



# **A Comparative Study of Career Aspirations among students Pursuing Professional and Non-Professional Courses**

**Preeti Singh<sup>1</sup>**

Research Scholar, C.S.J.M. University Kanpur<sup>1</sup>

**Dr. Nitin Bajpai<sup>2</sup>**

Assistant Professor, Education Department

Maharana Pratap Govt P.G. College Hardoi<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract-** The present study aimed to compare the career aspirations of students pursuing professional and non-professional courses. A total of 500 students studying in self-financed colleges in Kanpur city were selected through the convenience sampling method. The sample comprised 250 students from professional courses and 250 students from non-professional courses. The professional courses included B.Pharm., B.B.A., B.C.A., and B.Ed., while students pursuing non-professional courses such as B.A., B.Sc., and B.Com. were included in the study. The Career Aspiration Scale developed by Sarita Anand was used to measure the students' career aspirations. The collected data were analyzed using the mean, standard deviation, and t-test. The findings revealed a significant difference in the career aspirations of students pursuing professional and non-professional courses. Students enrolled in professional courses were found to have higher career aspirations than those pursuing non-professional courses. The findings suggest that courses linked to specific professional fields may help students develop greater clarity and a stronger sense of direction regarding their future careers. Therefore, it is important for higher education institutions to strengthen career guidance and counselling services in accordance with students' interests and abilities.

**Keywords-** Career Aspirations, Professional Courses, Non-Professional Courses, Higher Education, Career Guidance.

## **I. Introduction**

Education is an important means of developing an individual's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personality. Its purpose is not limited to imparting knowledge; it also involves preparing individuals for their future life and career. At the higher education level, students begin to think seriously about their future employment and careers and



set professional goals based on their interests, abilities, and the opportunities available to them. In this context, an individual's aspirations, goals, and expectations regarding a future career can be understood as career aspirations. According to Gottfredson (1981), career aspirations develop through an individual's personal experiences and social environment. Similarly, Rojewski (2005) associated career aspirations with an individual's goals and priorities concerning their future career.

At present, students in higher education have a wide range of courses to choose from. Some courses provide specialized knowledge and skills required for a particular occupation or profession, whereas others place greater emphasis on developing broader subject-based and academic knowledge. In the present study, B.Pharma., B.B.A., B.Ed., and B.C.A. have been classified as professional courses, while B.A., B.Sc., and B.Com. have been classified as non-professional courses. This classification is based on the operational definitions adopted for the present study. Students enrolled in professional courses have opportunities to become directly familiar with the nature of their respective fields, the qualifications required, and potential employment opportunities. For instance, B.Pharma. students are exposed to potential career fields related to pharmaceuticals and healthcare; B.B.A. students to business and management; B.Ed. students to teaching; and B.C.A. students to computers and information technology. In contrast, students pursuing courses such as B.A., B.Sc., and B.Com. may have a wider range of career options depending on their area of study and further educational choices. However, students' career aspirations do not depend solely on the course they choose. Family expectations, social environment, economic conditions, personal interests, abilities, self-confidence, and available employment opportunities also influence their career-related decisions. Agarwal, Kapoor, and Tognatta (2012), in their study of the educational and career aspirations of Indian students, emphasized the need to provide students with appropriate information about different career options and the pathways available to pursue them. The importance of vocational education in the Indian education system has also been particularly recognized in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The policy emphasizes reducing the existing separation between academic and vocational education and integrating vocational education into the mainstream education system. It aims to provide students with diverse educational and career opportunities in accordance with their interests and abilities and to prepare them for the changing world of work (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020).

#### **Need and Rationale of the Study**

The nature of employment is undergoing continuous change in the present era. The emergence of new technologies, changing economic conditions, and new occupations has created a wide range of career opportunities for students. In such a situation, choosing an appropriate career path has become an important challenge for students.



Therefore, it is essential to understand their career aspirations and provide appropriate educational and career guidance accordingly. Since professional and non-professional courses differ in their nature and structure, it is important to examine whether students enrolled in these two types of courses also differ in their career aspirations. Professional courses generally prepare students for specific fields of work, whereas non-professional courses provide a relatively broader academic foundation. A comparison between the two groups may therefore help in understanding the extent to which the nature of a course influences students' career goals and aspirations. The present study is also needed because information about students' career aspirations can contribute to making career guidance and counseling more effective. If a significant difference is found between the two groups, appropriate measures can be taken to strengthen career orientation within the respective courses. On the other hand, if no significant difference is found, it may indicate that factors other than the nature of the course, such as individual, family, and social factors, also play an important role in shaping students' career aspirations. The present study employs Sarita Anand's Career Aspiration Scale to measure the career aspirations of students enrolled in professional and non-professional courses on a common basis and to make a comparative assessment of the two groups. The findings of the study may be useful for higher education institutions in strengthening career guidance and counselling, curriculum planning, and helping students make informed decisions about their future careers. Therefore, the present study, entitled "A Comparative Study of Career Aspirations among Students Pursuing Professional and Non-Professional Courses," appears to be relevant and useful in the field of education and career guidance.

## **II. Review of Related Literature**

Alam (2021) conducted a study on the educational and career aspirations of undergraduate students. The study included 150 undergraduate students from B.A., B.Com., and B.Sc. courses, with equal representation of boys and girls. The study examined whether educational and career aspirations differed according to course and gender. This study is particularly relevant to the present research because it considered students from different undergraduate courses while examining their career aspirations. Sapra, Chaudhary, and Jeswal (2021) examined career aspirations and their relationship with academic performance among 547 undergraduate management students in Delhi and the National Capital Region. The researchers also examined gender differences, factors influencing career aspirations, and students' inclination towards entrepreneurship. The study found a minimal positive relationship between career-level expectations and academic performance and highlighted the need to align career-development activities with students' aspirations.



Dangwal and Mitra (2024) investigated self-esteem and career aspirations among 118 undergraduate students at a private university in Rajasthan. The sample consisted of students enrolled in B.Tech. programmes. The researchers used the Career Aspiration Scale developed by Gregor and O'Brien to assess achievement, leadership, and educational aspirations. The study is relevant to the present research because it demonstrates the importance of examining career aspirations among students pursuing professional higher-education programmes.

Bhatia, Rana, and Gregor (2023) examined the relationship between parental attachment and career aspirations among 157 Indian female undergraduate students. The study used an integrated framework based on Attachment Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory. Its findings highlight the relevance of family-related factors in understanding students' career aspirations. This suggests that career aspirations may be influenced not only by educational choices but also by students' social and family environments.

Raju and Devarani (2023) studied the career aspirations of 508 agricultural students in India, including undergraduate, postgraduate, and Ph.D. students. The study explored the range of career aspirations among students from different educational levels and backgrounds. The findings provide evidence that students enrolled in specialized higher-education programmes may have diverse career expectations and choices.

Maitra (2025) examined the career aspirations of 639 undergraduate students from 16 colleges across four districts of West Bengal. The study investigated variations in career aspirations according to gender, geographical location, family income, family type, and scholastic stream. The study is particularly relevant to the present research because it examined career aspirations in relation to students' academic streams and socio-demographic characteristics.

Malakar and De Gope (2025) conducted a study on career aspirations among higher secondary students in Tripura, focusing on Science, Commerce, and Arts streams. The study used the Career Aspiration Scale developed by Sarita Anand (2014). Interestingly, the researchers reported that academic stream did not play a decisive role in students' career aspirations, although differences were observed in terms of gender. The study also emphasized the role of parents, teachers, counsellors, and career-oriented curricula in preparing students for their future careers.

Indwar and Rajput (2026) investigated career aspirations among 165 tribal secondary-school students in Central India using Holland's RIASEC framework. The study examined vocational interests in relation to demographic characteristics and



highlighted the importance of career guidance in helping students make appropriate career choices.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

- To compare the career aspirations of students pursuing professional and non-professional courses.

#### **Research Hypothesis**

- $H_0$ : There will be no significant difference in the career aspirations of students pursuing professional and non-professional courses.

#### **Research Design**

##### **Nature and Method of the Study**

The present study is based on the comparative method under the descriptive survey method. The main objective of the study is to compare the career aspirations of students pursuing professional and non-professional courses. To achieve this objective, the career aspirations of students from both groups were measured, and the data obtained were statistically analyzed.

##### **Population of the Study**

The population of the present study comprised students enrolled in various professional and non-professional courses in self-financed colleges in Kanpur city.

##### **Sample**

A total of 500 students enrolled in various professional and non-professional courses in self-financed colleges in Kanpur city were selected for the present study. Of these, 250 students were pursuing professional courses, while 250 students were pursuing non-professional courses. Thus, an equal number of students from both groups were included in the study.

##### **Sampling Method**

The Convenience Sampling Method was used for selecting the sample. Students who were available in self-financed colleges in Kanpur city and willing to participate in the study were selected. The sample consisted of 250 students from each group, resulting in a total sample of 500 students.

##### **Variables of the Study**

The following variables were included in the present study:

Independent Variable



#### **Type of Course**

- Professional Courses – B.Pharma., B.B.A., B.Ed., B.C.A., etc.
- Non-Professional Courses – B.A., B.Sc., B.Com., etc.

#### **Dependent Variable**

##### **Career Aspirations of Students**

This classification was made on the basis of the requirements and operational definitions of the present study.

#### **Research Tool**

The Career Aspiration Scale developed by Sarita Anand was used to measure the career aspirations of the students. The scale was administered to the selected 500 students following the prescribed instructions. Based on the responses given by the students, their career aspiration scores were calculated according to the prescribed scoring procedure.

#### **Data Collection Procedure**

First, the necessary cooperation was obtained from the concerned authorities and teachers of the selected self-financed colleges. The selected students were then informed about the purpose of the study and given the necessary instructions for completing the scale. The students were asked to respond to all the statements included in the scale. After collecting the completed scales, the scores were calculated according to the prescribed scoring procedure. The data obtained were then organized and prepared for statistical analysis.

### **III. Statistical Techniques**

The data obtained were analyzed using the Mean, Standard Deviation, and Independent Samples t-test.

#### **Statistical Analysis of Data**

To compare the career aspirations of students pursuing professional and non-professional courses, a total of 500 students were selected from various professional and non-professional courses offered by self-financed colleges in Kanpur city. The sample consisted of 250 students from professional courses and 250 students from non-professional courses. The students were selected using the Convenience Sampling Method, and the Career Aspiration Scale was administered to them.



Based on the data obtained, the mean, standard deviation, and t-value were calculated to examine whether there was a significant difference between the two groups. The results obtained are presented in Table 1.

Table :1 Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-value of Career Aspiration Scores of Students Pursuing Professional and Non-Professional Courses

| variable          | course              |       |                         |       | t-value | Significant level |              |
|-------------------|---------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|---------|-------------------|--------------|
| Career Aspiration | Professional course |       | Non professional course |       | 2-809   | 0-05              | 0-01         |
|                   | Mean                | SD    | Mean                    | SD    |         | Significant.      | Significant. |
|                   | 118-62              | 11-64 | 114-95                  | 17-04 |         |                   |              |

Degrees of Freedom (df) → 498

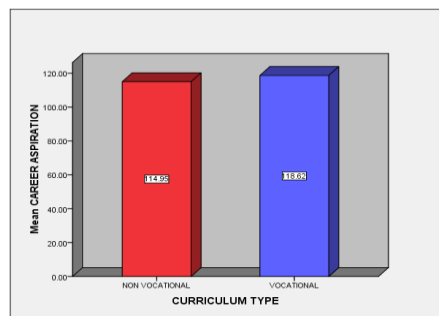
Critical value at 0.05 level of significance 1.96

Critical value at 0.01 level of significance 2.59

### Interpretation of the Results

An examination of the above table shows that the students pursuing professional courses obtained a mean career aspiration score of 118.62 with a standard deviation of 11.64, whereas the students pursuing non-professional courses obtained a mean score of 114.95 with a standard deviation of 17.04. Thus, students pursuing professional courses were found to have higher career aspirations than those pursuing non-professional courses.

The comparative results are presented in Bar Figure 1.



Bar Figure 1.



An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in the career aspirations of students pursuing professional and non-professional courses. An examination of Table 4.5.1 shows that the calculated t-value was 2.809. With 498 degrees of freedom (df), the calculated t-value is greater than the critical value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance and 2.59 at the 0.01 level of significance. Therefore, the difference between the two groups is statistically significant at both the 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), which states that “There will be no significant difference in the career aspirations of students pursuing professional and non-professional courses,” is rejected. The findings indicate that students pursuing professional courses have significantly higher career aspirations than students pursuing non-professional courses.

#### **IV. Educational Implications**

The findings of the present study indicate that students’ educational experiences and the nature of their courses may have an important role in the development of their career aspirations. Therefore, higher education institutions should provide effective career guidance and counseling to help students choose appropriate career paths in accordance with their interests, abilities, competencies, and future prospects. In particular, students pursuing non-professional courses should be provided with adequate and up-to-date information about employment opportunities, higher education options, competitive examinations, and different career possibilities so that they can set clear and realistic goals for their future. Colleges should regularly organize activities such as career counseling, career awareness programmes, workshops, expert lectures, job fairs, and practical training. Students pursuing professional courses should be made familiar with the various career pathways and employment opportunities available in their respective fields. At the same time, students enrolled in non-professional courses should also be informed about the diverse career options related to their areas of study. This may help students move beyond traditional career choices and explore emerging fields according to their interests and abilities. Teachers also have an important role to play in this regard. By identifying students’ interests, abilities, and individual strengths, teachers can help them make appropriate educational and career choices. Therefore, teachers should also be provided with adequate training and relevant information related to career guidance and career awareness programmes. Students should likewise be encouraged to make decisions about their courses and careers based on their own interests, abilities, and future prospects rather than choosing them solely due to family or social pressure.



The educational implications of the present study are also consistent with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes greater integration between academic and vocational education and the provision of opportunities in accordance with students' interests and abilities. Therefore, higher education institutions should not limit education merely to obtaining a degree but should connect it with career awareness, skill development, career planning, and employment-oriented preparation. Such an approach can help students make clearer, more confident, and realistic decisions about their future careers.

## V. Conclusion

The present study, "A Comparative Study of Career Aspirations among Students Pursuing Professional and Non-Professional Courses," highlights the significant role of educational background in shaping students' career aspirations, goals, and future expectations. Students pursuing professional courses generally tend to have more clearly defined career paths because their programs are closely connected with specific occupations and employment opportunities. In contrast, students enrolled in non-professional courses may demonstrate broader and more diverse career aspirations, often influenced by personal interests, higher education opportunities, competitive examinations, and changing employment trends.

The study indicates that career aspirations are influenced not only by the type of course pursued but also by several psychological, social, economic, and environmental factors. These may include parental expectations, peer influence, socio-economic background, academic performance, availability of career guidance, personal interests, and awareness of employment opportunities.

The comparison between professional and non-professional students emphasizes the importance of effective career counseling and guidance at the educational level. Institutions should provide students with adequate information about emerging career opportunities, skill-development programs, higher education options, and changing labor-market requirements. Such support can help students make informed career decisions and align their aspirations with their abilities, interests, and future opportunities.

In conclusion, although professional and non-professional courses may lead students toward different patterns of career aspirations, both groups require appropriate guidance, encouragement, and opportunities for skill development. Understanding these differences can help educational institutions, policymakers, teachers, and career



counselors develop better strategies to support students in achieving meaningful, realistic, and fulfilling career goals.

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