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# **The Relationship of Social Support with Academic Achievement and Career Aspiration of Grade- 8 Students in Myanmar**

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**Abstract.** A major concern for educational institutions is improving the quality of lives of students. This study investigated the relationship between social support and academic achievement of students and career aspiration of students in Myanmar. The quantitative research methodology, (survey method) was applied and 550 Grade- 8 students from public schools within Yenanchaung Township, Myanmar. Students in this study completed the two questionnaires, the social support questionnaore and the social support for career aspiration questionnaire to assess their received social support from their parents, teachers and peers. The researcher developed these questionnaires based on the four types of social support by Tardy (1985). The results of the data analysis suggest that there is a positive relationship between social support and academic achievement and the social support and students' career aspiration.

**Keywords.** social support, academic achievement, career aspiration

## **1. Introduction**

The concept of social support is the gratification of basic social needs, approval, esteem, and belonging. In addition, social support is the subjective feeling of belonging, of being accepted or being loved, of being needed all for one-self and for what one can do. Social support helps when coping with life stress, mental illness, physical illness, mortality risk, feeling of loss, loneliness, performance related to academic achievement, adolescent depression and behavioral performance. An individual network is made up of other people with whom he or she has contact (eg, peers, teachers, etc.)

This study defines social support as the degree to which a person's basic social needs (e.g, affection, esteem, approval, belonging, identity and security) are gratified through interaction with others (Thoits, 1982). Tardy (1985) proposed a comprehensive and multidimensional model of social support. In this view, social support may be conceptualized in terms of direction (given or received), disposition (available or actually utilized), description and evaluation, content (type of support) and social network. According to content, Tardy conceptualized four types of social support: emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal. Emotional support entails the affection, empathy, and acceptance gained from social support. Instrumental support entails the physical and emotional support an individual receives from social support. Informational support involves advice and information conveyed from social support. And, appraisal support entails evaluative feedback.

Social support can be defined as “an individual’s general support or specific support behaviors (available or enacted upon) from people in the social network, which enhances their functioning and or may buffer them from adverse outcomes” ( Malecki & Demaray, 2002). (cited in Lyons, J.A, 2002).

According to Tardy, emotional support consists of feeling taken care of or valued (e.g. a student feels as if his or her teacher really care about him or her) and instrumental support involves receiving time and resources (e.g. a peer spends time helping a friend on a project). Appraisal support consists of receiving constructive feedback (e.g. a teacher provides helpful feedback to a student), whereas informational support simply involves providing needed information (e.g. a teacher provides a student with information to apply to college). However, the ways in which support is provided may affect them differently. (Tardy, 1985).

Students get social support from their parents, teachers and peers. Students who report feeling supported by important individuals in their social networks generally display higher level of academic achievement and social-emotional competence when compared to students who do not feel supported (Elias & Haynes, 2008).

In addition, every child has to set his/her aspiration to live successfully in life. In Trait-And-Factor Theory (Frank Pearsons 1901; Sharf, 1997), all individuals have unique interests, abilities and values, while each occupation has unique characteristics related to tasks, skills required, and rewards. Thus, adolescents need to have support in the information of their aspirations fitting with their interests, skills and abilities ( cited in Holland, 1977).

In this study, the researcher investigated about the social support by focusing on academic achievement and career aspiration. Academic achievement is typically regarded as the core criteria for determining students’ success. In the present study, the researcher proposes that social support is an important factor to promote students' academic achievement and career aspiration.

### **1.1.Social Support and Academic Achievement**

The ecological opinion posits that students are significantly influenced by their surrounding social contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This opinion gives an approach to understand the relationship between social support and students' learning outcomes (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). Several studies have found that students with higher perceived social support reported better attendance (Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 1998). A one-year longitudinal study conducted by DeBerard, Spielmans, and Julka (2004) has shown that social support is a significant factor to predict university students' academic achievement. Robbins et al. (2004) have confirmed the positive relationship between social support and university students' grade point average (GPA) by meta-analyzing 109 studies. Therefore, the researcher suggests that social support is positively related to students’ academic achievement.

### **1.2.Social support and career aspiration**

It is very essential to have good environment that can raise and rear the children in exploring their innate characteristics and abilities. Some empirical research suggest that career exploration and planning are positively related to career commitment and decideness in adolescence (cited in Hirschi,A., 2010). Parents can inform their children about the career since they were childhood and if they have a desire about one career, parents can nurture their children to try to join the career they want to do. Moreover, parents can support to their children to accomplish their aspiration emotionally and instrumentally. They can provide emotional support by appraising their children like you can try to join the career as you want to be. The combined influence of parents and peers support theories who argue that parents’ aspirations

for their children and children's own aspiration, stem from socially constructed roles. Role theory suggests that beliefs are derived from expectations held by groups for the behavior of its individual members (e.g., a family's expectations for a child's academic achievement). (cited in Aung,Z.M., 2011). Teacher support is also associated with students' career aspiration. Teachers can provide mostly informational support about the careers to the students. Teachers know well the students individually and therefore they can suggest that what career is suitable with which students.

Therefore, the researcher found out the following questions:

1. Is there relationship between social support and academic achievement of Grade - 8 students?
2. Is there relationship between social support for career aspiration and academic achievement of Grade -8 students?

## **2. Methodology**

The survey was conducted to investigate the relationship between social support of parents, teachers and peers and academic achievement and career aspiration of Grade -8 students.

### **2.1. Participants**

The participants are 550 Grade- 8 students from the public schools in Yenanchaung Township, Myanmar. They are selected randomly.

### **2.2. Instruments**

The researcher used two scales; social support for academic achievement scale and social support for career aspiration scale with 3- point Likert skill. Demographic variables such as gender, school, the career they want to be, were added in the first part of the questionnaire in order to find out the differences between groups.

To measure the social support for academic achievement of students, the researcher developed the social support questionnaire based on the Terdy. This questionnaire included 39 items with 3 point Likert skills; Always, Sometimes, Never. This questionnaire examined how much the students get emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal support from their parents, teachers and friends. The social support for career aspiration questionnaire included 24 items with 3 points Likert skills; Agree, Disagree, Not sure. This questionnaire examined whether the students received the informational and appraisal support for their career aspiration from their parents, teachers and friends. The researcher applied the students' scores of half-term exam for determining their academic achievement.

## **3. Results**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of social support on academic achievement and career aspiration of Grade-8 students. In this study, descriptive analyses, correlation and independent sample t test were utilized to investigate the influence of parents, teachers and peers social support on academic achievement and career aspiration of students.

Descriptive analyses for all 550 participants were firstly computed. The mean score of social support was 82.21 and standard deviation was 8.507. The social support scores of all students were normally distributed. Thus, it was concluded that all students had a moderate level of social support. Similarly, the mean score for social support for career aspiration was 60.62 and standard deviation was 5.670. These scores indicated that social supports for career

aspiration of students were normally distributed and it was seen that all students had a moderate level of social support for career aspiration.

Correlation analyses were also conducted to explore the relationship between social support and students' academic achievement, the relationship between social support for career aspiration and students' academic achievement. According to the results, social support and students' academic achievement were significantly correlated with each other on one tailed test at the 0.05 significant level ( $r=.031$ ,  $p=.079$ ). Thus, it can be said that the more students get the social support, the more they achieve at their academic performance.

**Table 1 Correlation analysis for social support and academic achievement**

Variables	Social Support	Academic Achievement
Social Support	1	.079*
Academic Achievement	.079*	1

Moreover, social support and students' career aspiration was significantly correlated ( $r=.564$ ,  $p=.000$ ) at 0.01 level on two-tailed test. Thus, this result revealed that the more social support the students get, the higher the career aspiration they have.

**Table 2. Correlation analysis for social support for career aspiration and academic achievement**

Variables	SS for career aspiration	Academic Achievement
Social Support	1	.225*
Academic Achievement	.225*	1

To examine the gender difference of social support, descriptive analysis was also conducted. By comparing the mean scores of male and female students in each social support scales, it was found that mean scores of female students were higher than those of male students. Thus, female students accepted more social support than the male students from parents, teachers and peers. According to the result of t test, the female students received more emotional and informational support from their parents, teachers and peers.

**Table 3. t test Result of Social Support for academic achievement by Gender**

Social Support Scales	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Emotional Support	-4.112	548	.000
Instrumental Support	-1.707	548	.088
Informational Support	-0.043	548	.001
Appraisal Support	-0.976	548	.330

Similarly, to examine the gender differences in social support for career aspiration, descriptive statistics was firstly conducted, and the mean scores of male and female students were compared. It was also seen that the mean scores of female students were higher than those of male students in both two subscales.

**Table 4. t test Result of Social Support for career aspiration by Gender**

<i>SS for Career Aspiration scales</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Emotional Support	-5.090	548	.000
Informational Support			

Moreover, to investigate the differences of students' social support according to the school types: middle schools and high schools, independent sample t test was conducted. According to the results, there was no significant difference between social support of students by school types they attend. Therefore, it was concluded that students' receiving of social support from their parents, teachers and friends did not depend on the type of school they attended. Similarly, the researcher found out to know the differences of students' social support for career aspiration according to the school types. The results of t test showed that there was no significant difference between social support for career aspiration of students and the types of school the attended. It was seen that students in both middle schools and high schools accepted the equal amount of social support for career aspiration from their parents, teachers and friends.

#### **4. Discussion**

Steinberg and Darling (1994) found that there exist a relationship between social support and academic achievement of students. They explained that social support from family, friends and teachers influence youngsters' educational achievement and long-term educational plan. The knowledge on how social support could help students to excel in their studies and to cope with any psychological disturbances will help educators to decide the amount of support needed by students to ensure their academic achievement. (Holahan, 1995 and Cutrona, 1994).

In addition, Holland (1977) proposed that the acceptance or rejection of career options is dependent on the positive or negative reinforcement supplied by the social environment and the role models that are valued by the society. Blustein (1992) found that instrumental support in the form of constructive advice and resources help to better appraise career-related information and adapt to the novel circumstances. In this study, social support and students' career aspiration correlate each other. Therefore, the finding is consistent with the Holland's saying that the acceptance or rejection of career options is dependent on the positive or negative reinforcement supplied by the social environment.

Furthermore, the present study indicated that there were gender differences of social support. Therefore, this finding is also consistent with the previous research that indicates that female students tend to perceive more social support than the male students. In Myanmar culture, parents and teachers especially care females than the males in everything and so females perceive more support than the males. However, parents and teachers should provide social support to male students as the same with the female students.

In conclusion, social support is critical because it provides interpersonal connectedness, fosters expression of emotion and performance, offers encouragement, improves health, reduces stress, decreases anxiety and provides self-efficacy. When the children get their basic needs, they can enhance their performance both in school and in society. They can get their needs from the support of people who live around them, especially parents, teachers and their friends. Students who received no social support may become lower school

satisfaction and then less time studying. Therefore, it is evidence that social support is one of the important factor of improving students' academic achievement and their career aspiration.

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