Parental Educational Expectation and Achievement Motivation in Adolescents

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This paper examines the role of parental educational expectation on achievement motivation of adolescents. Motivation refers to the student’s energy and drive to learn work effectively and achieve their potential at school and the behaviour that follow from this energy and drive. Motivation plays a large part in student interest and enjoyment in school. Achievement motivation refers to the concern for excellence in performance as reflected in competition with the standards set by others or over unique accomplishment. Children typically learn standard of excellence from their parents. Parental educational expectation has been identified as the most important contributor to children achievement motivation in adolescents. Although positive effect of parental expectation influenced by two set of factors, firstly parent’s education, occupation, income, and early academic performance of child, secondly, the relationship between children and parents.

Parent’s interaction with children and involvement in their education may strengthen the parent child relationship which in turn may increase parent child agreement regarding educational
expectation and foster academic achievement. Parents shared expectation such as school achievement, science orientation, carrier aspiration, moral character and cultural integration served as the children’s life goal and guided them every day practice. Thus this paper assist parents to establish mutual parent child understanding in the process of forming expectation and can help educators and counsellors understand family factors involved in children’s schooling, and accordingly provide responsive academic and social monitoring to children.

Motivating student to achieve in school is a topic of great practical concern to parents, teachers and of great theoretical concern to researchers. New books on the topic appear with increasing frequency and relevant research is proliferating at rapid rate. Higher education institutions are beginning to provide assistance to the students, in developing study skill and self regulatory skills. One of greatest challenges for school is to focus more on assisting students so that they become motivated for getting success in school. The social factors that influence adolescents’ achievement motivation toward school and academic task is family background. It influences short and long-term achievement of adolescents in school (Berndt, Laychak & Park, 1990; Berndt & Miller, 1990; Brown, 1989; Kindermann, 1993; Nichols & Miller, 1994; White & Nicholas, 1999; Winiarki & Johns, 1994). Family background is widely recognized as the most significant contributor to success in schools. Recent researches on family background supported the finding that the home has a major influence on student school success (Swick & Duff, 1978). The quality of relationship between students and their parents has also an important effect on student’s school performance (Neisser, 1986; Selden, 1990; Coldas, 1993).

Many Variables in the family background have strong (direct and indirect) associations with students’ success throughout school and in young adult’s eventual educational and occupational
attainment. Such variables included family structure (socio-economic status (SES), intact/single parent families), parental educational level, parental involvement, parenting style and parental educational expectation. Number of studies suggests that students who come from low socio economic status and single parent homes have significantly less school success than those students who come from high socio economic status and intact families. (Martini, 1998; Walker, McGorge, Himes, Williams & Duff, 1998, Amato & Keith, 1991; Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Entwisle & Alexeander, 1995). Parents in such setting also reported lower educational expectations, less monitoring of children’s school work and less overall supervision of school activities compared to students from high socio economic status and intact families. Similarly more educated parents are assumed to create environments that facilitate learning (Williams, 1980 & Teachman, 1987) and involved themselves in their children’s school experiences and school environments (Useem, 1992). Nevertheless, there are many students who come from low income homes who are high achievers and many students come from high socio economic status who are low achievers. Students may also come from homes where parents are highly educated and involved in their children’s education, but they achieve poorly at school.

The strong impact of family structure and family background on academic outcomes of children has been frequently documented. Among the family background variables which influences the children’s academic performance, the most important is parental educational expectations for their children, which consistently had been a strong predictor of student achievement at all age levels, beginning with first grade (Entwisle & Alexander, 1990) to upper elementary school (Marjoribanks, 1987), and to high school (Ainley, Foremen & Sheret, 1991) and beyond (Conklin & Dailey, 1981), and students from a wide range of racial and ethnic background.
Family being the first and major agency of socialization plays a pivotal role in styling child’s life. It has been shown that most of children who are successful and well adjusted come from families where the wholesome relationship exists between children and their parents. The quality of an adolescent’s relationship with his or her parents is a key component to healthy adolescents’ development. Secure bonds between parents and their adolescents allow young people the freedom to grow and explore, knowing their home represents a safe heaven to which they can return when necessary. However, conflict which may denote weak or weakening interpersonal bonds, often occur within adolescents relationships. Studies have indicated that adolescents’ reports of severe or unresolved disagreement with their parents have been associated with adolescents emotional difficulties, substance abuse, conduct problems and poor school performances. They are also related to a variety of variables such as independence, self esteem, moral development, anxiety and achievement motivation (Suman & Umapathy, 1997).

Achievement motive is a latent disposition to strive for certain goal states when the cues of the situation arouse the expectancy that performance of an act is instrumental in attainment of the goal. For the person, who is motivated towards achievement, achieving something has incentive value or reinforcing properties. It is an important determinant of aspiration and effort when an individual expects that his performance will be evaluated in relation to some standard of excellence. Therefore, achievement motivation can be defined as a concern for excellence in performance as reflected in competition with the standard set by others or over unique accomplishment or longtime involvement (McClelland, 1953). A person with a strong motive to achieve tend to derive satisfaction from overcoming obstacles by his own efforts and taking calculated risks, the achievement motive seems most likely to be associated
with setting of moderately difficult goal, interests in concrete feedback assuring personal responsibility and showing more initiative and exploratory behaviour (McClelland, 1953).

Over the years researches on achievement motivation demonstrated that individuals high in achievement motivation are more persistent and perform better in examination. They seem to be more competitive and willing to take responsibilities of the outcomes of their own performance. They tend to challenge themselves in realistic ways, so that their aspirations are in line with their capacities. Those, low in achievement motivation tend to be less realistic in their behaviour. They often choose a task: that is either very easy or so difficult that failure is inevitable. Thus, achievement motivation has been defined as the reintegration of affect aroused by cues in situation involving standard of excellence. Children typically learn standards of excellence from parents who encourage competition with these standards, while rewarding good performance and punishing failure. In time parental expectations become internalized, so that later exposed to the situation involving standards of excellence the individual re-experiences the effects associated with earlier efforts (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark & Lowell, 1953).

Rosen (1961) has stated that achievement motivation has its origin in complex of interrelated parental practices. Two types of practices are related to the development of the achievement motivation. The first and the most important parental practice which is related to the development of achievement motivation is achievement training. Parents who provide achievement training sets high goal for their child, indicate a high evaluation of his competence to do a task well, and impose standards of excellence upon problem solving task, even in situations where such standards are not explicit. The second type of parental practice related to the development of achievement motivation is called independence training. This type of training involves expectation that the child
be self reliant when competing with standard of excellence. At the same time, the child is granted autonomy in problem-solving and decision making in situations where he has both freedom of action and responsibility for success or failure. Essentially, achievement training is concerned with getting the child to do things well, while independence training seeks to teach him to do things on his own (self reliance) in a situation where he enjoys relative freedom from parental control (autonomy).

Parental expectations for achievement also have a powerful effect on the extent to which children develop achievement motivation. If parents do not express confidence in their children’s ability to succeed, it is difficult for children to develop much confidence in them (Suman & Umapathy, 1997). Atkinson and Winterbottom (1958) reported that early training of independence and mastery contributed to the development of strong achievement motivation in children.

Expectations are a strong motivational force for adolescents. They serve as targets which direct behaviours and set goal which people strive to achieve (Locke & Latham, 1990). Many studies conceptualized parental expectation in terms of the view that parents hold regarding the highest level of education that their children will complete (Reynolds, 1991). Seginer (1986) proposed a more complex conceptualization of parental educational expectations and defined them as consisting of three dimensions:

1. realistic expectation which combines parental predictions of the level of academic performance of their children,
2. idealistic expectations which includes the wishes and hopeful anticipations held by the parents related to their children in academic realms and
3. standards of achievement incorporates implicit measures by which the parents evaluate their children’s academic attainments.
Earlier studies related to expectation revealed that teacher expectations could actually serve as an educational self-fulfilling prophecy for student’s intellectual performances (Rosenthal and Jacobs; 1968). The importance of attitude and expectations to achievements has been investigated previously in the study by Keeves (1972). He has explored moderate to strong association between students’ mathematics and science achievement and parents’ attitude towards their child education and ambition for their future education and occupation.

Majority of the work related to expectation of individual student discussed the importance of parental interest, expectations, attitudes and aspiration on children academic achievement (Marjoribanks, 1977). Other researches have also demonstrated significant relationship between parental expectation and student academic performance, both directly as well as indirectly, though students, peers classroom variables (Alexander, Entwisle & Horsey, 1977; Seginer; 1983; Walker et al., 1998).

Some studies have been tried to explore the relationship of achievement motivation of children with certain parental factors. Herman, Terlaak and Maes (1972) found that parents of high achievement motivation children were inclined to express high expectations and to praise successful move towards solving problems. Nuttall and Nuttall (1976) reported that parents who perceived as being more acceptant and using less permissive attitude, restrictive and hostile psychological control tended to have children with higher achievement motive. Dornbush, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts and Fraleigh (1987); Nelson, (1984); Stevenson and Baker, (1987) found that adolescents’ adequate academic achievement and adjustment were influenced by their quality of relationship with their parents and family members, their levels of academic aspiration and achievement orientation. Studies in the relation of adolescents’ aspiration and achievement evidenced that parents play a key role in shaping students aspirations and
achievements. Family factors such as parental level of education, parental support and expectation for their children seem to exert some influence on adolescents’ achievement motivation (Beyer, 1995).

A number of studies have been conducted over the years to examine the relationship between parental expectation and academic achievement in adolescents. In a study Beyer (1995) found that parents’ educational aspiration and expectation of their children’s academic performance was positively correlated with children’s grade, IQ score, educational aspiration, achievement motivation and eventual educational attainment. The study also indicated that parental academic encouragement foster children’s cognitive development, grades, score on standardized test, educational aspiration and that parents’ realistic expectation related to child’s achievement more than extremely low and high expectation. Studies focusing on parental educational expectation have suggested that parental expectation influences children’s academic performance (Boocack, 1972; Okazaki & Frensch, 1998).

Academic achievement is additionally influenced by children’s perceptions of their parent’s educational expectation for them. Children are usually aware whether adults have high or low expectation, which influences academic achievement (Eggen & Kauchak, 2001). When parents expect children to do well on a specific task, children generally gain confidence in their abilities to carryout that task and are consequently likely to perform as expected. Children’s perceptions of their own academic competence are based on others expectations especially of parents and other significant adults such as teachers (Mancillas, 2005).

Parental expectation has been identified as the most important contributor to children school achievement (Hoge, Smit, & Crist, 1997). The empirical studies of immigrant in America, has consistently reported a positive relationship between parental
expectation and children’s school achievement (Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Schneider & Lee, 1990; Sue & Okazaki, 1990; Peng & Wright, 1994, Okazaki & French, 1998). In a study Jerry (2002) investigated the variables that predicted stability of adolescents’ educational expectation for at least bachelor’s degree. The variables were early achievement; student personal resources, parents and students behaviour and parent’s expectation. The effect of these variables was stronger for male than female. The studies also demonstrated that parental expectation was strongest predictor of mathematics score (Karbetian, 2004; Rangiin & Leung, 2000). Studies related to parents’ educational expectation also suggest that parent’s child agreement regarding educational expectation foster academic achievement (Hau & Burns, 1998). Parent child shared expectations such as school achievement science oriented career aspiration; moral character and cultural integration serve as the children’s life goals and guide their every day practice. In addition to this, future planning and goal setting motivate the children to pursue excellence and actively engage in learning, (Jun. 2003).

**Determinants of Parental Educational Expectation**

Status attainment and family social capital are two perspectives that have used to study the educational expectations of parents and children. Status attainment perspective views socioeconomic status (i.e., parent’s education, occupation, and income) and early academic performance are the determinants of educational expectations. These factors directly influence parents’ educational expectations, which in turn influence children’s expectations for themselves (Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969; Sewell & Shah, 1968). Socioeconomic background and early academic performance also have direct effects on children’s expectations (Sewell, Haller, & Ohlendorf, 1970; Wilson & Portes, 1975). In short, higher socio economic status families provide
resources and expectations that promote high expectations among children. Studies in United States have found support for the status attainment perspective (Sewell & Hauser, 1975; Wilson & Wilson, 1992). Expectations research in other more developed countries has also provided support for the status attainment perspective (Looker & Pineo, 1983; Marjoribanks, 1986; Ratty, 2006). Some studies in less developed countries have not found significant association between parental education, academic performance and educational expectations, which has been attributed to the nature of schooling in those countries (Tsui & Rich, 2002).

A second perspective i.e., family social capital focuses on the relations between children and parents or other family members (Coleman, 1988). Parents’ interactions with children and involvement in their children’s educational may strengthen the parent-child relationship, which in turn may increase parents’ and children’s expectations and the agreement between their expectations (Hao & Bruns, 1998). Some Studies in United States demonstrated parental involvement in children’s schooling increased children’s educational expectations even when parents’ expectations were controlled (Wilson & Wilson, 1992). Measures of family social capital (parental monitoring of schoolwork and frequency of parent-child talks about school) were not significant in studies of children’s educational expectations in less developed countries (Tsui and Rich 2002), which might that suggest that family social capital is less important for children’s educational expectations in social contexts different from the U.S.

Both the status attainment and family social perspectives suggest high agreement between parents’ and children’s expectations, although studies have found level of parent-child agreement varies by race/ethnicity and the way parental expectations are measured (Hao & Bruns 1998; Kerckkoff & Huff 1974). The family social capital perspective in particular
suggests that a reciprocal relationship exists between parents’ and children’s educational expectations. Parents and children who interact more frequently (i.e., who have more family social capital) may influence each other’s expectations more strongly. A U.S. study conducted by Hao and Bruns (1998) found parent-child interactions in learning activities increased both parent’s and children’s self-reported expectations and agreement between the two, but the reciprocal relationship between their expectations disappeared once which parent child interactions in learning activities were controlled.

Parents Educational Expectation and Gender Differences

Parent’s expectation of their children’s education is often based on stereotypes rather than children’s abilities and performance (Eccles, Jacobs & Harold., 1990; Eccles, Jacobs, Harold, Yoon, Arbreton, & Freedman-Doan, 1993). For example, parents have higher expectation and educational aspirations for their sons than for their daughters (Eccles, Adler, Futterman, Goff, Kaczala, et al., 1983; Halloway, 1986; Holloway & Hess, 1985), especially with regard to mathematics and sports performance (Eccles et al., 1993; Fennema & Sherman, 1977; Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982). These lower expectations are evident already for their kindergarten aged children no matter whether the mothers are American, Chinese or Japanese (Lummis & Stevenson, 1990). Despite the absence of gender differences in Mathematics performance, parents also tend to have lower minimum grade standards, think that their daughters are less talented than their sons, and believe that mathematics is harder for girls than boys (Eccles, et al., 1993; Parsons et al., 1982; Phillips & Zimmerman, 1990). Parent’s expectations of their daughter’s mathematics performance are frequently inaccurately low (Holloway & Hess, 1985; Parsons et al., 1982). For example, in a study of German parents and their 12-years old, parents rated their daughters, but not sons, lower in mathematics ability.
than was warranted based on their performance on a mathematics test (Helmke & Schrader, 1989).

Parent’s expectations not only predict children’s academic achievement, but they can also become self-fulfilling prophecies. Parent’s expectations affect children’s perceptions of competence more than does the children’s own performance (Eccles & Jacobs, 1986; Eccles et al., 1990, 1993; Parsons et al., 1982; Phillips, 1987). Parents low expectation for girls subtly communicate to their daughters that they are not competent at mathematics. Interestingly, even if parents had low expectation for son, he might not be as adversely affected as a daughter might be. The reason for this is that females tend to view others evaluative feedback regarding their performance as accurate and consequently more influenced by such feedback than are males (Roberts, 1990, 1991; Roberts & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1989, 1994). Given their parents low expectancies is not surprising that females hold inaccurately low perceptions of competence (Beyer, 1990, 1994), especially for mathematics (Crandall, 1969; Eccles et al., 1983; Phiips & Zimmerman, 1990). To summarize, parent’s low expectancies of performance negatively affect children’s perceptions of competence and consequently their academic achievement.

Parent’s Educational Expectation and Culture:

Cultural background not only influences family belief about the value of education, but may affect how academic expectation are communicated by parents and perceived by their children (Chen, 1998). Findings indicated that Asian students were more willing to accept their parent’s advice and cared more about fulfilling academy expectation than European students. Asian children are more obedient and respectful to elders. They are more concern about their parent’s expectation and evaluations and work diligently to receive good grade in order to avoid
disgracing their family. Asian parents unanimously emphasized
that their children must obtain a quality university education.

They regarded education as their top priority. In a series of
study Stevenson and Stigler, 1992 found that Asian students worked
much harder on academic studies than their American
counterparts. Such behaviours were influenced by three factors.
Firstly, education was more highly valued in Asian societies.
Secondly, the parents of Asian children underestimate their
children’s abilities and were not very much satisfied with their
performance. Finally Asian societies greatly attributed that children
should make more effort for their achievement. It was argued
that these three factors resulted in higher levels of motivation and
higher levels of parental expectation about education on the part
of Asian Children.

CONCLUSION

Number of studies has examined the role of family, culture,
parents’ education, parents self feeling etc. related to parental
expectation and children’s school achievement. There exist several
problems that demand further investigation. First it can be concluded
that the preview studies have been predominantly framed in a
positive relationship between parental educational expectation and
achievement motivation of adolescents whereas unrealistic
expectation could exert excessive parental pressure on their
children and damage their self esteem and confidence. Parental
educational expectation therefore, could become counter productive
to their desired outcomes. Parents must align their expectation,
especially their academic standards with their children’s talent
potential.

Some adolescents experience anxious thoughts and feeling
under parental pressure especially when their parents are extremely
concern about their academic achievement and future career.
Secondly majority of studies on parental expectation have been done only by using the data obtained from parents, hence the information is only one sided. A large body of research has been mainly focused on how parental expectations produce positive result i.e., high academic achievers; whereas less research attention has been given to children’s feeling and needs. Moreover, these studies can not answer how children come to internalize or reject their parents’ expectations. Third the majority of studies have portrayed Asian as a homogenous cultural group. Recent studies regarding child’s academic success also reinforce these assertion that high expectation often lead to worried children and unserious parents. (Adhyaru & Nandakumar, 2003).

Thus studies should investigate not only the importance of parental expectations for their children’s academic performance, but also the process by which children perceive this influence. Research should focus on the conditions under which parent’s communicate their expectation (Seiginer, 1983). Although positive effects & parental expectation are prominent in Asian cultures (Hiaschmann & Wong 1986, Peng & Wright 1994; Schreidn & Lee 1990).

As education is the most important factor in economic well being of individual in today’s society, most parents pay close attention to their children’s education and have high educational expectation for their children. However, the level of parental expectation depends upon various factors including culture, socio economic status and gender of the child. Parental expectations have been accredited as one of the most salient family factor that contribute to children’s school achievement Research should also focus on conditions under which expectation are most effectively communicated and accepted by the children especially when cultures clash.

In order to help their children realize educational expectation, the parents should closely supervise their children’s school work
and provide assistance at home. They should not only teach their children about advanced knowledge of the subject but also help to make them analyze their previous academic success and failure. The children should feel that their parents involvement and support have optimized their mastery learning experiences in various subject and greatly enhanced their self efficiency and competence in dealing with difficult task. The parents should continuously provide feedback on effort in the children’s school work. Parents should help their children by encouraging internal control belief. It is also important for parents to should nurture good study habits when the child is young and tell them importance of goal orientation (Jun, 2003).

REFERENCES


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