

Vocational Maturity and Career Aspirations Among Adolescents: A Comparative Study of Government and Private School Students

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Abstract

Vocational maturity and career aspirations are crucial components of adolescent development, influencing educational choices, employability, and long-term socioeconomic outcomes. Adolescence is a formative stage during which individuals begin to understand their interests, abilities, and future occupational roles. The present study aims to examine vocational maturity and career aspirations among adolescents and to compare these variables across types of institutions, namely government and private schools. A descriptive-comparative research design was adopted. The sample consisted of 600 adolescents (300 from government schools and 300 from private schools) aged between 14 and 18 years. Standardized tools, including the Vocational Maturity Inventory and the Career Aspiration Scale, were used for data collection. Statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation, t-test, and graphical representations were employed for data analysis. The findings revealed significant differences between government and private school students in terms of vocational maturity and career aspirations, with private school students showing higher levels on both dimensions. The study highlights the role of institutional environment, availability of career guidance, and socioeconomic background in shaping adolescents' vocational development. The findings have important implications for educational planners, school administrators, and policymakers to strengthen vocational guidance and career counseling services, particularly in government schools.

Keywords: Vocational Maturity, Career Aspirations, Adolescents, Government Schools, Private Schools

Introduction

Adolescence represents a crucial transitional phase in human development, characterized by rapid physical growth, cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, and evolving social roles. It is during this period that individuals begin to explore their identities, form value systems, and develop aspirations for the future. Among the most significant developmental tasks of adolescence is career development, which involves understanding personal abilities, interests, and values, as well as acquiring information about educational and occupational opportunities. The manner in which adolescents navigate this process has long-term implications for their educational attainment, occupational success, economic stability, and overall life satisfaction. Two key constructs that play a pivotal role in this process are vocational maturity and career aspirations.

Vocational maturity refers to an individual's readiness to make informed and age-appropriate vocational decisions. It encompasses self-awareness, occupational knowledge, decision-making competence, planning ability, and realistic goal setting. Adolescents who demonstrate higher levels of vocational maturity are better equipped to explore career alternatives, align their choices with their capabilities, and adapt to changing career demands. In contrast, low vocational maturity may result in confusion, unrealistic expectations, poor career decisions, and eventual dissatisfaction with chosen educational or occupational pathways. Therefore, understanding vocational maturity during adolescence is essential for promoting effective career development and smooth transitions from school to work.

Career aspirations, closely related to vocational maturity, represent the occupational goals and ambitions individuals hold for their future. These aspirations reflect not only personal interests and abilities but also the influence of family background, peer groups, cultural values, socioeconomic conditions, and institutional environments. Career aspirations shape motivation, academic engagement, persistence in education, and willingness to overcome obstacles. Adolescents with clear and realistic career aspirations tend to exhibit higher academic motivation and better psychological adjustment, while vague or unrealistic aspirations may hinder personal and professional growth. Thus, career aspirations serve as both an outcome of vocational development and a driving force behind future achievement.

In the contemporary global context, career development has become increasingly complex. Rapid technological advancements, globalization, automation, and shifts in labor market demands have transformed the nature of work. Traditional linear career paths are being replaced by dynamic, flexible, and often uncertain trajectories. As a result, adolescents are required to develop not only specific career goals but also transferable skills, adaptability, and lifelong learning orientations. In such a scenario, vocational maturity and career aspirations gain even greater importance, as they enable individuals to navigate uncertainty and make informed choices in a changing world of work.

Schools play a central role in shaping adolescents' vocational development. As formal institutions of learning, schools provide academic knowledge, socialization experiences, and exposure to career-related information. The school environment influences students' self-concept, academic self-efficacy, decision-making skills, and future orientation. Importantly, the type of school—government or private—often determines the quality and extent of resources available for career development. Differences in infrastructure, teacher-student ratios, curriculum enrichment, extracurricular opportunities, and access to career guidance services may significantly affect students' vocational maturity and career aspirations.

In many developing societies, including India, the education system is characterized by a dual structure comprising government and private schools. Government schools primarily serve students from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds and are often constrained by limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient guidance services. Despite policy initiatives aimed at improving quality, government schools frequently struggle to provide systematic career counseling and vocational exposure. Consequently, students in these institutions may lack adequate information about career options, higher education pathways, and skill development opportunities.

Private schools, on the other hand, generally cater to students from relatively higher socioeconomic backgrounds and often emphasize academic excellence, competitive examinations, and professional career pathways. These schools are more likely to offer structured career guidance programs, counseling services, aptitude testing, career fairs, and interactions with professionals. The exposure provided in private schools may enhance students' awareness of diverse career options and foster higher aspirations and better vocational preparedness. However, this advantage also raises concerns about inequality, as access to quality career development resources becomes closely tied to institutional type and socioeconomic status.

The disparities between government and private schools extend beyond academic achievement to psychosocial and developmental outcomes, including career readiness. Adolescents studying in different institutional contexts may differ significantly in terms of vocational maturity and career aspirations due to variations in parental education, peer influence, school culture, and institutional support. While some students may receive guidance and encouragement to pursue ambitious and well-informed career goals, others may be compelled to limit their aspirations due to lack of information, financial constraints, or social expectations. These disparities highlight the need for systematic research examining how institutional factors influence vocational development.

Previous research in the field of career psychology has established that vocational maturity is influenced by multiple factors such as age, gender, intelligence, academic achievement, socioeconomic status, parental support, and educational environment. Similarly, career aspirations are shaped by cultural norms, family expectations, role models, media exposure, and school experiences. However, empirical studies that simultaneously examine vocational maturity and career aspirations in relation to school type remain limited, particularly in the Indian context. Most existing studies focus either on academic outcomes or on general career awareness, leaving a gap in understanding the comprehensive vocational development of adolescents across institutional settings.

Furthermore, adolescence is a period marked by heightened sensitivity to social comparison and external validation. Students often evaluate their abilities and aspirations relative to peers, teachers, and societal expectations. In private schools, competitive academic environments and exposure to high-achieving peers may elevate aspirations and promote early career planning. In contrast, students in government schools may face structural and psychological barriers that limit their vocational exploration and confidence. These differences underscore the importance of examining vocational maturity and career aspirations through a comparative institutional lens.

From a policy and practice perspective, understanding institutional differences in vocational development is essential for promoting equity in education and employment opportunities. If significant disparities exist between government and private school students, targeted interventions can be designed to strengthen career guidance services in under-resourced schools. Such interventions may include teacher training, career counseling programs, exposure to vocational and skill-based education, partnerships with industry, and parental involvement initiatives. Addressing these gaps can help ensure that all adolescents, regardless of institutional affiliation, have the opportunity to develop realistic, informed, and fulfilling career paths.

Review of Literature

Vocational maturity has been widely studied as a key indicator of career readiness. Super's theory of career development emphasizes that vocational maturity involves the successful completion of career development tasks appropriate to one's developmental stage. Adolescents with higher vocational maturity are better equipped to explore career options, set realistic goals, and make informed decisions.

Several studies have found that vocational maturity is influenced by factors such as socioeconomic status, parental education, school environment, and access to career guidance. Research indicates that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to display greater vocational maturity due to better exposure to occupational information and parental support.

Career aspirations are equally important in shaping future outcomes. Aspirations influence educational attainment, motivation, and persistence. Studies suggest that adolescents studying in private schools often report higher and more defined career aspirations compared to those in government schools. This difference has been attributed to better academic support, role models, and institutional encouragement in private schools.

Comparative studies between government and private schools have highlighted significant disparities in academic achievement, self-concept, and career planning. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research focusing simultaneously on vocational maturity and career aspirations among adolescents across institutional types. The present study seeks to address this research gap.

Objective of the study

1. To compare vocational maturity among adolescents studying in government and private schools.
2. To compare career aspirations among adolescents studying in government and private schools.

Research methodology

Research Design

The present investigation adopted a descriptive comparative research design to study differences in vocational maturity and career aspirations among adolescents studying in government and private schools.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of adolescents studying at the secondary level. A total sample of 120 students aged 14–18 years was selected using random sampling technique. The sample was equally divided based on type of institution.

Type of Institution	Number of Students
Government Schools	60
Private Schools	60
Total	120

Tools Used

1. **Vocational Maturity Inventory (VMI)** – to measure adolescents' readiness for career decision-making.
2. **Career Aspiration Scale (CAS)** – to assess clarity and level of occupational aspirations.
3. **Personal Data Sheet** – to collect background information.

Procedure

Prior permission was obtained from the school authorities. The investigator administered the tools to students in group settings during school hours. Clear instructions were given, and confidentiality of responses was assured.

Statistical Techniques Used

- Mean
- Standard Deviation
- Independent samples *t*-test

Results Analysis

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Vocational Maturity Scores

Type of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Government Schools	60	141.28	17.36
Private Schools	60	154.72	15.14

Table 2: *t*-test Showing Difference in Vocational Maturity

Groups Compared	Mean Difference	<i>t</i> -value	Level of Significance
Government vs Private	13.44	4.52	Significant at 0.01 level

The mean score of vocational maturity for private school students (154.72) is higher than that of government school students (141.28). The obtained *t*-value (4.52) is significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups. This result shows that adolescents studying in private schools possess higher vocational maturity compared to their counterparts in government schools.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Career Aspiration Scores

Type of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Government Schools	60	64.18	8.92
Private Schools	60	73.65	7.48

Table 4: *t*-test Showing Difference in Career Aspirations

Groups Compared	Mean Difference	<i>t</i> -value	Level of Significance
Government vs Private	9.47	5.86	Significant at 0.01 level

The results indicate that private school students have significantly higher career aspiration scores than government school students. The calculated *t*-value (5.86) is significant at the 0.01 level, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This suggests that the institutional environment plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' career goals and ambitions.

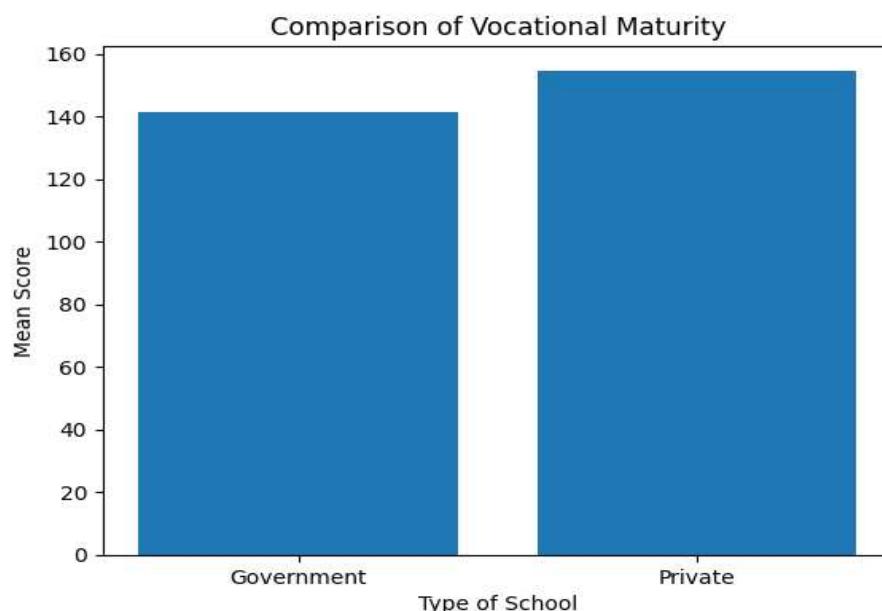


Figure 1 shows that the mean vocational maturity score of private school students is higher than that of government school students, indicating better vocational readiness.

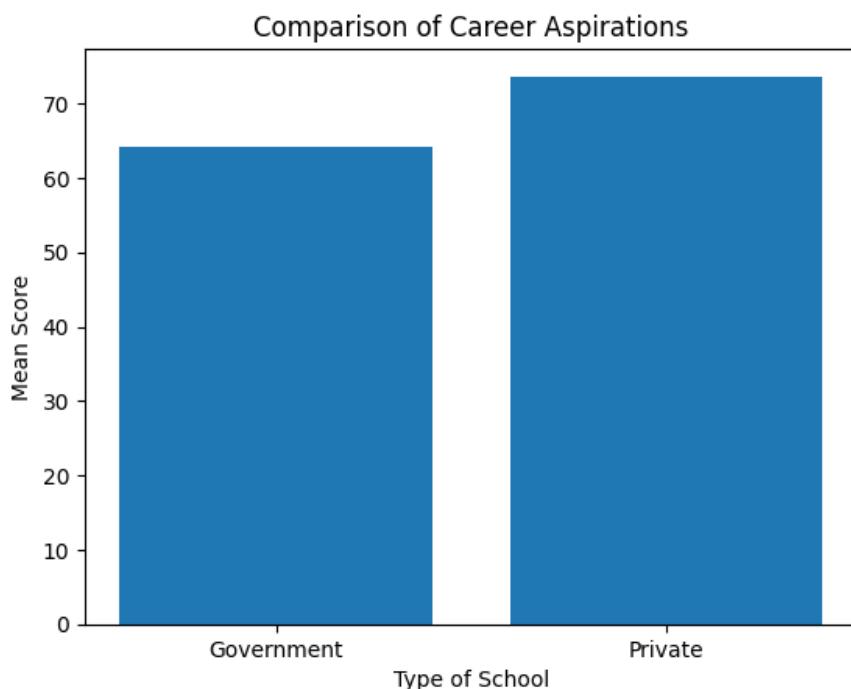


Figure 2 depicts that private school students have higher career aspiration scores compared to government school students

Discussion

The findings of the present study reveal significant differences in vocational maturity and career aspirations among adolescents studying in government and private schools. Private school students demonstrated higher levels of vocational maturity, indicating greater readiness for career decision-making, planning, and awareness of occupational options. This difference may be attributed to better institutional support, availability of career guidance services, exposure to competitive academic environments, and greater parental involvement commonly associated with private schools. In contrast, government school students may experience limited access to structured career counselling and fewer opportunities for vocational exploration, which can affect their vocational development.

Similarly, career aspiration scores were found to be significantly higher among private school adolescents. This suggests that the school environment plays an important role in shaping students' occupational goals and future orientation. The findings support earlier research indicating that institutional context and resource availability influence adolescents' career-related attitudes and aspirations.

Conclusion

The study concludes that type of institution has a significant influence on vocational maturity and career aspirations among adolescents. Private school students exhibit higher vocational readiness and clearer career aspirations compared to government school students. These results highlight the need to strengthen career guidance and vocational development programs in government schools to promote equitable career opportunities. Early and systematic career interventions can help adolescents make informed and realistic career choices, thereby contributing to their long-term educational and occupational success.

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