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Educational aspiration and the standing of academic achievement in the value system of school-going adolescents in Shashemene town, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Educational aspiration plays an important role in terms of both reinforcing and discouraging future academic achievement of students. The present research aimed at assessing the level of educational aspiration of school-going adolescents in selected primary schools of Shashemene town, Ethiopia. Using the survey method, quantitative data were collected by self-administered questionnaires from randomly selected 500 grade 8 students. Data were entered into SPSS version 20 and both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used for data presentation. It was found that 97.5% of respondents reported having planned to directly join secondary schools after completing 8th grade and 85.8% of them aspire to join higher education in the future. Results of correlation statistics revealed that educational aspiration is associated with age and academic performance of students. In addition, coefficients of regression analysis showed that age (0.184, 0.000) and academic performance (0.153, 0.001) of students significantly determine what the students intend to pursue after completing 8th grade under circumstances in which they are free to decide without external influence. Above all, students' aspiration to join higher educational institutions has been found to be significantly associated with the age (0.168, 0.000) of the students. School-going adolescents in the study area were found to have a very high level of educational aspiration. Converting such potential into an opportunity for Ethiopia's future development requires family, school, and government institutions to provide the necessary support to the students.

Keywords: Educational aspiration, Adolescents, Value of education, Academic achievement

Introduction

Education is the best investment for the people because the well-educated ones have more opportunities to get a job which gives them satisfaction (Fazilah et al., 2012). People sacrifice their time and money and sometimes even their health to raise educational level because they realize that education is their pathway to their future. Education helps to arouse and develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him/her both by the political society as a whole and by the specific environment for which s/he is particularly destined (Durkheim, 1992). Higher levels of educations are associated with higher income, a more prestigious career, lower risk of unemployment and an improved well-being (Pawel, 2011). The choice of education as the best alternative to individuals' upward social mobility is scarce in countries like Ethiopia.

Educational aspiration and its predictors has always been a topic of interest among sociologists, psychologists and economists for long. The theory of status attainment remained the dominant sociological explanations in which aspiration has been treated as a cognitive state that motivates young people to strive for an academic success (Khoo and Ainsley, 2005). Parents have been considered as 'significant others' playing the role of shaping aspirations in terms of providing opportunities, encouragement, and the necessary support for their children's learning. Economic theories, on the other hand, viewed educational aspirations as a purely rational assessment of pupils' economic and social circumstances (Buchanan, 1965).

Mateju and Smith (2008) undertook a study on "The perceived value of education and educational aspirations in the Czech republic" and found that the perceived importance of higher education for life success has dramatically increased following society's socio-economic structural transformation. They have also reported that pupils' educational aspiration is determined by parent's socio-economic background and ability and sex of children. Coleman (1961), on the other hand, found a low standing of academic achievements in the value system of adolescents. The low standing of academic achievement in the adolescent's value system is corroborated for both boys and girls by the questions about what it takes to belong to the leading crowd and what it takes to be popular; a good deal of the energies of those who could get high grades are distracted into non-scholastic activities. This implies that there are contradictory findings of research on educational aspirations of adolescents not only in various social settings but also across varied study periods.

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The period of 1990s can be considered as a turning point in terms of providing an equal access to education for most segments of the society in Ethiopia (Tassew and Mesele, 2016). The current generation of Ethiopian youth is the first to receive access to primary education on a wide scale (Kerilyn and Sonja, 2018). Despite a remarkable achievement Ethiopia made in expanding access to universal education over the last two decades, dropout rates are high, with only about half of young people completing grade 5, and the enrolment rate in upper-secondary school is still in single digits due to lagging investment in secondary schools (Jones et al., 2019).

Most studies undertaken on the topic of adolescence in Ethiopia mainly emphasize on issues related to the exposure of adolescents to reproductive health risks (Busi and Chea, 2017; Zenebu et al., 2015; Nicola et al., 2014). The topic of adolescents' value of educational achievements in general and educational aspiration in particular, in Ethiopia, has not yet been adequately researched. The few available researches are those published on the basis of data extracted from Young Lives longitudinal research project (Jones et al., 2019; Yisak and Tassew, 2012; Yisak, 2010). In addition, Asrat (2017) researched the relationship between students' attitude towards school, values of education, achievement, motivation and academic achievement in secondary schools of Gonder town of Ethiopia and found that students have positive attitude towards school and that there is a positive relationship between students' attitude towards school, values of education, and academic achievements. His study, however, mainly targeted on finding association among attitude towards school, value of education, and motivation, on one hand and students' academic achievement, on the other hand. Moreover, Bernard et al. (2019) conducted an experimental study on Parental Aspirations for Children's Education in rural Ethiopia and found high educational aspirations of parents for children but biased against girls.

Despite economic recovery, unemployment remains high, and youths are more likely to be unemployed than adults around the world. On one hand, youths are staying longer in education, and thus human capital is increasing. On the other hand, young people face significant challenges in finding employment and unemployment once again on the rise; then employment quality is a major concern (ILO, 2017). Hence, there is a reasonable premise to anticipate that such scenarios may influence adolescents' educational aspiration and the long-held value system towards considering education as the best avenue to lift oneself upward on the success ladder. A slight calculation on the economic returns of investing on further education, added to the current

politics surrounding Ethiopian education, may also affect both students' and their parents' value system. The aim of the present research was, therefore, exploring educational aspiration and the perceived importance of education in the value system of school-going adolescents in Shashemene town, Ethiopia.

Materials and methods

Study area

Shashemene is a town in West Arsi Zone, Oromia Region, Ethiopia. "Shashemene" refers to an area of 759.53 km² in the large Oromia Region approximately 160 miles south of Addis Ababa between the rivers Malcoda and Shashamane (Campbell, 2007). There are about 40 public and private schools, 15 private higher education institutions, and one public vocational school in the town. In addition, the town is surrounded by various public Universities, the most proximate ones being Hawassa, Madawalabu, and Arsi Universities. The major sources of livelihood for the town are small business, informal trade, civil service employment, brokers and handcrafts, such as carpentry, pottery and metal works. There is more in-migration than out-migration in Shashemene. Several thousand people from different parts of the country are reported to have migrated to Shashemene on an annual basis. More than 83 percent of people in the community claim that they were born out of the area (Yisak et al., 2006). The urban communities have been hosting both seasonal/short-term and permanent/long-term migrants mainly from different ethnic groups to the south that include Wolayita, Kembata, Hadiya, Dawro, Gamo, Gofa, Sidama, as well as Gurage and Oromo ethnic groups. The most common reasons mentioned by seasonal, male and adult migrants are shortage of land, landlessness, rural destitution, land tax and debts from agricultural inputs. Above all, the town is also known for hosting foreigners, especially those who were originally from Jamaica whom are commonly known as the "Rasteferians" although most are recently leaving the area and moving to Harar town. Shashemene, being a major urban area, located along main roads and commercial routes with high prevalence of commercial sex workers, is known by high heterosexual HIV transmission. The number of orphans as a result of the spread of HIV/AIDS is growing and worsening the social and economic situation of children in the town.

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Research design

Institutional based cross-sectional study was undertaken in which both descriptive and explanatory research designs were employed. Using quantitative research approach, the present study involves the collection of numerical data from a sample of school-going adolescents pertaining to educational aspiration and the place of academic achievement in the value system of the research participants.

Data collection methods

Quantitative data were collected using survey research method through distributing a structured and self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was adopted from Mateju and Smith (2008) and Colemen (1961), contextualized and translated into two local languages (Amharic and Afan Oromo). Then, it was given to two language editors both of whom teach at Wolaita Sodo University. After incorporating the feedbacks, the questionnaires were duplicated with a 10% contingency of error copies and pre-tested. A one day orientation was provided to data collectors regarding the purpose of the research, the variables in the questionnaire, and the procedure to be followed during data collection. A cooperation letter was secured from the concerned body of Wolaita Sodo University. After obtaining permission from the principals of respective schools, school principals and vice directors, unit leaders, and home room teachers were very briefly oriented about the research and why data collectors are there in the schools. Selected classrooms were identified with the help of the above stakeholders, students were contacted in their respective classrooms, and the questionnaires were distributed to randomly selected students who were voluntary to fill the questionnaire. In order to maintain the quality of the data, students were briefly oriented about the research, their role in the process, the content and themes of the questionnaire, and how they are supposed to answer the questions. Above all, data collectors guided and followed-up the respondents during the entire processes of data gathering.

Dependent and independent variables

Dependent variables

The dependent variable in this study is educational aspiration of adolescents and the place of education in their value system. The variables were measured on the basis of questions such as:

"What would you decide to do when you finish 8th grade?" with response categories of 1- "I will directly join high school," 2- "I will start making money," 3- "I will join vocational education". The other question was: "Try to imagine for a moment that you will be deciding by yourself with no one influencing you; what would you decide to do when you finish the 8th grade?" with response alternatives of 1- "I will directly join high school," 2- "I will start making money," 3- "I will join vocational education". In addition, respondents were also asked the question: "In order to achieve my dream, I will join University/college in the future" with response categories of 1- "Yes," 2- "No" and 3- "uncertain (didn't decide)". Moreover, students were asked: what is the most important thing you want to be famous for in this school?" with response categories of "outstanding student", "athletics", "leadership in school activities", "beauty", "Might", "others". Furthermore, the place of education in the value system of adolescents was measured by asking survey participants additional questions such as: "How important are the following things for a person to be successful in life?" and respondents were given various alternatives, including: "reaching at the highest academic level", "knowing how and where to make money", "belonging to a certain ethnic group", and "getting involved in politics". Above all, adolescents' educational aspiration was measured on a five point Likert scale with responses ranging from 5= "Strongly Agree" to 1= "Strongly Disagree". In this case, adolescents were provided with statements: "My future depends on my education", "In order to achieve my dream, I will join University/college", and "I will successfully graduate from University or college".

Independent variables

Educational aspiration of adolescents was tested against various independent (socio-demographic) variables to analyze if the former is associated to any of the latter. The independent variables in the present study were 1) Sex which was measured as being either "male" or "female", 2) Age measured in the number of years a respondent lived since birth: "10-15", "16-20", "21-25", "26-30", "31-35", "36-40", "41-45", "46-50", "51 and above", 3) Religion with response categories of "Orthodox Christian", "Muslim", "Protestant", "Catholic", "Atheist", "others", 4) Academic performance which was measured on the academic rank a student stood in the class as "1-3", "4-6", "7-10", "11-13", "14-16", "17-19", 20-23", "24-27", "28-30", "31-33", "34-37"…."44 and above", 5) Father's educational status having a response categories of "never attended school", "1-8", "9-12", "10+3", "BA/Sc", "MA/Sc", "PhD", 6) Mother's education having the same response categories with "father's education mentioned

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above, and 7) Current marital status of respondents' parents with "still in wedlock", "divorced", "widowed", and "separated but not divorced".

Sample size and sampling procedure

The source population of the current research is all school-going adolescents learning in 40 primary (second cycle) (grade 5-8) schools of Shashemene town during the period of data collection (November, 2019). The exact number of students in those schools couldn't be found on a request of the town's education bureau. But rough estimation of officers in the bureau indicate that there are over 40,000 students learning at various grade levels in 40 (11 public and 29 private) schools, the number of which fluctuate one week to another. The researcher purposively selected eight schools (5 private and 3 public) the inclusion criterion being having grade 8 students during the time of data collection. Then, 500 students learning in those schools were randomly selected to participate in the survey. The number of grade eight students that were active during the study period was obtained from registrar offices of respective schools. Finally, the structured questionnaires were distributed to the samples in each schools selected on the basis of probability proportionate to size sampling technique. During data gathering, data collectors oriented the respondents about how to fill the questionnaire. A close follow-up was made by the data collectors. Respondents were told to freely raise any question that is unclear to them, including on how to respond the questions.

Data analysis and presentation

A total of 472 completed questionnaires were returned making the response rate 94.4%. Data were inserted in to SPSS software for further processing. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were utilized for data analysis and presentation. Descriptive statistics were mainly used to present data regarding the frequency and percentage distribution of responses. It was, for instance, used to show the distribution of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, the level of educational aspiration of students, and the relative importance of education to other avenues for upward social mobility in the value system of students, etc. Further statistical tests mainly correlation and regression coefficients were also used to examine the association between socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and their educational aspiration. During inferential analysis, independent variables having a significance level less

than 0.05 were considered to be significantly associated to the dependent variable and those having a significance level of greater than or equal to 0.05 were considered as not significantly associated to educational aspiration of respondents.

Results

The females constitute the larger proportion of respondents (56.1%). Moreover, 75.4% of students were within 10-15 age range whereas respondents between 26-30 years of age constitute the smallest percentage (0.4%) in the distribution. Moreover, those survey respondents following Orthodox Christianity represent 57.2% of the total respondents, followed by Protestantism (25%), and Muslim (12.9%). As far as the academic performance of the students is concerned, the relative majority (12.3%) of respondents ranked 7-10 in the last semester and those that ranked 1-3 (best performers) constitute 8.1%. Furthermore, it was shown that most parents (37.5% fathers and 43.4% mothers) of the students have completed only elementary level education, followed by 31.6% who reportedly completed 9-12 grades. Above all, it was revealed that 352 of 472 students' parents are still in wedlock, 8.3% divorced, and 11% widowed (Table 1).

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Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Categories	Frequency (%)
Sex	Male	207 (43.9%)
	Female	265 (56.1%)
Age	10-15	356(75.4%)
	16-20	113(23.9%)
	21-25	1(0.2%)
	26-30	2 (0.4%)
Religion	Orthodox Christian	270(57.2%)
	Muslim	61(12.9%)
	Protestant	118(25.0%)
	Catholic	9(1.9%)
	Atheist	2(0.4%)
	Other	12(2.5%)
Academic performance (expressed in rank achieved last semester)	1-3	38(8.1%)
	4-6	46(9.7%)
	7-10	58(12.3%)
	11-13	37(7.8%)
	14-16	55(11.7%)
	17-19	45(9.5%)
	20-23	57(12.1%)
	24-27	31(6.6%)
	28-30	35(7.4%)
	31-33	20(4.2%)
	34-37	22(4.7%)
	38-40	10(2.1%)
	41-43	7(1.5%)
	44 & above	11(2.3%)
Father's education	Never attended school	38(8.1%)
	1-8	177(37.5%)
	9-12	149(31.6%)
	10+3 (diploma)	27(5.7%)
	BA/MSc degree	53(11.2%)
	MA/MSc degree	23(4.9%)
	PhD	5(1.1%)
Mother's education	Never attended school	70(14.8%)
	1-8	205(43.4%)
	9-12	125(26.5%)
	10+3 (diploma)	31(6.6%)
	BA/MSc degree	36(7.6%)
	MA/MSc degree	4(0.8%)
	PhD	1(0.2%)
Current marital status of parents	Still in wedlock	352 (74.6%)
	Divorced	39(8.3%)
	Widowed	52(11.0%)
	Separated but not divorced	29(6.1%)

Educational aspiration of school-going adolescents

It has been found that school-going adolescents in the study area have a high educational aspiration. That is, 97.5% of respondents replied that they aspire to directly join high school after finishing 8th grade while only 0.6% of them reported that they are planning to start making money. In addition, 94.7% of them answered that they will directly join high school after completing 8th grade even under circumstances where they have the opportunity to decide alone. A slight reduction in the frequency of students who aspire to join high school deciding with no one's influence implies that the decision either to directly join high school or otherwise is somewhat influenced by variables outside the control of the pupils. Above all, data in the table also reveals that the majority (85.8%) of the students aspires to join University or college in the future while 12.1% replied that they haven't decided yet (Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency distribution of respondents in terms of their educational aspiration

Question (variable)	Categories of responses	Frequency (%)
What would you decide to do when you finish 8th grade?	I will directly join high school	460 (97.5%)
	Start making money	3 (0.6%)
	Join vocational education	9 (1.9%)
Try to imagine for a moment that you will be deciding by yourself with no one influencing you; what would you decide to do when you finish the 8th grade?	I will directly join high school	447 (94.7%)
	Start making money	15 (3.2%)
	Join vocational education	10 (2.1%)
In order to achieve my dream, I will join University/college in the future?	Yes	405 (85.8%)
	No	10 (2.1%)
	Uncertain (didn't decide)	57 (12.1%)

Students were asked: "what is the most important thing you want to be famous for in this school?" and it was found that 77.1% of them replied that they want to be known for being an outstanding students, followed by 9.7% that answered athletic. The figures indicated lead one to generalize that academic achievement occupies a better place than other things in the value system of respondents (Figure 1).

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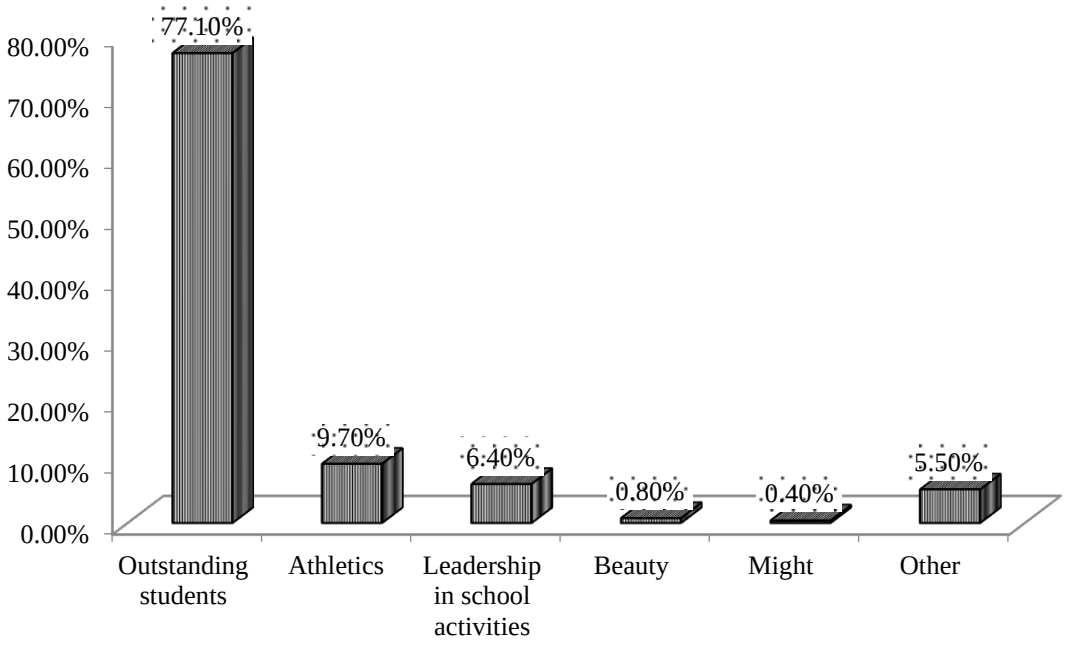

Figure 1. Students' value of education

Students were asked to provide their responses regarding how important they think the things mentioned in the table are for a person to become successful in life as a 'yes' or 'no' alternatives. They were informed to have a chance to choose as many responses as they wish among the listed ones. Accordingly, it was found that 91.3% of the students participated in the survey consider that education is an element that is most important than the other things for a person to become successful in life. The finding that only 2.8% of the respondents considered belongingness to a certain ethnic enclave is important for someone's life success implies that majority of the students in the study area believe in achievement than ascription (Table 3).

Table 3. Students' value about the importance of education in a person's life success

How important are the following things for a person to be successful in life?	Responses		Percent of cases
	N	Percent	
Reaching at the highest academic level	429	28.6%	91.3%
Getting along with all persons	285	19.0%	60.6%
Knowing how and where to make enough money	200	13.4%	42.6%
Saving a right friend	317	21.2%	67.4%
Working a lot	220	14.7%	46.8%
Participating in politics	34	2.3%	7.2%
Belonging to an ethnic group	13	0.9%	2.8%
Total	1498	100.0%	318.7%

The findings indicated in the table four are the ones that reaffirm the generalization made from data in table 3. Once again, it has been revealed that most students place a relatively high value to education than other things. Achieving the highest academic status (85.6%) and ability to rely on one self (88.6%) were things considered as very necessary for someone to become successful in life from the point of view of the students (Table 4).

Table 4. Relative importance of things as evaluated by survey participants

How necessary do you think are the following items for a person to become successful in life?	Very necessary	Necessary	Unnecessary	Very unnecessary
Achieving the highest academic status	404 (85.6%)	60 (12.7%)	6 (1.3%)	2 (0.4%)
Knowing many languages	306 (64.8%)	154 (32.6%)	9 (1.9%)	3 (0.6%)
Membership to a political party	32 (6.8%)	119 (25.2%)	204 (43.2%)	117 (24.8%)
Having Many influential acquaintances	115 (24.4%)	111 (23.5%)	105 (22.2%)	141 (29.9%)
Belonging to a certain ethnic group	48 (10.2%)	70 (14.8%)	144 (30.5%)	210 (44.5%)
Self-reliance	418 (88.6%)	45 (9.5%)	7 (1.5%)	2 (0.4%)
Knowing how and where to make lots of money	204 (43.2%)	226 (47.9%)	34 (7.2%)	8 (1.7%)
Allocating more time for work	230 (48.7%)	182 (38.6%)	53 (11.2%)	7 (1.5%)

Here, educational aspiration was measured in terms of three questions each intended to examine students' future desire and life orientation. The statistics presented in the table were derived from Likert scale questions ranging from 5 representing *strongly agree* and 1 *strongly disagree*.

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Accordingly, it was found that most students aspire their future job to rely on education (mean=4.3 with a variance of 0.923), dream to join higher education (mean=4.4 with a variance of 0.882), and hope to successfully complete their higher education studies (mean=4.4 with a variance of 0.955) (Table 5).

Table 5. Aggregate of students' educational aspiration calculated from Likert scale values

Statistics	My future job depends on my education	I will join University/college to achieve my dreams	I will successfully graduate from University or college
Mean	4.3602	4.4597	4.4746
Median	5.0000	5.0000	5.0000
Mode	5.00	5.00	5.00
Std. Deviation	.96077	0.93894	.97712
Variance	0.923	0.882	0.955
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00

Factors associated with respondents' educational aspiration

Here, educational aspiration is expressed through: 1) what the students intend to do after completing 8th grade under existing circumstances, 2) what they intend to pursue after completion of 8th grade provided that they are free to decide on their own, and 3) their aspiration to join higher education. As shown in the table, students' self-determination to join high school with no one's intervention is significantly associated to age (0.217, $P<0.01$). In addition, age has also been significantly associated to students' aspiration to join higher education institutions in the future (0.186, $P<0.01$). Furthermore, students' current plan after completing 8th grade is associated to age (0.264, $P<0.01$). In other words, the younger the students are, the higher their educational aspiration is and vice versa. Moreover, students' self-determination to pursue high school education is significantly associated to their academic performance (0.180, $P<0.01$); the higher their academic performance, the higher their educational aspiration and vice versa. Other

independent variables, such as father's education, mother's education, and current marital status of parents are less significantly associated to respondents' educational aspiration (Table 6).

Table 6. Pearson's correlation between respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and educational aspiration

Dependent variable/s	Correlation coefficients	Age	Sex	Religion	Academic performance	Father's education	Mother's education	Current marital status of parents
Plan with no one's intervention	Pearson Correlation	0.217**	-0.072	0.061	0.180**	-0.117*	-0.114*	0.034
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.116	0.189	0.000	0.011	0.013	0.457
	N	472	472	472	472	472	472	472
Aspiration to join University or college	Pearson Correlation	0.186**	-0.004	0.059	0.075	-0.052	-0.098*	0.062
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.931	0.202	0.104	0.258	0.033	0.181
	N	472	472	472	472	472	472	472
Student's plan after completing 8 grade	Pearson Correlation	0.264**	-0.072	-0.029	0.088	-0.098*	-0.079	0.104*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.118	0.531	0.057	0.034	0.087	0.024
	N	472	472	472	472	472	472	472

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Accordingly, it is found that what students intend to do next just after completing 8th grade is affected by the age of the students (0.239, 0.000). It is also indicated that age (0.184, 0.000) and academic performance (0.153, 0.001) of students significantly predict what the students intend to pursue after completing 8th grade under circumstances in which they are free to decide without external influence. Above all, students' aspiration to join higher educational institutions in the future has been found to be significantly associated to the age (0.168, 0.000) of the students. Therefore, age and academic performance of respondents are positive predictors of the level of educational aspiration of the respondents (Table 7).

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Table 7. Coefficients of linear regression

Dependent variable/s	Regression coefficients	Independent variables						
		Age	Sex	Religion	Academic performance	Father's education	Mother's education	Parents' Marital Status
Student's plan after completing 8 grade	B	0.145	-0.036	-0.007	0.005	-0.006	-0.005	0.019
	St. error	0.028	0.026	0.011	0.004	0.012	0.014	0.014
	Beta	0.239	-0.064	-0.027	0.057	-0.026	-0.020	0.062
	Sig.	0.000	0.157	0.545	0.216	0.635	0.711	0.172
Plan after completing 8th grade with no one's intervention	B	0.131	-0.051	0.015	0.015	-0.006	-0.015	0.001
	St. error	0.033	0.030	0.013	0.005	0.014	0.016	0.016
	Beta	0.184	-0.077	0.053	0.153	-0.024	-0.050	0.003
	Sig.	0.000	0.089	0.239	0.001	0.660	0.357	0.947
Aspiration to join University or college	B	0.236	-0.004	0.031	0.011	0.018	-0.045	0.031
	St. error	0.066	0.061	0.026	0.009	0.028	0.033	0.033
	Beta	0.168	-0.003	0.053	0.054	0.038	-0.078	0.043
	Sig.	0.000	0.945	0.246	0.250	0.508	0.163	0.355

Discussion

Statistical results from the present study showed that educational aspiration of adolescents in the study area is very high varying between students of different age and varied condition of academic performance. Moreover, students also place a higher value on education with a remarkable consideration of the academic realm as the most important avenue to upward social mobility. The finding of a high educational aspiration of adolescents in the present study is consistent to the findings of other previous researches. For instance, a study undertaken on some of the most disadvantaged adolescents (adolescents with disabilities, married girls and adolescent

mothers, adolescents from pastoralist and remote rural communities, adolescents from internally displaced households and child-headed households) by Jones et al. (2019) found a high educational aspiration in which 95% of adolescents would like to attend at least some secondary school and 61% of them would like to attend University. Another qualitative study by Yisak (2010) also found a high but changing with age, educational and occupational aspiration among children.

The research further stated that children's educational expectations were largely based on their occupational aspirations; they aspire to reach a certain level of education in order to ensure that they would qualify for their desired occupation when they grow up. The result from a longitudinal study on "Rural youth aspiring to occupations beyond agriculture: evidence from young lives study in Ethiopia" by Yisak and Tassew (2012) revealed that both parents and children preferred non-farming to farming occupations to children in rural Ethiopia. The finding of the present research, nevertheless, contradicts to the one found by Coleman (1961) who found a low standing of academic achievement in the value system of adolescents.

Correlation statistics in the present research have shown that educational aspiration of adolescents is significantly associated to age and academic performance of the students. Further statistical test of linear regression coefficients also revealed that age and academic performance of students significantly determine students' aspiration to join higher education and what they intend to pursue after completing 8^{th} grade. The finding implies that the level of educational aspiration varies among students in a different age and between those having various academic performances. Findings of other previous researches also reveal that educational aspiration of students is influenced by socio-demographic variables. For instance, Mateju and Smith (2008) undertook a study on "The perceived value of education and educational aspirations in the Czech republic" and found that pupils' educational aspiration is determined by parent's socio-economic background, ability and sex of children. Coleman (1961) also found sex as a determinant variable creating differences between males and females in the place they give to academic achievement in their value systems. Furthermore, Abdulah (2020) found the effects of sex, parental education, and students' academic performance on their career aspirations in which females, students with better educated parents, and those having high academic performance were reported to have high career aspirations. The influence of age on the educational aspiration of students, in particular, has also been observed by Yisak (2010) who reported that the educational aspiration of children

decreases as they go older. In addition, Jones et al. (2019) also found differences in the level of educational aspirations among students living in various ecological zones of Ethiopia.

Conclusions

School-going adolescents have a very high educational aspiration. Students were also found to attach a relatively higher value to the academic realm than other paths to worldly success. Moreover, age and academic performance of the students were found to significantly determine the level of students' educational aspiration. Despite the high and ever increasing graduate unemployment rate in Ethiopia, the high educational aspiration of adolescents still remained persistent without being significantly influenced by changing scenarios in the country. Such a promising level of educational aspiration can be considered as a potential source of Ethiopia's forthcoming socio-economic development. Converting such a potential into an opportunity requires family, school, and government institutions to provide the necessary support to the students. Therefore, all stakeholders in the institution of education (teachers, education policy makers, parents and other family members of students, school administrators, and others financing the sector) should work effectively to create a favorable learning environment in which school-going adolescents can pursue further education and contribute to the development of their society.

Ethical approval

A letter of ethical approval was first obtained from the concerned committee of Wolaita Sodo University. In addition, because the research partly involves collection of data from students under the age of 18, the researcher discussed with and persuaded both home-room teachers and school principals about the fact that the research doesn't cause exploitation or other related ethical concerns on the lives of the research participants. Using those key role players of the schools as a gate way, the researcher also gained a verbal informed consent from the students.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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