


A Grounded Theory Approach to Educational Aspirations of Youth in North Cyprus: Personal, Parental, and Community-Related Factors on a Divided Island

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Abstract

Future aspirations play a definitive role in adolescents' developmental outcomes. This research aims to explore the factors involved in building the educational aspirations of high school students in North Cyprus. The study is designed as grounded theory on the contextual framework of the ecological systems model and integrative theory. The research design involves multiple data sources including 101 semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, and school administrators of high schools, ministerial officials, and political leaders of North Cyprus. The findings illuminate the role of parental, personal, and community-related factors that influence students' aspirations. The results reveal that these factors are intertwined, some of which lead to the emergence of other factors. Identifying these relationships has implications for school administrators, teachers, and policymakers, enabling them to design stimulating school settings and eliminate the adverse effects of these factors to encourage students to develop their future aspirations.

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INTRODUCTION

Socioeconomic factors have always been involved in educational matters and consistently have a significant role in forming students' educational experiences, outcomes, future aspirations, and expectations (Rojewski, 2005). The aspirations and expectations of students predict a variety of factors such as academic outcomes, grades, exam scores, educational attainment, motivation, behavioral and emotional difficulties, school attendance, and school bonding (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Cunningham, Corprew, & Becker, 2009; Dubow, Boxer, & Huesmann, 2009; Marcenaro-Gutierrez & Lopez-Agudo, 2017). Therefore, across nations, there is a growing global interest in the educational aspirations of students, especially adolescents, and an appreciation that the exploration of the factors may inform policymakers on the possible strategies to improve school management and students' academic outcomes (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Hosler & Stage, 1992).

Research suggests that future aspirations, such as completing high school and having a stable job, support students' overall social and behavioral adjustment (Cunningham et al., 2009; Dubow et al., 2001; Wyman et al., 1993). The literature proposes that the optimistic students on educational aspirations, that is, those who believe that they can reach higher goals, show higher performance than their peers who tend to have more pessimistic educational aspirations (Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2008; Ou & Reynolds, 2008). Thus, the factors that make students optimistic about their educational aspirations are critical indicators for educators and policymakers.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

There is a consensus on defining educational aspirations that often refer to how much education one wants to achieve, i.e., the level of education students believe they will attain in the future (Khattab, 2003). The overall thrust of the theory suggests that educational aspirations are functions of parental variables, social roles, and socioeconomic status (Elliot & Beverly, 2011; Goodman & Gregg, 2010; Hartas, 2016; Herrold & O'Donnell, 2008; Huang et al., 2013); gender (Gil-Flores et al., 2011; Powers & Wojtkiewicz, 2004); race/ethnicity (Cook et al., 1996); teacher expectations and biases (Dee 2005; Gershenson et al. 2016; Gregory & Huang 2013), school climate in terms of social and academic facilities (Beal & Crockett, 2010; Christofides et al., 2012; Foley et al., 2009), and an environment of high unemployment (DeJaeghere, 2016). The research also generally acknowledges the support and investment of the family as defining students' educational aspirations (Alloway et al., 2004; Berrington, Roberts, & Tammes, 2016; Lazarides, Viljaranta, Aunola, Pesu, & Nurmi, 2016; Louie, 2001). The literature has also documented the importance of personal variables such as valuing school/homework, school self-esteem, and perception of courses as being significantly associated with students' aspirations (Abu-Hilal, 2000; Filozof et al., 1998; Garg et al., 2002). The research devoted to parental variables highlights the influence of parental involvement in educational settings and parents' aspirations with the students' educational aspirations (Greenaway & Cruwys, 2015; Murayama et al., 2016; Wang & Benner, 2014). On the other hand, many studies showed that community level and environmental factors also determine the students' aspirations. Indeed, the quality of the neighborhood affects the probability of completing high school and attending college (Hope, 1995; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

All of these variables can be expressed as three categories: parental variables, personal variables, and community-related variables. This conceptual review shows that both individual and collective relationships need to be considered to understand how educational aspirations developed. Thus, there is no single factor that accounts for sufficient variance by itself to determine a developmental outcome (Nichols et al., 2010). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems framework acknowledges examining multiple layers of a system, affecting the child's developmental pathways. In this approach, the environment includes the home, school, and neighborhood surrounding the child's daily life. This model focused on the dynamic interaction effects of multiple systems, including

students, parents, and the community. Bronfenbrenner mentions five environmental systems defined as Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem (Christensen, 2016).

Bronfenbrenner and several other developmental theorists made a substantial contribution to understanding better the child's role and behaviors in his/her context surrounding different levels. However, some variables found as critical factors in child development (e.g., social class, ethnicity, race, gender, discrimination, and segregation) are unaddressed in many sociodevelopmental frameworks and approaches, such as the organizational, transactional, and ecological levels (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). In their integrative model, Garcia Coll et al. (1996) argued that the normative development of children could only be completely explained in the context of a historically established system of social stratification. Their model contributed to the child development theory by highlighting the roles of ethnic-racial experiences and stratification factors (e.g., stereotypes), and criticized the lack of understanding of group differences in prevalent conceptual frameworks, such as ignoring minorities, perpetuating false stereotypes, and/or disrupting lifestyles (Sue & Sue, 1990). Garcia Coll's framework also suggests exploring and promoting the expanded role played by networks of families and close relatives in the developmental processes of disadvantaged children that may protect them from economic difficulties and social and psychological pressures from society. Furthermore, the integrative theory asserts that the differences of certain groups are particularly prominent in child development. The development of the child is an iterative and multilevelled process. But it is most represented by the psychological and social segregation of the child, the stimulating/inhibiting environments, and the reciprocal effects on family processes. Therefore, there is a need to fully include contexts outside of the family (Garcia Coll et al., 1996).

Engaging Garcia Coll et al.'s (1996) integrative model and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model as leading conceptual frameworks in this paper, we explore the salient variables affecting the students' educational aspirations of different high schools in North Cyprus. Educational aspirations are both predictors of academic and social achievement as well as a result of academic and social achievement (Gorard, Huat, & Davies, 2012). As such, identifying and supporting students' educational aspirations are critically important. Concerning unrecognized nations, the issue becomes whether the relative isolation of learners in this environment impacts those aspirations, and potentially limits academic achievement and social adjustment. There has been little examination of this question, and in the case of North Cyprus, virtually nothing at all. This paper will examine the degree to which the status of North Cyprus as an unrecognized nation impacts the influence of more generally defined variables. This study also examined factors from the student, parent, school, and community levels and their independent and interrelated impacts on educational aspirations within a sample of different North Cyprus high schools.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The existing research discussed above has extended our knowledge of the importance of academic expectations and aspirations and illuminated variables associated with potential discrepancies between educational expectations and aspirations and family-child educational aspirations (Boxer et al., 2011; Dubow et al., 2009; Murayama et al., 2016). Furthermore, many studies deal with parental and student aspirations to predict academic achievement, school attendance, attitudes towards school and learning, and college entrance (Astone & McLanahan, 1991). Considering the educational aspirations of students and parents, over-aspiration has been identified as a predictive factor of students' development, depression, confidence, and academic performance (Greenaway & Cruwys, 2015; Murayama et al., 2016; Wang & Benner, 2014). Although the factors forming students' educational aspirations have long been studied, the literature shows that the variables predicting and determining the educational aspirations are much more complicated than previously thought (Akos et al., 2007). This complexity becomes manifest concerning Cyprus. Given its status as two nations inhabiting one small island and the complex issues that often plague communities, the matter of lower

educational aspirations among students with low socioeconomic status (SES) characteristics becomes particularly complex. Therefore, it becomes particularly important in Cyprus to analyze these issues from multiple perspectives. In this study, we aimed to explore several variables that may affect educational aspirations among socioeconomically disadvantaged and educationally at-risk urban public high school students and socioeconomically and educationally advantaged college-type high school students and determine what these unique influences are for adolescents in North Cyprus.

Some background about Cyprus is critical to understanding this complexity. Cyprus is a divided island and has contained two nation-states since 1983, the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" in the north and the "Republic of Cyprus" in the south, although the de facto split occurred almost a decade earlier. After the 1974 division, enforced by the United Nations, many thousands of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots were displaced and forced to migrate, causing social and political conflict on the island that has persisted for more than four decades and appears to be intractable, despite numerous attempts to resolve it. Currently, the northern part of the island is not a part of the European Union (EU), and is recognized only by Turkey. Further, while settlement negotiations continue, seeking some formula for a single state based on political autonomy, political equality, bizonality, and bicommunality, the chances do not seem favorable in the foreseeable future (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008). This impacts every aspect of life in Northern Cyprus, most crucially in terms of a profound lack of international investment and industrial innovation over a 50-year period in which the global economy fueled by neo-liberal policies surged. Agricultural and industrial production exists only in very small scale enterprises. Thus, job opportunities, including those for well-qualified university and vocational-technical graduates, are very limited, making serious underemployment and unemployment challenges. Young people entering the workforce, therefore, have to rely far more on leveraging individual resources than do similarly qualified youth in the rest of the world, including their peers on the other side of the island. If these young Turkish Cypriots have dual citizenship (e.g., Northern Cyprus and EU nation), they will tend to leave the island to study or work in the United Kingdom, Australia, or EU countries (Mertkan-Ozunlu & Thomson, 2009). This causes a major drain of highly capable future workers, but on an individual level, it is preferable to the alternative. For those not so advantaged, the prospects are bleak. This begs the question of not only what Northern Cyprus youth will do, but also how schools at the apex of these contradictions should respond.

Besides the problems of youth, schools also face increasing pressures involving the recent migration of others in the region, fleeing political and economic upheaval. Cyprus' geographic location has made it a prime destination for refugees from war-torn Syria, failing states in Central Asia, and political dissidents from Turkey, among other places. This creates even more stress on social life in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The citizens of TRNC are already marginalized; these new migrants are marginalized even more profoundly (Vural & Rustemli, 2006). The children of these new immigrants, challenged as they are in terms of basic needs, are even further disabled by an inability to speak the major language of Northern Cypriot society (Turkish). These issues, too, come to the doorstep of schools. The serious questions this complexity of social conditions bring and that the schools must answer are: What kinds of educational aspirations can young people in North Cyprus reasonably have? What are the hindering and enabling factors in this context? This, then, is the setting in which high school students develop their educational aspirations and to which schools respond. These issues are the foci of this study.

METHOD

The study is designed in the context of grounded theory to examine student aspirations through theoretical analysis. This method enables the researcher to make sense of large amounts of data (Charmaz, 1996; Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Grounded theory methods are suitable for studying social psychological concepts such as motivation, emotions, identity, prejudice, and conflict by examining the individual processes, interpersonal relations, social processes, and the interaction effects (Charmaz

& Belgrave, 2007). Since grounded theory has an inductive nature, it is used to explore the participant's meanings (Glaser, 1978). In this way, grounded theory creates a bridge between interpretative analyses and positivist assumptions.

PARTICIPANTS

The sample utilized purposive sampling , which can establish common patterns emerging from a wide range of differences (Patton, 2015). To maximize the differences and identify the picture of aspirations of public high school students, the students were selected from a diversity of high schools, nationalities, gender, GPAs, and districts. There are 31 public high schools in the north, 14 of which participated in the study. Data were collected through interviews with high school students (n=56) from all six districts (Table 1). The students are from different nationalities, including Turkish Cypriots and students from other countries (primarily Turkey, Moldova, Hungary, Russia, United Kindom, Pakistan, Syria, and the Turkic Republics). Students from each of three different types of public high schools participated in the study. Their GPAs ranged between 5.00 and 9.40 (out of 10.00). The student sample compares favorably with the proportions of students in North Cyprus in these categories generally.

Table 1. Demographics of Students

<i>Variables</i>		<i>n</i>
High School Type	College-Prep	7
	General	21
	Vocational-Technical	28
Nationality	North Cyprus	11
	Turkey	21
	Both	18
	Other	6
Gender	Female	21
	Male	35
Having A Private Tutoring Course	Yes	12
	No	44
Total		56

Additionally, 24 teachers, 12 school administrators, four ministerial officials, and five political leaders were recruited as participants. Participating teachers came from disciplines including Literature, Geography, Chemistry, German, Art, Mathematics, Technical and Vocational Education, and Guidance and Counseling. Their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 31 years. The home disciplines of administrators were English, Literature, Sociology, Computer Science, Biology, Music, and Technical and Vocational programs. Their experience ranged from 21 to 31 years. The officials group was composed of the Ministry of Education inspectors, consultants, and undersecretaries. All these officials were teachers before coming to their current positions. The five most influential political parties with a large base of voters were included in the study: One party leader, two former ministers of education, and two education representatives of parties were interviewed. Three of them were academicians, and two of them were teachers. In total, 45 non-student educational professionals participated in the study, creating the total study sample, n=101.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To collect the data, semi-structured interview protocols were developed based on the essential aspects of aspirations assumed by the ecological systems approach and integrative theory, namely parental, personal, and community-related factors. Once the protocol was finalized, two researchers from the psychology and sociology disciplines provided feedback. The revised protocol was piloted in three different public schools with eight students and six teachers. After the pilot study, necessary changes and revisions were made to the protocols.

A three-step approach of grounded theory was adopted for the analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, the data were coded line-by-line to keep ourselves close to the data, as Glaser (1978) suggests. Each researcher reviewed the data independently to identify the codes. Initial codes ranged widely across different categories. In the second step, the researchers calculated the intercoder reliability with a consistency rate of 87%. This step also helped researchers compare the initial codes and explore the further relationships among them. In this step, many codes were revised and matched or combined. In the third step, categories were created based on the codes emerged in the data. We further attempted to build a conceptual framework based on our findings to understand better the affecting factors of students' aspirations. We used the Maxqda Analytics Pro software was used throughout the coding and progressively organizing of the data. While presenting the data, quotes from student opinions were coded as S, citations from teachers were coded as T, citations from school administrators were coded as A, quotes from ministry officials were coded as Ministry of National Education (MoNE), and quotes from political leaders were coded as P. Each interviewee was assigned a number so that the letters and numbers at the end of quotes represent the rank and group of the interviewee.

A variety of safeguards were engaged to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. The data collected from high school students were then triangulated by the responses of other stakeholders, namely teachers, school administrators, ministerial officials, and political leaders (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Parallel interview forms were developed to provide the face and content validity of the instrument. An expert panel reviewed the schedule, and data were gathered in the final application through interviews with 101 participants in private discussions to ensure the confidentiality of the interviews.

FINDINGS

The educational aspirations of high school students are evaluated based on the opinions of the different participants. According to students; one of them hopes to join the army; three of them are not considering attending university; one of them wants to be a soccer player; one of them wants to go abroad to find a job; thirteen students report an aspiration to attend university in Turkey; and thirty students wish to attend university in North Cyprus. None of the North Cypriot university-bound students have decided what to study.

The subjects that students want to study at university differ according to the type of high school they attend. Accordingly, in interviews from "College-Prep" high schools, all the students are considering medicine, law, and engineering. By contrast, students at "General" high schools state that they want to go to a university or vocational college in such fields as sports, conservatory, public relations, management, banking, service occupations, literature, and nursing. In "Vocational-Technical" high schools, the results are quite different, and the number of students who want to go to university decreased dramatically. Only 10 students who wish to go to university are planning to continue in their field, while others want to try new areas. The students, who do not wish to attend university, would like to work in professions related to their departments such as cooking, chef, hotel management, electric, electronic, restaurant management, and secretarial jobs.

According to most teachers ($n=20$), students have aspirations, but they are not optimistic about their ability to realize them. What they study is not the issue; they just want to attend a university. Other teachers complain that students could not identify "real" goals, which tended to concern occupations people see in their daily lives, those which are popular, or those they think would make them more employable. Vocational high school teachers report that their students do not have high aspirations and aim at getting an ordinary job related to their field. Most of the teachers ($n=20$) said that male students plan to study in any university department so that they can apply for police positions after graduation.

The findings on the factors affecting the educational aspirations of high school students focus on three major categories of factors, namely, "Parental," "Personal," and "Community-Related," were summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. *Categories and Codes of Factors Affecting the Educational Aspirations*

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Parental Factors	Parents' educational aspirations and attitudes towards their children's choices, career plans, and aspirations are significantly associated with students' academic outcomes and educational aspirations (Elliott & Beverly, 2011). Parental assets explain the variance of students' aiming for higher aspirations and reaching better educational support and encouragement, and thus academic outcomes (Zhan, 2006).	Parents' Attitudes
		Parents' Aspirations
		Parental Assets
Personal Factors	Contextual influences include ethnic background, socioeconomic status, personal resources, perceived life barriers like adaptation level, and language barriers that influence students' aspirations (Hartas, 2016; Khattab, 2013).	Ethnic Roots
		Social Living Conditions
Community-Related Factors	Being in a rich community, school, and social resources, both inhibiting/promoting environments, and adaptive culture directly affect students' aspirations (Beal & Crockett, 2010; DeJaeghere, 2016; St. Pierre, Mark, Kaltreider, & Campbell, 2001)	Educational Politics, Opportunities, and Facilities
		Political Climate

PARENTAL FACTORS

Parents' attitudes and aspirations towards their children's educational aspirations and career choice, and *parental assets* emerged from the data as important variables. Although college-prep high school students report their university education aspirations, all their teachers believe that students do not aspire or have low aspirations. They claim that students lack "purpose as regards future" because "they are spoiled by their parents" and "think that whatever they do, they will still send them to a university."

Universities in Cyprus are easy for them. Whatever they do, they will enter the universities here with or without a scholarship. For this reason, they do not have the ambition and motivation to study. Very few students want to go to a university in Turkey or take private courses for this goal. (T16)

50% think like that: "If I cannot enter a university in Turkey, we have schools here [in TRNC]. I have another chance." (A6)

MoNE officials emphasize the attitude of parents and claim that Cypriot parents tend to have a decisive say in the goal-setting process of the adolescents:

Unfortunately, there are serious problems in the child-raising culture of Turkish Cypriot society. It isn't about the teenagers themselves. The over-protective family is widespread in our country. The parents choose teenagers' goals on behalf of them. They do not want to send them to universities far from here, even if they are more qualified. (MoNE3)

Families have the perception that their child must always be a teacher, lawyer, doctor, or dentist. We have to overcome these ideas. Can the system in North Cyprus provide family education and career guidance? It cannot. (MoNE4)

One of the students from general high school supports this by explaining her situation:

My dream is to study Korean Language and Literature. Every family wants their child to have a profession like a doctor or a lawyer. They say I am free to choose one of them. My parents tell me they are with me no matter what I choose, but not in Korean. I'm not free. When I select the program I want, they will show an adverse reaction. I did not dare to tell them. (S53)

As MoNE4 and S53 mention, parents' aspirations differ from students' in this sample. Another student said that he does not speak to his parents about this topic; 13 students said that their parents do not support the area or country they want to study, and 45 students said that their parents do not interfere in the area that the student wants to study but do have a say in the country they want to study in.

If I want to go to Turkey...my parents won't let me. They don't want to send due to safety concerns. But I would like to study in Turkey. (S54)

MoNE officials and political leaders commonly state that students usually aim to study at a university. However, these aspirations are affected by financial conditions. If family assets are not favorable, they tend to target free public universities in Turkey; however, students with financial means aim at studying in Europe or at private universities in North Cyprus. The students' data proves this claim, and 25 students emphasize the importance of receiving a scholarship while studying at university since their parents do not have the necessary wealth to support them.

PERSONAL FACTORS

Interviewee groups emphasized the importance of *ethnic roots* and *social living conditions* as critical determinants. All teachers and administrators mention that immigrant students' low economic conditions, language barriers, adaptation problems, and life conditions harmed their goals.

When the economic level and socio-cultural level of the family are high, the importance given to education increases. More than 50% of our children do not have a study room. The value given by parents to education is debatable in these cases because of the living conditions and opportunities they can serve their children. (A4)

Political leaders emphasize that most of the students in public schools have to work, and as parents have to work for long hours, they can not spend enough time with their children. Furthermore, having to work in a job often reduces their academic achievement, and in turn, affects aspirations.

Some children skip school and go to work with their parents. These children have to support their family. (MoNE2)

Usually, these children are from worker families, people who immigrated here to work. Some of their families came illegally. These people are working for meager wages and living in very unfavorable conditions. Most children lack clothes, they have difficulties in buying books, and don't even have overcoats. (P4)

COMMUNITY-RELATED FACTORS

Educational politics, opportunities, and facilities and political climate are the codes emerged under the category community-related factors.

EDUCATIONAL POLITICS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND FACILITIES

Interviewees state that systemic factors about education impact student achievement and, thus, educational aspirations. The quality of education, sense of education, educational policies, and applications affect students' faith in success and create despair about aspirations.

All school administrators acknowledge that there are limited social, cultural, and sports activities at schools. Teachers and administrators report that students who do not have high academic aspirations still show success in sports or artistic fields. The lack of such activities created negative results.

Government policy has to change. I think it's forgotten that there are children here. There must be places where children can be active. There is nothing in terms of sports and culture. When they are not present, children acquire bad habits. (T16)

Similarly, all teachers and administrators mention the improvement of physical conditions at schools and creating areas where different activities can be made would help students be directed to not only certain professions but also to new areas. All politicians and ministerial officials also take attention to the low academic and social facilities, even the physical conditions of public high school buildings, by comparing them with private high schools. At this point, personal and community-related codes converge.

There is a gap between private schools and public schools in terms of working hours, discipline inside the school, and the quality of the facilities inside the school; Students feel "otherized" at public schools. School begins to turn into a place where economic and social discrimination in this society are reflected. Public schools are places where children of low-income families are enrolled. Education institutions perpetuate social injustice is being felt. (P3)

All interviewees other than students point out there is a need for more effective guidance available to students at younger ages. While school staff did not mention their lack of guidance for the students in building their aspirations, all politicians highlighted the importance of knowing the children and helping them in exploring themselves.

We have problems in guiding children. At schools, students are told that they can succeed if they want. But they are not told what to do. What is the child skilled at? The child does not know. (P2)

The politicians are also at the same stand as all other interviewees, complaining that a coherent sense of education cannot be established in the country. According to the participants, the characteristics that should be acquired by a generation that would contribute to the future of the country were not defined and guided.

Children cannot set high aspirations themselves, and neither can families. It is education that has to help set the goals of the children. It will determine where we want to see the education standard five years from now. (P4)

The students' data also proves that students need guidance for career planning, setting or reaching goals, effective study habits, and also counseling for test anxiety.

It is challenging to set a higher goal for me. Because I have a problem of can not work hard. I am getting bored quickly. (S36)

I am afraid. I am always afraid of failing at university exams. I suffer from a panic attack when taking an exam and I forget what I already know. (S50)

I am in a verbal field; people ask, "What can you do in that field?" And I also think that I will have difficulty. I regret a lot. (S48)

This code proves that neither factor alone has sufficient variance to determine a developmental outcome. This could actually be considered as a personal factor. However, not being able to decide on aspiration, and not being able to decide exactly what one wants, appeared in this category as an underlying variable. Regarding this, students report that they are not knowledgeable about many professions.

I still do not know what to select because I am afraid of making decisions. It turned out that I was successful in the verbal area, but I am in the quantitative department. My math scores are high, but I do not like it. I do not know anything about professions. I spoke to my guidance teacher. As we had no internet connection in our school, she told me to do my search and bring the information. But I did not take any serious step in this as I am afraid of making decisions. (S53)

Another policy factor affecting aspirations is the grade passing system in high school. Even the students emphasize as there is no failing, they do not need to study hard nor set high academic aspirations.

With the new system, you can pass the class in any case, even if you get three [system is out of 10]. My son says, "Dad, I have the right to get three from a course, and I will use it." My son does that. In our time, getting 3 was something to be ashamed of. We used to study to get higher grades. (P2)

Teachers, administrators, ministerial officials, and politicians questioned teacher qualities and lack of inspections when asked about factors affecting students' aspirations. They agree that education should be governed after being freed from political concerns.

There is a political side to teacher assignments. While choosing teachers, they have to be chosen with the right attitude. Unfortunately, the commission which conducts the exam is created through political assignments. People who do not deserve it can also be assigned. (T23)

Teachers must not be assigned to life terms. Teachers must know that if they are not good, if they can not help students set high aspirations, they have to resign. (MoNE2)

Again, almost all the students state that they could pass the university entrance exam if "teachers gave better lectures" (S13). A school administrator supports students by complaining about the lack of questioning for the quality of education: In the system, no one inspects my school and asks, "what is the reason for this mess?" (A1)

Furthermore, all interviewees emphasize that North Cyprus does not have its own national secondary education curriculum and uses the program belonging to Turkey. Students said that the topics handled in full-day teaching programs in Turkey could not be finished in TRNC where education is half-day, or, as they are covered very fast, they are not learned in detail. For this reason, people with financial means go to private courses or take private tutoring after school to compete with students in Turkey in a university exam.

We don't have our own program. It is sent from Turkey. Turkey applies it full-day, whereas we try to shrink it between 8:00 and 13:00. (A1)

Likewise, depending on the program and schedule, teachers and administrators conclude that course books and related materials are not produced as unique to North Cyprus but brought from Turkey. Administrators claim that books were not delivered from Turkey on time. For this reason, they had difficulties in the first few months of the academic year, which affects the quality of instruction.

All participants believe that half-day education affects student achievement negatively and that students are behind their peers in Turkey academically. A student summarizes the negative influence of this:

We come to school at 08.30, it ends at 13:00. The teacher to comes and takes the attendance for 35 minutes, then he lectures for half an hour, that's all, it is awful.(S40)

One teacher points out that not being at the school after 1.00 pm impacts student lifestyles and take attention to how the future aspirations are shaped in a negative way for the students who have to work to support their families and do not have private tutoring opportunities after school:

Some students are making money by working at bars and casinos illegally. Those who can speak English can make very good money. They give some to their parents and spend the rest to buy drugs and cigarettes. Drugs are very cheap; they can find Bonzai for 5 TLs [about \$1]. Under these conditions, you accelerate the existing problems when you send them away from school early. (T20)

All the participants other than the teachers mentioned that teacher absenteeism, which emerges due to frequent union strikes, worsens the situation. Teachers often strike for several days a week, and strikes can go on for very long periods of time. School administrators and politicians criticized teachers who did not follow a remedial program at the end of the strike, affecting students' preparation for the university entrance examinations.

In this country, all unions are using the same instrument without considering the impacts. As they always use strikes, education is interrupted. There are losses all the time. Nobody thinks, "We had a strike for 3 months. Let us make up for that loss." (P3)

When teacher absenteeism occurs, other problems emerge. Even with the best curriculum and teaching practices, teacher absenteeism will continue to be a major problem.

POLITICAL CLIMATE

All interviewees, including students, claim that unemployment and limited areas of employment in the country force them to adopt lower aspirations and lead them to hopelessness.

Unfortunately, if they have the means, our high school students can easily settle into university programs here, but after completing these programs, they cannot find a job in their field. (MoNE1)

The students are already aware of the problem raised by MoNE1, and most of them aspire to a more placeable profession. While the "College-Prep" students can dream of different occupations and want to attend universities abroad, most ($n=32$) "General" and "Vocational" high school students have lower aspirations. The change in the aspiration is not only rooted in parental assets but the unemployment problem in the country. Thus, students prefer professions that will always be needed and bring civil servant opportunities like lifetime job guarantee. All administrators highlighted that the purpose of university attending aspiration is to create a route for being a policeman or soldier:

When you ask, "what would you like to study, what would you like to do?", boys want to be a soldier or policeman, girls want to be a nurse. Attention that these are the most employable fields. (A3)

The fact that North Cyprus is not recognized and the atmosphere of uncertainty created by the fact that the divisive political issue remains unsolved were cited by all interviewees, including students, as the reasons for hopelessness among students for the future.

Cyprus negotiations continue for 40 years; the process is ongoing. In this country, depression and pessimism is the dominant mood. Naturally, the youth are affected, too. (A7)

MoNE1 explains how this political climate affects students' aspirations:

The political structure of Cyprus causes problems. Due to embargoes and isolation, Turkish Cypriot youth cannot find a place in the world. Even if he does sports, he knows that he cannot carry it outside North Cyprus. Also, if he does art, he knows that he cannot take it outside North Cyprus. Even if he is the best in a specific field, he notices that it is limited to North Cyprus only. (MoNE1)

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings revealed that high school students enrolled in public schools in Northern Cyprus are having problems in setting goals. Those students with academic goals often do not set them high, tending to seek education and training to make them easily employable. Only a few are aiming at graduating from university. In other words, except for the one student, who dreams of learning Korean literature and language and going to Korea, none of the participants talked about the 'dreams' of the students in the country. These findings are rather thought-provoking for the future of the country since the literature shows that the lack of aspirations and indecisiveness of adolescents lead to low or insufficient academic achievement, depression, and lower well-being (Cheryan, 2014; Gorard, Huat, & Davies, 2012).

Parental attitudes, aspirations and assets, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, living conditions, educational policies, opportunities, facilities, and political climate were salient in this study as influencing factors of youth's educational aspirations. These codes were framed under three categories from the perspectives of ecological and integrative development approaches. There is a vast amount of study in the literature examining the relation of discrepancies between academic aspirations and expectations, the parental-child differences between educational aspirations and academic achievement to theoretically associated with social, economic, academic, and behavioral variables (Boxer et al., 2011; Lv et al., 2018). The large body of the research was designed as survey studies and explored the correlations between the variables mentioned before. In this study, grounded theory methodology, which provides in-depth data and rich conceptual analyses, was chosen to contribute to the scope of questionnaire-based studies in the literature (Charmaz, 1996). The narrative data in this study allowed an in-depth understanding of the parental and personal variables when combining them with community-related variables.

Most of the students in the data are immigrants with lower family assets that bring other factors together as a barrier to setting higher future aspirations. These factors marginalize these groups compared with their peers from the hosting communities (Keddie, 2012). Having poorer living conditions and socioeconomic status forces most students to work illegally or make them aspire to employable professions. These findings are not only associated with parental and personal factors, but also the community-related factors that change the situation. Garcia Coll et al. (1996, p.1896)'s integrative approach highlights the interactive relation between "inhibiting/promoting environments and adaptive culture" on the family-related variables and children's development. Similarly, St. Pierre et al. (2001) highlight that attending rich communities, schools, and social facilities may perform as a barrier against the undesired behaviors typically related to poor neighborhoods, including substance abuse, low academic achievement, and school dropout. The findings are also important for the inclusive education literature and can also be used to inform educational policy departments about the effect of migration policy on establishing future aspirations. This research contributes to existing research investigating school climate and inclusive education and the relationship between educational aspirations and students' academic outcomes with inclusive education (Cook et al., 1996; Dimitrova et al., 2018; Flecha, 2015) by exploring educational policy and community-level factors affecting the mostly disadvantaged and immigrant students' aspirations in Northern Cyprus. Aspiring

to employable occupation is not unique for North Cyprus students, and it is a well-documented motivation for most immigrant hosting countries generally (Hoffman et al., 2003).

Our findings also align with existing knowledge on the effect of parental and personal variables (Majoribanks, 2003; Zhan & Sherradan, 2003) and contribute the literature by providing a lens through socioeconomic status' creating a chain effect of shaping aspirations by having lower family assets and barriers to reach the quality of instruction, appropriate curriculum, rich club and social activities, individualized guidance opportunities. The study was undertaken within a Northern Cyprus context and could therefore be seen as limiting, but the narrative of adolescents' aspirations development can not be interpreted separated from the community-related factors is global. The lack of political recognition and the embargoes applied to the country, which prevent the development of such sectors as agriculture, tourism, and banking in Northern Cyprus, have been identified by some studies (Katircioglu, 2006). The uncertainty of the future of the north side, the political and economic embargo, resulting in a lack of job opportunities, and a limited job diversity could be accepted as a factor of the lower aspirations since economic development indeed has a direct impact on the social and economic life of a society (Katz, 2004). However, the consequences of this dispute on the young are devastating to their academic aspirations. Thus, while the relative poverty and dislocation in North Cypriot society negatively impact students' educational aspirations, as is evident elsewhere in the world with similar conditions, the isolation adds an extra dimension, enhancing the sense of hopelessness. Indeed, the impact of all of these factors affects students' educational aspirations everywhere. But they have an accelerator effect in North Cyprus, creating a vacuum that makes holding high academic aspirations nearly pointless. The high school experiences have a high impact on the post-secondary education plans (Hossler & Stage, 1992). While the Cyprus problem is expected to continue for a while, political actors should develop more permanent policies to overcome students' despair. Long-term strategic planning in the education sector as a state policy is desperately needed, aggressively moving forward to address academic infrastructure, curriculum, career development, and teacher absenteeism. Indeed, without such decisive action, the potential for students building higher educational aspirations and hope for their future careers may be limited.

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