

# VOCATIONAL ASPIRATION AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KERALA: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract :** Vocational aspiration plays a vital role in the personal development of students. It contributes to self-understanding, builds confidence, and supports identity formation during adolescence. By enabling students to recognize their strengths and interests, it assists them in selecting appropriate career paths. The present study focuses on vocational aspiration of secondary school students in Kerala within a gender perspective. The study was conducted on a random sample of 342 students from four revenue districts of Kerala. Findings of the study revealed that secondary school students have a moderate level of Vocational aspiration. The study also found that the vocational aspiration of male and female students differ significantly and the difference is meaningful in favor of female students.

*IndexTerms* - Vocational aspiration, Secondary school students, Career aspiration, Gender perspective

## INTRODUCTION

Vocational aspiration refers to an individual's strong desire to achieve a particular career based on their interests, abilities, and personal goals. It can also be understood as an orientation towards an occupational goal that develops through enthusiasm, passion, or the necessity to sustain life (Promod & Suresh, 2019). At the secondary school level, vocational aspiration assumes significant importance, as this stage represents a crucial period during which students begin to shape their future educational and career paths.

Having clear vocational aspirations provides direction and purpose to students' learning. It enhances their interest in academic activities, encourages active participation, and ultimately improves academic performance. Moreover, vocational aspiration helps bridge the gap between education and employment by promoting skill-based learning and aligning educational efforts with future career opportunities. In this regard, educational and career decisions should reflect students' long-term career goals (Jayadev & Kumar, 2024).

Vocational aspiration also plays a vital role in the personal development of students. It contributes to self-understanding, builds confidence, and supports identity formation during adolescence. By enabling students to recognize their strengths and interests, it assists them in selecting appropriate career paths. Furthermore, students with strong vocational aspirations are more likely to remain committed to their education and are less prone to dropping out. Early formation of occupational aspirations significantly influences later vocational choices, which in turn affect job satisfaction, productivity, and overall adjustment in life (Chauhan, Sharma, & Kaur, 2024).

Career aspiration, on the other hand, is a broader process involving goal setting, planning, decision-making, and forming expectations about one's future in the workforce (Aziz et al., 2025). In this context, vocational aspiration can be viewed as a foundational component of career aspiration.

Vocational aspiration has become increasingly important for secondary school students due to rapid changes in education, employment patterns, and societal expectations. It supports self-awareness, enhances motivation, reduces dropout rates, and strengthens the connection between education and employment. When students choose careers aligned with their interests and abilities, they are more likely to experience satisfaction and success in their professional lives.

Therefore, vocational aspiration has become a vital component of secondary education, as it shapes students' future, supports personal and social development, and contributes to national progress.

## NEED OF THE STUDY.

The Government of Kerala has undertaken several initiatives to improve the career awareness and employability among students. Skill development programmes, career counselling services, vocational higher secondary education and various schemes and projects under General education department, minority department and scheduled caste and scheduled tribes development departments help the students to get equal opportunity and help students develop realistic, progressive career aspiration. Studying the level of vocational aspiration among secondary school students will help in determining the effectiveness of these programmes and the findings will throw light on the need of improving the existing programmes and planning new programmes to enhance the vocational aspiration and career development of the students.

Studying gender differences in vocational aspiration is highly relevant in the present scenario. Traditionally, men and women were encouraged to choose stereotyped occupations based on societal expectations and gender roles. However, changes in society brought about by quality education, awareness programmes, globalization, technological advancement and women empowerment initiatives have influenced occupational choices and vocational aspirations among both boys and girls. Despite these changes, gender differences in vocational aspiration may still persist due to the influence of various cultural and social factors. The findings of the study will give useful insights for educational planners, teachers and policymakers in designing effective career guidance programmes and ensuring equitable occupational opportunities for all students.

## Review of Related Literature

Many studies are found to be reported in the area of aspirations among students, especially, career aspiration, vocational aspiration and occupational aspiration and the correlates and predictors. Researchers like Chauhan et al. (2024), Kiani et al. (2013) reported moderate level of occupational/vocational aspiration among students, whereas Sarthaj (2018) reported a high level. Male students are found to have higher level of vocational aspiration than females by Shamshad (2022), female students are reported to have higher level of vocational aspiration by Sarthaj(2018), but no significant gender difference in Vocational aspiration was reported by Sharma and Chopra (2020). Inconsistent results in the level of vocational aspiration and the gender difference indicates the need for further studies in the area.

## Objectives

The objectives of the study are

1. To find out the level of Vocational aspiration of secondary school students of Kerala
2. To find out whether gender influences the Vocational aspiration of secondary school students.

## Hypotheses

1. Secondary school students in Kerala have a high level of Vocational aspiration.
2. Gender does not influence the Vocational aspiration of secondary school students.

## Methodology

Survey method was used in the study and the variable studied is Vocational aspiration with gender as the classificatory variable. Participants of the study were 342 secondary school students from schools of six districts in Kerala selected using random sampling method. Vocational aspiration scale developed by Shadiya and Vijayakumari was used for collecting data on Vocational aspiration from the participants. The scale is a five point Likert type scale with 23 items, the validity and reliability of which was established. The minimum score obtainable in the scale is 23 and the maximum is 115. Descriptive statistics, one sample t-test and test of significance of mean difference of two large independent groups were used for analysis of the data.

## Analysis and Interpretation

The descriptive statistics of the variable Vocational aspiration was calculated and is given in table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics of vocational aspiration (N=342)*

Constants	Vocational aspiration
Mean	87.5
Median	88
Mode	87
Standard deviation	9.65
Skewness	-0.012
Kurtosis	-0.738
10th percentile	74
25th percentile	81
75th percentile	95
90th percentile	100

Table 1 shows that the mean, median and mode of Vocational aspiration are almost the same and the values of skewness and kurtosis are negligible. This implies that the variable Vocational aspiration is normally distributed among the group. The percentiles, P10 and P90 are 74 and 100, the difference is 26, the inter quartile range is 14, indicating the middle 50% of the scores are relatively clustered and there are a few extreme scores.

To find the level of Vocational aspiration among secondary school students, one sample t test was used with reference values as 92, the scale value indicating the high level and 69, the scale value indicating moderate level of Vocational aspiration. The hypotheses tested here are ‘The obtained mean score is significantly less than 92’ and ‘The obtained mean score is significantly higher than 69’. The details are given in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Details of One Sample t-Test with Reference Values Indicating a Moderate Levels of Vocational Aspiration*

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Reference value	t-value
Vocational Aspiration	342	87.5	9.65	92	-8.66
				69	35.4

Table 2 shows that the mean score obtained is significantly higher than 69, and significantly lower than 92. This indicates that secondary school students have a moderate level of Vocational aspiration, and their Vocational aspiration is not high.

Significance of gender difference in the mean scores of Vocational aspiration was tested using test of significance of mean difference for large independent groups. The details are given in table 3.

**Table 3**

*Critical Ratio for Testing the Significance of Gender Difference in Vocational Aspiration of Students*

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Critical Ratio	Effect size Cohen's d
Vocational Aspiration	Male	173	84.5	8.47	6.10	0.66
	Female	169	90.5	9.85		

Table 3 shows the critical ratio for Vocational aspiration is 6.10, which indicates that there is significant gender difference in Vocational aspiration ( $p \leq .01$ ). The effect size is 0.66 denoting a medium effect. That is, the vocational aspiration of male and female students differ significantly and the difference is meaningful. Female students are found to have a higher mean score in Vocational aspiration than male students.

### Discussion

Secondary school students are found to have a moderate level of vocational aspiration, in spite of various programmes organized in the school like career awareness and counselling programmes. Chauhan et al. (2024) reported a moderate level of occupational aspiration among senior secondary school students in Mandi district, Himachal Pradesh and Kiani et al. (2013) reported moderate level of vocational aspiration among high school students in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Sarthaj (2018) observed high level of vocational aspiration among students of Villupuram district, Tamilnadu. Factors related to family and society may influence the career goals and ambitions of the individuals.

The gender difference in vocational aspiration may be influenced by many social and cultural factors. One of them is the existing gender stereotypes in society. Traditional beliefs regarding career choice influence students even though social attitudes are gradually changing. Sakib and Bhakat (2019) found that gender significantly influenced career aspirations. From childhood itself boys and girls are frequently encouraged differently in terms of independence, risk-taking behavior and career ambition. Bora (2021) reported that vocational aspirations are significantly influenced by gender roles, parental occupation, family support and socio-economic background. Saini and Meenakshi (2024) reported significant gender differences in career aspirations. These studies support the findings of the present study.

### Educational Implications and Recommendations

Findings of the study lead to some educational implications and practical suggestions. Vocational aspiration plays an important role in shaping educational and career choices of students. Therefore schools should provide systematic and continuous career guidance programs which will enable the students to know the various opportunities regarding careers. Teachers and counselors should promote students to identify their interests, abilities and aptitudes while making career decisions. Students can develop career aspirations when they get practical exposure in vocational training, internships, field visits and interaction with professionals.

The findings also suggest the need to address gender stereotypes and social barriers that influence vocational choices. Schools should promote gender equality in career education and encourage both boys and girls to explore careers based on their interests and capabilities rather than traditional social expectations. Parents should also be involved in career guidance activities so that they can provide positive support to students in career planning. In addition, the curriculum should include life skills, decision-making skills and career education to strengthen students' confidence and self-efficacy in pursuing suitable careers.

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