Learner Career Evaluation in a Quasi-Rural Area in South Africa

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Introduction

The South African education system is experiencing substantial changes, characterised by a range of challenges and uneven resource distribution between urban and rural areas. Educational institutions vary from well-equipped schools in cities to poorly resourced facilities in rural locations, where numerous barriers hinder educational progress (Ensor, 1996; Hopkins & Harris, 1997; Department of Education, 2006, 2018; Fleisch, 2008; Van der Berg, 2008; Dyomfana, 2022). These inequalities reflect deep-seated socioeconomic divisions that influence students' ambitions and prospects differently based on their geographical and socioeconomic backgrounds (Hoadley, 2007; Van der Berg, 2008; Bouldden & Henry, 2023). Consequently, learners' views of their prospective roles in society are shaped by these contextual elements, highlighting the need for customised educational strategies that address these distinct circumstances (Thabang, 2020; Shah, 2023).

This research examines Grade 9 students in Mankweng, a town situated approximately 30 km east of Polokwane in Limpopo Province (Figure 1). Positioned along the R71 main road from Polokwane eastwards to Tzaneen, Mankweng functions as both a residential area for those employed in the provincial capital and a community influenced by the University of Limpopo's social, cultural, and economic impacts (White, 1997; University of Limpopo, 2021). This dual role results in a multifaceted socio-cultural landscape, where traditional African customs exist alongside contemporary educational and career aspirations, partly due to the nearby higher education institutions. Before 1994, Mankweng was part of the Lebowa homeland and has maintained numerous social and administrative characteristics, further contributing to its distinctive local culture (White, 1997; Thabang, 2020).

Figure 1
Location of Mankweng in Limpopo Province, South Africa
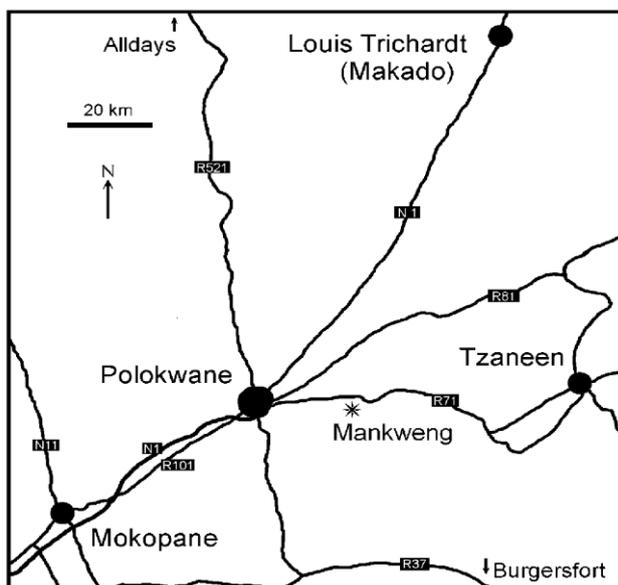
This research was conducted as part of a collaborative initiative between the University of Limpopo and the Rotary Club (Pietersburg 100 Club), and aimed to examine the career aspirations, personal strengths, and perceived societal roles of Grade 9 students in Mankweng. The study employed a structured questionnaire originally developed by the Montana Department of Labor and Industry (MDLI, 2020), which was modified to reduce cultural bias. This survey instrument categorises learners into six personality-based career types: Helper, Persuader, Organiser, Doer, Thinker, and Creator (Carney & Hubbard, 2023; Gianforte & Esau, 2023). The questionnaire was designed to identify potential career paths for each student by assessing their preferences across various tasks and roles in domestic, community, and prospective work environments. Nevertheless, certain questions had limited relevance in this quasi-rural setting, an issue previously observed in comparable studies (White, 1997). This study expands upon previous investigations by exploring the impact of learners' individual, gender-specific, and cultural identities on their views of potential career paths. This examination is particularly pertinent given that earlier studies have indicated a lack of well-defined career aspirations or inaccurate self-assessments among younger students (Hoadley, 2007; Van der Berg, 2008). In doing so, this investigation seeks not only to enhance our understanding of career guidance in rural South Africa but also to emphasise the importance of developing tailored educational approaches that are sensitive to cultural and contextual factors.

The research employed a questionnaire developed by the Montana Department of Labour and Industry (MDLI 2020; Carney & Hubbard 2023; Gianforte & Esau 2023) to classify participants into six distinct categories: Helper, Persuader, Organiser, Doer, Thinker, and Creator. This classification was based on responses to seventy-two (72) questions (Table 1) that explored participants' preferences, abilities, and aspirations in domestic, community, and potential work environments. Despite its American origin, the survey exhibits only a slight bias toward American culture, which is largely offset by its multicultural approach. The questionnaire encompasses a wide range of scenarios, probing respondents' "likes," "can do" attitudes, and "want to" inclinations across various contexts.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws upon several fundamental theoretical frameworks: Super's Developmental Self-Concept Theory (Super, 1990; Hartung, 2013) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al. 1994; Brown & Lent, 2017), Cultural Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Di Maggio, 2018), and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020). These perspectives offer valuable insights into the formation of career aspirations among adolescents in semi-rural South Africa, considering their socioeconomic environment, individual identities, and cultural heritage.

Super's Developmental Self-Concept Theory. Developmental Self-Concept Theory, proposed by Super (1990), suggests that one's career choice reflects the gradual development of self-concept, which is influenced by ongoing personal and social experiences (Super, 1990; Hartung, 2013). Super's theory emphasises adolescence as a crucial period for self-concept formation, during which young individuals begin to connect their perceived abilities and interests with their potential career options. This theoretical framework implies that career interventions for adolescents should encourage the exploration of various roles, promote self-reflection, and enhance the understanding of personal strengths. In the context

of a semi-rural area such as Mankweng, where students may have restricted exposure to a wide range of careers, Super's theory highlights the importance of providing accessible and relatable career guidance programs (Brown & Lent, 2017).

Social Cognitive Career Theory. The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by Lent et al. (1994), broadens Bandura's social cognitive theory to encompass career development, highlighting the importance of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals in moulding career ambitions (Lent & Brown, 2019). SCCT suggests that an individual's confidence in their capabilities or self-efficacy plays a crucial role in shaping career-related interests and choices. This framework is especially pertinent for teenagers in various socioeconomic environments, as self-efficacy can be affected by community resources, exposure to role models, and educational prospects (Brown & Lent, 2017). Within the modern (post-1994) South African context, SCCT underscores how sociocultural and economic elements influence students' career expectations and their perceptions of potential career achievement (Badat & Sayed, 2014). By focusing on personality-based career types, this study offers insights into learners' self-assurance in specific roles, supporting SCCT's emphasis on the connection between self-efficacy and career interest.

Capital Theory. Bourdieu's (1986) Cultural Capital Theory examines the impact of social and cultural resources on educational and professional outcomes. Cultural capital encompasses the knowledge, abilities, principles, and conduct transmitted through familial and communal channels. Bourdieu (1986) posits that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds may have restricted access to forms of cultural capital esteemed in academic and professional spheres (Di Maggio, 2018; Bathmaker, 2015). This concept is particularly relevant to students in semi-rural South Africa, where traditional roles may be prioritised over urban-centric occupations (Hoadley, 2007). By examining the role of cultural capital, this study illuminates how community expectations and limited exposure to diverse careers influence learners' self-perception and vocational aspirations. Consequently, this theory underscores the significance of career programs that broaden learners' cultural capital, thereby improving their access to a wider range of career options.

Self-Determination Theory. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (2000) posits that motivation stems from the satisfaction of three psychological necessities: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). According to SDT, when individuals experience a sense of autonomy and competence, they are more inclined to make career choices that align with their intrinsic interests. The research findings revealed a strong preference for entrepreneurial positions, which reflects a desire for autonomy, aligning with SDT's emphasis on self-directed motivation. Studies suggest that adolescent career development is enhanced by nurturing autonomy and competence through individualised, strength-focused guidance (Howard et al., 2020; Wang & Degol, 2017; Bouldden & Henry, 2023). For students in Mankweng, SDT highlights the importance of implementing career interventions that promote self-reliance and offer opportunities for skill enhancement within their sociocultural context.

Integrating Theory with Research Goals. This conceptual structure illuminates the intricate relationship between personal identity, societal and cultural factors, beliefs in one's abilities, and drive. Collectively, these concepts suggest that the students in Mankweng would thrive with culturally appropriate, introspective career counselling that not only facilitates self-

discovery but also broadens exposure to various professional role models. Furthermore, by implementing these theoretical perspectives, this research seeks to offer a more nuanced understanding of how Grade 9 pupils envision their future capabilities and roles within a setting that merges conventional values with contemporary ambitions.

Methodology

Research Design. This study also utilised a descriptive survey design to examine the career aspirations, perceived strengths, and personality-based career inclinations of Grade 9 learners in Mankweng, Limpopo Province (Figure 1). Descriptive surveys are widely used in educational research to capture data on attitudes, behaviours, and preferences across a large sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach enables a comprehensive analysis of career perceptions among learners in a semi-rural context, providing valuable insights into the intersection of sociocultural influences and career aspirations.

Study Sample. This study focuses on Grade 9 learners in Mankweng, a semi-rural area near Polokwane, Limpopo Province, South Africa. A total of 264 learners were selected through purposive sampling, which is a non-probability method commonly used in educational research to target specific groups relevant to the study objectives (Patton, 2015). Grade 9 was selected because of its importance as a transitional stage, where learners begin to consider subject choices that influence their future career paths (Rojewski et al., 2017). The sample included learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, reflecting the mixed cultural and economic landscape of Mankweng. Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure that participants represented a variety of school resources and backgrounds, thus enhancing the study's capacity to capture a wide range of career aspirations.

Data Collection. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from the Montana Department of Labour and Industry (MDLI) career categorization tool, designed to assess preferences across the six personality-based career types: Helper, Persuader, Organiser, Doer, Thinker, and Creator. Questionnaires are well-established tools for gathering data on career preferences, as they provide a standardised method for measuring attitudes and perceptions across large groups (Fowler, 2014).

Questionnaire Structure. The survey instrument comprised 72 closed-ended questions divided into three sections: preferences were assessed through "I like" statements, self-perceived abilities were measured via "I can" statements and career goals were explored using "I want" statements. Participants responded with either "Yes" or "No" to each item, enabling quantitative analysis across the six personality types. To minimise cultural bias and ensure applicability to South African learners, particularly those in semi-rural areas, the questions were modified (Adams & Lawrence, 2018).

Data Collection Procedure. During school hours, surveys were distributed with the assistance of school personnel to enhance comprehension and engagement. Guidance was offered to ensure clarity, and students were prompted to raise queries to reduce misinterpretation. The data-gathering process spanned a fortnight, allowing ample time for comprehensive involvement. To encourage truthful answers, anonymity and confidentiality were upheld with each student receiving a unique identifier.

Data Analysis. This research employed both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to examine the questionnaire responses provided by learners. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the prevalence of affirmative answers within each personality-based grouping (McMillan & Schumacher 2014) while the graphic data presentation emphasises significant trends and anomalies. Additionally, chi-square analyses were conducted to identify statistically significant variations in responses, considering factors such as gender, age, and other demographic characteristics (Field, 2018).

Descriptive Statistics. Positive responses were tallied for each personality category to identify patterns in career inclination among learners. These results provided insight into how learners aligned with specific career types, enabling comparisons across gender and age.

Inferential Statistics. Chi-square tests and correlation analyses were used to explore significant differences between male and female learners as well as age-related trends. This statistical approach is widely used to test for significant associations in categorical data (Pallant, 2020). These analyses allowed for the examination of gender-specific career interests and the identification of age-related shifts in career aspirations, providing a more nuanced understanding of learners' career preferences.

Validity and Reliability. To ensure validity, the questionnaire was pretested on a small group of learners to verify the clarity and cultural relevance of each item. Content validity was achieved by adapting a few items to reflect the relevant sociocultural factors in the Limpopo Province and South African quasi-rural contexts (Zohrabi, 2013). Reliability was addressed through consistent administration procedures and statistical tests to confirm the stability of response patterns across demographic groups.

Ethical Considerations. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research with adolescent participants. School officials provided consent, and pupils were informed about the study's objectives, privacy safeguards, and optional participation. To ensure anonymity and enable confidential data examination, the students' names were substituted with unique identifiers. The researchers modified the questionnaire to mitigate cultural prejudice and guarantee that enquiries were pertinent and considerate of the pupils' environment, thereby reducing potential bias (Babbie, 2020).

Limitations

While the study offers valuable insights, it acknowledges certain limitations:
1   Cultural Bias – Notwithstanding attempts to modify the survey, certain questions may still incorporate cultural presumptions that are not entirely applicable to semi-rural South African environments.
2   Time-based Constraints – The study's snapshot approach limits its ability to assess long-term trends in career aspirations (Bryman, 2016).
3   Restricted Focus – The results were obtained from a single location and age cohort, limiting their applicability to other regions or age groups.

Findings

The findings from the survey offer a comprehensive insight into the career goals, personality characteristics, and gender-related preferences of Grade 9 students in Mankweng. These results underscore the impact of sociocultural elements and the range of self-perceived abilities and occupational interests of pupils.

Distribution of Personality-Based Career Types. The study revealed a varied spread across the six career types based on personality: Helper, Persuader, Organiser, Doer, Thinker, and Creator. Among male students, Doer stood out as the most common career type, with approximately half of the males strongly associating with this category. Female students, however, exhibited a more evenly distributed pattern, with comparable percentages in the Thinker, Creator, Helper, Persuader, and Organiser groups, each falling between 20% and 27%. This equilibrium in the distribution for female students indicates a broader receptiveness to various roles, while the male concentration in the Doer category might be indicative of strong conventional gender stereotypes surrounding careers that are physical and action-oriented, with a clear indication of motivation to take an active leadership role in adult life.

Gender Differences in Career Aspirations. Notable disparities between sexes were observed in responses to particular enquiries, with distinct inclinations aligned with conventional gender roles. For example, most male participants exhibited a strong preference for practical and physical pursuits, achieving higher scores in questions concerning the use of tools, engagement in physically demanding work, and operation of machinery (Questions 7, 13, 43, and 55). In contrast, female participants demonstrated a predilection for professions associated with education, nurturing, and service industries, as evidenced by their highly affirmative responses to questions about nurturing others, instructing, and participating in creative endeavours such as art and writing (Questions 34, 40, and 64). Interestingly, males and females exhibited similar responses to certain enquiries, such as their appreciation for communal activities, highlighting a shared appreciation of societal engagement (Question 22). This commonality indicates some degree of flexibility beyond conventional gender roles, with both sexes expressing an interest in socially oriented and cooperative positions.

Trends in Career Aspirations by Age. An analysis of age-related patterns revealed that students aged 16-18 exhibited a more pronounced inclination towards entrepreneurial and leadership positions, such as running a business or being self-employed (Question 65). In contrast, pupils aged 14-15 showed a greater tendency to favour community-oriented and exploratory roles. These observations suggest a shift from a broad investigative interest to more specific career goals as students mature. This progression aligns with theories of career development that associate age with the formation of a professional identity.

Cross-Category Alignment. The findings indicated substantial alignment across categories, with more than half of the students, particularly females, giving affirmative responses in multiple areas. A minority of students (approximately 20%) demonstrated a strong preference for a single category by scoring ten or more positive responses, while the majority exhibited diverse interests spanning several categories. This pattern suggests that most Grade 9 students have not yet solidified their career aspirations, which is consistent with their developmental stage, as they continue to explore various professional paths. The observed cross-category

interest underscores the importance of career guidance programs that introduce students to a wide array of potential occupations, especially multifaceted fields that accommodate a range of skills and interests.

Popular and Least Popular Responses. The survey revealed distinct preferences and aversions among learners through certain questions that garnered notably high or low positive responses.

Most Favoured Responses: Enquiries concerning self-reliance and entrepreneurship, particularly the aspiration to "be the boss" (Question 65), elicited overwhelmingly positive reactions from both sexes (exceeding 96%). This marked enthusiasm for autonomy indicates that students valued self-guided career trajectories, potentially mirroring the socioeconomic ambitions prevalent in the area.

Least-Favoured Response: Queries about administrative and clerical roles received the lowest affirmative responses, with males showing particular disinterest (Question 66). This lack of enthusiasm for secretarial positions may be indicative of either cultural prejudice or limited exposure to such occupations within the community.

Influence of Socio-Cultural Context on Career Perceptions. The career aspirations of students in Mankweng appear to be shaped by the area's unique sociocultural landscape, which blends rural customs with academic influences. This environment, marked by the presence of the University of Limpopo and its proximity to urban centres, seems to create tension in learners' professional outlooks. While some pupils express a preference for conventional roles rooted in caregiving and community service, others demonstrate a keen interest in contemporary, city-oriented professions, such as business administration and technology. This contrast in career goals suggests that students are grappling with the balance between traditional societal expectations and modern opportunities afforded by their surroundings.

The learner's personality type is determined by summing their perceived strengths and aspirations. However, numerous instances exist in which students score highly across multiple categories. Slightly more than 20% of learners achieved 10/12 (>83.3%) affirmative responses in a single category, while fewer than 10% achieved this score in two categories. The overwhelming majority (nearly 70%) did not attain 10/12 positive answers. By contrast, over half of the learners exhibited 50% affirmative responses in four or more categories, indicating either a lack of clear career objectives at this age or significant misunderstandings regarding self-assessment and personal capabilities. The minuscule number (exclusively male) who attained 10/12 positive answers in four categories was attributed to a few individuals who either approached the questionnaire frivolously or were uncooperative.

Age and Gender. The questionnaire data unexpectedly revealed an intriguing gender distribution among Grade 9 learners. Female students outnumbered males, with a ratio of 1.21 females to males. The age distribution, measured in years, exhibited a more pronounced skew for male students than for their female counterparts (Figure 2). While over 95% of female learners fell within the 14-15-year age bracket, only 69% of male learners were in this category. The eldest female students were 16 years old (5%), whereas the oldest male was 18, with 31% of the males being 16 years or older. Various socioeconomic factors could account

for this notable disparity in age distribution among Grade 9 learners in Mankweng. Although investigating these factors is outside the scope of this survey, identifying the relevant influences and causes could prove crucial for future educational planning and curriculum development.

Figure 2

Age Distribution of Male and Female Learners in Grade 9 Classes
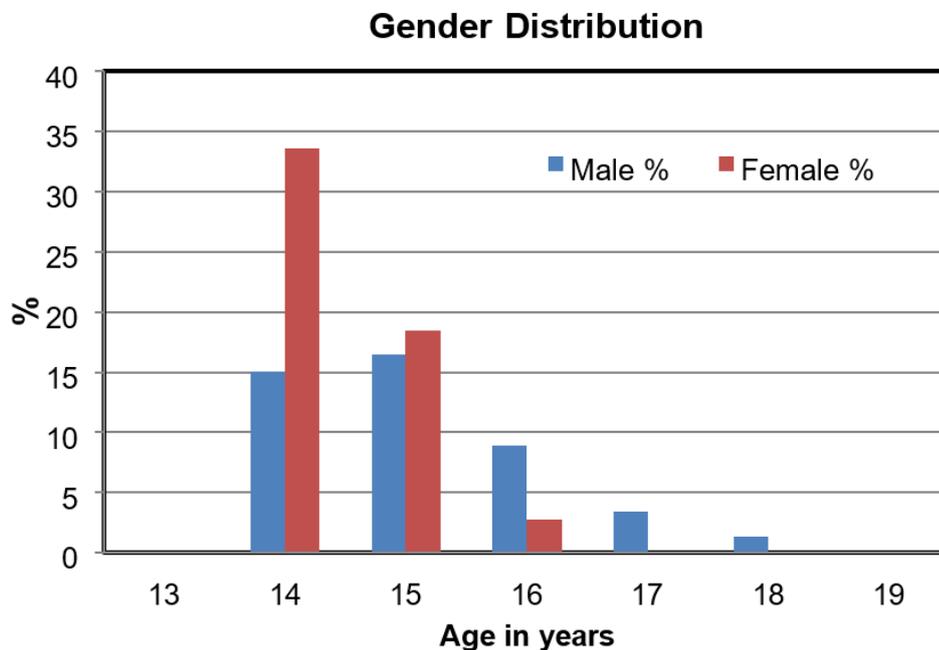
Career Guidance and Aptitude Evaluation Question Responses. The set of 72 queries (Table 1) aims to identify an individual's strengths across six broad categories: "Helper, Persuader, Organiser, Doer, Thinker, or Creator" (Carney & Hubbard 2023; Gianforte & Esau, 2023). Nevertheless, certain queries, namely Q4, Q18, Q44, and Q69, seem to have restricted relevance to Mankweng's semi-rural context (White 1997). Despite this limitation, the survey garnered an exceptionally high response rate, with only 1.4% of the participants failing to answer one question and less than 0.7% omitting responses to multiple questions (nearly 98% provided answers to all questions).

The overall affirmative response rate was nearly identical for both sexes, hovering at around 50% (50.15% for males and 49.11% for females). Question 65, concerning the desire for self-employment, garnered the most positive feedback from both sexes (96.97% for males and 96.25% for females). In contrast, males showed the least enthusiasm for Question 66, which asked about becoming a secretary. However, females displayed equally strong negative reactions to Questions 25, 50, and 72, which pertained to using equipment for manufacturing, working with electricity, and having a superior, respectively. Interestingly, while Question 72 ranked second lowest among the positive responses from males, Questions 25 and 50 received moderately favourable feedback (48.48% and 46.97%, respectively). Despite its thematic similarity to Questions 65 and 72, Question 59, which explored interest in managing someone else's business, elicited a low overall positive response, with a marked disparity between male and female scores.

Table 1

Career Guidance and Aptitude Evaluation Question Responses

| Q n	Question Statement	Q n	Question Statement
1	I like working in the garden	37	I can read a plan which describes how to build a house
2	I like to search for lost things	38	I want to learn how plants grow
3	I like taking photographs of people and things	39	I like to sing in a choir
4	I like taking my grandparents swimming	40	I can nurse and care for sick people
5	I like buying and selling things	41	I can make honest clever plans to sell things
6	I like writing letters to my friends	42	I can see mistakes in written material or numbers
7	I like to repair things in our home	43	I can handle tasks that require physical strength
8	I like to nurse animals when they are sick	44	I want to experiment by mixing different chemicals
9	I like drawing pictures that tell a story	45	I want to design beautiful clothes and jewellery
10	I like to look after my neighbour's house and animals when they are on holiday	46	I want to be a rescue worker
11	I like to be the leader of the group	47	I can manage the operations of a business for someone else
12	I like doing administrative work	48	I like working in an office
13	I like to work with tools like spanners and screwdrivers to repair things	49	I can perform tasks with accuracy
14	I like to know more about other countries	50	I want to work with electricity
15	I like to write articles for the local newspaper	51	I want to perform in front of audiences
16	I like serving dinner to my family	52	I want to assist the community in development programs
17	I like organising parties or meetings	53	I can take risks if necessary
18	I like working at a telemarketing call centre	54	I want to be a cashier or work with money
19	I like to take part in sport	55	I want to work with machines
20	I understand mathematical problems	56	I want to work with numbers or solve problems
21	I can design different things	67	I want to paint things
22	I like to have lots of friends	58	I want to be part of a group of people
23	I like bargaining for the best prices when I buy things	59	I want to manage a business for somebody else
24	I can type	60	I want to use office equipment
25	I can use equipment to make things	61	I want to build things with my hands
26	I understand the laws and rules of the country	62	I want to know more about people's rights
28	I can play a musical instrument	63	I want to write a song
28	I can make speeches in front of a group of people	64	I want to render a service to people
29	I can buy things and sell them at a profit	65	I want to be my boss
30	I can use technology	66	I want to be a secretary
31	I can repair things	67	I want to work outdoors
32	I understand how and why things move	68	I want to do things on my own
33	I can paint the pictured	69	I want to write articles about events
34	I can teach people	70	I can easily talk to individuals
35	I can manage the family finances	71	I want to be a salesperson
36	I can lead a group of people	72	I want to work for a boss
Questions were presented to Grade 9 learners; answers were received on a "Yes" or "No" basis.			

As anticipated, certain questions exhibited notable gender-related differences in their responses (Figures 3 and 4). A particularly striking example is Question 43 (I can handle tasks that require physical strength), where affirmative responses from males outnumbered those from females nearly three times (2.87). Positive female responses, while present, were significantly less prevalent than their male counterparts were.

The graph illustrating the disparity between male and female responses (% male positive–% female positive) (Figure 4) mirrors several conventional stereotypes. Nevertheless, the balanced reaction to Question 16 (I like serving my family dinner), where over 85% of both genders responded positively, implies that traditional gender role stereotypes may be less firmly established than commonly believed.

Figure 3
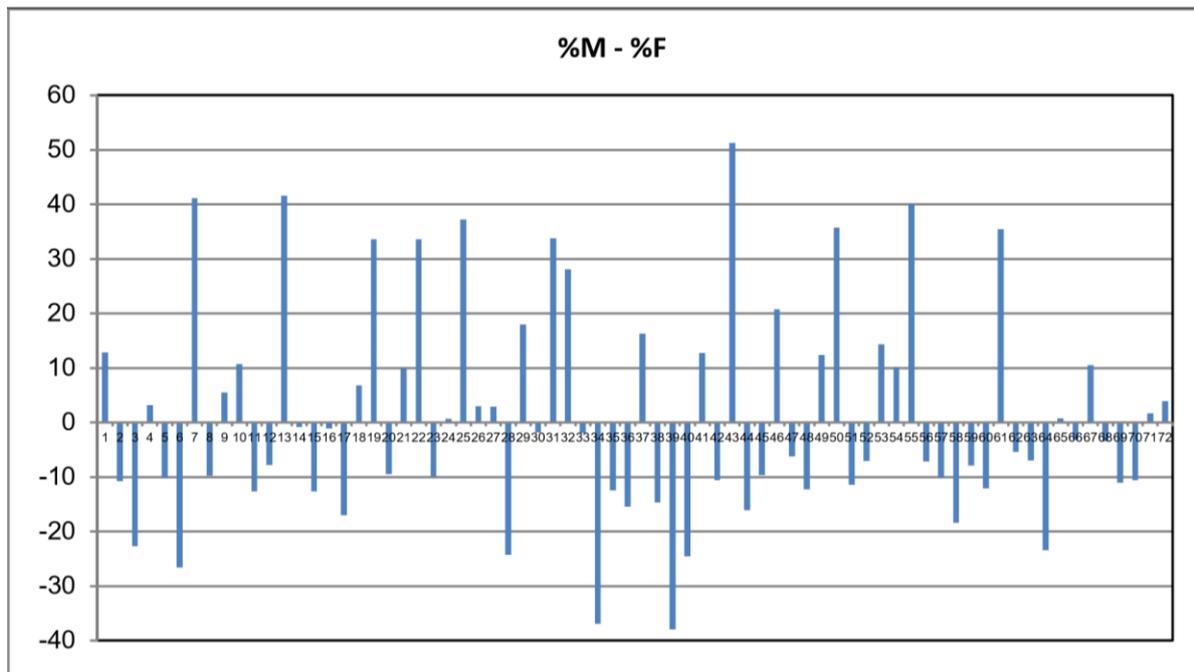*Distribution of Male and Female Positive Responses to Questions 1-36*
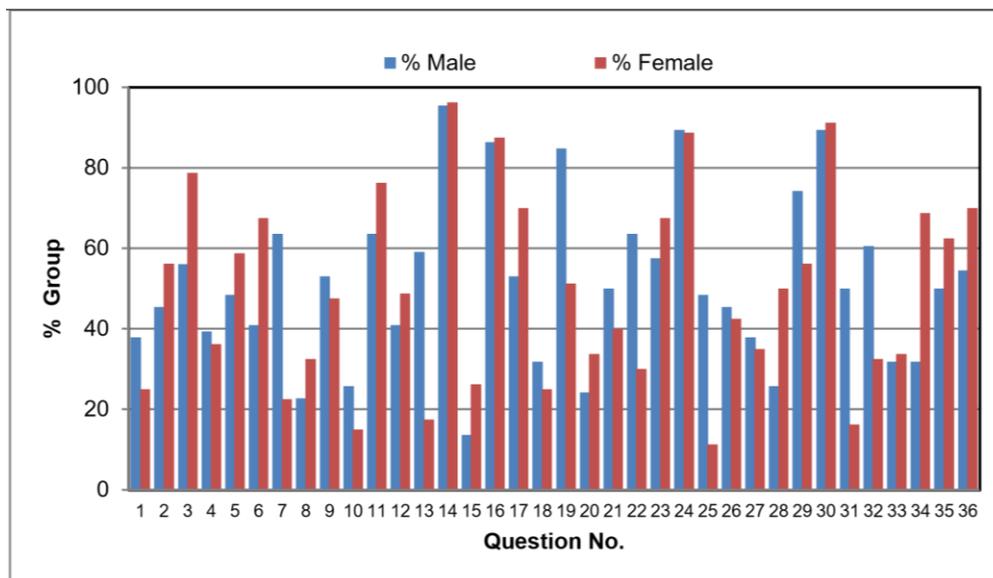
Figure 4
Distribution of Male and Female Positive Responses to Questions 37-72
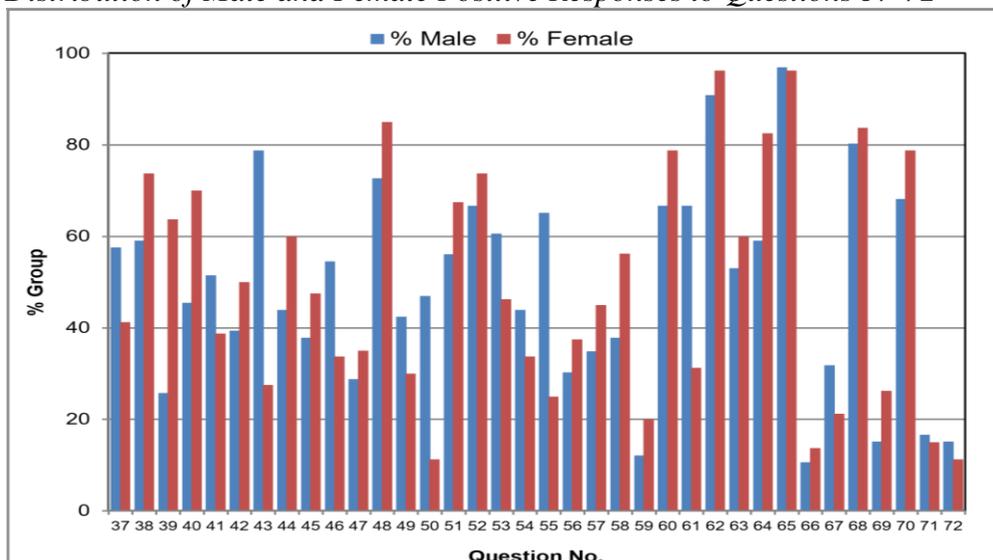
Figure 5

Difference in Male and Female Positive Question Responses

The survey revealed distinct gender preferences in the responses. Questions 7, 13, 43, and 55, which pertained to home repairs, tool usage, physical strength, and working with machinery, elicited an overwhelmingly positive response from males (Figure 4), as anticipated. Questions 19, 22, 25, 31, 50 and 61, concerning sports participation, socialising, equipment operation, repairs, electrical work, and manual construction also garnered strong male approval, albeit to a lesser extent. Conversely, females responded most positively to questions 34 and 39, which involved teaching and choral singing. They also showed moderate enthusiasm for questions 3, 6, 28, 40, and 64, which covered photography, letter writing, public speaking, nursing, and providing services to others. Both genders expressed similar levels of interest in questions 14, 24, and 30, which addressed learning about foreign countries, typing skills, and technology use. However, it is worth noting that in this semi-rural environment, typing and technology exposure may be primarily limited to mobile phone usage.

Results

The survey instrument aims to aid individuals in their career decision-making process by identifying their innate strengths and limitations, subsequently guiding them towards one of six categories: Helper, Persuader, Organiser, Doer, Thinker, or Creator. However, the outcomes were seldom straightforward; many participants exhibited more than six potential affirmative responses (exceeding 50%) across multiple categories (Figure 5). It is rather unusual that a considerable proportion of men and a smaller proportion of women did not seem to fall into any of the designated categories, with only about 10% of the participants identifying with a single category. The overwhelming majority of students responded affirmatively to at least half of the questions (six out of 12) across three or more of the six categories. Notably, slightly more than 26% of women and more than 18% of men appeared to show a preference for five of the six categories. The findings indicated that a substantial

number of participants, both male and female, may have been somewhat uncertain in their responses.

Figure 6

*Learners Scoring Six or More Positive Responses in Multiple Categories*
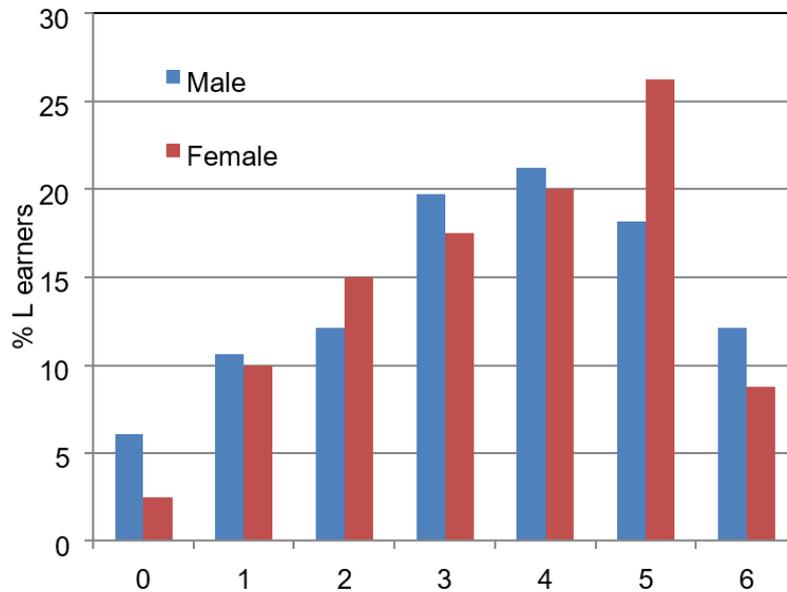
The pattern became more straightforward when considering categories with ten or more positive responses (exceeding 83%), as shown in Figure 6. Nevertheless, the majority of students (slightly over 68% of males and 71% of females) did not provide ten or more affirmative answers in any single category. Approximately 20% of both genders seemed to align exclusively with one career-type category. A small proportion (approximately 9% of males and 6% of females, gave ten or more positive responses in the two categories. While no learners provided ten or more affirmative answers across the three categories, a minimal number of male students (1.5%) appeared to have responded positively to nearly every question, scoring more than ten affirmative answers in four of the categories.

Figure 7 illustrates the classification of the learners. The statistics reveal a significant disparity between genders in the Doer category, with nearly 50% of males but merely 2.5% of females. The 'Thinker' classification was the next most prevalent for males, though the difference between genders was minimal (24.2% males versus 23.8% females). Female learners were distributed fairly evenly across the Thinker, Creator, Helper, Persuader, and Organiser groups, each comprising between 20% and 27% of female participants. The apparent sum exceeding 100% for these four categories is attributed to numerous females scoring equally high in the multiple classifications. The lowest percentage of males was observed in the creator category, with only 9.1% of male respondents having the highest scores in this group. This low representation in the organiser category seems to contradict the high affirmative response to Question 65 (exceeding 96% for both genders) and the notably low positive feedback for Question 72 (15.15% male and 11.25% female).

Figure 7

Learners Scoring 10 or More Positive Responses in Multiple Categories
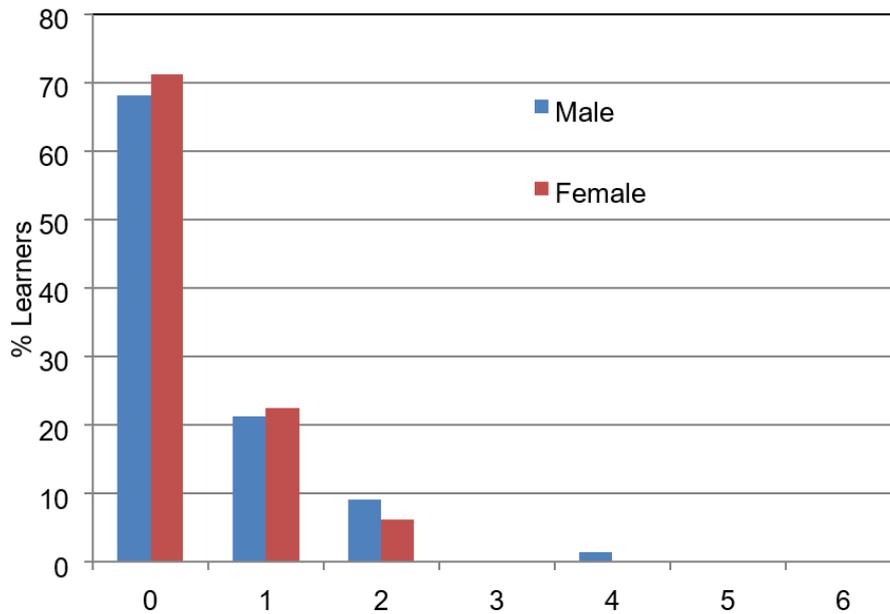
Conclusion

This research provides significant insights into the career aspirations, perceived abilities, and sociocultural elements influencing the career identities of Grade 9 pupils in Mankweng, South Africa. Using a structured questionnaire to investigate personality-based career preferences, this study underscores the variety of career inclinations and illustrates how gender, age, and sociocultural factors impact learners' self-perceptions. The results indicated a predominant interest in action-oriented careers among male pupils, while female pupils exhibited a wider range of career interests, indicating a departure from traditional gender roles in career aspirations. This corresponds with recent research on young people's increasing openness to diverse career paths influenced by evolving societal expectations and improved educational access (Howard et al., 2020).

The pupils' strong inclination towards entrepreneurial and self-directed roles, particularly the aspiration to "be their boss," reflects a desire for autonomy and self-efficacy. These findings align with the Self-Determination Theory, which emphasises autonomy and competence as crucial to motivation and career selection (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This preference highlights the necessity for career guidance interventions that focus on skill development and self-efficacy, especially in semi-rural areas, where pupils may have limited exposure to diverse professional paths (Lent & Brown, 2019). Moreover, the prevalence of cross-category alignment, where pupils expressed interest in multiple career types, emphasised the developmental nature of career exploration at this age (Super, 1990; Hartung, 2013). This observation aligns with Super's theory of career development, suggesting that many pupils at this stage still form a coherent career identity and benefit from broad exposure to potential paths.

The varied responses to questions about caregiving, teaching, and leadership reflect the influence of both traditional and modern career ideals, indicating that pupils balance sociocultural expectations with emerging professional aspirations (Di Maggio, 2018).

Cultural Capital Theory, which examines the role of cultural and social resources in shaping career and educational outcomes, offers an additional context for the dual influence of the traditional and modern roles observed in the findings (Bourdieu, 1986; Bathmaker, 2015). The presence of both traditional caregiving roles and entrepreneurial aspirations among pupils suggests that career guidance programs must consider these cultural nuances to support pupils' aspirations effectively.

Implications and Future Research. The results of this study underscore the necessity for career guidance strategies that are culturally sensitive, promote personal exploration, and offer insights into a wide array of professional paths. Considering the students' diverse interests and desire for independence, career programs should incorporate activities that enhance self-confidence and showcase various occupational possibilities. Moreover, this investigation emphasises the significance of career counselling tailored to the distinct socioeconomic and cultural environments of semirural South Africa, thus empowering students to navigate both conventional and contemporary career trajectories (Badat & Sayed, 2014).

Subsequent studies could benefit from extended periods (e.g., several years) of observations to examine the evolution of career aspirations over time and to evaluate the effectiveness of specific career interventions. Broadening the scope of research to encompass additional age groups and geographical areas could also yield a more comprehensive understanding of career development across South Africa's varied educational landscape. Unfortunately, Department of Education budget constraints make these studies difficult and socio-political factors are limiting accessibility to learners.

Acknowledgements

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