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Senior high school students in Ghana and their labor market aspirational Gap

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the variables affecting senior high school students (SHS 3) labor market aspirations in Ghana. This investigation was led by a quantitative paradigm. A simple random sampling approach of 445 SHS students was sampled for the study. In this study, a questionnaire was utilized. To analyze the data, the main statistical tools employed were percentages, and contingency coefficients using IBM SPSS version 26. From the finding of the study, it appears that students' demographic traits have a direct bearing on their labor market aspirations. Moreover, the majority of SHS 3 students are drawn to the public sector, even though different demographic factors influence both the sort of work that students want to pursue and the economic sector in which they want to work. Furthermore, SHS students are not drawn to some of Ghana's most pressing labor demands. The implications of the findings and practical considerations are discussed in the study.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education has always been a role model in supporting a better lifestyle. In the current era, education continues to experience developments that occur dynamically and we are required to have the ability to adapt to educational developments that occur. Many of us still don't realize that education is getting more interesting and modern day by day. Education in Indonesia is supported by a curriculum, in which the curriculum itself is made so that education can be carried out according to a strong foundation and is expected to achieve the desired educational goals.

In the modern world, one in six people is a young adult (15–24 years old). By 2030, there will be 1.3 billion youth worldwide, and that number will keep growing until 2065, with Africa leading the way (Holechek, J. L., et al., 2017; Hall, C., 2017; Cropper, M., & Griffiths, C. 1994). By 2030, 375 million young people in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are anticipated to enter the labor force. Policymakers across the world, particularly in Africa, are preoccupied with the great challenge of helping millions of young people find decent work, as conveyed in Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Lorenceau et al., 2021; Fox, L., Senbet, L. W., & Simbanegavi, W. 2016; Abdelkerim, A. A., & Grace, M. 2012). The difficulty is especially great in emerging nations where lax enforcement of labor laws and informal labor markets trap many young people in low-wage, and unsatisfactory employment.

The choices of young people about their careers are reflected in the theoretical framework. In the Gottfredson theoretical framework, the theory seeks to find answers if it is possible to change people's views and aspirations, especially in light of the profound changes that the labor market is undergoing now and in the future. It is possible to create effective policies if aspirations can be changed to lead to improved levels of labor market accomplishment. As confirmed by recent trends analyses, young people remain particularly disadvantaged in the labor market. With the most recent data showing a 13.6% global youth unemployment rate, the transition from school to work is becoming more and more challenging (Bahmani, S. 2011; Feldmann, H. 2009; Chand, K., et al. 2017) With a neoliberal trend toward flexible accumulation, young people's employment prospects have become a major global concern, with sporadic employment and increasing youth unemployment .

Youth in Ghana today are more educated than previous generations, but fewer opportunities match their skill level and the routes that young people take to find employment are shifting. The labor market aspirational gap in this study can be conceptualized as the estimated labor required in the various sectors and the number of students who aspired to be working in those sectors. With a rate of 6.3 percent in 2018, which is significantly higher than the sub-Saharan average of 3 percent, the issue of unemployed growth in Ghana has grown to be a major worry in light of the comparatively significant development recorded over time. Despite this expansion, there is still a high rate of precarious and vulnerable work, especially among young people. According to estimates from the Ghana Statistical Service, youth unemployment is substantially higher than the average national unemployment rate of roughly 6%. Particularly, between 15 and 35-year-olds, 59.6% of the population is employed, 12.1 % are unemployed, and the remaining 28.3 % are not in the labor force. Additionally, 31.8 percent of young people work for themselves as own-account workers in the non-agricultural sector, which represents at least one in three of them (Ukpere, W. I. 2011; Baah-Boateng, W. 2015; Awad, A. 2019). Youth as a life phase is extended by secondary participation, and it frequently carries with it social prestige as well (Richter, L.,

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& Panday, S. 2007). Additionally, young peoples have perceptions of the kind of employment they value, and their aspirations for themselves as educated individuals.

Young people must be ready in terms of their skill acquisition and degree of desire and aspiration if they are to benefit from the changing nature of the workplace. For young people to invest in their human capital and succeed in the job market, their aspirations are crucial. Success is possible when realistic goals connect a person's agency and confidence that they can effect change on their own through their efforts with the channels and resources that will help them to do so. It is critical to comprehend aspirations to create good employment policies. Young people may continue to be failed through employment strategies that attempt to match their skills with job prospects if their labor market aspirations and life objectives are not taken into account.

Numerous studies demonstrate that students are frequently faced with difficulty while choosing a career. The majority of this research focuses on how students' demographic characteristics affect their choice of career. However, none of these studies have looked at how these demographic characteristics affect participants' preferences for the economic sectors in which they would like to work and their labor market aspirations, leaving a discrepancy between students' career aspirations and their labor market aspirations.

This study makes use of the growing significant aspect of the human capital approach. The human capital theory says that individuals make occupational choices regarding the amount of schooling, type of schooling, and occupation that are optimum for themselves (Wiswall and Zafar, 2021; Nafukho, F. M., et al. 2004). That is individuals are not only interested in their educational investment but also the return to their education as well as the economic sector they would like to work.

The need for more precise statistics is obvious; without them, it is impossible to adequately estimate the likelihood of matching supply and demand for labor, and as a result, developing strategies to address the imbalances of young labor in the labor market can only be, at best, very rudimentary. However, the study will offer information that shows there is a significant problem with respect to job selection, particularly in light of senior high school students' aspirations for the labor market as they transition from the high school level to the workforce. This suggests that economic education policies might need to be better crafted to be adaptive to the reality of the labor market and more spatially applicable and relevant to youth occupational prospects.

In the context of labor supplies, however, statistics on numbers alone only reveal a part of the picture. Information is also needed about manpower aspirations and potential employees' perceptions of alternative forms of employment in higher demand or lesser demand by the youth in the labor market. There can be little prospect of developing methods that have a fair chance of succeeding in their objectives of balancing the demand for young labor with the supply of labor if it is not known how different jobs are seen by high school students.

The findings of this study offer decision-makers information on the variables shaping the labor market and the labor market policies that together affect how wide or limited the realistic aspiration window are for any given skill set among the youth. People may become involved in education and skill development to broaden their perspectives and create new future aspirations if there is a finite range of feasible objectives for a specific skill set (Hamza, A. 2010; Camiré, M., et al. 2009; Mann, K. V. 2011).

Only a few scholarly publications raise concerns about the exposure of young people's viewpoints in the job market. There is scant proof of the widespread tendency to silence young people's voices in academic and political debates about development issues. Despite

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current efforts by international organizations like the United Nations to "make youth a major pillar of the post-2015 global development agenda. This study seeks to fill this gap by focusing on the individualized experiences, goals, and ideologies of young people while acknowledging their agency. Since they have a wealth of first-hand knowledge and the ability to articulate their goals, young people can significantly contribute to our understanding of the youth employment dilemma. As a result, they will receive the necessary support (Awad, A. 2020; Kovacheva, S., & Pohl, A. 2007).

We contend that demand-side initiatives that produce work are essential in resolving what is referred to as the youth employment "problem" or even "crisis," despite the current dominance of supply-side measures (Hoff et al., 2022; O'Halloran, D., 2018; Tomlinson, J. 2001). To address the objectives of SHS labor market aspirations to the economic sector they would want to work in and their labour aspirational gap. The following research questions are addressed to achieve the objective of this paper:(1) What proportions of students aspire towards the various sectors of the economy? (2) Do students' aspirations for the various economic sectors differ according to their demographic? (3) What is the labor market aspirational gap?

2. METHOD

The targeted population for the study was final-year SHS3 students in 12 Senior high Schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. The Career Aspirations Questionnaire was used to ascertain the factors influencing SHS students' employment expectations in Ghana, their preferred economic sector, and the gap between those aspirations and the actual labor market. The questionnaire utilized in this research was adapted from works by. 2064 students made up the entire population. The final sample, 445, is determined by applying the statistical procedure with a 5% Slovin's margin of error.

To achieve this, the study used the Ghana Education Service Categorization of Senior High Schools. Through a simple random sampling method (Lottery Approach) with the respective categories A, B, C, and D Senior High Schools, two schools were selected from category A, and one school was selected from each of the three remaining categories B, C, and D. Two schools were selected from Category A because all the listed category A schools in the Cape Coast metropolitan were all single-sex school (either 'boys only' or 'girls only'). Therefore, we selected one boy's school and one girl's school all from category A. The study's participants were chosen using a multi-stage stratified random sampling process.

This is to guarantee that the various student categories were fairly chosen to represent the study's objective. Pilot research using a sample of 20 students who were not included in the main study was conducted with the questionnaire that had been established. The questionnaire had a 0.81 Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficient. This suggests that the questionnaire is a good and trustworthy indicator for the sample. SHS 3 final-year students were chosen for this study because they were in their final year of the senior high school program and valued the opportunity to choose a career in the labor market more than their peers in lower forms or grades. The data were analyzed using percentages and contingency coefficients. Table 1 below shows the described method in more detail.

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Table 1. Distribution of Participants by their Program of Study

Program of Study	Frequency	Percentage
Business	104	23.4
General Arts	103	23.1
Home Economics	81	18.2
Science	79	17.8
Visual Arts	78	17.5
Total	445	100.0

Source: Generated from the author's,2022

Table 2. Distributions of Participants by the Type of School

Type of School	Frequency	Percentage
Mixed	262	58.9
Boys only	98	22.0
Girls only	85	19.1
Total	445	100.0

Table 1 shows the participant distribution according to their program of study. Since every school has an arts program, enrollment in those programs was at a high level. Additionally, art programs are composed of numerous combinations; nonetheless, for the sake of this study, such combinations were treated as a single group. Table 2 also indicates that 58.9% of the sample came from schools with both boys and girls, whereas 22% and 19% of the participants came from schools with just boys and girls, respectively. Table 3 shows the distribution of participants by school and sex

Table 3. Distribution of Participants by School and Sex

School	No. of Female	% Female	No. of Male	%of Male	Total Participants
Academy of Christ the King SHS	52	27.1	38	15	90
Adisadel College SHS	0	0	98	38.7	98
Effutu SHS	20	10.4	72	28.5	92
University Practice SHS	35	18.2	45	17.8	80
Wesley Girls SHS	85	43.3	0	0	85
Total	192	43.1	253	56.9	445

Source: Generated from the author's field survey (2022)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 RESULTS

Research Question One

What proportions of students aspire towards the various sectors of the economy? Do students' aspirations for the various economic sectors differ according to their demographic? This study's main goal was to investigate the relationship between Ghana's economy and the occupational goals of senior high school students. Finding out the percentages and

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characteristics of students who are interested in the various economic sectors was one component of this inquiry. The sectors identified were government sector employment, private sector employment, Non-Governmental Organizations, self-employment, or entrepreneurship.

Table 4 reveals that the majority of respondents (60.2 percent) sought employment in the government sector. The private sector, which attracted 20.4 percent of the respondents, came next. A significant percentage of respondents (2.7 percent) preferred employment in non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Only 16.6 percent of the participants would want to own or manage their own business. Table 5 shows that while the majority of their fathers (51.7 percent) were self-employed, the majority of students (60.2 percent) desired employment in the public sector. The chi-square test of independence computation revealed that, at the 0.05 alpha level, there was no association between the economic sectors, where students want to work, and where their fathers were employed. A contingency coefficient of.293 from the asymmetry measure indicated a very weak link. Table 5 lists the economic sectors that students hope to work in as well as the fields in which their mothers are employed. Only 71.4 percent of their children wanted to be self-employed, even though 46.7 percent of mothers worked for themselves. In comparison to themselves, their mothers preferred working in the private sector and for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The association between the economic sectors that students want to work in and the economic sectors that their mothers were employed in was not significant at the.05 level, according to the computation of the chi-square test of independence. A contingency coefficient of .140, obtained from the calculation, indicated that the association was insignificant.

Table 4. Sectors of the Economy and Students' Career Aspirations

Sector of Economy	Frequency	Percentage
Public/Government	268	60.2
Private Firm	91	20.4
NGO	12	2.7
Ent. /Self	74	16.6
Total	445	100

Table 5. Distribution of Respondents by the Sectors of the Economy they Aspire to Work and their parents' employer

Sector of Economy	Students Aspiration		Fathers Employer		Mothers Employer	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Public/Government	268	60.2	110	24.7	118	26.5
Private Firm	91	20.4	96	21.6	40	9.0
NGO.	12	2.7	3	0.7	5	1.1
Ent. /Self	74	16.6	230	51.7	269	60.4
I don't know	-	-	6	1.3	13	2.9
Total	445	100	445	100	445	100

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Table 6. Tabulation of Fathers' Employers with Sectors Students Aspire to Work In

Fathers Employer	The sector of the economy that students which to work							
	Pub/Government		Private firm		NGO		Ent/ Self.	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Public/ Government	73	27.8	18	20.8	4	33.3	15	20.5
Private Firm	46	17.6	30	33.3	2	16.7	18	24.7
NGO	2	0.8	1	1.1	-	-	-	-
Ent. /Self	143	54.6	41	45.6	6	50.5	40	54.8
Total	264	100	90	100	12	100	73	100

X^2 (12, N=439) = 15.952, p=.053 contingency=.293

Table 7. Tabulation of Mothers Employers with Sectors Students Aspire to Work In

Mothers Employer	The sector of the economy where students wish to work							
	Pub/Government		Private firm		NGO		Ent/ Self.	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market
and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market
and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market
and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market	and their labor market
Total	262	100	90	100	10	100	70	100

X^2 (12, N=432) = 12.751, p=.060 contingency=.140

The descriptive statistics on the association between gender and the economic sectors where students want to work are shown in Table 8.

The degree to which gender affects students' aspirations for the various economic sectors was looked into. Investigations were made into the degree to which gender affects students' goals for working in the various economic sectors. There were differences in the percentages of male and female students who expressed a desire to work in the various economic sectors. The results of the chi-square test showed that the aspirations of the students varied significantly depending on their gender,$\chi^2(4, N=445) = 9.833$, P = 0.043. So, a person's desire to work in a particular area of the economy depends on their gender.

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Table 8. Distribution of Respondents by Sex and the Sectors of the Economy, they Aspire to Work In

Sector of economy	Female		Male	
	No	%	No	%
Public/Government	106	55.2	162	64.0
Private Firm	52	27.1	39	15.4
NGO	4	2.1	8	3.2
Ent. /Self	30	15.6	44	17.4
Total	192	100	253	100

Table 9 displays the frequency and percentage distribution of students by academic programs and the economic sector they intend to work in. Students in vocational programs were proportionately more likely to find work in the public sector to be favorable than students in other program categories. Science students preferred working for private companies over the government sector, which was the least appealing to them compared to students in other study areas. Relatively. Compared to other economic sectors, business students showed a greater percentage of interest in the government sector. According to chi-square analysis, students' aspirations to work in different economic sectors varied depending on their academic programs,

χ^2 (16, N = 445) = 13.34) P =.003

however, it had a poor contingency coefficient of.171.

Table 9. Responses by academic program and the economic sectors that respondents aspire to work in

Sector of Economy	Academic Program							
	Business		Arts		HE/VA		Science	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Public/Government	69	66.3	62	60.	91	57.2	46	58.2
Private Firm	13	12.5	22	21.4	40	25.2	16	20.3
NGO	4	3.8	2	1.9	3	1.9	1	1.3
Ent. /Self	18	17.3	17	16.5	25	15.7	13	16.7
Total	262	100	90	100	10	100	70	100

3.2 DISCUSSION

More than any other industry, the public sector attracts students for high employment. Given how the public views employment in the public sector, this is not surprising. The majority of respondents chose the public sector as their preferred career destination, which may have been influenced by their knowledge of the employment landscape in Ghana. For the past few years, a significant portion of the educated youth in African nations, including Ghana, have chosen government employment as their occupation of choice. This implies that some young people may experience disappointment if they decide to pursue their goal of working in the public sector after completing their schooling. A sizeable and very encouraging fraction of respondents expressed a desire to work in the private sector. The present strategy of the Ghanaian government is to encourage the growth of the private sector, which will act as the main driver of economic expansion. There is some optimism for a successful

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government strategy given the suggestion that a sizeable section of the prospective labor population is eager to work in the private sector. It's important to observe that there was no connection between the economic sectors where parents worked and those where children wanted to work. This is consistent with a finding (Anyon, J. (2017) .

Research Questions Two

What is the labor market aspirational gap?

This is to examine the estimated labor required in the various sectors and the number of students who aspired to be working in those sectors.

Table 10. Comparison of Respondents Who Aspire to Selected Critical Professions and the Proportion of Labor Force Required in Those Professions

Critical Professions	Estimated labor Required	Percentage Required	No. of students Aspiring	Percentage of students aspiring
Construction	591,783	4.6	3	0.7
Trade/hotel/rest.	499,211	3.6	41	8.1
ICT	133,171	1.0	15	3.3
Transport/ stor.	501,593	3.9	7	1.5
Fin/ insurance	219,304	1.7	48	10.8
Agricultural	4,234,674	32.5	1	0.2
Mining	271,863	2.1	2	0.4
Education	333,851	2.6	27	6.1
Public Admin/defence	172,769	1.3	58	19.9
Health and Social work	144,587	1.1	117	25.8

The analysis was based on the statistical projection by [41] on the required labor force in some important economic sectors for the year 2025 and the supposition that the study's student participants would need at least three years to fully integrate into the workforce. This logic was further supported by the presumption that SHS3 students need between three and six years of university education or an apprenticeship before entering the workforce. They projected using data from the Ghana Living Standards Survey's fifth and sixth waves, conducted in 2012–13 and 2016–17, respectively. As can be seen in Table 10, only 0.2% of students are interested in a career in agriculture, even though it is predicted that this sector would contribute to the majority of Ghana's economic growth, While this is going on, it is predicted that by 2025, the agriculture sector would need 32.2% of the labor force, which is glaring evidence of a 32-times skill gap. This outcome is consistent with the Ghanaian proverb that says agriculture is a poor man's business. ICT, mining, and public administration/defense results were comparable with this one. This has made it less appealing for students to focus their career aspirations in the agricultural industry. This indicates that there is a significant discrepancy between the predicted labor force composition of the agricultural business sector and the number of students who want to work in the agricultural sector. A serious scarcity of farmers should be anticipated if this generalization were made to the entire labor population. According to Table 10, 1.1 percent of the labor force as a whole is predicted to be employed in the medical field by 2025. On the other side, 25.8 percent of the research sample said that they wanted to work in the medical field. This suggests that the number of students who wanted to become doctors was roughly 24.1 times higher than the number of medical officers

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to be required by the year 2025. Therefore, if every student who had the urge to become a doctor could see their dreams come true, there might be more medical officers than the economy needed. Table 4.23 also shows that more students wanted to be in the education field than the economy needed.

According to the study, only a small percentage of SHS students are interested in the critical labor needs in Ghana's mining, ICT, and agricultural industries, which is far less than the number of workers required in those fields in the nation at the time when these students would make up the majority of the labor force. The findings of this study suggest that if drastic action is not taken, the issue could last for a very long time. A considerable fraction of the respondents, which is a proportion that is significantly higher than what the economy will require in 2025, had aspirations to become doctors. The findings presented are comparable to those made earlier by. As rightly pointed out, given that medicine has always been a noble profession in Ghana, the students' strong predilection for the field is not surprising. However, there is cause for concern given that in reality, only a small portion of each cohort of students enters the medical field. This is due to some factors, including the lack of training facilities and the constraints placed on students by their academic prowess, aptitudes, and socioeconomic circumstances. Therefore, it would seem from this research that students' expectations and occupational aspirations are in no way realistic when compared to the actual employment prospects available to them. Such unrealistic aspirations among students may result in disappointment or failure, and ultimately, unemployment.

4. CONCLUSION

It was revealed from this study that the aspirations of Ghanaian youth and the realities of the labor markets differ significantly. Young individuals in Ghana are not likely to transition from school to work smoothly since their career goals do not align very well with the labor market's current and future demands. Unmet career needs over a long period can cause social instability, as the Arab Spring in 2011 demonstrated. Therefore, youth well-being and social cohesiveness, in general, may greatly benefit by matching young people's career objectives and aspects of job satisfaction with the realities of labor markets. Young people's objectives and what matters to them most are not given enough consideration while developing policies. It can be recommended from the findings of the study that i) creating reasonable career objectives for young people that are compatible with the country's labor demand, and ii) Enhancing the quality of employment while taking into account the important job circumstances for young people and keeping in mind that closing the gap between young people's preferences and realities may take some time.

Young people need to have access to reliable information about employment opportunities and helpful advice on how to move in the direction of their aspirations. Thus, the need for better and more knowledgeable career guidance and counseling. This necessitates the creation of reliable systems for collecting and analyzing data on educational outcomes and employment prospects in the labor market as well as on schooling. Additionally, a complete strategy, which includes well-designed entrepreneurship promotion initiatives, is required to address the variety of enabling and impeding aspects of entrepreneurial performance. The study also showed that young people do not find the agricultural industry appealing. Even yet, the industry has the potential to give young people greater opportunities to start their businesses and get salaried employment in the agricultural and food processing industries. Multiple interventions are required to increase young

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people's interest in agriculture. Improving farmer earnings and modernizing agricultural practices that take environmental issues into account are the first steps in transforming employment in the agriculture industry into respectable jobs that draw young people. Providing young people with excellent career counseling, investing in their career, applicability, and responsiveness of education and beginning training, and creating chances for on-the-job learning and ongoing training at work are further strategies to lessen the skills mismatch. This is to end that general manpower planning and matching strategies are to be viewed as a crucial component of a larger development strategy and ought to take into account particular national limits of senior high school students' occupational aspirations.

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