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STUDENTS' CAREER ASPIRATIONS VERSUS OCCUPATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS IN THE ECONOMY OF GHANA

Frederick Ocansey
University of Cape Coast

Abstract

A study was conducted to investigate the relationship between secondary school students' career aspirations and the various sectors of the Ghanaian economy as well as the occupational environments in it. Specifically, the study examined the extent to which secondary school students in Ghana aspire to the various sectors and occupational environments in the Ghanaian economy as well as the relationships between their career aspirations and their demographic characteristics. Participants consisted of 1075 males and 1265 females (N=2340) randomly chosen from 22 senior secondary schools through a multi-staged stratified sampling. Data was collected with a questionnaire and analysed with percentages and chi-square (χ^2) test of independence. Results revealed that majority of students aspire to enter government sector employment and enterprising occupational environment. School setting, school-type, academic programme, and ethnicity related significantly to students' preferences for employment in the various sectors of the Ghanaian economy. Implications of the findings for counselling and human resource development including the need to guide the aspirations of the youth into the private sector and to moderate their interest in public sector employment are made.

Introduction

The theory of career development formulated and reviewed by Holland (1985) proposed that personalities and work environments can be characterized by their resemblance to six types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. Central to his theory is the assertion that people seek work environment that allows them to express the character of their personalities. Weinrach and Srebalus (1990) observe that while continually open to revision based on empirical evidence, Holland's theory has successfully resisted the kinds of modification intended to satisfy prescriptive cultural and political

pressures. Holland's goal was to devise a simple theory with a symmetrical structure that would encourage practitioners to use it because of its ease of application. Brown (1987) calls it the best current theory of vocational choice.

However, Gati (1984) believes that a more complex, multidimensional theory would be better able to predict vocational phenomena than Holland's can. Holland (1985) himself has observed that although the hypotheses about the person-environment interactions have received support, they also require more testing. He further concedes that "many important personal and environmental contingencies will lie outside the scope of the theory, although an attempt has been made to include the role of education, sex, intelligence, social class, and other major variables" (Holland 1985, p.119).

In addition, Holland (interviewed by Weinrach, 1980) has indicated that the biggest weaknesses of his theory are its formulations about stability and change. Other scholars including Brown (1987) and Osipow (1983) have also criticized Holland's theory on the grounds that it is sexist, and that the theory does not sufficiently explain how people become the types that they are. Thus although Holland's theory and its instrumentation are among the most widely used, ongoing research is warranted and it is certain to continue. Hence, a pertinent issue in this study is to determine the extent to which students' career aspirations relate to the various occupational environments and the implications of such trend to the Ghanaian economy.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 1989) has observed that the social and economic crisis in Africa, Ghana being no exception, seems to be unyielding. After several years of painful policy reforms at the national level and new initiatives launched by the international community, the situation continues to deteriorate. As a result, the number of people living in poverty is alarmingly high – ranging between one-half and three-quarters of the total population in most African countries (ILO, 1989). The ILO report reveals that the prime cause of mass poverty in the region is the inadequate number of opportunities for productive and gainful employment. It is estimated that the extent of open and disguised unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa increased by a sixth between 1980

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and 1988, which was four times faster than in the 1970's, and the trend has probably persisted to date. According to the ILO (1989), the causes of the deteriorating employment situation in the region are many, including (i) the interaction between the impact of the demographic tide on labour supply; (ii) the phenomenal expansion in the education system which has led to a substantial mismatch between supply of and demand for skills on the sub-Saharan labour markets; (iii) lack of structural transformation of the economy and (iv) sluggish economic growth.

It is in this context of economic concentration and social regression that the sub-Saharan labour markets are undergoing far-reaching adjustments which, according to the ILO Report (1989), can be summarized in the following points. First of all, real wages have been remarkably flexible downwards.

Second, the growth in modern sector wage employment has substantially slowed down. At present, it can be estimated that the modern sector does not employ more than 8 per cent of the labour force in the region. The public sector, in particular, which has traditionally been the engine of wage employment growth in Africa, has markedly reduced its rate of labour absorption. In some extreme cases, the public sector had to retrench thousands of workers.

Third, the informal sector has become one of the most important labour sponges in Africa. The sector employs approximately 60 per cent of the urban labour force, which is equivalent to about 15 per cent of the regional workforce. An estimated three-quarter of the newcomers to the urban labour market are absorbed in the informal sector. The informal sector is a labour sponge with a finite capacity of absorption, and it would appear that the sector is increasingly operating as refuge which eases the extent of unemployment by transforming it into underemployment.

Fourth, the employment prospects in the rural areas have improved recently and look better than those in urban areas, especially where incentives for small-scale farmers have improved. Agricultural producer prices have increased more rapidly than wages and prices in general thus narrowing the urban-rural income differential in most African countries.

Finally, unemployment is emerging as a major adjustment on the sub-Saharan labour markets and can no longer be dismissed as an unimportant phenomenon. In many countries the unemployment is increasing by 10 per cent or more every year. Unemployment seems most prevalent among

prices have increased more rapidly than wages and prices in general thus narrowing the urban-rural income differential in most African countries.

Finally, unemployment is emerging as a major adjustment on the sub-Saharan labour markets and can no longer be dismissed as an unimportant phenomenon. In many countries the unemployment is increasing by 10 per cent or more every year. Unemployment seems most prevalent among women and male youth. Unemployment is also creeping up the educational ladder, indicating that a substantial proportion of the scarce resources which are spent on human resources development is not yielding the expected social returns.

The Ghanaian labour market has undergone several changes since independence, with far reaching implications for the society in general and the career aspirations of the youth in particular. Increased investments both in social overhead capital, particularly in education and health and directly in productive activity by the government during 1957-65 sharpened rural-urban migration and enhanced participation in the paid labour force (ISSER, 1994). However, the growth in the capacity of the urban formal sector to absorb the expanding urban labour force began to slow down by the late sixties due to a combination of internal and external factors, notably fiscal constraints, declining terms of trade and global recession after the first and second oil-shocks. Increasing population growth and the continued drift from the rural areas to urban centres have consequently led to increasing urban unemployment and under-employment, particularly among the educated. Such developments obviously impact directly or indirectly on the career aspirations of the youth especially those who may be in tune with the labour market situation.

The principal function of the labour market is to provide a channel for interaction between the forces of demand and supply and thereby determine the level of employment and wages in the economy. On the other hand, the level of labour demand is determined largely by economic factors notably, the growth in aggregate demand, the rate of investments, and the real wage rate. The level of labour supply, on the other hand, is determined largely by non-economic factors, notably, the rate of growth of the labour force which in turn depends on the growth of the population and the direction of career aspirations of the youth. Thus in a developing society like Ghana, there is always the tendency for labour supply to

exceed the demand unless deliberate policies are adopted to match the demand with the supply. ILO sources cited by ISSER (1994) estimate that the growth rate of Ghana's total labour force which in the 1980s averaged about 2.7% per annum will exceed 3% per annum in the 1990s, leading to an increase in the potential labour force to 7.7 million by the year 2000. This means that the rate of growth of new employment has to be accelerated to avoid a future of mass unemployment. Current trends indicate that growth in employment has not been able to keep pace with the growth in the labour force.

The agricultural sector remains the dominant source of employment for the Ghanaian worker (African Development Report 1994). However, as rightly pointed out by an ILO/JASPA (1989) report:

"Jobs in the agricultural and services sector have generally a low skill profile and are normally low-paying or non-paying. It goes without saying that such jobs do not correspond with the aspirations of the youth who enter the labour market, especially when they have undergone some degree of formal education" p52

Formal sector employment in Ghana grew steadily from 332,900 in 1960 to 483,500 in 1976 but declined reaching a low 186,300 in 1991. That is formal sector employment in 1991 was 44% less than in 1960. Following the same pattern, public sector employment and private sector employment declined by 17.9% and 79.2% respectively between 1960 and 1991. The poor employment performance of the Ghanaian economy in both the public and private sectors surely has profound implications for the career development and aspirations of the youth in the country.

Contrary to the employment failure in the formal sector, the informal sector expanded in its jobs generation from an estimated 2,694,000 to 5,686,000 – an increase of 111% - between 1960 and 1990. The Jobs Skills Programme for Africa (JASPA), a unit of the ILO in Africa, has indicated that in 1990 for every worker employed in the formal sector, there was five-and-a-half workers employed in the informal sector.

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Declining formal sector employment in the context of a rapidly expanding labour force may lead to a phenomenal increase in the rate of unemployment, all things being equal. Estimates of average unemployment rates indicate that unemployment rate has at least doubled since the 1960s, with the possibility for further increases, as a decrease in the absolute level of unemployment is not foreseeable in the immediate future (ISSER, 1995).

One of the major causes of the increasing unemployment in the Ghanaian economy, as pointed out by an ISSER (1994) report, is the problem of labour market mismatch. The supply of graduates per annum has outstripped the demand for such labour in the economy. In 1973 it was estimated that the ratio of modern sector job vacancies to new labour market entrants with secondary or higher education was 1.33, indicating that vacancies (the additional demand for educated labour) exceeded the number of new entrants (the additional supply of educated labour) by 33%. In 1993, the number of vacancies in the public service was estimated at 8,300 at the middle and higher management levels but actual employment was only 538 in that year compared with the 4500 new graduates expected to enter the labour force that year. Thus the ratio between effective demand (538 employed) and the supply (4500 new graduates) for 1993 was 12% compared with 133% in 1973.

Furthermore, there are serious gaps between the types of education and training being offered (as measured by enrolments or outputs of the various educational institutions) and the types of demand being made by the public sector and private businesses (ISSER, 2004). Apparently, this state of affairs is to some extent fostered and encouraged by the direction of students' career aspirations.

It is noteworthy that other causes of the unemployment problem in Ghana have been identified. These include the global economic recession, the impact of the structural adjustment policies, the redeployment exercise, low level of directly productive investment and demographic problems including high population growth rate and rural-urban population drift. In response to the rapidly increasing unemployment and the diminishing capacity of the public sector to offer employment, the government of

Ghana has had to encourage the private sector to expand to absorb the excess labour supply. Some NGOs have also sprung up to provide employment opportunities.

Against this background, the study tried to answer the following research questions.

1. What proportions of students aspire towards the various sectors of the economy?
2. To what extent do students' career aspirations towards the various sectors of the economy differ by demographic characteristics?
3. What proportions of students aspire towards employment in the various occupational environments in the economy?
4. To what extent do students' career aspirations towards the various occupational environments in the economy differ by demographic characteristic?

Methodology

Sample

The study was a national survey and in order to make the sample have a national representation, steps were taken through appropriate sampling procedures to ensure that students from different parts of the country were included.

A sample size of 2861 was obtained for the study from 22 Senior Secondary Schools through a multi-staged stratified random sampling. Out of the initial sample, 2340 produced valid and useable completed instruments. These participants consisted of 1075 (45.9%) males and 1265 (54.1%) females with a residential status composition of 1853 (79.2%) boarding and 487 (20.8%) day students.

The minimum age of respondents was 16 years with 25 years being the maximum. The mean age for the group was 18.2 with a standard deviation of 1.1. Of the 2340 participants, 1393 (59.6%) were from urban schools, 656 (28.0%) were from schools in small towns and 291 (12.4%)

from rural schools. On the basis of school-type, 1621 (69.2%) of the respondents were from mixed schools whilst 430 (18.4%) and 289 (12.4%) were from 'girls-only' and 'boys-only' schools respectively. The ethnic composition of the respondents was as follows: Ashantis (28.4%), Fantis (20.6%), Balsa/Frafra (22.2%), Gas (3.9%), Ewes (4.9%) and others (20.0%).

Instrument

One set of survey instrument was designed by the researcher to collect data from the sampled students. The instrument consisted of two parts. Part one contained twenty items that collected data on the demographic characteristics of respondents. Part two elicited information from students on their most preferred work after completing their education. They were also asked to indicate the sector of the economy they would like to work after completing their education. Respondents also indicated the sectors of the economy where their parents work.

Procedure

A pilot study was conducted at Ghana National College, Cape Coast with a sample size of 50 students. The sample which was chosen with a stratified random sampling method ensured that students of different categories (boys, girls, residential, non-residential, students from different academic programme areas) were included.

The pilot study helped to determine the clarity of the instrument, the problems to be encountered in the main administration, and the reliability of the instrument. It also helped to test the planned statistical methods for the data analyses.

In the main data collection, the questionnaire for students were hand-delivered to them by a research team made up of the researcher and six research assistants who were given some training in the questionnaire administration.

The administration of the questionnaire was done either in the classrooms of the students or the school's assembly hall. The selected students were asked to stay in their classrooms, where appropriate, or were organized in the school's assembly hall and the questionnaire given to them, and the purpose of the study was explained. There was a 93.2 per cent return rate of the questionnaires.

Data Analysis

The data analysed for the study were obtained from 2340 students in 22 senior secondary schools. The data were statistically analysed with the SPSS 10.0 format. Being a descriptive survey study, both descriptive as well as inferential statistics were used. Frequency distributions, percentages, and chi-square (χ^2) test of independence were used to analyse the data. Research questions 1 and 3 were analysed with frequencies and percentages while research questions 2 and 4 were analysed with percentages and chi-square test of independence.

The questionnaires returned from the field were first edited and some rejected for poor completion. The usable questionnaires were numbered and coded with the guidance of a coding manual prepared for that purpose.

Results

Sectors of the Economy and Students' Career Aspirations

Table 1 shows that government sector employment attracted the highest proportion (51.4%) of the respondents. This was followed by the private sector which had attraction for 29.2 percent of the respondents. Employment in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) was favoured by a substantial proportion (7.0%) of the respondents.

Table 1

Distribution of respondents by the sectors of the economy they aspire to work

Sector of Economy	Frequency	Percent
Government	1230	51.4
Private	683	29.2
NGO	163	7.0
Self-employment	222	9.5
Other sectors	69	2.9
Total	2340	100

Table 2 presents a comparison of the sectors of the economy students wish to work in future and the sectors where their parents work.

Table 2

Comparison between the proportions of students who wish to work in the various sectors of the economy and the proportion of parents who work in those sectors.

Sector of Economy	Students	Fathers	Mothers
	%	%	%
Government	51.4	39.6	21.7
Private	29.2	14.5	5.9
NGO	7.0	1.2	0.6
Self-employment	9.5	41.8	69.8
Other sectors	2.9	21.9	1.9

The majority (51.4%) of students aspire to work in the government sector whilst the bulk (41.8%) of their fathers was in self-employment. Chi-square (χ^2) of independence computation revealed that the relationship between the sectors of the economy where students wish to work and where their fathers were working was significant at the .05 level, $\chi^2 (16, 2340) = 75.313, p=.000$. A symmetric measure produced a contingency coefficient of .177 indicating just a slight relationship.

Table 2 also shows the sectors of the economy students aspire to work and the employment sectors of their mothers. While 69.8 percent of mothers were self-employed only 9.5 percent of their children desired to be self-employed. Private sector employment and work with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) were more popular with students than it was with their mothers. Computation of chi-square (χ^2) of independence between the sectors of the economy students wish to work and the sectors their mothers were engaged revealed that the relationship was not significant at the .05 level, $\chi^2 (16, n=2340) = 22.036, p=.142$. The calculation yielded a contingency coefficient of .097 indicating that the relationship was negligible.

The extent to which gender influences the aspirations of students towards the various sectors of the economy was investigated. Table 3 presents the descriptive.

Table 3

Distribution of respondents by sex and the sectors of the economy they aspire to work

Sector of the Economy	Sex		Total (n=2340) %
	Female (n= 1265) %	Male (n=1075) %	
Government	51.1	51.7	51.4
Private	30.3	27.9	29.2
NGO	6.1	8.0	7.0
Self-employment	9.5	9.5	9.5
Other sectors	3.0	2.9	2.9
Total	100	100	100

$$X^2(4, N=2340) = 4.809, p=0.307$$

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Statistics on the relationship between gender and the sectors of the economy students aspire to work.

The proportions of male and female students who indicated their desire to work in the specified sectors of the economy were strikingly equivalent. Chi-square (χ^2) test indicated that there was no significant difference in the aspirations of the students on the basis of their gender χ^2 (4, N=2340) = 4.809, p=0.307). Thus the wish to work in the various sectors of the economy is not dependent on gender.

The influence of school setting on students' aspirations to work in the various sectors of the economy was also examined. Table 4 presents the result.

Table 4
Distribution of respondents by school setting and the sectors of the economy they aspire to work

Sector of the Economy	School setting			Total % (n=2340)
	Urban % (n=1393)	Small town % (n=656)	Rural % (n=291)	
Government	42.1	62.3	71.1	51.4
Private	34.9	22.4	17.2	29.2
NGO	7.3	7.5	4.1	7.0
Self-employment	12.1	5.5	5.8	9.5
Other sectors	3.5	2.3	1.7	2.9
Total	100	100	100	100

$$\chi^2(8, N=2340) = 134.057, p = .000$$

As could be seen in Table 4 the proportion of students who had the desire to work in the government sector was highest among the rural students and decreased through small town students to urban students.

On the other hand, private sector employment attracted the highest proportion of students from the urban schools and this decreased through small town students to rural students. Chi-square (χ^2) computation showed that the differences in the proportions were significant at the 0.5 level, χ^2 (8, N=2340) =134.057, p=.000. This means that the desire to work in the various sectors of the economy varied by school setting. Employment in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) which is a more recent development was more popular with the urban and small town students than the rural students.

The type of school students attend (boys, girls or mixed) appears to have some influence on their desire to work in specific sectors of the economy. The data on this is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by school type and the sector of the economy they aspire to work

Sector of the Economy	School Type			Total %
	Mixed % (n=1621)	Boys % (n=289)	Girls % (n=430)	
Government	58.2	36.3	36.0	51.4
Private	24.9	40.8	37.4	29.2
NGO	6.4	5.9	9.8	7.0
Self-employment	8.0	11.4	13.7	9.5
Other sectors	2.5	5.5	3.0	2.9
Total	100	100	100	100

$\chi^2(8, N=2340) = 107.327, p = .000$

As seen from Table 5 government sector employment was much favoured by students in mixed schools with 58.2 percent of them choosing that option. Students in 'boys only' schools most preferred private sector employment whilst students in 'girls only' schools relatively preferred NGO and self-employment. The difference in the proportion of students

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in the different school types as indicated by their desire to work in the different sectors of the economy was significant at the 0.05 level $\chi^2(8, N = 2340) = 107.327, p=.000$ (Table 5).

Table 6 also depicts the frequency distribution of the preferences of the students categorized by the size of the communities where they usually resided and sectors of the economy they wished to work. The majority (60.5%) of the students who usually resided in rural areas preferred to work in the government sector and this proportion exceeded the proportions of students from either the small town or the urban communities who wished to work in the government sector.

Table 6: Distribution of respondents by their usual places of residence and the sectors of the economy they aspire to work

Sector of the Economy	Usual Place of Residence			Total %
	Urban % (n=877)	Small town % (n=911)	Rural % (n=552)	
Government	40.8	56.1	60.5	51.4
Private	38.05	25.0	21.2	29.2
NGO	5.9	7.8	7.2	7.0
Self-employment	12.5	8.0	7.1	9.5
Other sectors	2.2	3.1	4.0	2.9
Total	100	100	100	100

$$\chi^2(8, N=2340) = 95.985, p=0.000$$

In proportionate terms students who usually resided in the urban areas were interested in private sector and self-employment more than their counterparts in either the small towns or the rural areas. Employment with NGOs was more popular with students from small town and rural areas. Aspiration to work in the various sectors of the economy varied by the places they usually resided, $\chi^2(8, N=2340) = 95.985, p=0.000$.

In Table 7 is presented the frequency and percentage distribution of students by their academic programmes and the sectors of the economy they wish to work in.

Table 7: Distribution of Respondents by their Academic Programmes and the Sectors of the Economy they Aspire to Work In

Sector of the economy	Academic Programme			
	Voc/Tech % (N=504)	Business % (n=472)	Arts % (n=870)	Science/ Agric % (n=491)
Government	42.7	50.0	58.0	50.3
Private	29.6	34.7	24.2	32.2
NGO	5.6	6.8	8.6	5.7
Self-employment	18.7	5.7	6.4	9.2
Other sectors	3.6	2.8	2.9	2.6
Total	100	100	100	100

$$\chi^2 (12, N = 2340) = 95.762, P = .000$$

By proportion, Arts (58.0%) students found government sector employment more favourable than students in the other programme areas did. Whereas government sector employment was the least popular with Vocational-technical students, they found self-employment more attractive than students in the other programme areas did. Relatively, Business students had higher proportions from their group expressing interest in private sector employment than the other students. Chi-square (χ^2) computation revealed that aspiration to work in the various sectors of the economy differed by the academic programmes of students, $\chi^2 (12, N = 2340) = 95.762, P = .000$

Table 8 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the respondents by their ethnic background and the sectors of the economy they aspire to work in.

Table 8: Distribution of Respondents by their Ethnic Groups and the Sectors of the Economy they aspire to Work In

Ethnic Group				
Sector of the economy	Fanti % (n=483)	Ashanti % (n=665)	Bulsa/Frafra % (n=519)	Others % (n=673)
Government	48.4	51.6	58.2	48.1
Private	32.3	31.1	18.3	33.4
NGO	6.2	4.5	13.1	5.2
Self-employment	10.6	11.4	5.2	10.1
Other sectors	2.5	1.4	5.2	3.1
Total	100	100	100	100

$$\chi^2 (12, N=2340) = 100.390, p = .000$$

As seen in Table 8, the proportion of students from the Bulsa/Frafra ethnic group interested in government sector and NGO employment were higher than the proportions from any other ethnic groups. Government sector employment had the least attraction for Fantis, who rather dominated the other ethnic groups in expressing interest in private sector employment. Self-employment was more popular with Ashanti (11.4%) and Fanti (10.0%) students. Aspirations among the students towards specific sectors of the economy varied by their ethnic background, $\chi^2 (12, N=2340) = 100.390, p = .000$.

Occupational Aspiration and Work Environments in the Economy

The direction of students' occupational aspirations with reference to the six work environments postulated by Holland was investigated. Besides the general pattern of students' aspirations in the various work environments, three variables of interest on this theme were gender, the size of community where respondents usually resided and their ethnic background.

Table 9 shows the frequency distribution of students by the work environments they wish to work in after their education. Enterprising work environment had attraction for the largest proportion of respondents (32.5%). This was followed by the social (20.6%) and investigative (20.1%) work environments in order of popularity. The differences in students' preferences for the various work environments were significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 9: Distribution of respondents by their preferred occupational environments

Occupational Environment	Frequency	Percent
Realistic	188	8.0
Artistic	257	10.5
Enterprising	805	32.5
Investigative	518	20.1
Social	483	20.6
Conventional	89	3.5
Others	39	4.7
Total	2340	100

$$\chi^2 (6, N=2340) = 1090.999, p=0.000$$

With reference to gender, female students had greater attraction to artistic and social work environment than their male counterparts (Table 10). The male students on the other hand favoured the enterprising, investigative and realistic work environment than the female students. Interest among the conventional work environment was almost at par. Chi-square (χ^2) test showed that attraction to the various work environments varied by gender, $\chi^2 (6, N = 2310) = 208.432, P = .000$.

Table 10: Distribution of respondents by gender and their preferred occupational environment

Occupational Environment	Female % (n=1265)	Male % (n=1075)	Total % (n=2340)
Realistic	4.5	12.2	8.0
Artistic	13.5	6.9	10.5
Enterprising	30.5	34.8	32.5
Investigative	13.9	27.4	20.1
Social	28.1	11.9	20.6
Conventional	3.4	3.7	3.5
Total	100	100	100

$$\chi^2 (5, N=2310) = 208.432, p=0.000$$

The size of community where students usually resided also related significantly to their preferred work environment (Table 11). Relatively higher proportions of students who usually resided in urban areas showed more interest in enterprising, artistic and conventional work environments than their counterparts in the other two settlements. Students resident in small towns were slightly ahead of the urban and rural students, in relative proportions, in expressing interest in investigative work environment.

Rural students, on the other hand, stood out among their other counterparts in indicating their desire to work in social and realistic work environments. Chi-square (χ^2) test revealed significant difference in the aspirations of the students from the different communities,

Table 11

Distribution of respondents by the size of the settlement where they usually reside and their preferred occupational environment

	Urban %	Small towns %	Rural %	Total %
Occupational Environment	(n=877)	(n=911)	(n=552)	(n=2340)
Realistic	7.6	8.1	8.3	8.0
Artistic	12.3	10.4	7.6	10.5
Enterprising	36.7	31.7	27.0	32.5
Investigative	19.4	21.5	19.0	20.1
Social	14.0	21.3	30.1	20.6
Conventional	5.0	2.2	3.4	3.5
Total	100	100	100	100

$$\chi^2 (10, N=2310) = 71.704, p=0.000$$

Among the ethnic groups, there were significant variations in student's aspirations to work in the various work environments. The first two ethnic groups with the largest proportion showing interest in the various work environments were as follows: Realistic: Ewes (11.4%) and Bulsa/Frafra (8.9%); Artistic: Ashantis (12.6%) and Fantis (11.4%); Enterprising: Gas (38.5%) and Ashantis (35.2%); Investigative: Brongs (28.6%) and Gas (25.3%); Social: Bulsa/Frafra (32.2%) and Fantis (21.1%); Conventional: Fantis (6.2%) and Ewes (5.3%). The variations in the aspirations of the students in their ethnic groups were significant at the 0.05 level of significance, $\chi^2 (42, N=2310) = 115.953, p=0.000$.

Discussion and Implications

Public sector employment had attraction for students more than any other sector. This is not surprising because as the literature revealed, public sector employment has been the career destination of a large proportion of the educated youth in African countries, including Ghana, for the past several years. The decision of majority of the respondents to choose the public sector as their most preferred career destination may well have been influenced by what they know about the employment trend in Ghana. Unfortunately, as stated elsewhere in the literature review, formal sector employment in Ghana has been declining steadily since 1976 ILO/JASPA (1989) due to the declining economy. While the labour

market has about 230,000 new job seekers every year, the formal sector can absorb just about 2% of these new entrants (ISSER, 2004). The implication of this is that some of the youth could face frustration if they should maintain their aspiration of working in the public sector after their education.

The proportion of the respondents who had the aspiration to work in the private sector was substantial and quite encouraging. The current policy of the government of Ghana is to stimulate the expansion of the private sector to serve as the engine of growth to the economy. The indication that a substantial proportion of the potential labour force is interested in working with the private sector gives some hope for a successful government policy.

It is interesting to note that no relationship existed between the sectors of the economy where students aspire to work and where their parents were employed. This is consistent with a finding in Ocansey (2005) in respect of the relationship between students' occupational aspirations and their parents' occupations. It is also consistent with the findings of Forster (1970) and Roe and Lunneborg (1990). Ocansey's study (2005) indicated that generally secondary school students hope to acquire education at a higher level than their parents. Thus with better education than their parents, the respondents hope to break from their parents' careers and enter their own preferred sectors of the economy.

The study revealed no significant difference between the sectors of the economy the male and female students wished to work after their education. Even though the details of students' occupational aspirations showed some differences (Ocansey, 2005) this was not the case when they were asked to indicate the sectors of the economy they would like to work. The apparent bridging of the traditional gap between the career interest of the male and female youth could probably be attributed to the influence of feminist movement and gender advocates who have been encouraging women to see themselves as equal to men in their educational and career pursuits.

Differences were reported in the preferences of students in respect of the sectors of the economy they wish to work based on their school setting.

This result was strikingly similar to the results obtained when the responses of students were categorized according to the places they usually resided. The desire to work in government sector employment which is mainly found in urban centers in Ghana, was strongest among rural students. This is not surprising because in Ghana most people see education as a means by which the less privilege rural dwellers can improve their lot by gaining employment in the formal sector and thereby migrating to the urban centers (ILO/JASPA, 1989, Gould, 1993). Interestingly, students who resided in urban areas seemed to have the view that self-employment or private employment is more lucrative than government sector employment and therefore more preferable.

The differences found between the sectors of the economy students wish to work on the basis of their school type, academic programmes and ethnic groups are intriguing. These findings should be of interest to Counsellors, Guidance Coordinators and Occupational Psychologists. Since there seems to be a dearth of information from other studies to support these findings, further research in these areas may be appropriate.

The proportion of students aspiring to enterprising work environment was greater than those of all other work environments. This is contrary to the finding among African Americans most of whom were found to be interested in realistic jobs (Miller, Springer and Wells, 1988; Arbona, 1989). In Ghana, the current emphasis in the economic planning paradigm is the encouragement of entrepreneurship and private sector development. It is, perhaps, a good signal for the future of the economy that a large proportion of the youth wishes to be in the enterprising work environment. The challenge to human resource development officers, school guidance coordinators and educational planners is to guide the aspirations of the youth into the private sector and to moderate their interest in public sector employment.

The interest of student respondents in social work environment was also quite high and attracted a proportion that came only next after enterprising work environment. This compares favourably with the pattern found among African-Americans (Miller, Springer and Well, 1988). The specific proportion of the African-American respondents

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interested in the social work environment was, however, not reported. In the current study, the investigative work environment attracted the second highest proportion of respondents. Agencies and professionals responsible for human resource development and planning in Ghana should be interested in the preferred work environments of the youth as these have implications for the future of the economy.

It is fascinating to note those students' preferences for work environment varied by gender, the size of the community where they usually resided, and their ethnic background. It will be interesting to investigate to adduce the factors that account for these differences. Meanwhile, it may well be that the influence of some traditional stereotyping could account for some of the variations. As revealed in the study, the male students demonstrated greater interest in the enterprising and investigative work environments than their female counterparts while the opposite was true for social and artistic work environments. This is consistent with the trend in traditional gender work preferences found by earlier researchers like Foster (1970), Reis (1987), and Shapiro and Crowley (1982).

The greater interest shown by urban students in enterprising and artistic work environments than their other colleagues could also be the effect of environmental factors. The impact of the emerging industrialization and commercialization of the Ghanaian economy as well as the booming artistic industry (fashions, music, and entertainment) are more likely to be greatly felt by students in the urban centres than those in the rural areas. On the other hand, students from rural areas with low socio-economic background are more likely to be attracted to social work like teaching (especially at the basic school level) which commands some prestige in the rural areas.

Ashantis are generally perceived as traditionally enterprising; it is therefore not surprising that Ashanti students showed up strongly in demonstrating interest in enterprising work environment. Gas are predominantly urban dwellers, thus the commercial and industrial environment in Accra may have influenced the preferences of the Gas students to be interested in enterprising work.

It is noteworthy that Ashanti students indicated greater interest in Artistic work (Music, Acting, Fashion design) more than any other group. They

were followed closely by the Fantis who apparently have traditionally dominated the Artistic profession. Other striking results were the strong showing of Ewes and Northerners (Bulsa/fracra) in realistic work and the Brongs and Gas in investigative professions. Further studies are needed on these findings since there appears to be no earlier studies to corroborate these results.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned limitation, it could safely be concluded that the findings revealed and discussed in this report provide clear indications of the need for career counselors and human resource development officers to take cognizance of the demographic characteristics of the youth when planning career guidance programmes for them. The results of this study also underscore the relevance of Holland's theory in examining the patterns of career aspirations of the youth in Ghana.

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