Exploring the aspirations of primary-aged children in Uganda

A study of the career aspirations of children aged 4 to 11 years to determine:

- What career aspirations do they have and how do they vary by age?
- What social, cultural and economic factors influence their career aspirations?

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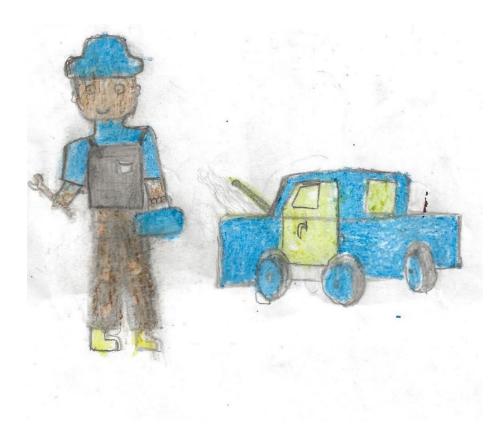
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Introduction

Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are striving to build their human capital so that young people can be more productive in their work life. As a result, for over two decades, there has been a rapid increase in the number of young people who complete primary and secondary school levels in the region. However, youth unemployment in SSA is still considered to be one of the highest in the world. Some analysts attribute this problem to lack of clear ideas about career prospects that consequently leads to a weak linkage between the school product and the labour market (Pillay, 2020).



According to the OECD report (2021), the career aspirations of young people in SSA have little in common with the current and projected demands in the region. For example, more than 70 percent of the young people aspire to work in the public sector where there is supposedly better job stability and security. It so happens that a smaller percentage of them value agricultural related and medium skilled jobs in the manufacturing sector, which are considered to be an important engine for growth (OECD, 2021). Therefore there is an urgent need for ingenuity to help the young people in the region to be more open minded rather than over rely on the already saturated formal job market.

Since mid-2020 Maria Assumpta Nursery and Primary School has created space for learners both in primary and secondary schools to talk about their future aspirations in partnership with the Education and Employers NGO. The purpose of this is to help students focus their learning on something that is more meaningful to them. These talks help students to persist longer, produce higher quality efforts, learn more deeply and perform better in classes. Since children learn differently and come from different backgrounds they need to be encouraged and to try and try again to achieve more in life. Once encouraged, children keep trying even when they face challenges.

Volunteers as role models are often seen as a way of motivating learners and inspire them to set ambitious goals¹. For example, in our context, this is particularly true for learners from rural communities, disadvantaged backgrounds, girls and stigmatized groups. Volunteers who speak about their own backgrounds having gone through similar life experiences inspire young learners from the disadvantaged communities. In line with this idea, the utility of volunteers has been examined across a wide range of contexts including how volunteers as role models might impart core values for engineers, doctors, address the underrepresentation of women in science and increase debate and decision-making among young people (Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006). While it is common knowledge that children's career aspirations do not rhyme with the available jobs, this survey set out to get more details about what they young people think. The connecting with volunteers virtually which we have done via Education and Employers opens to children in our schools to an amazing range of role models in a way that has not been possible before. For schools in Uganda this could be a game changer, especially those in remote rural parts of the country who can get to meet a diverse range of role models which has not been possible before.

¹ www.educationandemployers.org/research

Purpose and scope of the study

The study was guided by two questions:

- 1. What career aspirations do children 4-11 years have?
- 2. What social, cultural and economic factors influence children's conception of their career aspirations?

It was conducted at Maria Assumpta Nursery and Primary school, Mityana district in Central Uganda. Children who took part were aged from (4 years to 11 years) both boys and girls. That is children from Kindergarten, top class, Primary 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 took part by the guidance of their teachers and it just took few minutes for them to finish.

Methodology

The study methodology was based on Education and Employer's landmark 2018 study '*Drawing the Future*' which looked at the career aspirations of primary aged children in 20 countries: https://www.educationandemployers.org/drawing-the-future-published/

Children aged 4-11 at Maria Assumpta Nursery and Primary school were asked to draw a picture of the job they wanted to do when they grew up. To enable them think and or imagine the kind of job they wanted, they were also asked if they knew anyone who did the said job and how they had heard about it. While the teachers were asked to guide the students, they were discouraged from influencing in any way their responses.

On March 15th 2022, the teachers in charge of the selected classes were contacted to find learners willing to participate in the survey. These learners remained free to withdraw at any time of the exercise. The teachers themselves were obliged not to influence the learners' responses in any way. The learners were made aware that there were no right or wrong answers and they were free to skip any questions that would be considered potentially embarrassing or private without any negative consequences. They were also informed that the information collected would be shared with other audiences in anonymous format. The children aged between 4 and 6 expressed their thoughts in drawings while the older children were asked more questions to clarify their preference eg why they were interested in the job, their favourite subjects and if they intended to go to university.

Background to the school composition

Class	Age range	Class population
Kindergarten	4 to 5 years	28
Pre-primary	5 to 6 years	48
Primary One	6 to 7 years	83
Primary Two	7 to 8 years	41
Primary Three	8 to 9 years	62
Primary Four	9 to 10 years	41
Primary Five	10 to 11 years	36

The section below highlights the aspirations for study participants (children). The section is presented according to the class levels starting with the Kindergarten, Pre-school through primary Five (P.5).

Kindergarten (4 to 5 year olds)

The table below indicates their career aspirations of the Kindergarten class.

Table 1: Career aspirations for pupils in Kindergarten (4 to 5 years)

Career	Boys	Percentage	Girls	Percentage
Teacher	9	63%	6	43%
Medical	2	14%	4	2%
doctor				
Engineer	2	14%	0	0%
Pilot	0	0%	2	14%
Driver	0	0%	2	14%
Teacher &	1	7%	0	0%
Engineer				
Total	14	100%	14	100%

The top preferred job was teaching by 6 (43%) girls and 9 (64%) boys, followed by medical doctor 4 (29%) girls and 2 (14%) boys. One girl aspired to become both a Teacher and an Engineer.



Figure 1: Aspiration for Teacher/Engineer

Pre-Primary pupils' career aspirations (5-6 year olds)

Table 2: Career aspirations for Pre-primary class

Career	Boys	Percentage	Girls	Percentage
Medical	11	42%	2	9%
doctor				
Driver	4	15%	0	0%
President	4	15%	1	5%
Police officer	2	8%	0	0%
Nurse	2	8%	13	59%
Teacher	3	12%	6	27%
Total	26	100%	22	100

In Pre-primary the majority of the boys preferred to become medical doctors (11 representing 42%), followed by becoming drivers 4 (15%), whilst the same number 4(15%) opted to president or head of state. On the other hand, the majority of the girls wished to work as nurses 13 (59%) and 6 (27%) wished to become teachers.







Figure 3: Aspiration for doctor

Primary One (6-7 year olds)

Table 3: Career aspirations for Pre-primary class

Career	Boys	Percentage	Girls	Percentage
Pilot	13	26%	1	3%
Medical doctor	8	16%	1	3%
Driver	9	18%	1	3%
Police officer	4	8%	0	0%
Nurse	0	0%	19	60%
Teacher	6	12%	7	22%
Head teacher	1	2%	0	0%
Lawyer	2	4%	1	3%
Surgeon	1	2%	1	3%
Electrician	1	2%	0	0%
Soldier	3	6%	0	0%
Engineer	1	2%	1	3
Vet Medical doctor	1	2%	0	0%
Farmer	1	2%	0	0%
Total	51	100	32	100%

The Primary One learners had a wider range of options. A large number of boys preferred to become pilots 13 (26%), medical doctors 8 (16%), drivers 9 (18%) and teachers 6 (12%). For the girls, the majority preferred becoming nurses 19 (60%) and teachers 7 (22%)

The drawings of the children were largely holistic. For example, the aspiration to be a medical person was not limited to drawing a doctor or nurse but also the child drew the sick bed with a patient, a medical kit and an ambulance. They also associate a career with the career tools. For example, a dream to be a soldier is associated with a gun.



Figure 4: Medical Aspiration



Figure 5: Aspiration for Security

Primary Two (7-8 year olds)

Table 4: Career aspirations for Primary two class

Career	Boys	Percentage	Girls	Percentage
Medical	4	21%	7	32%
doctor				
Pilot	7	36%	1	5%
Imam	1	5%	0	0%
Gate keeper	0	0%	1	5%
Nurse	0	0%	5	23%
Teacher	1	5%	4	18%
Carpenter	1	5%	0	0%
Business	1	5%	0	0%
Chef	1	5%	1	5%
shopkeeper	0	0%	1	5%
Nun	0	0%	1	5%
Lawyer	2	10%	1	5%
Vet Medical	1	5%	0	0%
doctor				
Total	19	100%	22	100%

In Primary Two, becoming a medical doctor was a high aspiration for a large number of learners; 4 (21%) boys and 7 (32%) girls. More still, another group of boys wanted to become pilots 7 (36%) while a sizeable number of girls 5 (23%) girls preferred to be nurses and teachers 4 (18%).



Figure 6: Aspiration for teaching

Figure 7: Aspiration of a medical career

NUMBER 1

Other children associated their dream careers with career processes, activities and routine. For example, a teacher in Figure 3 above was associated with teaching using a black/white board while the medical career was associated with attending to the patients one by one according to their arrival (see Figure 4).

When Primary Two learners were asked to indicate as to why they aspired for those particular jobs, they gave various reasons indicated in the table below.

Table 5: Primary Two learner's response about why they have such career aspirations (7 to 8 years)

Learner's response	Frequency	Percentage
Because I love it / it is my	11	26.8%
dream job		
I want to get a lot of money	6	4.6%
I want to help other people	3	7.3%
The job is already done by a	3	7.3%
close relative		
To help sick people or	2	4.8%
animals		
Because it is fun	2	4.8%
To do something different	1	2.4%
from my parents		
No response	13	31.7%
Total	41	100

The majority of learners 11 (26.8%) claimed that their choice driven by the love for the job while another category 6 (14.6%) wanted to earn highly from their jobs. Others were influenced by the need to help others 3 (7.3%), or influenced by a close relative doing a similar job 3 (7.3%). However, 13 (31.7%) did not indicate the reason behind their aspiration.

Asked whether they already knew someone doing the career of their choice, 33 learners were affirmative while the 3 indicated that they had not met such a person before, while another 3 did not respond to the question.

In response to the person that they believed to have influenced their career choice, the learners gave the following responses highlighted below

Table 6: Primary Two response about the person that influenced them to like a particular career (7 to 8 years)

Learner's response	Frequency	Percentage
Professionals in the local	12	29.2%
community		
Parents and siblings	7	17%
Other relatives	8	19.5%
Teachers in the school	3	7.3%
Through reading	2	4.9%
No response	9	21.9%
Total	41	100%

The responses above indicate that the most influential people to these learners career choice were either professionals in the local community 12 (29.2%), or parents and older siblings (7, 17%) or even other relatives 8 (19.5%). Others were influenced by either the teachers in the school or through reading.

When the Primary Two class were further asked whether they hoped to go to university, 36 learners were affirmative, 2 did not know while one of them did not respond.

These learners further indicated the following as their favourite subjects

Table 6: Primary Two members' favourite subjects (7 to 8 years)

Subject	Frequency	Percentage
Maths	16	39%
Literacy	10	24.2%
English language	5	12.2%
Both literacy and Maths	5	12.2%
Reading	4	10%
Religious Education	1	2.4%
Total	41	100

The majority indicated Mathematics as their most favourite subject, followed by Literacy 10 (24.2%), and English Language 5 (12.2%). Another group opted for both Literacy and Mathematics 4 (10%), and 4(10%) indicated Reading to be their favourite subject.

Primary Three (8-9 years old)

Table 7: Career aspirations for Primary Three learners

Career	Male pupils	Percentage	Female pupils	Percentage
Medical doctor	11	28%	5	21.7%
Pilot	9	23%	0	0%
Nurse	0	0%	5	21.7%
Fashion designer	0	0%	4	17.3%
Soldier	2	5%	0	0%
Engineer	1	2.5%	2	8.7%
Farmer	2	5%	0	0%
Police officer	2	5%	1	4.3%
Chef	0	0%	1	4.3%
Bishop	1	2.5%	0	0%
Government minister	0	0%	1	4.3%
Accountant	0	0%	1	4.3%
Mechanic	1	2.5%	0	0%
Lawyer	1	2.5%	1	4.3%
Scientist	1	2.5%	0	0%
Banker	1	2.5%	1	4.3%
Dentist	1	2.5%	0	0%
Project manager	1	2.5%	0	0%
Business	1	2.5%	0	0%
Pastor	1	2.5%	0	0%
Shopkeeper	1	2.5%	0	0%
Reverend	1	2.5%	0	0%
Teacher	0	0%	1	4.3
Carpenter	1	2.5%	0	0%
Total	39	100%	23	100%

Table 7 indicates that the class had a wide range of career aspirations. While majority of the boys aspired to become Medical doctors 11 (28%) and pilots 9 (23%), a huge number of girls opted to become medical doctors 5 (21.7%), nurses 5 (21.7%) and fashion designers 4 (17.3%).

Further still, from the 62 learners, 6 of them indicated that they did not anyone know before who did their dream job, while two had not yet interacted with a pilot, one had not interacted with a soldier, another with a farmer, another with a medical doctor and another learner had not interacted with a scientist.

Table 8: Primary Three learners' responses about choice of particular careers (8 to 9 years old)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
I want to help (save) sick	20	32.3%
people		
To get money	11	17.7%
It is my parent's or relative's	7	11.2%
job		
It is my best job	6	9.7%
To fly aeroplanes	4	6.5%
I want to preach the word of	3	4.8%
God		
To grow food for my family	3	4.8%
To keep law and order	3	4.8%
To tell the truth	1	1.6%
To design for people	1	1.6%
To build houses for people	1	1.6%
No response	2	3.2%
Total	62	100%

When the Primary Three learners were asked what they wanted to achieve from their dream careers, the majority 20 (32.3%) indicated that they wanted to help or save sick people. Still many more 11 (17.7%) wanted to earn lots of money or wanted to do what their parents or relatives were already doing 7 (11.2%), or just because they just loved the job 6 (9.7%). There were a few other that wanted to fly aeroplanes 4 (6.5%), preach the world of God 3 (4.8%), grow food for their family 3 (4.8%) or contribute to the keeping of law and order 3 (4.8%).

When the learners were asked whether they knew someone doing their dream job, 54 were affirmative while 3 indicated that they had not seen a pilot before, and one learner had not met a soldier before. Four learners did not respond to the question.

They further indicated that the people that they had seen before do their dream jobs ranged from parents to relatives to neighbours and local community members as presented in the table below.

Table 9: Primary Three responses regarding the person that seen do their dream job (8 to 9 years)

Learners' responses	Frequency	Percentage
My parent or sibling	30	48%
My close relative	13	21%
An adult in the local	8	13%
community		
My neighbour	5	8.2%
I saw it on TV	3	5%
People were talking about it	1	1.6%
A friend	1	1.6%
No response	1	1.6%
Total	62	100

The majority of Primary Three learners 30 (48%) indicated that their career aspirations were influenced by their parent or sibling, while another sizeable group 13 (21%) were inspired by other close relatives such as aunties and uncles.

Regarding the hope of going to university, 54 (87%) were affirmative while 8 (13%) learners didn't know.



Figure 8: Aspiration for a Medical Career

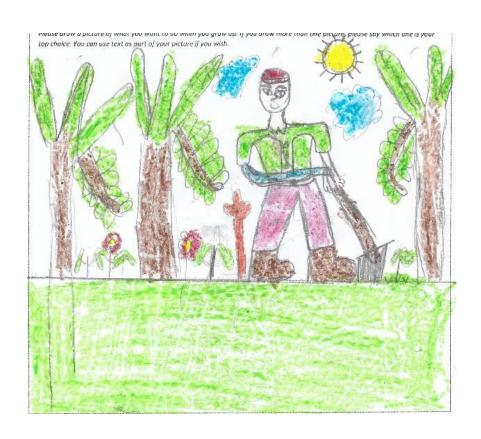


Figure 9: Aspiration for an agriculturalist

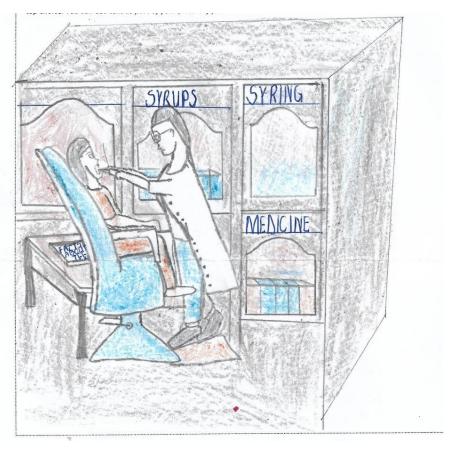


Figure 10: Aspiration for a Medical Career

The above drawings also bear the strong connection between the career, the tools and processes. Young people admire to be part of a given career because of what members of the profession behave, what they do and how they do it.

Table 10: Primary Three learner's favourite subjects (8 to 9 years)

Subject	Frequency	Percentage
Mathematics	37	60%
English	10	16%
Science	8	13%
Social studies	3	5%
Literacy	3	5%
Luganda	1	1%
Total	62	100

The majority of Primary Three learners preferred the study of Mathematics 37 (60%), followed by English language 10 (16%) and Science 8 (13%).

Primary Four (9-10 Years)

Table 11: Primary Four job aspirations

Career	Frequency for boys	Percentage	Frequency for girls	Percentage
Farmer	6	18.7%	0	0%
Pilot	5	15.6%	0	0%
Soldier	4	12.5%	0	0%
Medical doctor	3	9.3%	2	22.2%
Bank manager	2	6.3%	0	0%
Mechanic	2	6.3%	0	0%
Makeup artist	0	0%	2	22.2%
Engineer (welder)	1	3.1%	1	11.1%
Shopkeeper	2	6.3%	0	0%
Footballer	2	6.3%	0	0%
Priest	2	6.3%	0	0%
Musician	0	0%	1	11.1%
Teacher	0	0%	1	11.1%
Midwife	0	0%	1	11.1%
Hairdresser	0	0%	1	11.1%
Police officer	1	3.1%	0	0%
Planner	1	3.1%	0	0%
Lawyer	1	3.1%	0	0%
Total	32	100%	9	100%

A reasonable number of Primary Four boys aspired to become farmers 6 (18.7%), pilots 5 (15.6%), soldiers 4 (12.5%) and medical doctors 3 (9.3%), while some girls aspired to become Medical doctors 2 (22.2%) and makeup artists 2 (22.2%).

Asked whether they have knowledge about people doing their preferred jobs, the Primary Four pupils gave the following responses:

Table 11: Primary Four learners' knowledge of people doing the preferred job (9 to 10 years)

Learner's response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	33	80.5%
No	5	12.2%
No response	3	7.3%
Total	41	100%

As indicated above 33 (80.5%) of the learners had prior knowledge while a relatively small group 5 (12.2%) did not have any knowledge.

Table 12: Hope of going to university (9 to 10 years)

Learner's response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	26	63.5%
I don't know	11	26.8%
No response	4	9.7%
Total	41	100%

The table above indicates that majority 26 (63.5%) wanted to go to university whilst the other group 11 (26.8%) were not sure.

The Primary Four learners gave the following responses regarding their most favourite subject.

Table 13: Favourite subject (9 to 10 years)

Subject	Frequency	Percentage
Mathematics	21	51.2%
English language	11	26.8%
Science	4	9.8%
Social studies	4	9.8%
Religious education	1	2.4%
Total	41	100%

The majority 21 (51.2%) preferred Mathematics, followed by English Language 11 (26.8%), Science 4 (9.8%) and Social Studies 4 (9.8%).

Primary Five (10-11 year olds)

Table 14 shows a range of their career aspirations for the Primary Five class.

Table 14: Primary Five learners' career aspirations

Career aspirations	Frequency for	Percentage	Frequency for	Percentage
_	boys		girls	
Medical doctor	6	46%	11	48%
Fashion designer	0	0%	3	13%
Engineer	2	15%	0	0%
Medical doctor /	0	0%	1	4%
midwife				
Surgeon	0	0%	2	9%
Banker manager	1	7%	1	4%
Teacher in outside	0	0%	1	4%
countries				
Secondary school	0	0%	1	4%
teacher				
Dentist	1	8%	0	0%
Lawyer	0	0%	1	4%
Business	1	8%	0	0%
Pilot	1	8%	1	4%
Tailor	0	0%	1	4%
Mixed farmer in	1	9%	0	0%
Rwanda				
Total	13	100	23	100

Becoming a medical doctor is the most popular job for both girls 11 (47.8%) and boys 6 (46.1%) in primary Five followed by surgeon for girls 2 (8.7%) and engineering for boys 2 (15.4%).

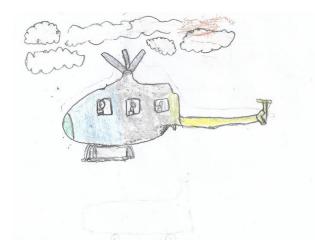


Figure 11: Aspiration for a Pilot



Figure 12: Aspiration for an Agriculturalist

Table 15: Primary Five learners' justifications for preferring certain jobs (10 to 11 years)

Learner's response	Frequency	Percentage
To treat sick people to save	13	36%
lives		
I like the job/ it makes me	8	22%
happy		
To get a lot of money	7	19.4%
Because it is what some of	2	5.6%
my family members do		
No response	6	17%
Total	36	100%

In response, a reasonable number of the classmates 13 (36%) gave the issue of treating sick people to save life as the reason for their career choice. Still another significant group 8 (22%) indicated that they liked the job because it made them happy while another group 7 (19.4%) expected to make a lot of money out of their dream career aspirations.

Furthermore, out of the 36 Primary Five learners, a large number 32 (89%) indicated that they had earlier interacted with an individual doing their prospective career while a minority group 4 (11%) showed that they had not interacted with an individual practising the career of their preference.

Asked about people they had seen before doing their job, the following responses were given

Table 16: People seen practising the learner's dream job (10 to 11 years)

Learner's response	Frequency	Percentage
My parent or sibling	16	44%
A local community member	13	36%
My relative	5	14%
People who work at the	1	3%
airport		
Mummy used to encourage	1	3%
me		
Total	36	100%

The response indicated that the most significant influence for these learners was from parents or siblings 16 (44.4%), role models in the local community 13 (36.1%) and one of the relatives 5 (13.9%).

In regard to continuing to university, 30 (83%) of the Primary Five learners had high hopes while 6 (17%) did not know.

The learners' responses about their favourite subjects is indicated in the table below:

Table 17: Favourite subjects for learners in Primary Five (10 to 11 years)

Subject	Frequency	Percentage
Science	25	69.4%
Mathematics	9	25%
Social studies	1	2.8%
English	1	2.8%
Total	36	100%

In Primary Five, Science was the most popular subject 25 (69.4%) followed by Mathematics 9 (25%).

Discussion

Learners in the Preschool have a narrow range of aspirations as compared to their counterparts in the Primary Three, for example. Their aspirations are more limited to what they see at home and in the school. This is further evidenced in Primary Three that children cannot aspire for jobs they have no experience about. It is the reason why they look to their parents, siblings, close relatives, neighbours, community role models or even celebrities on popular media when it comes to career aspiration. There is a likelihood that when children are deliberately exposed to a wide range of role models their scope about future options can widen a great deal.

There is evidence that children's career choices are stereotyped from the earliest level. The findings, for example, indicate that while 11 (42%) boys of Pre-primary aspired to work as medical doctors, 13 (59%) girls in the same class opted to become nurses. This trend was further indicated in Primary One when 8 (16%) boys aspired to be medical doctors yet only one girl opted for the same career. Similarly, while no boy showed interest to work as a nurse, 9 (60%) aspired for the same. This highlights the urgent need for school to design programs that reverse such trends.

The findings further indicate that majority of the learners in the surveyed school aspired for highly skilled occupations and professions and less for intermediary service jobs. The gap between the young people's aspirations and the reality of the labour markets is widely highlighted as a huge problem in Africa. For example, Rielander & Bernard (2014) reported a discrepancy in the job market resulting from skills mismatches: '...Many firms are looking for young people with technical skills to operate machines and oversee manufacturing processes... many young people with a university education go unemployed'. In addition, evidence from ten African countries similarly showed that young people prefer to work in the public sector where there is job security than taking medium skilled jobs (OECD, 2021). Thus, governments and schools in the region need to do more to help young people focus on careers that are more relevant to their contexts.

Perhaps surprisingly, in several classes the study of Mathematics was highlighted as the learners' favourite, Primary Two 16 learners (39%), Primary Three 37 learners (60%) and Primary Four 21 learners (52%). While until now Mathematics is the worst passed in primary and secondary national exams, the learners' interest in the discipline should be an eye opener to the teachers to work harder to unleash their potential.

It is notable that to widen their scope about future career life, children need to interact with several role models from the local community and beyond. Through technology, in particular the ways of connecting virtually, children from rural communities and disadvantaged backgrounds can interact with volunteers from a wide range of disciplines. This is most likely to give children more confidence about how to invest their time and energy.

In summary, the survey has revealed how the children's aspirations in Maria Assumpta Nursery and Primary School for particular careers begin at a very early stage and aligns with research done by Education and Employers². Their aspirations are often informed by their social environment and the role models they encounter. Governments and schools have responsibility to address the mismatches between the young people's aspirations and the likely employment opportunities

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² https://www.educationandemployers.org/startingearly/

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Appendices

Location of the school

