



Empowering Futures:

Career Counselling in Sierra Leone's Secondary Schools

Data Report

June 2026

Caminor
FOUNDATION

Supporting Career Choices for Youth in Sierra Leone

To help students in Sierra Leone find meaningful career paths, a new program introducing career counsellors in senior secondary schools was launched in November 2024. This initiative is a collaboration between **Caminor Foundation**, **Skool Grind**, and the **Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE)**. The aim is to drive systemic change by making the most of limited educational resources and guiding students through the difficult transition to adulthood in a highly constrained job market.



Executive Summary

This report is based on data from 1,361 students and 2,827 counselling sessions conducted between November 2024 and April 2026. The findings provide one of the first large-scale insights into the career aspirations, challenges, and development needs of senior secondary students participating in structured career counselling in Sierra Leone. To our knowledge, this is one of the most comprehensive datasets currently available on career aspirations and career counselling among secondary school students in West Africa.

Key Findings

- Health remains the dominant aspiration (33%)
- Banking/accounting interest has grown significantly
- Less than 1% aspire to work in education
- Career aspirations are becoming more diverse
- Financial barriers are the most common challenge

How the Data Was Collected

Career counsellors have been placed in three senior secondary schools in Freetown:

- Prince of Wales School
- Ahmadiyya Secondary School
- Services Secondary School

Students aged 16 to 21 participate in progressive career counselling, meeting individually with a counsellor three times per academic year. Each session is digitally documented, and this report is based on data collected from those records.

Context and Limitations

Data in this report was collected from 1,361 students across 2,827 sessions between November 18, 2024, and April 20, 2026. All students attend three large secondary schools in Freetown. The findings should therefore be interpreted as representative of urban students and may not fully reflect the experiences of young people in smaller or rural schools across Sierra Leone. Additionally, one of the schools—Prince of Wales—is a boys-only school, leading to a gender imbalance in the dataset:



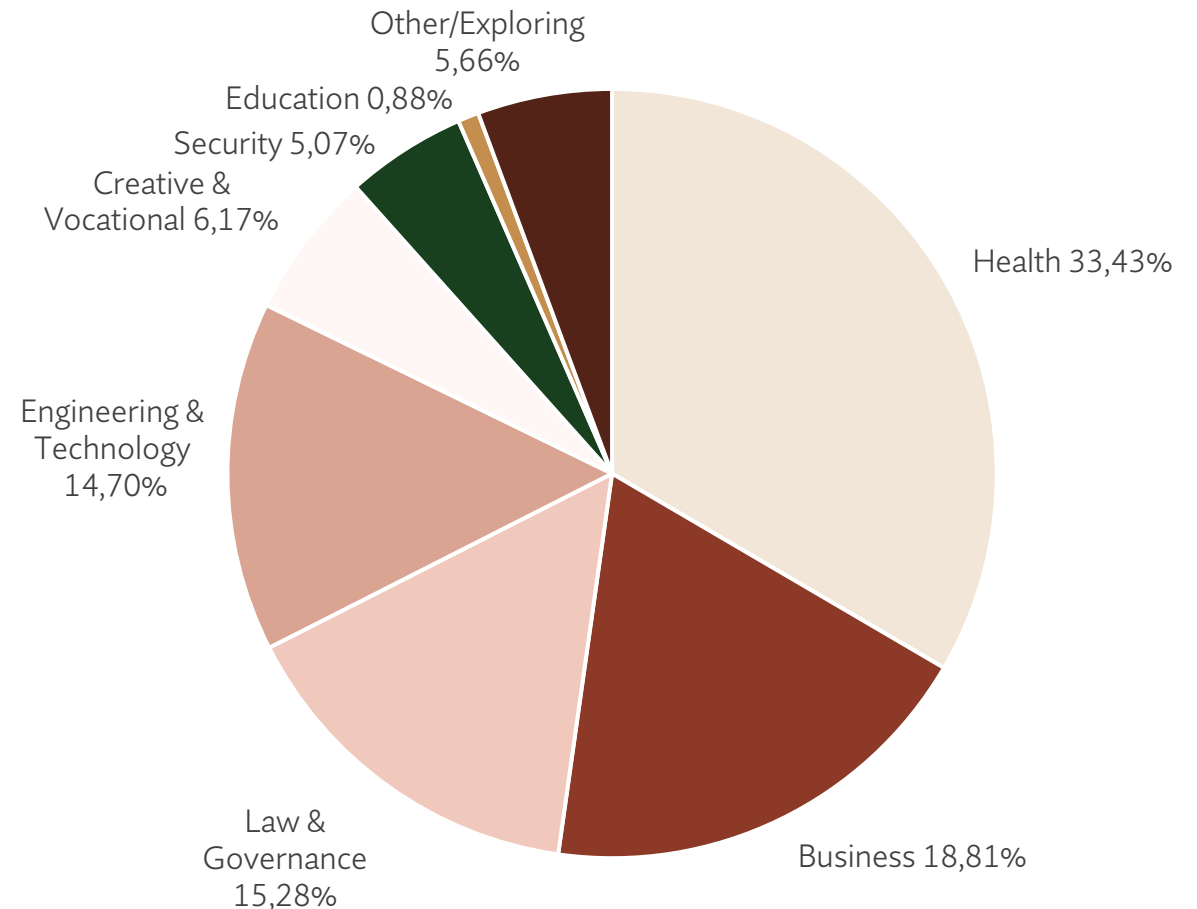
Career Aspirations by Sector

Overwhelming Preference for Health

Many students aspire to work in health, reflecting strong motivation to contribute to public well-being. If supported, this could strengthen future health capacity, particularly through expanded community health pathways. However, limited training places, internships, and employment opportunities may prevent the system from absorbing the large number of interested students.

Challenge for Education Sector

Less than 1% of students expressed interest in working in education—a worrying sign for national human capital development. In countries like Sierra Leone, an estimated 4–5% of students may need to enter education-related professions to sustain future teacher supply and educational quality. Without this, gains in literacy, workforce skills, and civic engagement may weaken. This finding may warrant further investigation, as future teacher shortages could become a constraint on national development.



Career Aspirations by Profession

Health Careers Continue to Dominate

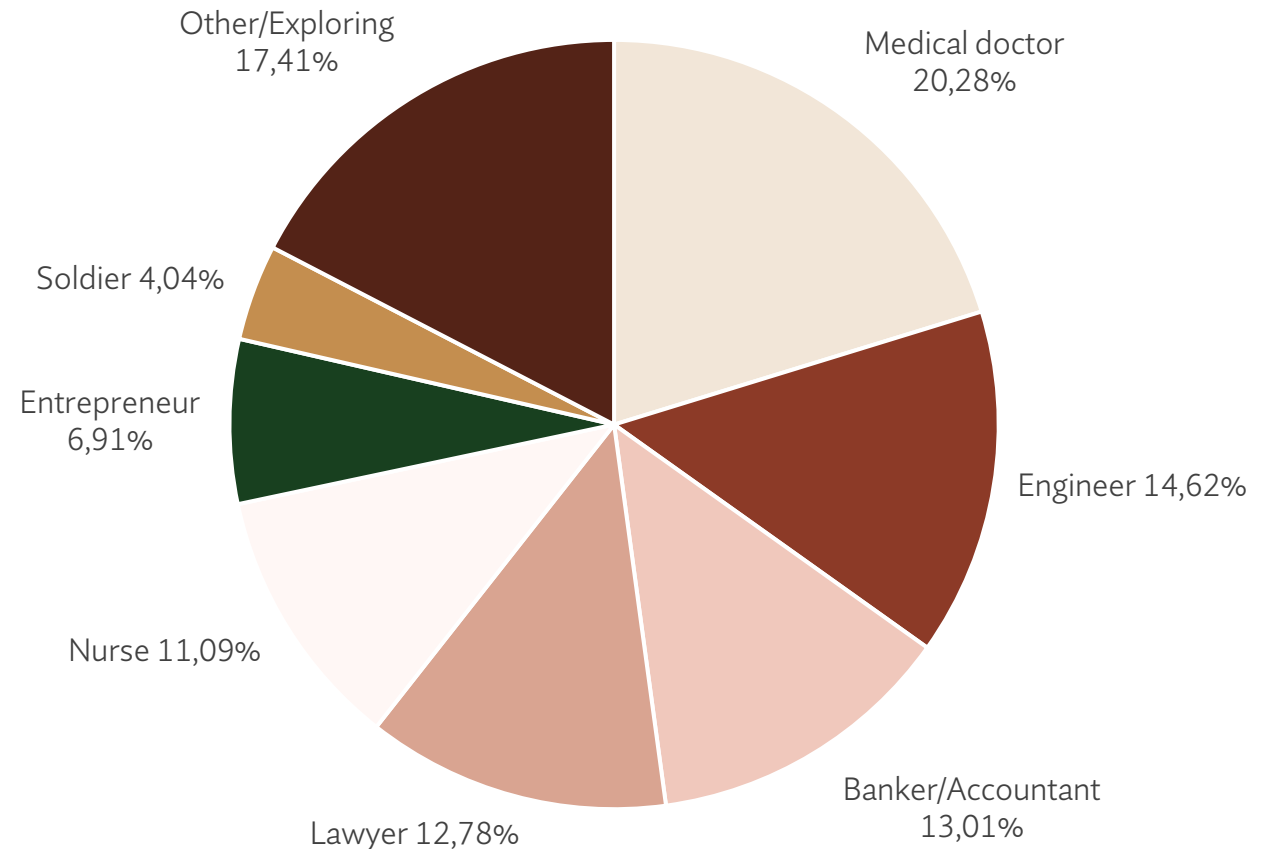
Medical doctor remains the most common career aspiration, reflecting strong student interest in status, purpose, and contributing to public health. Students may also have limited awareness of alternative health careers that are critically needed.

Rising Interest in the Financial Sector

Interest in banking and accounting has increased. This may reflect growing awareness of business, financial independence, and formal-sector employment opportunities.

Technical Skills Remain in High Demand

Engineering continues to attract many students, showing strong interest in technology and infrastructure development. Expanding access to science education, ICT, and technical training pathways could help meet this demand and support future workforce needs.

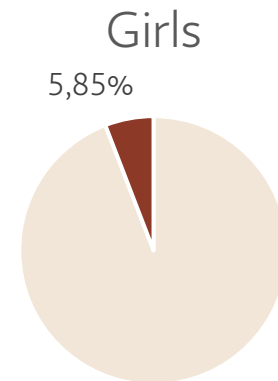
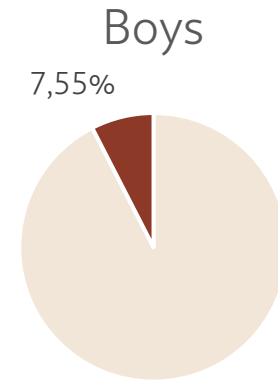


Entrepreneurial Aspirations

Entrepreneurship as a Development Opportunity

With limited access to higher education and a constrained job market, entrepreneurship represents an increasingly important pathway for young people in Sierra Leone. However, relatively few students currently see entrepreneurship as a first-choice career, suggesting a need to further stimulate entrepreneurial interest and ambition among youth.

By strengthening entrepreneurship education, mentorship, and exposure to role models, more students could view business creation as a respected and realistic career path. Encouraging students to solve local problems, develop practical skills, and build small businesses could help create jobs, strengthen resilience, and contribute to long-term economic development.

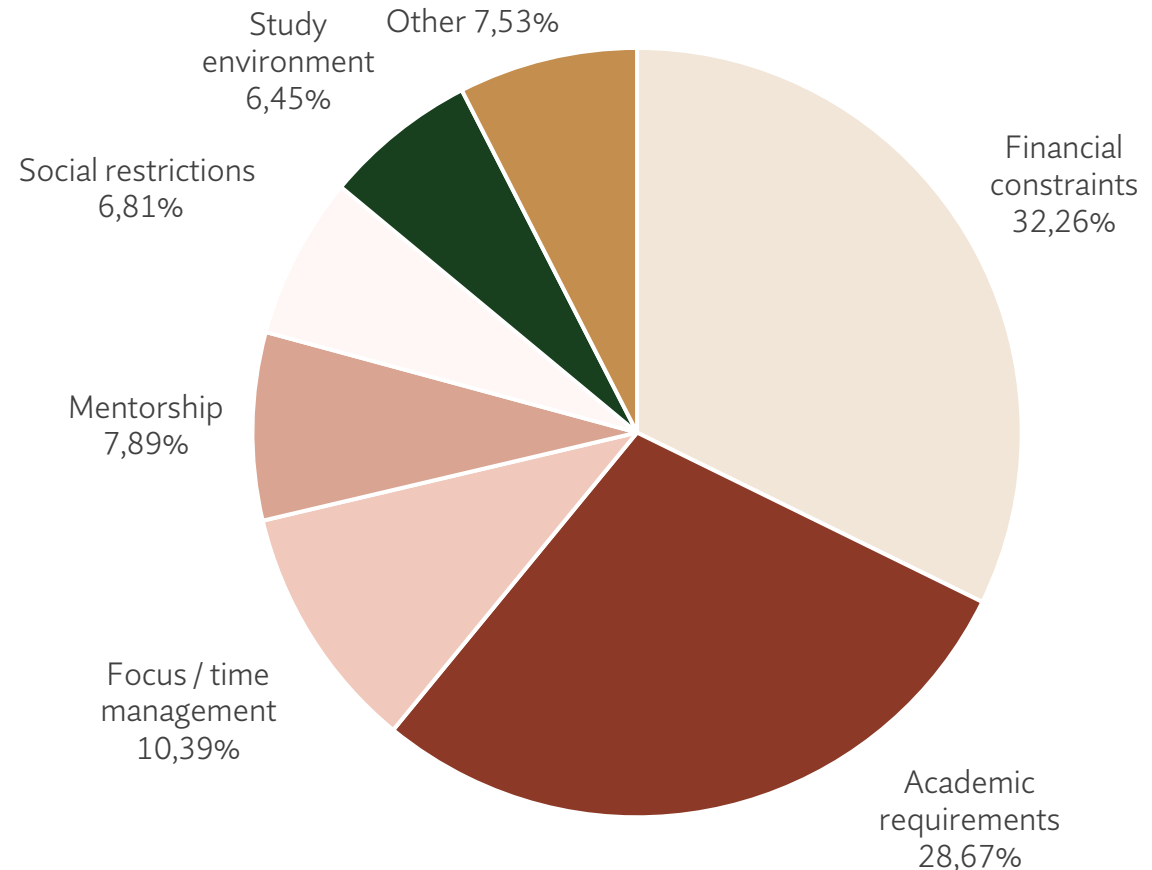


Challenges in Reaching Career Aspirations

Structural and Personal Barriers

Many students face significant barriers in pursuing their career goals. Financial constraints were often linked to the cost of university education, learning materials, transportation, and limited access to start-up capital for entrepreneurship. Academic requirements mainly reflected concerns about achieving the grades needed to complete secondary school or qualify for further studies. Challenges related to focus and time management frequently included difficulties concentrating, balancing responsibilities, or lacking a home environment that supports studying.

Not all students were asked about challenges during counselling sessions, meaning these findings reflect the 279 out of 1,361 students who explicitly expressed a challenge connected to achieving their aspirations.



Informed Career Decisions Through Counselling

One of the most important roles of career counselling is to help students make informed decisions about their future by increasing awareness of career pathways, requirements, and opportunities. The goal is not to change students' aspirations, as many already have thoughtful and meaningful career goals. However, counselling can help students refine, adapt, or reconsider their plans when they discover alternatives that better match their interests, abilities, or circumstances. Here are examples of students who described positive changes in their career thinking following counselling sessions:

"Growing up around my father's work made me interested in becoming a medical doctor, but after researching my strengths and interests, I realized IT suited me better. By learning more about computers and technology, I became confident that becoming an IT specialist is the career path I truly want to pursue."

SS3 Student at Prince of Wales School, Freetown

"My goal was originally to become a nurse or doctor because I wanted to help people through medicine, but after researching different health careers, I became interested in public health and nutrition. I realized I also want to improve community health on a broader level, not only by treating individual patients."

SS3 Student at Services Secondary School, Freetown

"I initially considered becoming an agriculturist, but after our last meeting and doing some research, I've changed my mind and now I'm more interested in becoming a mechanical engineer because I find how cars operate really fascinating."

SS2 Student at Prince of Wales School, Freetown

Human and Social Impact of the Programme

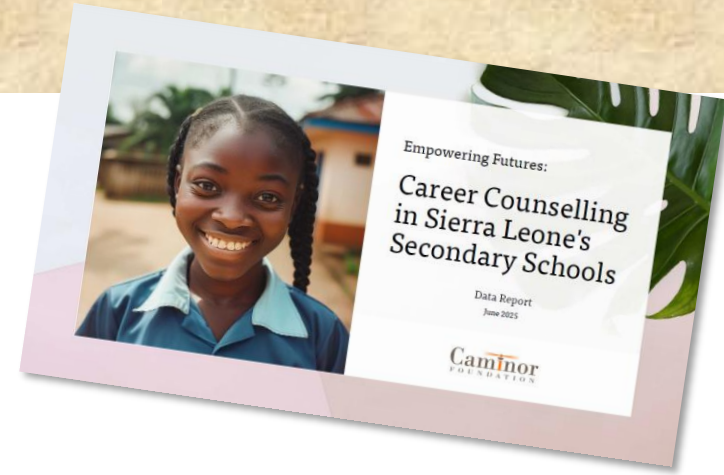
Improved School Environment and Student Direction

Beyond career planning, counsellors have helped students gain stronger direction and motivation in daily life. Some students who previously struggled with drug use or negative peer environments have become more focused on education and future goals after receiving guidance and support. School management has also reported reduced tension among students, improved behaviour, and stronger academic focus. These changes are difficult to measure but have important long-term effects on student wellbeing, school climate, and community stability.

Broader Social and Personal Outcomes

The programme also contributes to wider positive social outcomes beyond direct career decisions. Counselling helps students avoid unsuitable educational pathways, strengthen confidence and purpose, and increase motivation to contribute to society. It also supports lower school dropout rates, reduces vulnerability to exploitation, encourages girls to continue education, and helps students transition more smoothly into work, entrepreneurship, or further studies. These broader effects strengthen both individual life outcomes and long-term community development.

Changes Since the June 2025 Report



Growing Interest in Financial Professions

While health-related careers remain the dominant aspiration, interest in financial professions has grown considerably since the June 2025 report, which covered the first six months of the programme. Banking and accounting now represent one of the largest career categories, suggesting increased awareness of business and finance.

Career aspirations also appear more diversified. More students are expressing interest in creative, vocational, and other professional pathways, reducing the concentration around a small number of traditional career choices.

Evidence of More Informed Decision-Making

This shift likely reflects, at least in part, the impact of career counselling. Many students enter the programme with aspirations shaped by family expectations or the professions most visible in their communities. Through counselling sessions, students are exposed to a wider range of careers and educational pathways. As a result, students appear to be making more informed career decisions, exploring options that better align with their interests, strengths, and future opportunities. The increasing diversity of aspirations may therefore reflect greater career awareness rather than changing ambitions.



Future of the Career Counselling Programme

In May 2026, three more senior secondary schools in Freetown were added to the programme:

- Annie Walsh Memorial School
- Vine Memorial Secondary School
- Albert Academy

The first two are all-girls schools, which will provide a broader base for girls' aspirations. The latter is an all-boys school, meaning the programme now includes two girls' schools, two boys' schools, and two mixed schools.

Future Data Collection

This report covers the programme's first 18 months. Future reports will follow the academic year to enable easier comparisons over time. With this foundation in place, we plan to expand data collection to include socioeconomic background, academic performance, mental wellbeing, and family or peer support. Over time, we also aim to follow students after graduation to understand how their careers develop and what factors influence their pathways, while incorporating data on educational opportunities and labour market demand to better assess students' prospects of achieving their career goals.



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