

Parental expectations, learning self-efficacy, and academic achievement: a study on primary school pupils

Linlin ZHAO^{1,2,*}

1. Pingdingshan Vocational and Technical College, Pingdingshan 467000, China

2. Graduate University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar 13000, Mongolia

*Corresponding Author:

Email address: 542781275@qq.com

Abstract: This study delved into the relationship between parental expectations, learning self-efficacy, and pupils' academic achievement. Questionnaires and interviews were administered to parents and pupils in Pingdingshan primary schools. The findings revealed that parental expectations vary with family factors. They are comprehensive in primary schools, yet overly emphasize academic performance. High expectations can cause stress and negatively affect mental health. Parental expectations are conveyed through diverse means but do not effectively enhance students' self-efficacy. The structural model indicates that self-efficacy mediates the influence of parental expectations on academic achievement, yet the current outcomes are suboptimal. The research advocates for parents to adjust expectations, employ appropriate methods, and prioritize children's holistic development.

Key words: parental expectation; learning self-efficacy; pupils' academic achievement; family education

1 Introduction

In the backdrop of accelerating globalization and evolving educational paradigms, the significance of family education has garnered considerable attention. International bodies such as UNESCO and UNICEF have emphasized the pivotal role of family education in nurturing children's potential, shaping their identity, and ensuring their overall well-being. The global educational framework outlined in UNESCO's *Education 2030: Guide* underscores the need for equitable, high-quality primary and secondary education for all by 2030, highlighting the importance of foundational learning experiences during early childhood. In parallel, national policies and initiatives have also recognized the crucial role of parents in shaping children's educational aspirations and outcomes. For instance, the *National Human Development Paper* by the UNDP Mongolia Office in 2024 emphasized the importance of education in fostering human development and underscored the influence of parental expectations on children's aspirations and well-being. Similarly, China's *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Family Education (2021)* and the *Special Action Plan for Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving the Mental Health of Students in the New Era (2023-2025)* have provided critical guidelines for modern family education, advocating for scientific parenting methods and appropriate growth expectations [1].

However, despite these advancements, concerns regarding excessive parental expectations and their impact on adolescent mental health have been raised. Reports such as the *China's National Mental Health Development Report (2021-2022)* and the *Blue Book of Family Education 2024* have highlighted the negative consequences of overly high expectations, particularly from mothers, on children's mental health. These findings underscore the urgent need for in-depth research to understand the complex interplay between parental expectations, children's learning self-efficacy, and academic achievement [2].

2 The present study

In this context, this study aims to explore the intricate relationships among these key variables [3]. Primary school is a crucial stage in children's educational journey, where foundational skills and attitudes towards learning are formed. During this period, parents play a significant role in shaping their children's educational experiences and outcomes through their expectations and support. The study will focus on understanding how parental expectations influence children's learning self-efficacy, which refers to their belief in their ability to successfully engage in and complete academic tasks. High self-efficacy has been shown to positively correlate with academic achievement, as students who believe in their abilities are more likely to persist in the face of challenges and achieve better outcomes [4].

Specifically, the research will address the following questions:

1. What are the nature and extent of parental expectations for primary school pupils in relation to their academic achievement?

2. How do these expectations impact children's learning self-efficacy?

3. What is the relationship between learning self-efficacy and academic achievement among primary school pupils?

To answer these questions, the study will employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including surveys, interviews, and observational data. The findings will provide valuable insights into the mechanisms through which parental expectations influence children's learning self-efficacy and academic achievement, and will have important implications for parents, educators, and policymakers.

3 Procedure

The research employed a multi-method approach. Questionnaires, designed based on relevant theories and with proven reliability and validity, were distributed among 1,200 parents of pupils from diverse backgrounds in Pingdingshan primary schools, yielding 1,065 valid responses. Interviews were conducted with parents and educational experts, recorded, and analyzed qualitatively. Literature research involved comprehensive collection and analysis of pertinent literature. Quantitative analysis utilized Excel and SPSS to process questionnaire data, revealing patterns and correlations. These methods were integrated to systematically explore the relationship between parental expectations, learning self-efficacy, and pupils' academic achievement, ensuring the comprehensiveness and rigor of the research.

4 Results

4.1 Parental expectations and student self-efficacy: no direct link to academic achievement

According to the data analysis provided, the Pearson correlation coefficients between self-efficacy (SE), academic achievement (AA) and parental expectation (PE) were all close to 0, and the P-value was much higher than 0.05, indicating that there was no statistically significant positive or negative linear relationship between the three. In particular, high parental expectations do not significantly affect children's self-efficacy or academic achievement, suggesting that academic achievement may be determined by a combination of complex factors rather than a single factor [5].

Table 1. Correlation analysis between SE and PE, AA

		SE	AA	PE
SE	Pearson correlation	1	-.016	-.014
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.598	.640
	Sum of squares and cross-products	83505.540	-137.202	-498.037
	Covariance	78.483	-.129	-.468
	N	1,065	1,065	1,065

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.2 The complex relationship between parental expectations, self-efficacy, and academic achievement

The correlation analysis between parental expectations (PE) and academic performance (AP) is displayed in Table 2, revealing a weak negative relationship with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.112. This indicates that as parental expectations increase, academic performance tends to slightly decrease. The correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), with a significance value of .000, suggesting it is not due to chance. The analysis is based on a sample size of 1,065, which adds reliability to the findings. Overall, the data suggests that higher parental expectations may be associated with slightly lower academic achievement, although other factors also play a role [6].

Table 2. The correlation between PE and AP

		PE	AP
PE(SCORE)	Pearson correlation	1	-.112
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of squares and cross-products	14442.762	-395.788
	Covariance	13.574	-.372
	N	1,065	1,065

. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5 Discussion

The study investigated the interplay between these variables. The results indicated no statistically significant direct relationship between parental expectations and either students' learning self-efficacy or academic achievement. This finding underscores the complexity of academic outcomes, suggesting that they are influenced by a multitude of factors, including the educational environment and individual student characteristics [7]. Notably, the correlation analysis revealed a weak negative relationship between parental expectations and academic performance, challenging the common belief that higher expectations automatically lead to better results. This outcome may reflect the potential detrimental effects of excessively high expectations on children's academic performance and mental health [8].

The implications of these findings are significant for parents, educators, and policymakers. Parents should strive for realistic and achievable expectations while fostering a supportive environment conducive to children's overall well-being [9]. Educators can assist parents in understanding the importance of balanced expectations and provide strategies for effective communication and support. Policymakers should consider these insights when formulating guidelines and policies related to family education and academic expectations [10].

Overall, the study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to examining the relationships between parental expectations, learning self-efficacy, and academic achievement, highlighting the importance of considering multiple

influencing factors. Future research could delve deeper into the specific mechanisms through which parental expectations impact these outcomes, as well as the role of contextual factors such as the school environment and peer influences.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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