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## **THE MEANDERS OF THE CONCEPT OF ASPIRATION FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: FINDING THE CORE MEANING OF BEING AN ASPIRANT STUDENT TODAY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the history, the concept of having aspirations has been understood in quite different ways. Especially, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a person with aspirations has been perceived as more passive in terms of accepting the dreams of the others for them. By seeing aspirations as something not possible to reach presumes that young generations do not need to work on their aspirations because these future ideals are beyond the real-life possibilities surrounding them. On the contrary, they need focus on the future expectations which would be more realistic and accessible for them. In this way, they would not need to show a big effort to reach the final destinations and moreover, they would get benefits of these reachable targets more quickly.

On the other hand, great emphasis is put on bringing up conscious and active citizens of the world, which means there is a need for young/future generations to be aware of the real conditions of the world and work on them to shape both their own and the world's future. Moreover, individuals are expected to protect their own identities such as their own abilities and interests. Relatedly, the youth has been encouraged to be aware of and work for their own aspirations. This recent trend pushes young people to think about who they really want to be and how they want to live in the future, which means that they should be conscious and aware of their own aspirations in order to be satisfied in this modern world. At that point, future dreams of young generations seem to have an important role in their life, as a result of which the human characteristic of being aspirant

seems to be desired and expected. Therefore, the common understanding of today implies youth to be more utilitarian in their aspirations such as prioritizing practical skills in accordance with the current needs, both in life and relatedly in education. However, this tendency of the youth to be less idealistic is completely contradictory with individuals of today, caring for the others and for the world by keeping their own identity.

In literature, aspirations were shown to have a significant relation with various characteristics of human beings such as personality traits (Luzia Deißler et al., 2023; Beth Visser & Julie Pozzebon, 2013) and well-being (Matti Hovi & Jani-Petri Laamanen, 2021; Estrella Romero et al., 2012; Visser & Pozzebon, 2013) for adults and undergraduate students. In addition, the meaning in work, the meaning in life (positive, Hong Zhang et al., 2019) and even performances in professional life (Henrich R. Greve, 1998; Giuseppe Labianca et al., 2009; Nielsen, 2013) are also related to the aspirations for adults. Moreover, aspirations might be investigated depending on their types such as intrinsic vs extrinsic (Romero et al., 2012) for university students or adults, or on the more specific factors under these types such as income, educational and social aspirations as examples of extrinsic aspirations (Deißler et al., 2023) in adults. Moreover, as a popular element of contemporary times, social media seems to have a role in shaping aspirations of teenagers (Michael Brown et al., 2022; Sora Pazer, 2024; Donghee Wohn et al., 2013), which definitely draws more attention to understanding the concept of aspiration more thoroughly.

As schools are a central point of young generations' lives, aspirations have become important in the field of education, especially related to their role in providing achievement through school life. That is why educational researchers looked for the aspirational factors surrounding students to examine their relation with the high and low scores in courses. Recently, a number of studies have provided significant results demonstrating that teenager students with higher aspirations are academically more successful (Nabil Khattab, 2015; Erin Hiley Sharp et al., 2020; Frank Walkey et al., 2013). Moreover, while 33% of Generation Z does not know how to create and shape their future aspirations (Anna Duda-Machejek, 2024), in Walentyna Wróblewska's (2001) study, Polish university students also mentioned the educational institution as the place to support and develop their life and career aspirations. In these studies, it has been proven that even holding either aspirations or expectations high helps students to improve their achievement, which requires educational support for these individuals. It is also emphasized that having low aspirations and low expectations at the same time affects success negatively, while keeping both aspirations and expectations high provides a big positive impact (Khattab, 2015; Sharp et al., 2020; Walkey et al., 2013). However, Khattab (2014) also found out that aspirations and expectations are not accurate and obvious predictors of achievement, which requires focusing on the role of some other issues, such as family-based factors including family type, social capital, social class, parental expectations and

involvement. Tim Kasser and Richard M. Ryan (1993), on the other hand, drew more attention on types of self-motivation and external factors, all of which have a role in shaping individuals' aspirations. As mentioned hereinabove, the issue of aspiration and expectation has not become clear through time. Additionally, there was no common use of the word *aspirant*. Hence, firstly it is crucial to focus on clarifying the meaning of being *aspirant*. Secondly, it is necessary to understand the relation between the terms *aspiration* and *expectation* by analyzing related theories which do not appear in the same time periods. Through the meta-analysis of previous works of these theories from the fields representing or closely connected with education, the question of *What are the contemporary characteristics of an aspirant student as a subject of their individual life?* will be examined. By this way, a model of aspirant young individual will be suggested so that individuals might have the chance to develop themselves to fit into contemporary reality, challenges and expectations from them.

## 1. DEFINITIONS OF ASPIRATION AND EXPECTATION ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Although there is a common view about the positive effect of having aspirations for young individuals, the real meaning of aspiration has not been an exact and clear understanding by the researchers. Before moving on the perspectives of scientists about the issue, firstly it is necessary to focus on the core definitions that come from different disciplines, which are interconnected to the field of education. Because of understanding education both as a social and humanistic discipline, it is important to take a closer look at the social and psychological understanding and finally refer to the pedagogical perspective. On the other hand, it is also crucial to clarify the definitions of other terms related to aspiration (i.e. expectation or wish) so that we could grasp the shifts in the meaning of being aspirant through time.

### 1a. Original Dictionary Definitions

In order to have a deeper understanding of the role of aspirations and expectations in student success, it is necessary to discuss their meanings and difference. According to Oxford English Dictionary (2025a), the word *aspire* was officially used as *aspyreth* for the first time by Sir John Fortescue (1460), a justice and political theorist, in the first version of his book titled *Governance of England* to describe one of the noblemen as *Mannys Corage is so noble that naturally he aspyreth to hye thyngs and to be exaltyd* (p. 128). In the current version of the dictionary, the word *aspire* is explained with the original meaning of 1400s as *to have a fixed desire, longing, or ambition for something at present above one; to seek to attain, to pant, long*. The word is presented to have roots in Latin and specifically stemming from the word *aspīrāre* with the meaning of *to seek to reach*. On the other hand, *expectation* (in Latin, it was *exspectātiōn-*,

*expectātiō*) is currently defined as *the action or fact of anticipating or foreseeing something; the belief that something will happen or be the case* (Oxford Dictionary, 2025b) which firstly appeared in the texts with that meaning as *expectacion* in 1523 (State Papers of King Henry the Eighth by T. Wolsey). After that, it appeared in the texts of 1585 to mean *a preconceived idea or opinion based on what a person has hoped for or imagined regarding a future event, situation, or encounter* (Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society by R. Lane). As a result, aspirations seem to be related more to desires and ambitions to reach, while expectations cover anticipations, opinions, beliefs and hopes about future events. From this aspect, aspirations might be perceived as a stronger power pushing someone to attain, compared to the expectations as a passive situation of hoping and waiting for the result.

#### 1b. Definitions from Sociological Perspective

Studying on the concepts of aspiration and expectation, one of the sociologists, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) explained *aspirations as demands adjusted by ageing through accepting their objective chances and possibilities* (p. 110) and also as *unrealistic expectations* (p. 156). As a result, he underlined the conceptual difference between aspirations and expectations and also the relation between aspirations and real possibilities. In one of the more recent books, Bourdieu (1990) also defined expectations as *the product of objective conditions and probabilities* (p. 156), which puts expectations on a more concrete base compared to the aspirations as simple demands. On the other hand, he (1998) explained how the lives of new generations are shaped through *collective expectations as socially inculcated beliefs* (p. 103), in which the word *belief* was used as related to the concept of expectations, which is completely the opposite of Khattab (2015) who utilized *belief* while explaining the concept of aspiration.

When it comes to a more recent sociological perspective, Nabil Khattab (2015) attempted to identify the difference between two interrelated terms, *aspiration* and *expectation*. He described aspirations as *abstract values and beliefs regarding future plans* and expectations as *assessment of the likelihood that an event, a behavior or an outcome will occur* (p. 733). Khattab (2015) also referred to researchers of pedagogy field, Stephen Gorard et al. (2012) who suggested the definition of *what an individual hopes will happen in the future* (p. 13) for the term aspiration and *what an individual believes will happen in the future* (p. 13) for the term of expectation. At that point, it is interesting to see that while Khattab (2015) uses the word *belief* when describing aspirations, his reference, Gorard et al. (2012) uses the same word in the explanation of the concept of expectation. Moreover, Khattab (2015) suggests a more concrete term for the concept of aspirations – *plan*, but Gorard et al. (2012) wrote about *hope* which appears to be a more abstract, long-term concept. On the other hand, Khattab (2015) also uses the idea of *«likelihood» of an event* in the explanation of expectations, which suggests the meaning of more concrete possibilities.

As a result, Khattab (2015) attempted to draw attention to the difference between these two similar but different concepts (aspirations and expectations), but even he had some contradictions and blur in the definitions he provided. Moreover, he underlined the roots of aspirations in the cultural sphere of the society, while expectations are determined by the perceived structure of opportunity within society.

#### 1c. Definitions from Psychological Perspective

From another perspective, two psychologists, Kasser & Ryan (1993) suggested that aspirations are related to *beliefs* (p. 420) and *goals*, which should be measured based on two dimensions: *their personal importance and the likelihood they will be realized* (p. 411). In their research, the relation of *beliefs* with aspirations was similar to Khattab's (2015) while on the contrary to Khattab's (2015), for Kasser and Ryan (1996) the idea of *likelihood* is not related to expectations, but aspirations. Moreover, by using the idea of *goals*, they (2000) identified two types of aspirations: intrinsic which is explained as *goals such as affiliation, personal growth, and community that directly satisfy basic needs* and extrinsic as *goals such as wealth, fame, and image that at best indirectly satisfy the needs* (p. 75). As a result, Kasser and Ryan (2000) did not seem to distinguish the concepts of aspiration and expectation, and in fact they used contentious words such as *belief* and *likelihood* to explain aspirations.

#### 1d. Definitions from Pedagogical Perspective

Polish pedagogue, Lewowicki (1987) defined aspirations (Pol. *aspiracje*) as *ambitions, plans, intentions and desires for something and pursuits to achieve something* (pp. 12–13) which are more connected to the *wishes*. The word of *wish* is basically older than the word *aspyreth*, with its first use in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which is defined as *a desire for something not attainable by one's own effort, felt in the mind but not impelling to action; a passive or inactive desire* by Oxford Dictionary (2025a). As a result, from sociological and pedagogical perspective, aspirations are related to life ideals and worldviews shaping the actions, which causes them to be far from the realities surrounding the individuals, like *wishes*. Moreover, aspirations get higher when they are related to the ideal result (Pol. *idealnym*) as part of self-ideal (pol. *ja idealnego*) which is the perception about oneself for now and for the future (p. 13). At that point, Lewowicki (1989) views expectations (Pol. *oczekiwania*) as lower-level targets which are more related to *judgements referring to the future actions* (p. 10) and he uses the concepts of ambitions, wishes, plans and desires to explain *aspirations* similar to the original meaning of the term in the 1400s.

Another older period Polish pedagogue, Andrzej Janowski (1977, p. 12) mentioned the concept of aspiration from the psychological perspective as *pursuits of special determined intensity to achieve a specific aim as a destination* by referring to Atkinson (1973). On the other hand, he also transmitted the sociological

definition of aspiration as *an assembly of pursuits described by the hierarchy of aims which individuals accept and define as so important to shape their life plans* (p. 12). Janowski also suggested the term of conscious aspirations of individuals which is explained as the result of the relation between their social desires and needs (as part of their social interactions or role in social groups) and psychological desires and needs (as a personal identity). Individuals need to evaluate these different types of aspirations and then shape their individual aspirations. That requires both individual readiness and optimal conditions to reach aspirations which shape expectations and life orientation (p. 32). Janowski argues that while personal wishes do not have limits and evaluation, during our lifetime we realize the surrounding conditions and possibilities and choose better ways to follow. These paths become our aspirations by meeting expectations of different groups (i.e. society or family) around us at the same time, which means our personal idealistic, passive, long-term wishes turn into more realistic and active aspirations through our actions to satisfy the others (p. 36).

## 2. FINDING OUT THE CONCEPT OF ASPIRANT PERSON FOR EACH AUTHOR

In different time periods, there have been various perspectives about the steps followed by individuals in designing their aspirations. Oxford Dictionary (2025a) defines being *aspirant* (adj.) as *striving for a higher position, seeking distinction* by referring to its original use in literary texts and its first appearance in the dictionaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, *aspirant* is also a noun used to name an individual *who aspires, [...] who seeks advancement to high position* as originally used in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Oxford Dictionary, 2025a). Having these oldest definitions provided by a well-known dictionary, I followed the idea to call individuals with aspirations *aspirant* in this article. Generally, in the literature, researchers explain the issue of aspirations and the steps to create or realize aspirations, but they do not speak clearly about being aspirant. At that point, I see *aspirant* emerging from these contradictory structures and suggestions. The variety of scope and content of aspirations and expectations provided by a number of social scientists would help to have a wider understanding about the issue. Specifically, aspirant people are believed to follow different paths to create, shape and work on their aspirations. From my perspective, these steps might be roughly grouped as (1) Logical Stages, (2) Emotional Stages and (3) Real Life Attempts of the individuals as suggested in Table 1. Logical stages are basically the mind work, during which someone invents his/her aspirations (1a: Creating the Ideas), thinks about its various aspects and details (1b: Elaborating the Possibility to Fulfill the Ideas), and make revisions in the original idea when it is necessary (1c: Shaping the Original Ideas). On the contrary to this thinking-based stage, the emotional stage includes the feelings towards the aspirations (2a: Strength of Emotions towards the Ideas) and



the future vision of individuals (2b: Vision of Future), which are also effective in reaching the final version of them. In the last stage, the person might attempt to make their aspirations real in various ways, which is called as real life attempts (3a: Concrete Steps to Fulfill Dreams).

From this perspective, when the term aspiration appeared for the first time in the Middle Ages, its definition suggested a specific meaning, especially related to the activities of individuals. Specifically, it meant people were in need to think about their own dreams in detail to make it real (active) and they were not limited by the difficulty or even impossibility to reach it because they regarded them as unrealistic. Aspirants were so focused on the core of aspirations, that is why they tried alternative routes to make it real (seek to reach) without any changes in the original ideas. The words of ambition and desire were also included in its definition suggesting the strong emotions that an individual would feel towards his/her aspirations. As a result, the original meaning of the term included strong thoughts and feelings of such as being ambitious about a never-changing dream. This kind of a definition was suggesting a completely **individualistic approach** focusing on protecting the core of the idea, without any interest in the realization thereof.

When the term aspiration appears in the texts of Janowski in the 1970s, he also focused on individual needs and desires by adding the role of social desires as a result of the social interactions. According to his pedagogical perspective, aspirants actively create their unlimited aspirations based on their own interests (active). However, as part of the society, they evaluate the surrounding conditions of reality and put their aspirations into more accessible forms (realistic) by thinking about the possibilities to reach, i.e. as a result of the life conditions, people reshape their original dreams (adjustment) and that makes them different from the unrealistic wishes. As a result, aspirants were following more **individual-social approach** in designing their ideas.

Another Polish pedagogue, Lewowicki (1987), on the other hand had a completely different understanding about aspirations. According to him, aspirations were very close to wishes by being related to ambitions and desires for something. In his theory, aspirants created their aspirations in their mind with the intention to accomplish them (active), and tried to push the limits of surrounding conditions for their abstract ideals (unrealistic). On the other hand, expectations are lower-level, more accessible and realistic targets. Although aspirations are related to strong feelings (ambition and desire), they might become accessible and realistic targets through adjustment. This transmission especially appears during creating and following the concrete steps to reach aspirations (plan). Here, Lewowicki (1987) suggests the ideas of the self-awareness and also awareness of the surrounding conditions of the aspirant, which appears as an **individualistic approach** similar to the Middle Ages, by additionally including the practical steps to follow to reach these aspirations for the first time in literature.

Table 1. Comparison of Scopes and Elements of Understanding Aspirations and Expectations by the Authors of Different Social Sciences

		Time Periods	Middle Ages 1300s to 1500s	20 <sup>th</sup> Century				21 <sup>st</sup> Century	
				1970s	1980s	1980s	1990s	2012	2015
Stages Followed by Individuals in Shaping and Reaching Aspirations	1. Logical Stages	Source of Definition	Oxford Dictionary	Janowski (Pedagogy)	Bourdieu (Sociology)	Lewowicki (Pedagogy)	Kasser & Ryan (Psychology)	Gorard (Sociology)	Khattab (Sociology)
		Attitude							
		Active	ASP	ASP	ASP	ASP			
		Passive	EXP + WISH	WISH				ASP	ASP
		Realistic (Likelihood)		ASP	EXP	EXP	ASP		EXP
2. Emotional Stages	2. Emotional Stages	Unrealistic (Abstract)	ASP	WISH	ASP	ASP			ASP
		Adjustment (Referring to changing conditions)		ASP	ASP	ASP			
		Seek to Reach (Trying alternative ways to reach)	ASP						
		Ambition	ASP			ASP (like WISH)			
		Desire	ASP + WISH			ASP			
3. Real Life Activity	3. Real Life Activity	Demand			ASP				
		Hope	EXP					ASP	
		Belief	EXP		EXP		ASP	EXP	ASP
		Goal					Intrinsic ASP Extrinsic ASP		
		Plan				ASP			ASP



In the same period, Bourdieu (1984) with a sociological perspective explained aspirations mostly as the individual demands, shaped through the objective conditions and possibilities provided by the surrounding society. It means that although Bourdieu (1984) accepted the active role of aspirants' minds in creating their long-term, unrealistic dreams, they are turned into more realistic forms through collective expectations (adjustment). In other words, the final point that aspirants reach does not coincide with their original life aspiration which is to be reshaped and adjusted to care about the society. Differently from Lewowicki (1987), Bourdieu (1984) also mentions about demands for aspirations, a weaker type of feeling compared to ambitions or desires. This attitude makes sense when we think about how he prioritized the social realities, but not the personal feelings in shaping the aspirations. As a result, he suggested aspirations not to be individually, but rather socially designed so that people could reach them in the future – similarly to the case when they reach their expectations; however, he did not propose any concrete steps (i.e. goals or plans) to follow to make these dreams real. As a result, Bourdieu's (1984) definition of aspirant comes definitely from the perspective of a **social approach** with the lower importance of unrealistic individual aspirations.

In 1993, psychology researchers Kasser and Ryan also focused on aspirations by showing the need of evaluation of the real-life conditions to shape them (realistic). They did not openly suggest how individuals create their aspirations, but they mostly focused on the role of personal beliefs in evaluating the possibility to reach them. By putting a strong emphasis on personal aspects on creating aspirations, they also underlined role of aspirations in providing motivation for aspirants. Accordingly, they grouped aspirations under two headings (intrinsic and extrinsic) to demonstrate their real-life importance for individuals in a detailed way. By this way, it could become possible to evaluate how aspirations may differ in relation to their roles in shaping concrete behaviors (goal). On the other hand, Kasser and Ryan (1993) did not mention about how to make plans in accordance with aspirations, leaving the issue of reaching them in blur. That means they also presented an **individualistic approach** concentrated not on creating aspirations, but mostly on shaping and reaching them.

More recently, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the concept of aspiration was discussed by Gorard et al. (2012) and Khattab (2015). Contrary to the previous eras, they understood the creation process of aspirations as individuals being not actively involved in their invention and not demanding but mostly waiting for external factors (e.g. family or even God) to decide about their long-term dreams (passive). Here, Gorard et al. (2012) mentioned the role of hope to think about future possibilities, which suggested the emotional stage that an aspirant is passing through shaping his/her aspirations. Although Khattab (2015) has the similar view about how individuals passively accept the aspirations designed by the others (i.e. their families or teachers) for them, he also puts emphasis on the low probability of reaching these aspirations (unrealistic). This issue causes people to focus on only the

most probable dreams, to work only on them, to identify and follow only the concrete steps to make them real (plan). That means, contrary to being passive in creating the aspirations, individuals should be active in the process of planning. Moreover, in case somebody does not find a path to reach his/her aspiration, he/she needs to completely forget about the original idea, and work on something else. Interestingly, in that less idealistic, but more realistic scenario Khattab (2015) mentions about long-term future vision of individuals (belief). That means that although aspirants actively think about which steps they need to follow for their aspirations, they may not prefer to struggle for them, but mostly expect from the others to make them real. With that profile, individuals would not focus on their original aspirations, but more on their realistic forms by following abstract values and beliefs. Related to this contradiction in the whole idea, Khattab (2015) might be thought to be using the word belief as more linked to wishes, which are naturally expectations from God without any role of personal attempts which means that in the most recent era, aspirants have been mostly waiting passively for the others to design and impose the ideals on them, which is completely different from the original understanding of the term. This contemporary approach is completely a **non-individual** one as aspirants of today are trying to reach actually the dreams of the others, which explains the weak bonds to the ideas and the high possibility to give up struggling for them.

### 3. COMPARISON OF THE RELATED TERMS WITH ASPIRATIONS ACROSS TIME PERIODS AND SCIENTIFIC FIELDS

It seems that the original meaning of *aspiration* was putting more emphasis on the active entity of individuals in the 1300s and even in the following periods such as the 1970s and the 1980s, which means aspirations were perceived as something reachable as a result of the attempts taken. On the other hand, the idea of passive human beings was related more to the concept of *wish* in the 1300s and in the 1970s. Actually, in terms of the difference between *goal/plan* and *hope/belief*, it might be argued that while the first two terms can be understood as actions of individuals related to their future, the second two terms suggest passive human beings under the rule and fate by God. From this perspective, expectations were originally related to the hopes from God without the capability to cross the borders designed for them. On the other hand, in the 1980s and the 1990s aspirations were perceived as the ideas shaping the goals and plans which suggests the possibility of changing life standards as a result of individual attempts. Interestingly, in the 2000s, recent scientists such as Gorard et al. (2012) and Khattab (2015), again matched *aspirations* with the passivity of individuals, which means that people cannot reach their aspirations through their individual attempts. Specifically, Khattab (2015) used the terms *hope* and *belief* to explain *aspirations*, while Gorard et al. (2012) used the term *hope* related to the concept of *expectation*. As a result, it might be argued that the most

recent research about aspirations actually neither uses the term with the original dictionary meaning, nor agrees on the current meaning of it.

Another contradiction about the term of *aspiration* is its relation with real life conditions surrounding individuals. Recently, Khattab (2015) suggested aspirations to be abstract, unrealistic compared to more likely or realistic expectations, which was actually the original understanding in the 1300s. However, in the 1970s, Janowski compared aspirations to unrealistic wishes, and he explained aspirations as more related to real world conditions. On the contrary, in the 1980s, both Bourdieu and Lewowicki presented aspiration as something unrealistic similarly to its original dictionary meaning of the term again while suggesting expectations with more bonds with the reality. However, researchers in the 1990s related aspirations to real life goals (Kasser and Ryan, 1993), suggesting another long-term inconsistency between researchers to define the concept of *aspiration*. As a result, there were a number of changes in the ideas about whether aspirations should be realistic or more abstract through time periods. However, it is recently perceived as more concrete plans in terms of the possibility to fulfill the original idea.

Researcher could not have a stable view either about the possible activities to shape the aspirations through life. In the 1970s and the 1980s, aspirations were perceived as something open to reshaping based on changing conditions surrounding individuals, which means that in that period, aspirations were not fixed and people were redesigning their dreams by taking their life conditions such as achievements or financial situation into consideration. For example, somebody could change his/her dream of being a doctor into being a teacher because of the impact of the schools attended, or as a result of his/her success rate in entrance exams or his/her incapability to cover medical training expenses. On the other hand, in the 1400s, aspiration included the idea of *seeking to reach*, which meant trying to reach the original dream without making any adjustments on it. In this perspective while aspirations were more constant and fixed, and people were encouraged and brave to satisfy them and make them real without any changes. However, after the 1970s, aspirations gained a completely different meaning compared to the previous times. In the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the attitude towards understanding the issue of aspirations became more flexible, which means that researchers started to see the concept as unstable, but possible to evolve based on the surrounding life conditions and the modifications necessary to be applied.

As part of the changes in prioritizing the logic and emotions of human beings, aspirations have also experienced differences in meaning. In the original meaning of the 1400's, aspirations were perceived as related to desires and ambitions for something difficult to reach, which had a very strong meaning as it suggested struggle. At that time, people showed their dreams through their words and wanted to make them real just because of feeling a strong impulse for them. For example, somebody wanted to be a famous writer and kept his/her dream because of the strong feeling he/she had for it, but he/she did not know

how to reach it and maybe did not even try to do anything practical for it. On the contrary, in the 1980s, Bourdieu related aspirations to demands, which was not such a strong feeling and therefore, not very provocative for people to keep. That is why, from a sociological perspective, it was possible to make adjustments in aspirations based on the objective life conditions. In the area of pedagogy, on the other hand, Lewowicki (1987), labelled aspirations also as ambitions and desires similarly to their original meaning, but also combined the necessity to have concrete plans to reach them. That means that from an educational perspective, it was possible to have dreams, however individuals need to take necessary steps through being educated to make these dreams come true. In that perspective, expectations were the concrete steps that somebody needed to complete such as the educational degrees that he/she needs to complete to be able to perform his/her dream job. These concrete steps were called goals by Kasser and Ryan in the 1990s, showing that psychologists also suggested the necessity for more realistic ideas to follow – such as small steps to reach the big ideal.

As the last aspect of the definitions, the roles of aspirations and expectations in relation with the attitude towards future have also varied a lot through time. In the original dictionary meaning, it was expectations which were related to someone's beliefs and hopes for his/her future. From the similar viewpoint, expectations were also mentioned by Bourdieu (1984) to show their relation to social beliefs. On the contrary to this perspective, Kasser and Ryan (1993) suggested beliefs as to be related to the aspirations of individuals. From their psychological understanding of the terms, aspirations were realistic ideas with the probability to be achieved in the individuals' lives. More recently, Gorard et al. (2012) identified expectations to be linked to the individuals' concrete beliefs about their future while aspirations to be related with individuals' hopes as a result of being more abstract and long-term ideals. At that point, the perspective of Khattab (2015) appeared as completely different and contradictory at the first moment. According to Khattab (2015), aspirations are abstract dreams of individuals which are difficult or even impossible to reach, which causes human beings to have a passive attitude to work on them. However, he also uses the word *plan* to show the reason for having aspirations, which results from the process of active thinking of individuals. Moreover, in the same definition, Khattab (2015) suggests aspirations to be related to the beliefs of individuals, which might be related to understanding the term belief from more religious perspective.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Having considered the contemporary world needs and analyzed the changing trends in defining the concept of aspiration and aspirant individuals, the category of self-awareness should be the key characteristic that young generations need to take account of. As the first stage to reach aspirations,

today's youth primarily need to **be aware of their own dreams** for their life, which would be their **life-long motivation**. In this process of aspiration design, they should continuously consider their **core aspirations** and their details, which would make them involved with the process as suggested in the Middle Ages. On the other hand, they should also **be aware of their surrounding conditions** such as financial situations of their families, which might help them to evaluate their likelihood of reaching the original dreams as suggested by Kasser and Ryan (1993). Following this comprehensive analysis of the possibilities, individuals may need to **make adjustments** in their original future-related ideas in order to turn them into more realistic targets by being aware of **their own conditions** in accordance with the Lewowicki's (1987) ideas. Inevitably, **being active** individuals is again important in that step in **reshaping the ideas** and trying to **find the alternative** routes to make aspirations real.

At the emotional stages of aspirations design, firstly it is definitely necessary for individuals to have strong feelings for their aspirations, like **ambitions**, to be able to keep strong willingness to reach aspirations and struggle for them. These **deep emotions** towards aspirations were covered in the definition of Oxford Dictionary (1460) which defined them as ambitions that individuals **seek to reach**. Having the concrete belief to reach their aspirations instead of abstract hope would also be more beneficial for individuals similarly to Kasser and Ryan's suggestions (1993). At the final stage related to real life activities, it would be helpful for individuals to create and follow some **concrete steps** like a road-map to reach their well-designed aspirations. At that point, it would be helpful for individuals to **differentiate their intrinsic and extrinsic goals** as suggested by Kasser and Ryan (1993), which means that young individuals might be aware of their **personal growth goals** necessary for their self-identity and also the **goals related to their social position** such as their wealth and fame. In that way, these individuals might turn these aspirations into more **realistic forms** as goals. As a result, aspirants would be **actively involved** in the whole process of reaching aspirations starting from the design of the core ideas to listing the **concrete goals** to complete.

At the first sight, all of these suggested characteristics of an aspirant student profile might appear as much closer to the definition and the scope of having expectations, especially in terms of being realistic. However, contrary to the significant role of other people to shape one's future expectations, here, I emphasize the active role of the individual and internal reasons to follow aspirations. Although surrounding conditions need to be taken into consideration to finalize the scope of the aspirations, keeping the core and original dream as it is, still makes aspirations individual, which means that students should definitely be aware of surrounding realities, but they should never lose their own identity hidden in their aspirations. Only

in that case, they will have the motivation to reach their aspirations, and the strength to struggle for them. If we tend to help young people to become aspirant, we should follow the steps and stages coming out of the characteristics of aspiration concept; the concept helping younger ones to become active and conscious about their own life and about the world. Practically, this kind of a huge and personal dream would be an intrinsic motivation for the young members of the society not only to provide improvement in various fields, but also to reach their overall well-being. As a result, they would feel more true to themselves, would be more target oriented and probably more engaged in their educational life.

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### ***The Meanders of the Concept of Aspiration from the Middle Ages to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Finding the Core Meaning of Being an Aspirant Student Today***

#### **Summary**

**Aim:** This study aims to present and analyze the meanings of aspiration and other related terms through social sciences perspectives, and also to suggest a contemporarily desired profile of an aspirant student.

**Methods:** The historical review and meta-analysis methods were used to examine the concept of *aspiration* across various disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and pedagogy.

**Results:** Scholars from different fields -and even within the same discipline- have not reached a consensus on the meaning of being *aspirant*. Furthermore, there is a tendency among researchers to leave the concept vaguely defined, which hinders a comprehensive understanding of their findings. It is possible to suggest an aspirant person profile stemming out of the texts of chosen authors of various time periods thanks to the comparison of their views.

**Conclusions:** The contemporarily anticipated profile of aspirant youth should be in accordance with the current and future changes and needs of the world.

**Keywords:** Aspiration, expectation, model of an aspirant student.