Effect of Parental Expectations and Parental Pressure on Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement of Students

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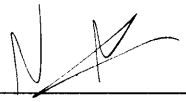

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Abstract

The current study explored the effect of perceived parental expectations and perceived parental pressure on the self-esteem and academic achievement of students, as well as the mediating influence of self-esteem. Participants were 151 students recruited from universities across the US. Most of the participants were female (72.8%) and in the age range 18-22 years (67.5%). Students completed an online survey which included demographics and measures related to students' perceptions of their parents' academic expectations, parental pressure, self-esteem, and self-reported high school and college GPA. The results suggest that both high perceived parental expectations and high perceived parental pressure lead to low self-esteem but were not related to academic achievement. Additionally, self-esteem did not significantly mediate the relation between either perceived parental expectations or perceived parental pressure and academic achievement. However, secondary analyses showed that perceived parental pressure was negatively associated with college GPA in the age range 23-26 years old only. Perceived parental expectations and pressure led to lower self-esteem primarily in females, white students, and those who were either freshmen or sophomores in college or in their master's program. These results suggest that the relationship between parental expectations or pressure and self-esteem and academic achievement is nuanced and is also influenced by culture. It may also be dynamic and influenced by circumstances such as the pandemic.

Keywords: parental expectations, parental pressure, academic achievement, student GPA, self-esteem, self-efficacy

Effect of Parental Expectations and Parental Pressure on Self-Esteem and Academic Achievement of Students

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy focuses on the importance of individuals' perception of their capabilities to succeed or perform in a given situation (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021). Self-efficacy may be influenced by mastery experiences or performance outcomes, vicarious or modeled experiences, forms of social persuasion, and physiological indices (Bandura, 1977a; Schunk & Usher, 2012). Opportunities to engage in positive social experiences influence individuals' belief in their ability to achieve a specified goal. More recent research (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021) has recommended the incorporation of additional variables like diversity, and collective self-efficacy into the understanding of the self-efficacy theory for improved teaching and learning. This research also stresses the importance of technology, especially since all self-efficacy research has been conducted in face-to-face settings in the past. With the universal need for and acceptance of online and/or remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this issue of technology and understanding its impact on self-efficacy becomes even more important today.

Self-efficacy may develop as a function of parental upbringing. Parents who are responsive to the needs of their children provide an environment that helps arouse curiosity in their children and enables them to engage in mastery experiences; these mastery experiences then aid in boosting self-efficacy (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Children who have responsive parents benefit from more engagement by their parents and are motivated to learn new skills and achieve more than children whose parents are less responsive. Parents who have high expectations from their children also provide supportive home-base involvement where the children are intrinsically motivated to learn; a supportive home base has been positively

associated with academic success (Froiland et al, 2013). Vicarious experience is the experience of having someone as a role model to look up to and can include parents, grandparents, other relatives, teachers, or other mentors (Hussain, Mkpojiogu, & Ezekwudo, 2021). Therefore, parents who act as good role models, also teach their children how to cope with difficult situations, support and encourage them and help to strengthen their self-efficacy (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Therefore, if children are made to feel good about themselves and their ability, they tend to believe in themselves and are inclined to perform better at the task at hand. On the contrary, if they are repeatedly told by different people they are incompetent, they tend to hold a negative view of their ability (Bandura, 1977; Schunk & Usher, 2012). The social or verbal persuasion factor can positively impact a child and add to the belief in their ability to take on challenges (Hussain, Mkpojiogu, & Ezekwudo, 2021). In a recent meta-analysis focused on the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) domains (Sheu et al, 2018), the four sources of self-efficacy were categorized into two different models, either four-source (where each source was looked at individually) or as two-source where the sources were split into groups of direct personal experiences (consisting of mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological indexes or affective states) and vicarious learning. Although both models predicted self-efficacy and outcome expectations, the two-source model was considered to be a better indicator of variance in self-efficacy. It was suggested that although mastery experiences have been considered to have the most important influence on personal efficacy (Bandura, 1986), this may differ in the case of STEM where encouragement may need to come from a variety of sources like mastery experiences, and supportive messages from others through verbal persuasion. Therefore, this could be the reason why the two-source model was a better fit as it provided a collective source of efficacy.

Parents shape their children's beliefs and choices through their own beliefs and behaviors (Eccles et al, 1983). High parental expectations increase children's self-concept and enable them to develop high value of academic success which in turn may have a positive impact on academic success compared to low parental expectations (Neuenschwander et al., 2007; Carranza et al., 2009). Parents are said to hold high academic expectations of their children when they place great importance on education and expect a very high performance from them. These expectations are perceived as being achievable and are a firm opinion held by parents about their child's future (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). High parental expectations are positively correlated with academic ability self-concept (Neuenschwander et al., 2007) and lead to academic success (Carranza et al., 2009), whereas low parental expectations predict a lowered academic performance (Neuenschwander et al., 2007). A more recent meta-analysis (Pinquart & Ebeling, 2020) has found that parental communication of positive academic expectations to children promotes a more positive academic self-concept and can assist in academic achievement, as opposed to parents trying to directly influence their child's achievement through controlling behaviors like checking homework, ensuring work was being submitted, etc.

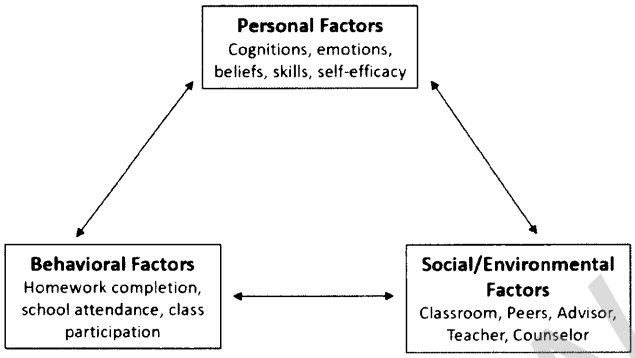
The positive association between parental expectations and achievement is consistent with the expectancy value theory proposed by Eccles et al. (1983), whereby children are motivated to pursue a task if they believe they are good at it and if they like or value that task. The ability to believe in their success or the expectation of success and subjective task value can be shaped through the influence of positive beliefs and expectations communicated to the children which can then help boost the development of self-concept (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Parents are instrumental in conveying positive beliefs and expectations to children, and through this communication, boosting the development of a positive self-concept. On the other hand,

when children perceive parental criticism or parental socio-academic pressure, it can lead to increased test anxiety (Raufelder et al., 2015), low self-esteem, internalizing symptoms, and learning problems (Ciciolla et al., 2017).

According to Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura et al., 2001), human behavior can be explained using a three-way-reciprocal model: the triadic reciprocal determinism. As per this model, there are reciprocal interactions between our physical, external environment (social, environmental factors); individual, internal, personal factors (cognitions, emotions, beliefs, skills etc.); and behavioral factors. Therefore, individuals learn from the social environment through observational learning and develop an understanding of rules and beliefs, as well as their appropriateness (Schunk & Usher, 2012). Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 2001) can be considered as a subset of the social cognitive theory and while focusing on the importance of personal factors like self-efficacy beliefs, it also considers the role played by the environment and behavior in predicting the outcome. So, for example, if a teacher were to comment on a student's learning and achievement in an encouraging manner (social/environmental variable), it would send a positive message and validate the student's perception of their hard work (personal variable). This can result in the student becoming even more motivated to learn and complete work in a timely fashion, or even attend school more regularly (behavioral variable), helping increase a sense of self-efficacy and agency (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021). This can, in turn, feed into a loop where positive behaviors can then lead to more positive feedback from the teacher (as in this example) leading to more self-efficacy, thus confirming the reciprocal interactions between these factors. This ties into the triadic reciprocal determinism mentioned earlier and can be explained visually as in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Triadic reciprocal determinism with behavioral, personal, and social/environmental factors



The current study aims to explore the effect of parental expectations and parental pressure on self-esteem and academic achievement of students. It is based on the theory of expectancy-value whereby children may be encouraged or motivated to perform better if positive expectations are communicated to them by their parents leading them to develop a positive sense of self. It is also based on the theory of self-efficacy which helps explain how positive social experiences and interactions can shape an individual's belief in their ability. The current study explores the personal factor of self-esteem to see if it plays a similar role as the self-efficacy belief in its relationship with performing better at academic tasks.

Literature Review

Parental Expectations

Expectation refers to the firm conviction or certainty that something will occur in the future (Lexico, n.d.). Parents commonly hold beliefs of high academic prospects for their children. Parental expectations or parental educational expectations can be broadly defined as a strong belief or judgment held by the parent about their child's academic capabilities (e.g., grades in school), and their future academic achievement in terms of level of school or college

completed (Ma et al., 2018; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). These expectations have been shown to be influenced by an adolescent's academic abilities, which in turn may influence an adolescent's own academic expectations. Parental and adolescent expectations are closely associated and appear to be even more similar as an adolescent grows and important education decisions need to be made (Rimkute et al., 2012). Parents may also adjust their expectations as the adolescents grow up (Zhang et al., 2011). This adjustment may be attributed to the parents becoming more aware and sensitive to their children's needs and wishes. As children get older, direct parental involvement may take the form of creating an environment conducive to academic success. Parents may achieve this by setting high expectations for their children in a manner that is not considered controlling or intrusive (Boonk et al, 2018). Overall, parents hold higher expectations for their daughters as compared to their sons (Gil-Flores et al., 2011). These expectations may exhibit the 'same gender effect' by virtue of which mothers have greater expectations for their daughters regarding higher education. Such a gender bias has not been found to be significant in the case of fathers (Koshy et al., 2019).

Parents' level of education may influence expectations such that highly educated parents tend to have higher expectations for future education for their children compared to less educated parents (Mortimer & Lee, 2021; Qian et al, 2020). Furthermore, family background can also impact parents' expectations about their children's education. Research indicates that grandparents' expectations for their children's education (when they were adolescents and in high school) are positively correlated with the expectations held by these children when they later become parents (Mortimer & Lee, 2021). Middle-class parents, who have had successful educational experiences themselves, maintain high expectations regarding their children's education compared to less educated parents (Sheng, 2014). Educated parents can share their

cultural capital and aim to provide their children with the appropriate resources to make them as successful academically as themselves. Working-class parents on the other hand, while having high expectations of their children, have low-volume cultural, social, and economic capital. This restricts them from paving the way forward for their children effectively with the appropriate decisions and resources. However, in child-oriented cultures where there is great emphasis on education, not much difference is found in the parental expectations of the less and more affluent families. This is probably because education is seen as the only way forward to build a better future (Long & Pang, 2016).

With regards to ethnicity, east Asian parents demonstrate a more positive association between parental involvement and academic achievement as compared to their Western counterparts. This relationship is strongest for academic socialization that includes education expectations and aspirations and parental attitudes towards the education of their children (Kim, 2020). Asian and Asian American parents also tend to have higher long -term academic expectations (Zhang, 2011) when compared to other parents in the US, whereas African American, and Latino American parents have similar expectations to other European American parents (Froiland & Davison, 2014; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Asian and Asian American parental expectations are based on an optimistic view whereby they believe in future improvement, maintaining that academic performance can always be improved by effort and self-motivation, irrespective of a child's prior results (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement or performance refers to skills that are essential to a student's success in school and is measured quantitatively by way of achieving the educational goals over a specific period of time (Kumar, Agarwal, & Agarwal, 2021). These include reading, writing,

oral, mathematical, science, social science, and thinking skills amongst other proficiencies. These skills can be measured by means of grade point average (GPA) or standardized testing (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006). In a meta-analysis study focusing on measuring of academic performance, GPA was found to be the universally accepted measure, especially in higher education institutes (Kumar, Agarwal, & Agarwal, 2021), owing to its capacity to capture student academic data conveniently and completely. GPA can be meaningful both at the high school and the college level. However, when factors predicting academic success were looked at in a study involving student-athletes (at the end of their first year of enrollment) and their retention into second year, high school GPA significantly correlated with academic success. All other factors like the ACT/SAT and college GPA were not found to be as predictive (Brecht & Burnet, 2019).

Student achievement is impacted by a number of factors which can be explained using Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model (Johnson, 2018; Bertolini et al., 2012). At the micro system level, personal factors like resiliency, cognitive abilities, and readiness for skills development can have a positive impact on achievement. This microsystem level also encourages a bidirectional relationship whereby a person's behavior is shaped by their immediate setting or environment and vice versa (Mulisa, 2019). This level may also be impacted by motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is motivation when an individual is driven from within and is working towards a task for internal rewards and for internal satisfaction and enjoyment. Extrinsic motivation on the other hand comes from the outside of the individual and is driven by external rewards like money, grades, and threat of being punished or fear of hurting or disappointing others. Academic achievement is impacted differently by intrinsic and extrinsic academic motivation (Singh, 2011). Those who are intrinsically motivated are more confident, dig deeper, enjoy their learning, and earn high grades. Intrinsic motivation is related to student

success and well-being. Extrinsically motivated students learn and perform with the desire to earn external rewards and do not challenge themselves as much. Extrinsic motivation is related to decreased well-being (Howard et al, 2021).

Welcoming school climate, parent networking, teacher training and evaluation are some of the meso-system factors which help a child succeed academically. When the school implements measures to build a trustworthy relationship with all parents, it can also potentially succeed in increasing the school involvement of low-income parents (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017). Since parental involvement has been known to have a positive effect on academic achievement, this can be beneficial for students (Jaiswal & Choudhuri, 2017).

Systemic issues are prevalent in the macro and exo-systems on a bigger scale in the larger community. These include issues of socioeconomic inequalities, racism, and child abuse/neglect. There exists an achievement gap between low- and high-income families in the United States. Children of poor families live in an environment deprived of intellectual and emotional support, are exposed to more stressful situations, and have an unhealthy lifestyle. They may be exposed to an environment with food of little or no nutritional worth which may in turn impact their cognitive ability, and hence have a negative impact on their academic success (Gedro, Hartman, & Suárez, 2021). Poverty also affects the quality of education the children receive in terms of the schools they attend and the enrichment programs they are able to attend (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018). Low-income families frequently live in potentially unsafe neighborhoods, with a lack of any aspiring mentors for their children to look up to or for them to show them the path forward to a successful future (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018). Children of families receiving welfare assistance have been found to have lower academic success reflected in reduced test scores, and lower chances of graduating high school. In early childhood, the

measures of ability and achievement that have been studied and have been found to be affected due to family income include the Bayleys IQ score, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) score, Standford -Binet score, and the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT) math and reading scores. Lower PIAT scores have also been indicated as being associated with low income in middle childhood (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). The lower standard of performance was worse for long-term recipients of welfare as compared to the short-term recipients (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). A study was conducted that looked at the effect of parental welfare assistance on children's education into adulthood (Ku, 2001). In this study, a negative association was found between welfare and children's education, regardless of race and gender. When controlled for unobserved family characteristics like health problems, poor school quality etc., this negative association was found to be different across different developmental stages. No significant negative association was indicated between welfare and education when welfare was received during early childhood whereas this association was significant for welfare received by parents during the child's adolescence, suggesting that welfare received during a child's early years allowed parents, mainly mothers, to spend more quality time with their children and being engaged in childcare (Ku, 2001). Achievement can also be positively impacted in elementary school-age children when their welfare-receiving parents are provided a financial supplement or if their welfare assistance was increased when they went to work (Morris et al., 2002). The income inequality-achievement gap may be explained by the greater investment of high-income families compared to low-income families in their children's education and enrichment activities (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018).

Parents with higher levels of education participate more in their children's school activities as compared to low-income parents (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017). Reduced

awareness of their role in the school environment could be a reason for this lack of involvement. Other barriers could be lack of time owing to the pressure of holding multiple jobs or looking after family and not having enough resources to manage everything (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017). Specifically, mother's education level has also been linked with student achievement. Although both parents' education impacts a child's academic performance, a mother's education level can have a 20% higher effect than that of the father's (Lacour & Tissington, 2011).

Parental Pressure

Parental pressure is a state in which one or both parents place tremendous stress or strain on a child to excel and be the best in every activity. Parental pressure frequently occurs when parents place stress on children regarding academics (Moneva & Moncada, 2020). This pressure may also be experienced by youth as not having fulfilled the academic expectations of their parents even when they are living on their own after having left the parental home (Brandmo, Bråten, & Schewe, 2019).

Parental pressure is a significant predictor of test anxiety (Ritchwood et al., 2015). Students who reported high parental pressure also reported high test anxiety compared to low parental pressure. It is possible that the fear of disappointing their parents or the fear of a negative reaction from them when favorable grades were not achieved may lead the children to experience anxiety regarding failure during testing situations. Increased parental pressure is also associated with lowered confidence and attention issues; and it has been found to be positively correlated with good study habits (Ritchwood et al., 2015).

Gender roles influence the feedback an individual may receive regarding various school subjects while growing up (Eccles, 2009). Advice on school-related matters, career paths to

support one's self successfully, and for what one is best suited is varied and shapes an individual's self-perception. As a result, the feedback given on education-related matters by mothers and fathers and the effect of this response on the children varies for boys and girls. For example, boys perceive the pressure from fathers more strongly than girls, and they also lean on their fathers' support to deal with high test anxiety (Raufelder et al., 2015). The association between inhibitory test anxiety (intrusive thoughts that may impair cognitive performance during a test) and emotional school engagement has been shown to be mediated by maternal pressure for girls. Although both girls and boys benefitted from the mother's support, the findings of the same study (Raufelder et al., 2015) suggest that children look up to the same-sex parent as a role model and this helps in shaping their learning.

While looking at the influence of parental pressure across gender, a more recent study (Afaq & Siddiqui, 2021) has focused on the relationship between parental pressure and ego virtue of fidelity for adolescent males and females. This study found that perceived academic pressure from the father was a negative predictor of ego virtue of fidelity. Ego Identity develops in stage 5 (Adolescence: Identity vs Identity Confusion) of Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development theory. Becoming aware of a sense of self and identity during this period generates a virtue of fidelity (Orenstein & Lewis, 2021). Overall, females were indicated to have higher levels of ego virtue of fidelity in this study when compared to males, and males were reported to have higher pressure to perform academically as compared to female adolescents.

Congruency in display of parental warmth towards children can impact the parents' involvement in their children's education, which in turn can have a positive effect on their learning outcomes (Chung et al, 2020). In this same study, it was discussed how high parental warmth is a significant predictor of coparenting abilities. This can help create a family

environment of warmth where both parents can contribute equally to the child's academic success. On the other hand, low parental warmth or incongruent parental warmth did not lead to a strong association between parental involvement and academic success.

In Chinese culture, since parents guide their children towards academic success by disciplining them, children may view the mother as displaying more warmth and pressure as compared to the father (Quach et al., 2015). There appears to be a difference in how boys perceive the warmth and pressure from both parents. It has been suggested that while the father's warmth is negatively correlated with both girls' and boys' anxiety, the mother's warmth was positively associated with anxiety. Also, while neither parent's warmth has been specifically correlated with depressive symptoms in girls, the father's warmth has been negatively correlated and the mother's warmth has been positively correlated with depressive symptoms in boys (Quach et al., 2015). A possible explanation can be that due to the virtue of filial piety and Confucian values, boys perceive their mother's warmth as a burden and feel an overwhelming sense of responsibility. This may result in depression because of the fear of disappointing their mothers (Quach et al., 2015).

Parental pressure and parental control over children's career choices can affect their emotional health and well-being. Young adult women report internal conflict, lack of control, feeling frustrated, confused, inferior, and anxious in career conversations with pressuring parents (Corey & Chen, 2019).

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to a person's subjective evaluation of their own worth, and not how they are evaluated by others (Orth & Robins, 2014). This subjective evaluation can be global or domain specific. Global self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their worth,

whereas domain specific self-esteem is a measure of how an individual evaluates themselves in specific areas like peer relationships, sports, academics, physical appearance, and so on.

Self-esteem changes over the lifespan, from one developmental period to the other. This is known as normative change. Meta-analysis of existing longitudinal studies shows a slight increase in self-esteem from preschool to middle childhood. It then remains stable during early and middle adolescent years before increasing around the age of 15. It then continues to increase into adulthood and peaks around the age of 50-60 years. After this, it begins to decline in old age (Orth & Robins, 2019).

If individuals enter adolescence with low self-esteem (global or domain specific) and/or their self-esteem continues to decrease during their adolescent years, they are more likely to have depressive symptoms in adulthood, two decades later (Steiger et al., 2014). Recent research has also suggested that state self-esteem (self-esteem in the moment) is influenced by digital social content. A study (Alfasi, 2019) measured the effect of social comparison on Facebook platform and its impact on state self-esteem and depression in participants in the age range 19-35 years. It was found that those who browsed the Facebook News Feed which showed the social content and had updated information about the lives of others, reported lower levels of state self-esteem and higher levels of depression, as compared to those who browsed the non-social content on Facebook. These levels were reported right after browsing Facebook to capture the "at the moment" levels. Another study explored the excessive use of Facebook among adolescents (13-22 years) in Kupang City. Facebook addiction was found to be negatively related with self-esteem (Seran, 2020).

The family environment, specifically the parenting quality and the cognitive stimulation during the first few years of a child's life appear to influence self-esteem even later in adulthood,