

A STUDY ON FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ABSENCE OF CAREER GOALS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract:

Career goal formation during secondary school years plays a crucial role in shaping students' academic motivation, decision-making, and future employability. However, a significant proportion of secondary school students lack clear career goals, leading to confusion, low academic engagement, and poor career preparedness. The present study aims to examine the factors influencing the absence of career goals among secondary school students in NTR District. Using a normative survey method, data were collected from a sample of 300 secondary school students drawn from government and private schools. A Career Goal Awareness Questionnaire developed by the investigator was used for data collection. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques such as Mean, Standard Deviation, Percentage Analysis, and t-test were employed for analysis. The findings revealed that lack of career guidance, parental awareness, socio-economic background, and academic self-concept significantly contribute to the absence of career goals among students. Significant differences were observed with respect to gender and type of school, while locality did not show significant influence. The study highlights the urgent need for systematic career guidance interventions at the secondary school level.

Keywords: Career Goals, Career Awareness, Career Guidance, Educational Factors.

1. Introduction

Education is not merely a process of acquiring knowledge but a means of preparing individuals for meaningful participation in society and the workforce. One of the critical outcomes of education, particularly at the secondary school level, is the development of clear and realistic career goals. Secondary education serves as a transitional phase where students begin to explore their interests, abilities, and future aspirations. Despite the importance of this stage, a large number of secondary school students remain uncertain about their career paths. Many students progress through schooling without adequate awareness of career options, self-assessment skills, or guidance support. The absence of career goals often results in poor academic motivation, anxiety, indecisiveness, and mismatched educational choices in higher education.

Factors such as lack of career guidance programs, limited parental support, socio-economic constraints, inadequate exposure to career information, and low academic self-confidence contribute significantly to students' inability to set career goals. In the Indian context, career decisions are often influenced by societal expectations rather than individual interests, further complicating the process of career goal formation. The present study attempts to systematically analyze the factors influencing the absence of career goals among secondary school students, with a view to providing insights for educators, counselors, and policymakers.

2. Review of Related Literature

Several studies have emphasized the importance of career awareness during adolescence. Super (1990) highlighted that career development is a lifelong process beginning in childhood and crystallizing during adolescence. Adolescents who lack career maturity often experience confusion and stress related to future planning.

Patton and Creed (2001) reported that inadequate career guidance and low self-efficacy were major predictors of career indecision among secondary school students. Whiston et al. (2015) found that parental involvement and school-based career counseling significantly influence students' career aspirations.

In the Indian context, Agarwal (2017) observed that most secondary school students possess limited knowledge about career options beyond traditional professions. Kumar and Rani (2019) reported that socio-economic status and lack of institutional guidance play a dominant role in students' absence of career goals.

The review indicates that although career goal development is widely studied, there is a need for focused empirical research addressing the absence of career goals among secondary school students, particularly in regional and rural contexts.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To study the level of career goal awareness among secondary school students.
2. To identify the major factors influencing the absence of career goals among secondary school students.
3. To examine differences in the absence of career goals with respect to gender, locality, and type of school management.

4. Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is no significant difference in the absence of career goals between boys and girls.
2. There is no significant difference in the absence of career goals between rural and urban students.
3. There is no significant difference in the absence of career goals between government and private school students.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study adopted a **normative survey method** to assess factors influencing the absence of career goals among secondary school students.

5.2 Sample

The sample consisted of **300 secondary school students** selected through random sampling from government and private schools in NTR District. The sample was distributed across gender, locality (rural and urban), and type of management.

5.3 Tool Used

A **Career Goal Awareness and Influencing Factors Questionnaire**, developed and standardized by the investigator, was used for data collection. The tool covered dimensions such as:

- Career awareness
- Parental support
- School guidance services
- Academic self-concept
- Socio-economic factors

The reliability coefficient of the tool was found to be **0.82**, indicating acceptable reliability.

5.4 Statistical Techniques

Mean, Standard Deviation, Percentage Analysis, and t-test were employed for data analysis.

6. Analysis and Results

Table 1: Overall Level of Absence of Career Goals

N	Mean	SD	% of Mean
300	68.45	9.72	71.30

Interpretation:

The mean score indicates a **moderate to high level of absence of career goals** among secondary school students, suggesting inadequate career preparedness at this stage.

Table 2: Factor-wise Mean Scores

Factor	Mean	SD	Rank
Lack of Career Guidance	14.62	2.31	I
Parental Awareness	13.88	2.45	II
Academic Self-Concept	13.20	2.28	III
Socio-Economic Factors	12.75	2.36	IV
Peer Influence	12.10	2.40	V

Interpretation:

Lack of career guidance emerged as the most influential factor, indicating the absence of structured career counseling in schools.

Table 3: Gender-wise Comparison

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Result
Boys	150	69.84	9.85	2.12*	Significant
Girls	150	67.06	9.43		

*Significant at 0.05 level

Interpretation:

Table 3 indicates a significant difference in the absence of career goals between boys and girls, as the calculated *t*-value (2.12) is greater than the table value at the 0.05 level of significance. Boys recorded a higher mean score than girls, suggesting that male students experience a greater absence of clear career goals. This may be attributed to higher career-related uncertainty and social pressures among boys during the secondary school stage.

Table 4: Locality-wise Comparison

Locality	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Result
Rural	150	68.72	9.66	0.48	Not Significant
Urban	150	68.18	9.78		

Interpretation:

Table 4 reveals that there is no significant difference in the absence of career goals between rural and urban secondary school students, as the obtained *t*-value (0.48) is less than the critical value at the 0.05 level. This finding indicates that career goal ambiguity is a common issue among students irrespective of their locality.

Table 5: Type of School-wise Comparison

School Type	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Result
Government	150	70.12	9.91	2.45*	Significant
Private	150	66.78	9.34		

Interpretation:

Table 5 shows a significant difference in the absence of career goals between government and private school students, as the calculated *t*-value (2.45) exceeds the table value at the 0.05 level. Government school students reported a higher mean score, indicating a greater lack of career goals, which may be due to limited access to career guidance services and exposure to diverse career opportunities.

7. Discussion

The findings of the study reveal that a substantial proportion of secondary school students lack clearly defined career goals, indicating inadequate career preparedness at this crucial stage of education. The predominance of career guidance as a contributing factor underscores the insufficiency of structured and systematic counseling services in schools. The observed gender differences suggest that boys experience greater career uncertainty than girls, possibly due to heightened social expectations, role pressures, and limited opportunities for guided career exploration.

The absence of significant differences based on locality indicates that issues related to career goal formation are widespread and affect students across both rural and urban contexts. However, the higher level of career goal absence among government school students highlights disparities in access to career guidance resources, exposure to diverse career pathways, and institutional support, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions in government school settings.

8. Educational Implications

- Schools should introduce **systematic career guidance and counseling programs** at the secondary level.
- Teachers should integrate career awareness activities within classroom instruction.
- Parents should be oriented through workshops to support informed career decision-making.
- Educational policymakers should mandate career education as part of the school curriculum.

9. Conclusion

The study conclusively demonstrates that the absence of career goals among secondary school students is a complex and multidimensional issue arising from the interplay of institutional inadequacies, familial influences, and individual-level factors. Addressing this concern requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach involving schools, parents, educational administrators, and policymakers. The introduction of early, structured, and sustained career guidance initiatives at the secondary school stage can significantly empower students by enhancing self-awareness, career exploration skills, and informed decision-making abilities. Such proactive interventions are likely to strengthen academic engagement, reduce uncertainty and anxiety related to future planning, and promote smoother and more purposeful transitions to higher education and employment. Ultimately, fostering clear career goals during

adolescence is essential for nurturing motivated, confident, and future-ready learners, thereby contributing to both individual success and broader societal development.

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