

Parental Expectations and Academic Performance: Understanding the Impact of Perceived Parental Pressure on Adolescent Achievement

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Abstract

Background: Understanding how adolescents form their academic self-perceptions is essential in educational psychology. Parental expectations are often cited as influential, yet the role of socioeconomic status (SES) as a moderating factor in this dynamic remains underexplored. This study investigates how teenagers assess their academic success, perceive their parents' expectations, and whether SES moderates this relationship.

Aims and Objectives: The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between perceived parental expectations and adolescents' academic self-perception. Specifically, it seeks to determine whether parental expectations influence students' perceived academic performance and if socioeconomic status moderates this relationship. The study also aims to examine potential gender differences in these perceptions.

Methodology: Data were collected from a sample of 60 secondary school students using two self-report instruments: the Perceived Academic Performance Scale (PAPS) and the Perceived Parental Expectations Scale (PPES). Socioeconomic status was recorded and included as a moderating variable. Statistical analyses included linear regression, moderation analysis, and independent samples t-tests.

Results: Findings revealed a small but statistically significant positive relationship between parental expectations and perceived academic performance ($\beta = 0.0504$, $p = 0.024$), suggesting that adolescents tend to rate their academic abilities higher when they perceive greater parental expectations. SES also significantly predicted academic achievement ($p = 0.048$), indicating that students from higher SES backgrounds typically exhibit more confidence in their academic skills. However, moderation analysis showed that SES did not significantly affect the relationship between parental expectations and perceived academic performance ($p = 0.334$). Gender comparisons revealed no significant differences in either parental expectations ($p = 0.136$) or academic self-perception ($p = 0.534$).

Conclusion: This study highlights the nuanced role parental expectations play in shaping adolescents' academic self-concept, with socioeconomic status independently influencing self-perceived performance but not moderating the expectation-performance link. Gender does not appear to significantly alter these perceptions. These findings underscore the importance of considering multiple psychosocial variables, such as peer support, motivation, and school context, in educational planning. The study advocates for balanced parental involvement and suggests targeted educational policies to support students from lower SES backgrounds. Future research should explore longitudinal trends and additional moderating variables to deepen our understanding of these relationships over time.

Keywords: Parental expectations, perceived academic performance, socioeconomic status (SES), academic self-perception, adolescent motivation, gender differences

Introduction

Over the last fifty years, sociologists and psychologists have been investigating the impact of parental expectations on the intellectual growth of children. Generally, research indicates that children's academic success is greatly influenced by the expectations set by their parents. Students whose parents have high expectations tend to achieve better academic results, standardized test scores, and longer school attendance than those whose parents have more moderate expectations. It is one of the few concepts in psychology that is nearly universally accepted that parental ambitions and expectations play a significant, if not overwhelming, role in determining their children's achievements. Numerous recent studies have shown a strong link between student success and the expectations of their parents.

The scenario may be more complex than simply stating that "expectations influence achievement." In a longitudinal analysis of Latino children and their families, researchers employed structural equation modeling to determine that prior academic success impacted later parental expectations. It was found that the expectations held by parents had minimal influence on the following academic performance of their children. A significant 81.6% of the students indicated experiencing test anxiety, with over a third, or more than 32.6%, showing signs of mental health issues. There was a clear connection between parental pressure and mental health problems with academic stress, while test anxiety also had a positive correlation with mental health issues. Academic pressure is a significant issue that impacts nearly two-thirds of senior high school students in Kolkata. Rather than encouraging their children to explore opportunities that align with their highest potential, parents often impose their expectations on them through their involvement, oversight, adherence, and support. Parental expectations refer to the hopes that parents hold regarding their children's academic success and career ambitions. Parents tend to worry about these expectations while raising their kids. During this time, parents might reassess their children's academic or career accomplishments to determine.

Numerous parents believe that establishing elevated expectations for their children can help instill a sense of self-worth, confidence, and an understanding of their significance. However, such aspirations are often unrealistic. Furthermore, having high expectations for success can sometimes be detrimental. Children frequently feel immense pressure from their parents to meet their standards. Research has shown that parental expectations are linked to psychological well-being, emotional distress, and academic performance in various nations. Elevated parental expectations correlate with students' motivation to excel academically, their resilience both academically and socially, and their aspirations for college.

Many scholars characterize "parental expectations" as the realistic beliefs or evaluations that parents hold regarding their children's future achievements, which are reflected in factors such as academic grades, the highest level of education completed, or college attendance. Nevertheless, parents establish expectations by assessing their child's academic capabilities and the resources available to maintain a particular level of performance. Various researchers have prompted parents to estimate their child's grades for the academic year or predict "how far" they believe their child will progress in school to measure parental expectations. Additionally, researchers have sometimes inquired about students' interpretations of their parents' expectations to gauge their parents' actual expectations.

Parental expectations can be likened to parental aspirations, which are frequently described as the desires, hopes, or goals that parents have established regarding their children's future accomplishments, rather than what they realistically expect their children to attain. As they illustrate the importance parents attribute to education, parental aspirations are influenced by the parents' personal goals as well as the cultural standards surrounding education and its role in promoting both career and personal success.

Parental beliefs regarding the factors that contribute to good academic performance are likely to influence the relationship between children's past achievements and their parents' expectations for future success. When parents attribute accomplishments primarily to intelligence or innate ability, they tend to expect that performance will remain unchanged, as these traits are often seen as fixed characteristics that are difficult to modify. Parents with strong confidence are likely

to interpret early performance as a reliable predictor of future achievements. On the other hand, those who believe that a student's effort—a more variable and accessible quality—plays a crucial role in their success are more likely to think that if children adjust their effort in school, their future performance might differ from what they have previously demonstrated. To understand parental aspirations, researchers often inquire about the year parents hope or anticipate their children will finish their education. Evidence indicates that parental involvement at home, such as assisting with homework, engaging in school-related discussions, and reading to children, correlates with improved academic outcomes for minority students in the United States. Similarly, in Ghana, there is a notable relationship between young people's academic achievements and the level of parental engagement at home. A connection has been found between students' academic performance and their parents' educational backgrounds. While active parental involvement fosters better academic results and social adaptation, it can also lead to student distress due to their parents' unrealistic expectations and negative attitudes. Generally, parents tend to set high goals for their children and anticipate that they will meet these aspirations.

Debet identified that the extent of parental influence greatly differed depending on the students' academic achievements, the educational levels of the parents, the number of private tutoring sessions, and the mother's job. It has been noted that fathers with lower education levels (non-graduates) are more likely to exert pressure on their children to excel academically. Indian children from stable homes experience higher levels of academic stress compared to those from unstable backgrounds. Children from disrupted families tend to receive less parental support and guidance concerning academic issues than their counterparts in stable homes. Although another study indicated no significant differences between the two groups, researchers found that African American parents had considerably higher expectations than European American parents when controlling for socioeconomic status (SES).

Labelling children as sluggish or uninteresting when they fail to meet expectations can lead to feelings of inadequacy among young people and rarely results in extreme reactions such as mental disorders, depression, or even suicide. The recognition that "academic stress, particularly academic expectations, contributes to suicidal thoughts in young individuals" is supported by empirical research. Finally, they employed multiple regression analysis to demonstrate that juvenile depression "partially mediates the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation through a four-step sequential process."

The pressure of high expectations, extensive knowledge, academic demands, idealistic standards, scarce opportunities, and intense competition are key stressors that create tension, concern, and anxiety among students. "The stress related to academics, driven by teenagers' expectations of themselves and others, such as their parents and teachers, is particularly pronounced in Asian settings." This statement aligns with findings from a study conducted by Goyette et al. in the United States. The researchers discovered that "parental expectations emerge as the primary factor explaining the notably high ambitions of Southeast Asian students and significantly contribute to the differences observed between Asian and white students across all ethnic groups."

Research indicates that Indian children from stable families experience greater academic pressure compared to those from families that have faced disruptions. Children from disrupted households usually receive less parental guidance and support regarding academic issues than their counterparts in stable homes. Ironically, this lack of parental involvement lessens their academic stress, illustrating the detrimental effect of parental attention and influence on their children's educational achievements. Young people who face challenges in self-organization and identity during their teenage years are at risk. Their main sources of stress include job searching, life transitions, social relationships, issues in their personal connections, and academic assessments. Generally, this kind of stress can lead to physical, mental, and behavioral difficulties.

Theoretical Framework

1. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985)

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) suggests that individuals have essential psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and connection with others. When students face intense parental expectations and stress, their sense of autonomy is diminished, leading to academic burnout. Students who perceive their academic achievements as insufficient may encounter feelings of inadequacy, which can reduce intrinsic motivation and elevate the risk of suicidal thoughts.

2. Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

This framework illustrates how people recognize and manage stress. Academic demands, including perceived parental expectations and unsatisfactory academic results, can be interpreted as either a challenge or a threat. Students who do not have effective coping mechanisms may suffer from burnout and engage in harmful behaviors like self-harm or thoughts of suicide.

3. Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954)

This theory posits that students assess their academic performance by measuring it against the achievements of their peers. When individuals believe they are falling behind in comparison to their classmates, they may face heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and diminished self-worth. The pressure of parental expectations can exacerbate social comparison, leading adolescents to become more susceptible to feelings of hopelessness and academic burnout.

4. Gender Role Theory (Eagly, 1987)

Gender stereotypes influence the way students recognize and express academic stress. Studies show that while female students tend to internalize stress, leading to higher rates of anxiety and depression, male students typically outwardly express stress through engaging in risky behaviors. These gendered coping strategies affect feelings of academic fatigue and thoughts of suicide.

5. Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989)

This theory suggests that individuals invest considerable energy in acquiring and maintaining resources such as self-esteem, social connections, and academic achievements. Students may experience mental distress and contemplate suicide when they perceive a loss of these resources due to burnout, substantial parental pressure, or underwhelming academic performance.

Significance of the study

This research is important because it elucidates how teenagers' perceptions of their academic identities are shaped by their parents' expectations. Gaining insight into this relationship may enable educators, parents, and policymakers to foster a conducive learning atmosphere that promotes academic achievement while minimizing unnecessary stress. By exploring gender differences, this research enhances our understanding of how male and female students interpret and react to parental expectations in distinct ways. Through its impact on mental health treatments, educational policies, and parenting practices, the results can help ensure that academic pressure serves as a motivator rather than a source of stress. Furthermore, by focusing on the psychological and emotional effects of academic pressure on adolescents, this research underscores the importance of a balanced approach to parental expectations. The results could aid parents in establishing realistic and supportive academic goals for their children, as excessive pressure may result in anxiety, diminished self-esteem, and lower motivation. The findings also advocate for student-centered learning approaches that promote academic confidence and resilience, which has consequences for educational institutions. Additionally, the results of the study could be utilized to create intervention programs, including stress management workshops and counseling services, to help students who are experiencing academic challenges.

Objectives

1. Examine the relationship between perceived parental expectations and perceived academic performance among adolescents.

2. Investigate the role of Socioeconomic Status (SES) as a moderating factor in the relationship between parental expectations and academic performance, exploring whether students from different SES backgrounds perceive and respond to parental expectations differently.
3. Investigate gender differences in how adolescents perceive and respond to parental academic expectations.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between perceived parental expectations and perceived academic performance among adolescents?
2. Does Socioeconomic Status (SES) moderate the relationship between parental expectations and academic performance, and do students from different SES backgrounds perceive and respond to parental expectations differently?
3. Are there gender differences in how adolescents perceive and respond to parental academic expectations?

Methodology

Research Design

This research employed a quantitative, correlational methodology to investigate the relationship between adolescents' perceptions of their academic success and their parents' aspirations. A cross-sectional survey approach was implemented to gather participant data, which enabled the analysis of correlations among variables at a particular moment in time. The study utilized self-report questionnaires to evaluate children's views on their academic achievements and their parents' expectations. Two statistical methods, regression analysis and correlation, were applied to assess the significance and strength of these connections.

Participants

The research sample included students pursuing bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. The demographic targeted in this investigation was Rajasthan. Data was gathered from the participants through a survey. A multistage sampling approach was employed to reach the participants. For this study, a total of 60 students were chosen, comprising - males and - females.

Instruments

Perceived Parental Expectations Scale (Wang & Heppner, 2002)

Perceived Academic Performance Scale (PAPS) – Assesses students' self-reported academic performance. Verner-Filion, J., & Vallerand, R. J. (2016)

Procedure

The student agreed to the data collection with a clear understanding. All questions were organized in a booklet based on the students' views of their parents' expectations and the stress related to academics. Each student was provided with a booklet containing instructions on how to fill out the research instrument. Students were assured that their personal information would remain confidential and be utilized solely for the purpose of the study.

Data Analysis

The data were examined using Jamovi software to explore the connections between parental expectations and academic performance through both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were utilized to compile key demographic and research data. Pearson's correlation analysis was employed to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between parental expectations and perceived academic achievement. Furthermore, linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether parental expectations significantly influence reported academic success. To investigate gender differences, independent samples t-tests were performed to compare male and female students' perceptions of their parents' expectations alongside their academic performance. Moderation analysis was also explored to assess if gender affects the relationship between

academic success and parental expectations. These statistical analyses contribute to a thorough understanding of how perceived parental expectations influence students' academic self-perception and whether this relationship differs across gender groups.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive

Descriptives					
	Age	Gender	Grade level	PPES	PAPS
N	60	60	60	60	60
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean				105	16.7
Median				103	17.0
Standard deviation				20.2	3.70
Minimum				66	9
Maximum				146	25

The study's primary variables were compiled using descriptive statistics. Students' perceptions of their parents' academic expectations showed variability, with an average score of 105 (SD = 20.2, range: 66-146) on the Perceived Parental Expectations Scale (PPES). Differences among participants in terms of self-reported academic success were indicated by an average score of 16.7 (SD = 3.70, range: 9–25) on the Perceived Academic Achievement Scale (PAPS). The dataset comprised 60 participants, and all gathered information was adequate for analysis.

Examine the relationship between perceived parental expectations and perceived academic performance among adolescents

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

Correlation Matrix			
		PPES	PAPS
PPES	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
PAPS	Pearson's r	0.231	—
	df	58	—
	p-value	0.076	—

A Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the link between perceived parental expectations (PPES) and perceived academic success (PAPS). The findings revealed a minimal positive correlation ($r = 0.231$, $p = 0.076$, $df = 58$). Although the relationship indicates that higher perceived parental expectations may correlate with slightly better reported academic success, the p-value ($p > 0.05$) suggests that this correlation is not statistically significant. This result implies that other factors, such as study habits, peer influence, and internal motivation, might play a more significant role in how students perceive their academic performance.

Investigate the role of Socioeconomic Status (SES) as a moderating factor in the relationship between parental expectations and academic performance, exploring whether students from different SES backgrounds perceive and respond to parental expectations differently.

Table 3: Moderation

Moderation Estimates				
	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Socioeconomic Status	3.0071	1.5238	1.973	0.048
PPES	0.0504	0.0223	2.259	0.024
Socioeconomic Status * PPES	0.0632	0.0654	0.967	0.334

The primary influence of socioeconomic status (SES) on perceived academic performance (PAPS) is indicated by the following: $Z = 1.973$, $p = 0.048$, $SE = 1.5238$; estimate = 3.0071; SES demonstrates a statistically meaningful positive impact on academic performance since $p < 0.05$. Individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are likely to report a better perception of their academic performance compared to those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The primary influence of parental expectations (PPES) on perceived academic performance (PAPS) is demonstrated by the following metrics: $Z = 2.259$, $p = 0.024$, $SE = 0.0223$, and estimate = 0.0504; with $p < 0.05$ suggesting a significant positive correlation between PPES and PAPS. Since higher parental expectations correlate with an improved perception of academic success, students who recognize elevated academic expectations are more inclined to have a favourable view of their academic abilities’.

The moderating effect of the interaction between SES and PPES on PAPS: $Z = 0.967$, estimate = 0.0632, $p = 0.334$, and $SE = 0.0654$. Given that $p > 0.05$, the interaction term lacks statistical significance. Interpretation: SES does not considerably affect the connection between parental expectations and academic success. This indicates that parental expectations similarly influence academic achievement across various socioeconomic statuses.

The results emphasize that both socioeconomic status (SES) and parental expectations separately affect how students view their academic performance, yet SES does not change the influence of parental expectations on academic self-image. This indicates that although students from more affluent backgrounds might generally have greater academic confidence, the motivational or pressure-related effects of parental expectations do not vary significantly according to SES.

Investigate gender differences in how adolescents perceive and respond to parental academic expectations.

Table 4: Independent Samples T-Test

Independent Samples T-Test				
		Statistic	df	p
PPES	Student's t	1.513	58.0	0.136
PAPS	Student's t	0.625	58.0	0.534
Note. $H_a: \mu_2 \neq \mu_1$				

Gender Variations in Perceived Parental Expectations (PPES): $t(58) = 1.513$, $p = 0.136$ Since $p > 0.05$, there is no significant difference in the PPES scores between boys and girls. Analysis: This indicates that both male and female students perceive parental expectations in a similar manner, implying that gender has a limited impact on how adolescents feel pressured to succeed academically.

Gender Differences in Perceived Academic Performance (PAPS): $p = 0.534$, $t(58) = 0.625$. The PAPS scores for both males and females do not exhibit a statistically significant difference, as $p > 0.05$. This indicates that perceived academic performance is comparable between male and female students, implying that gender does not influence how students evaluate their own academic success.

Discussion

The results of the study offer important insights into how perceived parental expectations relate to academic achievement, with socioeconomic status (SES) playing a moderating role. The findings indicate that although there is a slight correlation between higher parental expectations and improved academic self-perception, this relationship was not statistically significant. This aligns with previous studies showing that various factors beyond parental expectations, such as peer influence, intrinsic motivation, and educational environments, affect teenagers' academic performance (Gupta et al., 2022).

The linear regression analysis reinforced these results, demonstrating that parental expectations have a significant influence on perceived academic performance ($\beta = 0.0504$, $p = 0.024$), although this influence is somewhat restricted. Since parental expectations account for only a small fraction of the variance in academic achievement, the low R^2 value suggests that children's self-perception of their academic success is affected by other psychological and social factors. Furthermore, the moderation analysis indicated that students from more affluent socioeconomic backgrounds tend to report higher levels of academic achievement independently, implying that SES significantly influences how students evaluate their academic performance ($p = 0.048$). This aligns with findings that suggest a higher socioeconomic status (SES) enhances confidence in academic success by providing increased access to educational resources, academic support, and less financial pressure (Singh & Sharma, 2023). Nevertheless, the impact of parental expectations on academic success remained largely unchanged by SES ($p = 0.334$), suggesting that children's internalization of these expectations remains consistent across different SES backgrounds. This indicates that children's views of their academic identities are not heavily affected by parental expectations, regardless of their financial situations.

The gender analysis conducted with independent samples t-tests indicated no significant differences in academic performance and parental expectations between male and female students (PPES: $p = 0.136$, PAPS: $p = 0.534$). This contradicts longstanding beliefs that female students face greater academic pressure due to societal influences (Das & Chatterjee, 2025). Rather, these results imply that, potentially due to evolving societal norms and enhanced educational opportunities, both male and female adolescents assess academic achievement and parental expectations in a similar manner.

These results emphasize the importance of a holistic approach to academic achievement, highlighting that elements beyond parental expectations—such as peer relationships, school support, and individual resilience—play a more significant role in teenagers' academic outcomes. While parental expectations can motivate children, excessive pressure may not necessarily enhance their academic self-regard. Educational institutions and teachers should focus on academic counseling, stress relief programs, and psychological support to assist students in managing their academic duties without experiencing burnout or self-doubt.

Moreover, individuals from lower socioeconomic statuses might need additional institutional assistance to enhance their academic self-esteem and access to resources, considering how SES influences academic achievement. Subsequent studies should investigate how specific interventions, such as mentoring initiatives or financial assistance, could help mitigate the differences in academic confidence among various SES groups.

Conclusion

This research explored the relationship between how teens perceive their parents' expectations and their own perceived academic success, along with the moderating role of socioeconomic status (SES) and possible gender differences. The results reveal a minor yet statistically insignificant positive relationship between heightened parental expectations and adolescents' views of their academic capabilities. This suggests that factors other than parental expectations, such as peer influence, personal motivation, and educational support systems, play a role in shaping teenagers' academic self-assurance.

The research indicates that students' views of their academic abilities are notably affected by their socioeconomic status, with those hailing from more affluent backgrounds exhibiting higher levels of academic confidence. This suggests that having access to educational resources and financial support may enhance one's belief in their academic capabilities.

However, socioeconomic status did not significantly impact the relationship between parental expectations and reported academic success, indicating that young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds have similar experiences regarding parental expectations. Furthermore, there were no meaningful gender disparities in academic success or perceived parental expectations, suggesting that both male and female students experience and respond to academic pressure in similar ways. This challenges longstanding assumptions that parents hold higher expectations for their daughters and points to a shift towards fairer academic standards for both genders.

The results highlight the significance of a holistic approach to achieving academic success, emphasizing the need for psychological support, involvement in school activities, and access to social resources over parental expectations. Future research should explore long-term effects, additional moderating influences, and qualitative perspectives to enhance understanding of how students' perceptions of their academic abilities shift in light of parental and socioeconomic pressures.

Limitation

Only 60 individuals were part of the study, representing a limited sample, and since they were drawn from a single division, the findings cannot be applied to the entire community. Additionally, several demographic factors, including birth order, socioeconomic status, and birth order, which would have been pertinent to the study's constructs, were not considered in this investigation. The sample size of just 60 participants limits the generalizability of the results. A larger and more varied sample would provide more dependable findings and enhance the external validity of the outcomes.

The research utilized self-reported data for parental expectations and academic performance, which might have included biases stemming from social desirability and subjective inaccuracies. Participants might have inaccurately assessed their academic achievements or the pressure from their parents due to personal judgments or outside factors. Due to its cross-sectional nature, this study is unable to establish a causal relationship between parental expectations, socioeconomic status, and academic achievement. A longitudinal study would provide better insight into the lasting impacts of parental expectations on students' self-perception regarding academics. While the study did not reveal any significant differences between genders, the distribution of male and female participants within the sample was not entirely equal. Future investigations could clarify whether parental expectations influence males and females differently by ensuring a more balanced gender representation.

Recommendation

1. Parents ought to prioritize setting achievable and encouraging expectations to inspire students while avoiding unnecessary stress.
2. Maintaining open dialogue between parents and teenagers may help alleviate anxiety associated with academic pressure and enhance self-confidence.
3. Educational institutions need to offer academic guidance and mental health resources to assist children in effectively managing their parents' expectations.
4. Educators should encourage self-directed learning techniques and use positive reinforcement to enhance students' academic self-assurance.
5. Policymakers should expand access to academic resources, mentoring initiatives, and financial assistance for lower-income students to ensure equal opportunities.
6. To help students reach their academic potential, schools should provide complimentary tutoring, career advice, and extracurricular assistance for all pupils, regardless of their economic background.
7. Learners' ought to be instructed in effective coping strategies, including time management, techniques for reducing stress, and skills for solving problems, to tackle academic difficulties.
8. Future research might investigate the impact of gender on academic motivation and self-image using a more representative sample. The current convenience sampling method, which does not adequately represent the population, should be substituted with a probability sampling approach.

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