17	1	4	4.439
	I certainly feel useless at times.	19	26	29	33	37	2.701
	At times I think I am no good at all.	19	48	37	30	22	3.077

KEY:

A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree, NS= Not Sure, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree.

Item 13 (*Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale*) of the questionnaire provided data for research question one. The

$$\bar{X}_w = \frac{35.160}{10} = 3.516$$

data as presented on table two shows that the Mean of the weighted means was while the standard deviation $S = 0.584$. The computation of the 95% confident interval for the population mean is presented on table three below.

Table 3: Calculation of a 95% confident interval for the population Mean μ

\bar{X}_w Mean	Standard Deviation, S	Standard Error of Mean $S \bar{X}_w$	95% Confidence Interval for Population Mean μ	Inference
3.516	0.584	0.195	$1.740 < \mu < 2.684$	Average

Tables two and three showed that the girls tended to have an average self-esteem, i.e. they neither perceived themselves highly nor lowly.

Research Question Two: *What are the educational aspirations of secondary school girls in Fungom Sub-Division?*

Item 7 of the questionnaire was used to answer research question two which inquired to know the educational aspirations of secondary school girls. In response, the following were recorded:

Table 4: Educational Aspirations of Girls in Fungom Sub-Division

Intended Educational Level	Frequency	
	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Doctorate Degree	36	22
Master's Degree/ Professional Diploma	34	21
Bachelor's Degree/Professional Diploma	17	10
High School	63	38
Secondary School	15	9
Total	165	100

Table four shows that 15 or 9% intend to end after secondary school; 63 or 38% of the students intend to end their schooling after high school; 17 or 10% aspire to obtain a Bachelor's degree or professional diploma; 34 or 21% aspire to obtain a Master's degree and 36 or 22% are aiming to get a doctorate. The data on table 4 is also presented in the bar graph in figure one.

Figure one below shows the responses when it was inquired from respondents the extent to which they would want to go in the educational ladder, i.e. at secondary, high school, bachelor's degree, master's degree or doctorate.

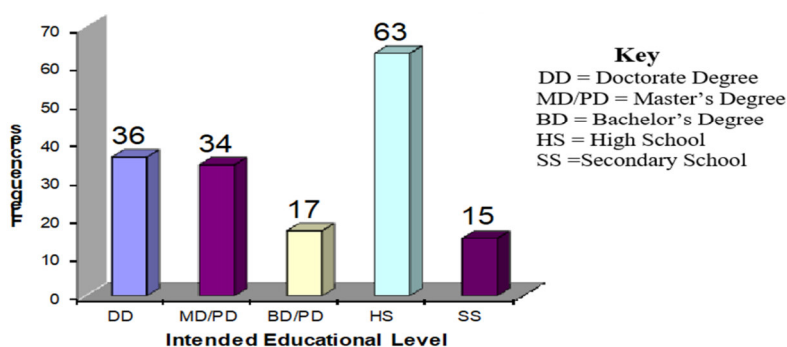


Figure One: Bar Chart Showing Educational Aspirations of Female Students in Fungom Sub Division

The length of the bars in Figure one gives a clear picture of the educational aspirations of girls in this sample. A greater number (63) aspire to get a high school education; 36 of them aspire to get the doctorate and 34 the Master's degree. A small number (17) intends to get a Bachelor's degree and secondary education (15). When respondents were also required to state possible reasons for discontinuing their schooling. That is, "what could possibly interfere with the attainment of their educational aspirations?" A good proportion (41%) of the respondents were of the opinion that financial constraints might be a disturbing factor for furthering their education. A small proportion considered lack of motivation as an obstacle to their educational pursuits. The other reasons include: 'parental refusal' to support them (24%); 'personal decision' (15%) and the 'need to get married' (6%).

Research Question 3: *What is the relationship between girls' educational aspirations and their academic achievement?*

Table 5: Correlations

Correlations			
		Aspiration	School achievement
Aspiration	Pearson Correlation	1	.166(*)
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.017
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	299.976	73.862
	Covariance	1.829	.450
	N	165	165
School achievement	Pearson Correlation	.166(*)	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.017	.
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	73.862	659.286
	Covariance	.450	4.020
	N	165	165

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

This correlations table above (table 5) displays Pearson’s correlation coefficients (.166 and 1), significance values (.017), and the number of cases with non-missing values (165). Pearson correlation coefficients assume the data are normally distributed. It is a measure of linear association between two variables. The values of the correlation coefficient range from -1 to 1. In this case, the correlation coefficient for educational aspirations and academic achievement was 0.166 and it was positive. Since 0.166 was not relatively close to 1 or -1, this indicated that educational aspirations and academic achievement were not strongly correlated.

Since the significance level (0.017) was very small (less than 0.05) then the correlation was significant and the two variables were not linearly related. In other words, the correlation coefficient for educational aspirations and academic achievement was 0.166. The significance level or p-value was 0.017 which implied a very low significance. The small significance level indicated that educational aspirations and academic achievement were not significantly positively correlated. This means that as educational aspirations increase, academic achievement does not necessarily increase. And as educational aspirations decrease, academic achievement does not necessarily decrease.

The Lone Hypothesis: *Female students with high educational aspirations perform better than those with low educational aspirations.*

The following were obtained after data analysis for this hypothesis:

Table 6: The Main Variables for Obtaining a t-ratio to Test the Hypothesis.

	Educational Aspiration	
	Low	High
<i>N</i>	85	80
$\sum X$	959.79	922.8
$\sum X^2$	11226.61	10890.83
\bar{X}	11.29	11.54

$$S^2 = \frac{11226.61 - (959.79)^2/85 + 10890.83 - (922.8)^2/80}{85 + 80 - 2} = 3.897$$

$$t = \frac{11.54 - 11.29}{\sqrt{\frac{3.897}{85} + \frac{3.897}{80}}} = 0.806$$

The number of degrees of freedom (df) associated with the above t-ratio was 163. For df = 163 and a one-tailed test, the critical t-value (t_{cr}) at the 5% level of significance was less than 1.658. Since $t > t_{cr}$, i.e. $0.806 < 1.658$ and the mean performance of girls with high educational aspirations was greater than that of girls with low educational aspirations, i.e. $11.54 > 11.29$, the hypothesis that girls with high educational aspirations perform better than those with low educational aspirations was accepted at the level of significance of 5%.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study set out to investigate the educational aspirations of girls in rural areas and how these affect their academic achievement. Three research objectives and a hypothesis were formulated to guide the study. This discussion section of the study focuses on how these objectives have been attained in relation to findings.

Summary of Key Findings

The key findings of the study include:

- The girls perceive themselves with average self-esteem;
- The bulk of girls aspire to further education and certification although discouraged by the lack of motivation and means;
- The girls’ educational aspirations and academic achievement were not correlated.

Research Objective One: To find out how girls in Fungom sub-Division perceive themselves

The first objective of this study has been attained because its findings indicate that the girls perceive themselves with average self-esteem as far as learning, progress and achievement are concerned.

Girls’ Perception of Education

Research objective one sought to know Fungom girls’ perception. The analysis showed that education was perceived as important as confirmed by 100% affirmative response from all 165 students in the sample. Students gave varied reasons for considering education as an absolute necessity. One can possibly explain that despite the

fact that the subjects are in a typically rural area, they are increasingly aware of the need for education. This confirms the fact that education is a major determinant of a meaningful and successful life in the current era where the trend is towards globalisation. Tambo (2003) states that education influences people's way of doing things, to be in accord with the changing times. Being a global village means that what happens in one part of the world triggers off consequences in another part regardless of its remote nature. Education, therefore, is the light which everyone needs in order to see clearly so as to move along with the rest of the world. This is confirmed by the fact that all 165 subjects gave credence to education. Emphasis on the apparent importance of education is clear when Good (1973) defines education as the aggregate of all the processes by means of which people develop abilities, attitudes, and forms of behaviour that are of positive value to themselves and to the society in which they live.

Today, a lot of manual jobs even non-technical jobs require a certain level of education. Even to be a very successful farmer today, you need to be literate so as to be able to apply modern techniques of farming if you want a good harvest. This further shows the utility of education. A famous Greek Philosopher, Plato, holds that ignorance breeds vices. According to him only ignorant people are wicked or bad. Through education, therefore, one can understand ethics and realise that only good acts should be performed while bad ones should be avoided. In constructing his ideal state, Plato prescribed that education should be made compulsory and free for all, including women, and should be strictly controlled by the state that should provide the means necessary for attainment of this goal. This confirms the importance and necessity of education as indicated by respondents of the sample. Some girls said that for one to gain respect and honour in the society one needs to be educated. Therefore to be wise is to be responsible, respectable and honoured. In almost all societies, educated people possess these features.

On the influence of teachers on students' perception of education, most students said that teachers make learning interesting and reasons were given for this response. Auster and Auster (1981) have emphasised the importance of teacher as a role model. Most girls indicated that their teachers motivate them to learn, by their good teaching and interesting lessons. Still, others indicated that some of their teachers do not motivate them to learn by their negative attitudes (absenteeism, late coming, poor moral standards, etc.). This apparently confirms the fact that teachers have an important role to play on the attitude of learners. A teacher therefore influences a learner's attitude to learning either positively or negatively.

Self- Esteem of Girls in Rural Areas

The results of this study show that girls in Fungom tend to have an average self-esteem. This means that they are not quite sure of themselves. They neither hold themselves in very high or low esteem. Statistics on female students' perception of themselves show that while up to 123 students agreed to the statement that 'I feel I do not have much to be proud of'. However, Gergen (1971) states that, in task orientation, low self-esteem persons accomplish poorly or not at all. Perhaps one can explain this differently. A child's upbringing or rearing practices can better account for the results of the study. In rural areas, girls who conform to societal norms tend to be complacent. They may be lukewarm even about themselves. Complacency cannot motivate an individual to aspire to achieve great things in life. Therefore, these girls need to be motivated.

Research Objective Two: To find out what educational aspirations girls in Fungom sub-Division have

Research Objective two of the study has been attained because the results reveal that the bulk of girls aspire to further education and certification although discouraged by the lack of motivation and means.

Educational Aspirations of Secondary School Girls

In the introduction to this study it was stated that female students do not seem to have the ambition to pursue higher studies implying that they have limited educational ambitions. This is one of the issues that motivated the study. The question is why don't they aspire to go very high in life? Results show that 85 students want to pursue studies beyond high school implying high educational aspiration, yet a good number (80) do not want to go beyond high school. Several factors militate against any ambitions and consequently act as deterrence to their progress. These factors include financial constraints, parents' refusal, personal decision, the need to get married, lack of motivation, parental influence, the level of education of parents and environmental influences.

During the investigation, when students were asked what could likely interfere with the attainment of their educational aspirations, several reasons were given and the results are presented. Results of the analysis show that the highest percentage (40%) of the sample indicated that they might discontinue school due to financial constraints. This explains why many female students do not aspire to pursue further education. Even though registration fees (7.500 francs CFA) for first cycle government secondary schools are relatively low, it takes some parents or the students themselves about three to four and even more instalments to complete it. Some may not even complete it by the time the school year comes to an end. This is probably due to the inability to get the money. Imagine, if the child struggles to pay fees in Form one and may be Form two, he certainly cannot think

of going beyond secondary or high school.

Parental refusal or parental influence is another important factor that accounts for why female students do not have high ambitions. The analysis shows that 24% of the sample indicated that they might discontinue schooling due to parental refusal. This is an important determinant of an individual's aspirations. It been noted that the family plays a determinant role in an individual's aspirations, expectations and opportunities (Auster & Auster, 1981). If a student knows the parents are not even interested in her schooling or that they might stop her at any time, she cannot develop high ambitions. It usually happens that on most social or cultural occasions, the girl is assigned some duty and asked not to attend school. This discourages her from developing interest in school. This confirms the earlier assertion in the introduction that young girls are held back at home to perform the traditional duties of women in the society like cooking, looking after younger children and helping out in the house. Some parents simply stop them from attending school probably because they do not see the usefulness of school education.

The level of education of parents also influences a student's plans. Since most parents are not educated they do not see the relevance of education in the life of their female children. This background has a predominant influence on the young girl's educational pursuits. The parents may withdraw her from school in the face of any difficulty, for example, fee drive, pregnancy, examination failure or lack of any school needs like uniform, books, shoes, etc. The parents immediately consider this a burden. This confirms O'Hare's (1988) conclusion that most students whose parents hold less than a Bachelor's degree most likely manifest low educational aspirations. Therefore, students whose parents did not attend school or ended at elementary level tend not to give sufficient encouragement to girls probably because they do not see much value or essence in higher education. Students indicated the level of education attained by their parents. Analysis show that the majority (60%) of the parents have not gone beyond high school. It is worth noting that while 35% of the fathers are illiterates, up to 58% of the mothers have never been to school, and only 9% (mothers) have been to high school and beyond. This is to say clearly that the level of education of the parents of the sample is actually low and this explains the predominance of their influence on the children's aspirations. This probably is clear testimony of why most students of the sample have limited ambitions. Their illiterate parents do not inspire them. They are not role models in that direction. This confirms the view held earlier that the one family factor that influences aspirations is the educational status of the father and mother. Auster and Auster (1981) hold that parents' occupation and educational level are positively related to their children's aspirations.

Personal Decision

A student's limited ambition might just be due to her own personal decision. Some prefer to get married while others lack the motivation. The results confirm the fact that some students would keep away from school for personal reasons and this will also mean lowering their ambitions. Sometimes the young girl may want to take over the traditional duties of the home or is just bored with school and prefers to stay at home rather than remain under the strict discipline that characterises school life. She may also stay away because of a pregnancy or the need to get married. Generally, women get marry at an earlier age than would men. Even the 1981 Civil Status Ordinance governing family life in Cameroon allows girls to marry as from the age of 15 and boys from the age of 18. This explains the very high rate of female dropouts in secondary schools especially in rural areas. This confirms why 14% of the sample of this study indicated that they might discontinue school in order to get married. If girls are in school always expecting to have a partner and drop schooling in preference to full-time conjugal life, then their aspirations would likely not be high. The students may lack adequate motivation to stay on at school. Besides the fact that their parents do not actually encourage them, the educational environment may also be an important factor. The teachers' attitudes towards the students influence students' perception of education either positively or negatively. Teachers' influence on students' perception of education is analysed. This confirms Gerow's (1997) view that motivation is the process that arouses, directs and maintains behaviour. It is worth noting that lack of motivation can also have its genesis from the home. When a student's basic needs are not met, how can she be motivated to study? When she does not eat well, lacks basic clothing, acceptance at home, and love, it is difficult for her to develop interest in studies. This confirms the view that a student whose basic needs are not met is unlikely to aspire to acquire knowledge, which is a need further up Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. This explains why students who show interest in studying beyond high school indicate higher educational aspiration than those who show no such interest. Therefore, learning experiences should be arranged in such a way that would inspire success.

The fact that jobs are scarce to get in Cameroon may also explain why some students are not motivated and consequently do not aspire to study further than high school. It was earlier asserted in this study that since it is difficult for young graduates to get jobs it tends to discourage quite a number of families in rural areas from investing in the education of their children, and more so, when these children are female. They think that these girls would be more useful to them if they stay at home and do other odd jobs. As the setting of this study is predominantly rural in nature, formal education is not really the matter here. The people prefer to keep them

around them rather than send them away to school because these young girls would very much help out with some domestic chores while at home. Some mothers feel that the long hours spent at school by these girls would make them not to be able to master domestic work and the traditional duties of the woman. The environment itself, considering its rural nature does not inspire the girls. They lack exposure and experience.

Research Objective Three: To examine the relationship between girls' educational aspirations and their academic achievement

Based on the analysis of findings, it was discovered that educational aspirations and academic achievement among female students in Fungom Sub-Division are not significantly related.

Relationship between Educational Aspirations and Academic Achievement

The study further sought to know the relationship between girls' educational aspirations and their academic achievement. The analysis of findings shows that educational aspirations and academic achievement among female students in Fungom Sub-Division are not significantly related. This simply means that the two variables are not linearly related. Normally, one would expect that girls, who aspire high, should perform well in school, while those with low aspiration should perform poorly. However, the results of this study are different. One may ask why individuals who set very high goals do not work hard to achieve these goals. While some who do not intend to go even beyond secondary school perform so well. Several factors may explain this situation. Such factors include; Lack of basic and necessary school materials and requirements such as books, writing material, and school wears (uniforms, shoes, sports attire, etc.), school fees and so on; Lack of motivation and encouragement are other important factors that can affect a student's academic performance despite her ambitions to further her studies; the student's aptitude, and many others.

Lack of basic and necessary school materials and requirements such as books, writing material, and school wears (uniforms, shoes, sports attire, etc.), school fees and so on, may affect students' studies. A girl may be interested in learning and may aspire to go to the university. However, if the girl lacks the very basic and necessary needs to enable her study conveniently, she may not excel in examinations. Even so, she might often be sent out of class for fees or to procure some necessary items. Such a student cannot conveniently concentrate and study. Parents need to provide the fundamental requirements to enable students study and succeed so that they can attain their goals. When a student is always putting on torn shoes or sleep shoes to school, such a student can easily develop a low, negative self-concept; she may feel rejected by society and would not be able to follow studies well. She cannot be expected to be attentive in class and concentrate on studies. A hungry man is an angry man. This confirms the view that a student whose basic needs are not met is unlikely to aspire to knowledge (Maslow, 1970).

Lack of motivation and encouragement are other important factors that can affect a student's academic achievement despite her ambitions to further her studies. A girl whose parents are not interested in formal education may not sufficiently encourage her to go for further studies even if she is doing well in school. The school environment may also be a problem. The teacher's negative and immoral attitude may not encourage the student to study. All these may lead to academic failure for the child. As such, the fact that you aspire high does not necessarily mean that you will perform well at school when you lack the motivation to study.

Another important factor, which may help explain why a student with high aspiration may have low academic achievement, is the student's aptitude. The student may aspire to become a medical doctor (a high vocational aspiration) a profession which requires at least seven years of university study (high educational aspirations) after high school. Her consistent failure in school and particularly in the science subjects may mean that she will not be able to attain her goal. Therefore, some subjects of the sample probably aspire high but lack the necessary aptitude required to attain the set objectives.

Another reason for poor academic achievement as against very high educational aspiration is that some of the subjects probably set very unrealistic goals which do not match with their current interest in the present level of education. A student who cannot pay fees in secondary school which is less than ten thousand francs CFA a year wants to study up to the doctorate level despite the fact that education in Cameroon becomes more expensive as you go higher. Ignorance could be another factor which can account for the results of the study. Although many girls aspire to further their education, they need to work hard and pass their examinations if they have to achieve their set goals. They may not be aware of the need to work hard at school to enable them attain their future academic objectives.

The results of the study confirm Skinner's (1953) assertion that past experience could account for differences observed in pupils' reaction to certain situations. A student may have high ambitions but fail his/her examinations because at one point he/she recalls that many persons who have acquired higher certificates are jobless, thus the motive to achieve diminishes. People like doing things that have had positive consequences than negative ones.

Another reason that could account for the results of the study is the 'fear of success' syndrome. Although,

many of the girls may nurse very high ambitions, the fear of being rejected by their peers and society for being too ambitious and for going out of the ordinary may explain why their results do not necessarily reflect their aspirations. Some of them pass very well at school but set very low goals to avoid being thrown out because of non-conformity with so-called societal expectations. The 'fear of success' haunts them. This confirms Crealock's (1979) view that Women in rural areas, in particular, fear aiming very high because society and particularly their male counterparts may reject them. In a similar note, it was noted that the fear of success motivates many women to avoid achievement, particularly in competitive situations (Horner, 1969).

The ambition of many girls in rural areas is to get married or at least become a mother as soon as the opportunity comes up. It was noted in Chapter one that many young girls in rural areas become mothers at the age of 15. This would mean that they do not aspire to go very high in education or to get into very prestigious jobs or professions. Consequently, such girls are likely to perform academically well, but have very low ambitions even though the contrary would have been expected. On the other hand, high ambitions would not necessarily mean academic success when the young girls are overtaken by social engagements.

Hypothesis

Female students with high educational aspirations perform better than those with low academic aspirations

From the findings reflecting to the realities in the investigated society context, the hypothesis indicates the following discussion.

Relationship between Educational Aspirations and Academic Performance

The lone hypothesis set out to determine whether students with high educational aspirations performed better than those with low educational aspirations. This hypothesis received an affirmative answer. That is, there is a difference between the academic performance of female students with high educational aspirations and those with low educational aspirations. Girls with high educational aspirations perform better than those with low educational aspirations. This is because the mean performance of girls with high aspirations (11.83) was found to be slightly greater than that of girls (11.05) with low aspirations. A possible explanation of these results can be found in the achievement behaviour of these girls owing to differences in their plans and expectations. Girls with high ambitions would desire and ultimately perform well in school while those who have low educational aspirations would not put in the interest required for a good performance. Therefore, achievement behaviour in some girls is motivated by a desire for mastery. When students set low goals they cannot be motivated to work hard in school. Those that aim at getting husbands at any time the opportunity comes up and those who are in school for the sake of it cannot perform well when they seem not to see what education has for them.

APPLICATION OF THEORY TO THE STUDY

Three theories have been applied to help explain and support practice in the research context. These theories include theory of achievement motivation (Gerow, 1997), Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1970), and the Socio cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978).

Hierarchy of Needs Theory

In his theory of growth motivation or need gratification, Maslow (1970) intimates that every individual has a definite hierarchy of needs for attainment in life. Maslow's (1943, 1970) hierarchical classification is according to the apparent importance of the needs. When a need has been achieved, it ceases to be important as focus shifts to another. This theory clearly explains what determines the level of aspiration. A student whose basic needs are not met is unlikely to aspire to acquire knowledge which is further up the hierarchy. It implies that students who indicate interest in studying beyond high school show a higher level of educational aspiration than those who show no such interest.

Theory of achievement motivation (Gerow, 1997): Reinforcement, importance of modelling, components of observational learning, cognitive view of motivation, hierarchy of needs theory, achievement motivation, need for achievement, and manifest needs theory. As young people grow they can be motivated by models they find in their environments and they may tend to imitate such models. For example, a student who identifies with and admires a teacher of a particular subject may work hard partly to please the admired individual and partly to try to become like that individual. A student who observes an older brother or sister reaping benefits from high grades may strive to do the same. These models can influence young girls who observe women in various works and professions. As most women in Fungom are subsistence farmers, teachers (primary or secondary school), or nurses with just a handful in other professions, it is no doubt that most female students prefer these professions.

Socio-cultural or Sociological Theory

This theory (Vygotsky, 1978) recognizes the influence of cultural background, family background, aspirations, attitudes, values, social class, sex and religious orientation on one's choice of career. In this regard, the milieu

within which an individual grows up or is brought up has a strong influence on his or her life decisions. What happens in the rural environment wherein these young girls are schooling has a determinant impact in the life of the girls. Therefore, their aspirations are restricted to their limited exposures and models as well as the extent of encouragement they can receive while in school. Environmental factors that commonly influence aspirations include: school, peers, home and neighbourhood: There is no doubt that the milieu within which a child grows up influences his thinking, his choices, conduct and decisions in life. The child may develop low or high aspirations depending on the environmental influences, which in turn would affect academic performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations, which based on the results of the study, were made:

- Basic and necessary facilities should be made available in rural areas such as electricity and communication so that the learning process can be facilitated for students.
- Teachers should make an effort to arouse and raise students' aspirations through their conduct, attitudes, rewards, advice and information.
- Resident counsellors should work with schools located in rural areas so that students can benefit from their services, especially in the area of educational and vocational counselling. Conducive conditions should be created to facilitate school leavers' insertion into the job market to erase the fear of joblessness.
- Parents and guardians should motivate and encourage their children by providing the necessary needs such as school fees, school needs, and so on in order to facilitate learning.
- It is important to have more female models in schools, especially in rural areas who can inspire female students to go beyond secondary school.

CONCLUSION

Education is very important for the improvement of the status of women in the Cameroonian and African society. Therefore, the state, parents, educators, policy makers and students, particularly, female students have to work hard to encourage a higher enrolment and retention of girls in school. Female students in rural areas need to develop a high self-esteem because the way they perceive themselves is crucial as this affects their behaviour as well as their aspirations in life. Parents, teachers and counsellors can contribute a lot in helping young girls develop a healthy, high self-concept. It is important for young people to have aspirations or ambitions. These can have a strong influence on their vocational and educational choices in life. An individual with set goals is often motivated to work towards attaining these goals.

Although, research has focused more on external factors that influence a child's aspirations, parents, teachers and counsellors can actively initiate measures to influence the educational and vocational development of students, especially female students. Teachers and counsellors can make students aware of the variety of careers and educational opportunities available to them, as a result of the subjects they study.

Female students have a wide range of obstacles which hinder their education and frustrate their ambitions. The hurdles need to be removed to enable them evolve normally and take their proper place in the society. Many girls in rural areas aspire to further their education, but face constraints outside their control; for instance, early marriages, lack of sponsorship, and so on. As Auster and Auster (1981) put it, "at times, children are exposed to influences over which they have no control". Students in rural areas have limited range of vocational interests. They can only aspire for professions that they know, despite the inexhaustible list of existing careers in the world.

This study reveals that there is very low correlation between educational aspirations and academic achievement among female students in rural areas. Having a high educational aspiration does not necessarily lead to high academic performance. However, any ambition can act as a source of motivation to work hard so as to achieve a desired goal. Knowledge of students' aspirations can be very useful in educational and vocational counselling.

The results also show that students with high educational aspirations perform better than those with low educational aspirations. This confirms the researcher's earlier assumption that students who have high aspirations are more likely to perform better than those who have low aspirations. This is understandably so because students who have set very high goals will persevere towards these goals and those whose goals are low will not perform well or will not even bother if they fail.

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