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Parental Expectations and Effect on Children's Motivation to Learn

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Abstract

This study examined the complex interaction between parental expectations and children's learning motivation by analyzing how the intensity and presentation of expectations affect intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Data was collected from 300 middle school students and their parents. The quantitative data analysis revealed that moderate expectations which support personal autonomy led to enhanced intrinsic motivation and academic engagement. Parents who impose excessively high demands often create stress for students which leads to reduced motivation when expectations appear authoritarian. Qualitative analysis revealed that communication methods and cultural backgrounds play crucial roles in shaping these educational dynamics. The study findings emphasized how supportive parental expectations that strike a balance can create sustainable motivation which is essential for educators, parents, and policymakers that aim to improve student success and welfare.

Keywords: Parental Expectations, Children's Motivation, Learn

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Introduction

Educational achievement relies fundamentally upon motivation which directs students toward sustained persistence and effort leading to academic success (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). The vast range of elements that determine motivation reveals parental expectations as significant social influences. As the main socializing agents' parents establish norms and goals which shape children's self-concept and drive motivation and belief in their abilities (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). According to Grolnick and Ryan (1989), setting proper challenges through expectations strengthens children's motivation, develop their feelings of competence and independence which results in greater involvement and success. Expectations that are too strict or unattainable can create anxiety, diminish autonomy, and result in burnout or disengagement (Graham & Weiner, 1996). The way cultural context influences these effects varies significantly between societies; collectivist cultures perceive high parental expectations as beneficial while individualist societies regard them as burdensome pressure.

Children's learning motivation demonstrates significant responsiveness to parental expectations through psychological theories and empirical research within different cultural contexts. Studies show that parental educational beliefs create fundamental influences on children's learning attitudes and academic successes. Pinquart and Ebeling (2020) meta-analysis study revealed strong correlation between parental educational expectations and children's academic performance. When parents set high expectations for children these expectations act as a driving force which motivates children to strive for exceptional achievements. Parental expectations drive children's motivation through psychological frameworks like the Expectancy-Value Theory. Children's motivation develops from how much they value activities and success expectations according to the theory (Lazarides et al., 2016). Parental expression of high expectations communicates belief in their children's capabilities which leads to better self-efficacy in children and fosters development. Parental expectations receive essential training through cultural influences. Parental attitudes towards education vary across different cultural contexts and results in unique changes to children's motivation levels (Barone, 2023).

Research findings validate these conclusions by showing the direct connection between parental expectations and students' motivation and success in diverse academic areas especially in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines (Šimunović & Babarović, 2020). This relationship extends beyond parental expectations and affects how teachers receive these expectations. Wang et al. (2018) studied how teacher expectations influence educational outcomes and how these expectations work with parents' expectations to determine student motivation. The study revealed that parental expectations act as essential influences that determine children's learning motivation. When the authors analyze psychological frameworks and cultural impacts through empirical data, it becomes clear that expectations can profoundly influence educational outcomes. The intricate relationship between parental expectations and educational contexts demands further research to understand how these expectations impact children's motivation to learn. This forms the thrust of this research which seeks to examine parental expectations and effect on children's motivation to learn.

Purpose of the Study

Although extensive research has been conducted, there are still unresolved questions about how parental expectations should be set and communicated to optimize children's motivation to learn without negative consequences. The influence of parents' expectations on children's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels varies according to the nature of these expectations. Children demonstrated higher achievement levels when parents showed autonomy support

which improved motivation (Froiland & Worrell, 2017). Parents who create space where children can freely make decisions and follow their interests foster autonomous motivation that is essential for lasting educational achievement (Froiland, 2015).

The regulation of expectations by parents causes children to lose their motivation to learn and perform. Jungert et al. (2015) opined that children experience pressure when parents use control as an approach causing tension between interests and outside requirements. The dual nature of parental expectations creates a situation where children choose extrinsic motivation to fulfil parental demands instead of seeking internal satisfaction. The cultural context determines the effectiveness of parental expectations according to Jaramillo et al. (2017). Jaramillo et al. (2017) studied how cultural standards determine parental socialization methods which in turn affect children's ability to regulate themselves and remain motivated. The expectations and practices of parents significantly affect how children develop their motivation levels (Gonida & Lemos, 2019). Parents in achievement-focused cultures often use high expectations to motivate children. These parenting practices unintentionally cause stress and anxiety which typically occurs when children perceive themselves as failing to fulfil these expectations. Pinquart and Ebeling (2020)confirmed that parental educational expectations impact children's academic performance to a greater extent when they match the children’s natural talents and interests.

How parents communicate remains an essential element within this dynamic relationship. Positive communication methods that provide support and motivation enable children to develop internal motivation while negative communication pushes children towards dependence on external rewards (Butler, 2015). Lerner et al. (2022) argued that children achieve academic success when parents actively support their autonomy and intrinsic motivation. When parents use autonomy support, controlling expectations, and communication they reveal how expectations impact children's motivation in multiple ways. Different expectations from parents lead to significant changes in children's intrinsic and extrinsic motivational levels. Supporting autonomy enhances children's engagement and self-driven motivation whereas controlling expectations damages children's natural learning desire. Cultural factors and communication patterns serve as key elements that define these interactive processes and thus require parents to maintain balanced expectations.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between parental expectations and children's motivation to learn?
2. How do perceptions of expectation framing (supportive vs. controlling) influence motivation?
3. Are these effects moderated by cultural context and communication styles?

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory suggests a motivational spectrum that starts with motivation then progresses through extrinsic motivation to reach intrinsic motivation at the end. Intrinsic motivation develops better in autonomy-supportive environments but controlling environments tend to suppress it (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Self-determination theory presents a full framework to examine how parental expectations significantly shape children's intrinsic learning motivation. Deci and Ryan (2012) found that intrinsic motivation develops when basic psychological needs related to autonomy competence and kinship reach satisfaction. When parental expectations are shown as supportive behaviour, they enhance children's competence perception and support their intrinsic motivation growth (Luo & Zhang, 2018).

Parental expectations become detrimental when they create high pressure which leads to student anxiety and diminishing intrinsic motivation (Al-Dhamit & Kreishan, 2016).

Recent studies show that students' academic motivation is influenced by their perception of parental expectations through the mediating effect of self-determination across various situations. Naseer et al. (2024) noted that student intrinsic motivation rises when parents convey expectations as approachable rather than overwhelming and supporting their academic endeavours. Parental expectations must align with children's abilities to create a learning environment that fosters intrinsic learning. Froiland and Worrell (2017) state that parental autonomy support plays an essential role in adolescent motivation. When parents establish autonomy-supportive environments adolescents show higher levels of internal motivation toward their educational goals. In a school context, Hornstra et al. (2018) argued that teacher expectations can influence student motivation and dedication when instructional methods align with student needs just as parental expectations do. The relationship between parental expectations and children's intrinsic motivational drive serves as a crucial point of study in educational psychology and child development. Parents who create supportive environments for autonomy and skill development boost their children's learning motivation which leads to academic achievement and enduring commitment.

Expectancy-Value Theory

According to Expectancy-Value Theory, motivation is determined by individuals' expectations of success and how much value they attribute to a given task. Parental expectations shape children's academic motivation through their impact on children's self-beliefs and valuation of educational success (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).The expectancy-value theory (EVT) delivers a strong framework to explain how parental expectations shape students' motivation to learn within academic settings. According to Wigfield and Gladstone (2019), the EVT theory claims that people choose to participate in tasks when they expect valuable outcomes and believe they can achieve those outcomes. Parents' expectations have strong effects on how children view their academic worth and ability to succeed.

This study demonstrates how parental expectations play a fundamental part in shaping children's academic motivation through communicated messages. Thomas and Strunk (2017) established that parental beliefs about their children's abilities directly impact children's performance in scientific disciplines, this demonstrates how parental expectations affect academic success. In a related study, Loh (2019) argued that parents' communication affects children's perceived value of learning and creates a sustained motivating environment that leads children to engage more deeply with their studies.

The work of Eccles and Wigfield (2020) expands EVT by adding a situated perspective which established the impact of social contexts and family dynamics on children's motivation levels. The approach underlines the need to understand the role of parental values and specific expectations in shaping children's belief in their abilities and patterns of attributing success or failure. Dietrich (2016) opined that parental expectations and interactions with children play a crucial role in motivation and academic performance and showed distinct differences between boys and girls in response to parental influence. The way parents' expectations become part of the value of expectation system shows how these expectations lead to better learning motivation in children. Parents who create supportive environments with high expectations and meaningful value can significantly shape the educational paths of their children.

Empirical Evidence on Parental Expectations

Studies indicate that children perform better and become more motivated when parents hold high expectations for them (Kim, 2020). Children whose parents establish goals that are difficult and achievable tend to build stronger self-efficacy and persistence (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). When people perceive expectations as unrealistic or controlling, they begin to experience stress and anxiety which leads to disengagement (Graham & Weiner, 1996).Research findings demonstrate that parental expectations strongly correlate with children's educational motivation and academic results. The meta-analysis performed by Pinquart and Ebeling (2020) revealed that parental educational expectations play a crucial role in children's academic success because higher expectations lead to better school performance. The research indicates that parental belief in their children's capabilities can boost their academic motivation.

Dietrich (2016) showed how parents' values and specific expectations shape children's motivational dynamics and displayed these variations between boys and girls. Parents' expectations serve as a key factor in shaping the scientific motivations of both girls and teenage boys which results in marked effects on their academic performance and overall outcomes. This perspective aligns with existing research which explores how expectations affect children through various contextual factors in unique ways.

Lerkkanen and Pakarinen (2019) analyzed how parental practices and beliefs adapt to evolving social contexts and contribute to this discussion. Adaptive parental strategies based on expectations help build children's natural interest in learning. Effective communication of expectations creates an environment where children develop stronger educational goals which bridges the gap between parental expectations and educational achievements. The research conducted by Lazarides et al. (2016) showed how parental expectations influence student motivation. The research assessed the connection between parental expectations and students' motivational profiles. The research findings indicate that parents' expectations create benchmarks which shape children's motivational profiles leading to their educational goal setting.

Thomas and Strunk (2017) empirical tests confirmed past findings by showing that children's scientific performance depends heavily on parental communication of expectations. The research findings noted that the expectation model plays a major part in explaining children's academic success. This reinforces the essential role parents have in guiding children's educational experience. These studies confirm that parents' expectations function as a vital influence on children's learning motivation and academic success.

The cultural background of parents determines their expectations and shapes the learning motivation of children. Lerkkanen and Pakarinen (2019) argued that educational cultural beliefs impact parental methods that subsequently influence children's motivation within a dynamic global setting. Parents in collectivist cultures maintain high expectations which focus on group achievements thereby boosting intrinsic academic motivation among children. In individualistic cultures, parents focus on personal achievements which creates an alternative motivation environment. Dietrich (2016) studied how parental values and specific expectations play a crucial role in shaping teenage academic motivation and achievement through gender-specific contexts. A meta-analysis study conducted by Pinquart and Ebeling (2020) showed that parents who set high educational expectations enhance their children's academic performance across different cultural backgrounds. It is essential to understand cultural dimensions to create educational strategies that enhance children's learning motivation.

How expectations are communicated is also critical. For example, supportive communication styles that emphasize autonomy is associated with higher intrinsic motivation, while more authoritarian or dismissive communication is associated with lower motivation (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989).The communication style of parents can influence their expectations, which in turn can influence the motivation of children to learn. Van Petegem et al. (2019) found that adolescent reactions to parents' regulation are also affected by parents' communication style, which implies that supportive communication can enhance children's self-determination and motivation. In addition, Pinquart and Ebeling (2020) performed a meta-analysis that showed a strong correlation between educational expectations of parents and the academic performance of children, this implies that how parents communicate these expectations is important to motivation. This effect is also apparent in the culture specific, Ren and Pope Edwards (2015) found that Chinese parents and their authoritative communication styles affect the social competence and academic motivation of children. These studies imply that effective communication can generate a motivating learning environment, which shapes children's goals and learning results.

Methodology

The participants for this study included 300 middle school children in grades 6 to 8 with their parents drawn from urban and suburban schools in the United States. Demographic data indicated a diverse sample. The participants' gender breakdown is 55% females and 45% males, ethnic backgrounds showed 40% Caucasian participants, 30% Hispanic participants, 20% African American participants, and 10% Asian Americans. The average age of the student participants was 13.2 years.

We adopted a mixed-methods approach to corroborate our findings and obtain deeper understanding. We used different instruments for data collection. The study introduced a Parental Expectations Scale (PES) containing 15 items that evaluate perceived parental expectations through subscales measuring expectation level (low, moderate, high) and framing (supportive, controlling). The Children's Motivation Questionnaire (CMQ) evaluates intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and motivation guided by the Academic Motivation Scale from Vallerand et al. (1992). The Academic Engagement Scale (AES) measured behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. We used Communication Style Inventory (CSI) to analyze student perceptions regarding parental communication of expectations. Data collection occurred over two months. Parents filled out surveys either at their residences or at parent-teacher meetings. During school hours researchers supervised student completion of questionnaires. Thirty students and parents were interviewed using semi-structured methods to understand their perceptions and experiences.

The analysis of quantitative data was done using Pearson's correlation and Regression with the aid of SPSS version 27 software. The qualitative thematic analysis was done through NVivo 12 to determine patterns about expectation framing, cultural influences, and communication.

Results

Quantitative Findings

Parental Expectations: 40% moderate, 35% high, 25% low. Intrinsic motivation mean = 4.2 (SD = 0.8), extrinsic motivation mean = 3.8 (SD = 0.9).

Correlations

Moderate expectations significantly and positively correlate with intrinsic motivation ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$).High expectations positively correlate with extrinsic motivation ($r = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$) but also with increased stress levels.

Perceived autonomy support significantly and positively correlates with intrinsic motivation ($r = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$).

Regression
Expectation level predicted intrinsic motivation ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). Expectations framed as supportive had a stronger positive effect on motivation (interaction term $\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$). Controlling expectations predicted higher stress and lower motivation ($\beta = -0.32$, $p < 0.01$).

Moderation effects
Cultural background moderated the relationship: In collectivist background high expectations had a stronger positive association with motivation than in individualist background.

Qualitative Findings
Our thematic analysis revealed four main themes supportive framing which makes children feel competent and autonomous, perceived pressure reduces motivation and causes anxiety, communication style mediates the effects of expectations, and cultural norms - East Asian students see high expectations as supportive while Western students see it as pressure.

Parents' expectations play an important role in children's motivation based on qualitative results in different educational contexts. Supportive framing expectations (encouragement, positive feedback) predict higher intrinsic motivation in children. Perceived pressure (usually caused by high expectations) predicts anxiety and lower motivation. Thus, how expectations are expressed matters. In terms of communication styles, communication in which parents engage in an open dialogue with children makes them feel more autonomous and competent, resulting in motivation. On the other hand, authoritarian communication (tied to strict expectations) makes children less willing to engage and explore their potential. Finally, cultural norms are a factor in the creation of expectations of parents and children's motivation. For example, in cultures that prioritize achievement, parents may place more emphasis on compliance with expectations, which leads to increased pressure. In subjects that emphasize development, parents may be more likely to promote a growth mindset in children by allowing them to pursue their interests freely. Overall, these qualitative ideas shed light on the different interaction between parents' expectations and children's motivation.

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

The findings highlight how parental expectations operate through complex dynamics. Moderate expectations that support autonomy improves intrinsic motivation through the development of competence and feelings of relatedness. When high expectations appear controlling or unrealistic they reduce motivation and create more stress. Expectations demonstrate cultural embeddedness through interaction with cultural norms because elements that provide support in one setting may be seen as oppressive elsewhere. Communication style is an essential intermediary element that influences the relationship between expectations and motivation.

Research examining the relationship between parental expectations and student motivation remains significant because it integrates quantitative and qualitative findings to reveal how these expectations correlate with cultural influences. Parental expectations which shape academic goals have demonstrated significant correlations with student motivation levels according to Iqbal et al. (2024). Research shows that students who experience higher parental expectations tend to achieve better academic performance and superior mental health outcomes. High academic stress emerges when parental expectations surpass what students can handle according to Rizwan et al. (2020). Qualitative investigations reveal how cultural settings play a major role in shaping parent expectations which in turn affect student

motivation levels. Immigrant parents from West African cultural backgrounds demonstrate educational aspirations which stem from their personal migration sacrifices (Roubeni et al., 2015). The cultural story shows parental sacrifices lead to strong expectations which can motivate students but also create overwhelming stress for them.

Makarova et al. (2023) explored how ethnic minority youth adapt to school settings. The study revealed how family-related risk factors and resources shape students' experiences through dual mechanisms. The combination of qualitative and quantitative testing results shows that parental involvement produces beneficial impacts on students' school adjustment and motivation. The results show researchers need to evaluate both family expectations and the emotional and social support families deliver across various cultural settings.

Parents' expectations influence student motivation through the fundamental communication styles they establish with their children. Suizzo et al. (2016) noted that teenagers from low-income ethnic minority families develop stronger autonomous motivation when their parents participate in educational support activities. The promotion of open dialogues about school performance and student involvement in setting objectives are key educational support practices. When teachers use authoritative or overly critical methods of communication it creates student disengagement and reduces their motivation.

Practical Implications

Educational research frequently examines the critical dynamic between parental expectations and children's learning motivation. Parents who set achievable expectations help create a supportive learning environment that enables children develop their own intrinsic drive. Excessively high or misaligned parental expectations cause anxiety in children and reduce their motivation which highlights the importance of maintaining a balanced approach. Parents need to create realistic goals which match children's abilities and their personal interests. This practice will create a supportive environment, boost self-efficacy and motivation.

Educators serve as essential mediators between the expectations of parents and children. They also teach parents how to use positive reinforcement as a tool without applying inappropriate pressure. Parent workshops serve as effective platforms for teaching parents about realistic expectations. Initiatives could involve use of communication methods that focus on fostering motivation and resilience instead of instilling fear of failure. The inclusion of workshops into school programs creates a cooperative environment between parents and teachers which makes outside expectations consistent with the school's educational values.

Policy formulators play a crucial role in creating guidelines which allow parental involvement and prevent children from facing too much stress. Educational institutions must receive policy-driven support to develop resources which teach parents best involvement practices through workshops, informative sessions, and family psychological support access. Policy formulators who build frameworks for parents to participate in a supportive way will enhance children's learning experiences which leads to better motivation and achievement outcomes.

Limitations

Studies exploring how parents' expectations affect children's learning motivation typically use research methods that face inherent constraints especially when dealing with transversal designs, self-reported evaluations and cultural variations. Transversal research provides limited perspective on dynamic interactions which complicates the determination of causal connections. Research methods cannot sufficiently track the development of parental expectations and their long-term effects on children's motivation which is necessary to understand changes over time.

The utilization of self-sensified measures presents potential bias risks because children and parents' perceptions might not accurately represent true conditions. Individual differences in interpretation can distort the findings which then generates doubts regarding the results' validity and reliability. The subjective characteristics of self-assessment led interviewees to unconsciously raise their perceived motives and expectations.

Research frequently fails to address cultural diversity considerations properly. Parents' expectations and children's motivation show complex patterns that vary according to cultural values and specific contexts. Research practices frequently blend multiple populations together which hides their distinct cultural dynamics that influence these relationships. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of this complex issue, researchers must implement a nuanced methodology that includes longitudinal studies, objective measures, and culturally sensitive research methods.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that parental expectations affect multiple aspects of children's learning motivation and focus on how these expectations are framed as crucial elements determining educational success. Research shows that students exhibit higher intrinsic motivation, enhanced engagement, and well-being when presented with moderate expectations that support their autonomy. When expectations promote personal control and capability, children naturally develop an eagerness to learn and persistence through challenges.

Excessively high or controlling expectations create stress and anxiety, and push students toward extrinsic motivation from outside forces instead of their own passions. Communication patterns and cultural values frequently intensify the adverse results of parental expectations by acting as protective factors or heightening their negative impact. People from collectivist cultures often see high expectations as supportive while individuals from individualist societies consider high expectations as intrusive and pressuring.

Research highlights the need to establish expectations that challenge students and remain achievable when communicated through supportive methods that promote independent thinking. This approach increases motivation, simultaneously cultivating a positive self-image, resilience, and a lasting passion for learning. Educators, parents and policymakers can enhance student motivation and academic achievement through supportive communication and culturally sensitive environments.

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