



## TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION SPACES: ANALYSIS OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT EXPECTATION FACTORS AMONG HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS IN KWA-DLANGEZWA, SOUTH AFRICA

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### ABSTRACT

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Higher education is a major driving force of transformation. To achieve this, higher educational attainment expectation among adolescent learners is critical. In order to clarify why it is challenging for so many black South African adolescents to pursue higher education using the little available facilities and resources, this study analyzed educational expectation factors in transforming higher education. This study adopted a quantitative research approach using the descriptive design of correlation type in order to explore variables such as parental engagement, academic self-efficacy and school connectedness on educational expectation of higher school adolescents in Kwa-Dlangezwa in South Africa. A total of 100 participants were selected as sample using simple random sampling with average mean age of 14 years ( $SD= 9.31$ ). A structured questionnaire consisting of parental engagement, academic self-efficacy, school connectedness and educational expectation was used to collect data. Three research questions were asked and answered using Multiple Regression and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistical tools. The result revealed that educational expectation could be achieved by parental engagement, academic self-efficacy, and school connectedness. It was concluded that if educational system will be transformed for sustainable development, factors such as parental engagement, academic self-efficacy, and school connectedness should be given adequate consideration.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study contributes to scanty literature in South Africa on parental engagement, academic self-efficacy, and school connectedness as determinant of educational attainment expectations. It brings result of parental engagement as the highest contributing factor followed by school connectedness and academic self-efficacy to educational attainment or learners.

### 1. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Higher education is the greatest driving force of social transformation as well as personal socio-economic development. It plays critical roles in combating poverty, sustaining development, driving national development and bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. According to three main functions of higher education as outlined by the South African government's proposed 2030 National Development Plan (NDP) which are: to strengthen social justice, equity and democracy by providing opportunities for social mobility and deal with apartheid injustices; to educate and equip learners with employability high-level skills needed by public and private sectors; and to produce new knowledge, assess and find applications for existing knowledge. Based on the above, Muola (2010) alluded that higher education inculcates needed values for good citizenship, societal growth and not

only to just equip people with the necessary knowledge and skills for the world of work, but to enable constant negotiation of power, new identities through strengthened social justice, open debate and critical inquiry.

In South Africa during the apartheid, the blacks were practically marginalized from benefiting from higher education, while the whites especially were favored. This necessitated underrepresentation of the black and colored South Africans at the top-tier institutions and economic decision making forums. Though the black South Africans till now are the majority, but due to low educational attainment, they continue to serve the white minority. Also, racial discrimination in almost all aspects of the political, cultural and socio-economic life of South Africans is noted to be as a result of apartheid laws which could only be eradicated by higher education attained by the black South Africans.

Shittu (2013) emphasized that education is the only vehicle for economic and political growth in any society. In other words, preservation of lives, maintenance of cultural values and social transformation are only possible through the instrument of quality education. Importantly, the higher the educational attainment of a nation, the better is the chance of social transformation of such a nation (Adeyinka, 2012). Therefore, it is suffice to say that in order to accomplish social transformation for sustaining development, educational attainment of young stars who are the primary agents of transformation should not be belittled. The South African government, after the apartheid has made laudable and significant efforts to encourage black South African youths to aspire for higher education, has earmarked close to 20% of national budget for education to be utilized in activities such as research support, scholarships etc. This effort has yielded significant result in bridging some of the educational attainment gap in the years after the end of the apartheid era. For instance, Statistic South Africa (2018) reported that between year 2000 and 2016, university enrollment of black students reportedly witnessed an increase to 71 percent from 59 percent. As part of the efforts to improve upon this progress, the South African government proposed 2030 National Development Plan which is to fund higher education from postgraduate to doctoral degree levels of black students in South Africa and to increase Black researchers from current 28 percent to 40 percent.

Unfortunately, South Africa Department of Higher Education and Training (2018) reported that only 9% of the Black African population has higher education, while the percentage of educational attainment by the Whites and the Indians has kept increasing. This shows that the Black South Africans are still lagging behind and have low expectation in terms of higher education attainment despite government efforts. The white minority may be enjoying world class educational system more than the black majority who are African, colored, and Indians; which is partly responsible for the low interest in higher education among the blacks. This has increased the difficulties in social transformation process of the Blacks in the South African society. Truly speaking, youth/adolescent learners remain primary actors to aspire for higher education and reduce the disparity in the intellectual and occupational development of the non-whites in South Africa. Therefore, a question is often raised to ask about the educational expectation of these agents of transformation and initiate social transformation.

Each level of education provides basic or specific skills for individuals enough to make them self-reliant and attain a certain level of education beyond elementary education. High education has formative effect on individual's mind, character or physical ability. Education remains the only process by which any society can deliberately transmit its accrued values, knowledge and skills from one generation to another (Kaur, 2012). In fact, higher education provides numerous opportunities for social transformation and determined human capital (Luthuli, 2017). Therefore, desiring highest level of education is critical in the transformation of the black African society particularly to determine the educational attainment of adolescents' learners. Educational expectation therefore, is the highest level of education an individual aspires to successfully attain which in the current times is the desiring level of education achievable by learners.

Usually, youths/adolescents are naturally curious and driven by an intense need to explore possibilities, however, proper or positive channeling of this drive towards socially orientated goals such as education cannot be downplayed. Past studies conducted in South Africa have focused mainly on teachers' roles, financial aids,

enrolment ratio, policies and program implementations (Breier & Le Rout, 2012; Meyer, 2014; Muola, 2010) in relation to improving high educational attainment with little or no attention given to the primary actors' interest or expectations in higher education. To bridge this gap, this study advances parental engagement, academic self-efficacy and school connectedness as factors that could predict higher educational attainment expectation of adolescent learners in Kwa-Dlangezwa, South Africa.

### *1.1. Parental Engagement and Educational Expectation*

The role of parents in educational attainment expectation of learners cannot be overemphasized as they are the child's first teachers and agents of socialization. Parents have a major influence on success and failure of their child's life. Importantly, parental engagement has lasting effects on young people's character, mindset and educational/career attainment, while peers, school and the environment may significantly matter. Simons-Morton and Crump (2003) ascertained that the parental engagement is critical to the lives and achievement of their early adolescent children. This explains why the nature of encouragement received by the adolescent learners from parents is important to the educational expectation of these learners. Muola's (2010) study on the relationship between academic achievement motivation and home environment revealed that low correlation exists between parental involvement or encouragement and academic achievement. Educational expectation in transiting from high school to university of higher education of learners depends on the level of their parents' engagement. This was confirmed by a longitudinal study by Gottfredson and Hussong (2011) who found out that parental engagement is directly linked with adolescents' smooth transition to high school, and lowered the risk of dropout. Fite, Cooley, Williford, Frazer, and DiPierro (2014) found out that investigated parental engagement moderate learners academic performance. On the contrary, the study of Koskel (2014) on the influence of parental involvement on academic performance of public mixed day secondary school students in Kuresoi district Kenya found that academic attainment of the participants was no influenced by parental involvement.

### *1.2. Academic Self-Efficacy and Educational Expectation*

Another vital factor in this study that could forecast educational expectation of adolescent learner is academic self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) defined academic self-efficacy as the belief in learners' capabilities to carry out, organize and perform academic task successfully. This shows that academic self-efficacy enables learners to pursue and overcome academic obstacles. Elmotaleb and Saha (2013) established that learners with high sense of academic self-efficacy have the capacity to accept more academic challenging tasks, and they develop abilities of pursuing higher education by organizing their time; they display lower level of anxiety, perseverance, flexibility in the use of learning strategies; and possess high ability to adapt with different educational environments. This is to say that learners' level of academic self-efficacy could affect the level of education attained and the amount of effort applied (Hibbs, 2012).

Ersanli (2015) affirmed that it is not easy for learners with high academic self-efficacy to give up when confronted with academic difficulties. In the view of Wernersbach, Crowley, Bates, and Rosenthal (2014) it was noted that learners who are easily discouraged, develop low educational expectation as a result of doubtful academic capabilities, whereas learners who are more confident, persist in the face of difficulties until success is achieved. In an empirical meta-analysis study conducted in the last 20 years one of the psychosocial constructs that reported strongest single prediction of learners' educational achievement was academic self-efficacy. Sparks (2016) studied the relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic career of American teenagers and found that academic self-efficacy of learners related positively and significantly to academic careers. Therefore, it is evident that academic self-efficacy interacts with learners' educational expectation.

### 1.3. School Connectedness and Educational Expectation

Amongst several psychosocial factors that drive educational attainment expectation of the adolescent learners is school connectedness. Whitlock (2006) defined school connectedness as the amount of care learners have for a school and the amount of care learners enjoy in a school. Simply put, school connectedness is the learners' feeling of being cared for as individual and their attention to the learning activities by adults and other peers in their school. School connectedness thus has an impact on learners' achievement, success, expectations and attainment. School connectedness is also learners' sense of belonging in the school or the extent to which learners feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school environment, particularly by teachers and their peers. Gardilla (2016) opined that learners who are connected to school usually are less likely to adjust to school's values, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and education expectations. Prior studies such as Bowes et al. (2013); Kochenderfer-Ladd and Troop-Gordon (2010); Spano, Rivera, and Bolland (2010) found that school connectedness related positively with learners' academic achievement.

Previous studies in some developed nations have also established that school connectedness plays important roles in achieving learners' educational attainment. For instance, Nonnemaker, McNeely, and Blum (2003) conducted a longitudinal study in United States of America (USA) on adolescents' psychological wellbeing in relation to school connectedness, using 36,000 school going adolescents between grade 7 and 12. The study revealed school connectedness strongly predicting adolescents' psychological wellbeing of the learners. Likewise, another study carried out in Australia by Loukas and Pasch (2013) found that learners who are connected to school stand the chance of attaining higher educational expectation. Also, Chapman, Buckley, Sheehan, and Shochet (2013) asserted that school connectedness correlated positively with academic commitment of learners. Musyoki (2011) who examined the relationship between school connectedness and psychological health among learners in selected schools in Kenya, established that low sense of school connectedness has negative but significant correlation with psychological health of learners. Going by all these studies, it could be said that educational expectation of learners depends largely on their sense of school connectedness.

### 1.4. Aim

This study mainly explored educational expectation factors in transforming higher education spaces among black adolescent learners in Kwa-Dlangezwa, KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa.

### 1.5. Specific Objectives

This study is guided by three objectives:

- 1) To explore the pattern of relationship that exists among factors of educational expectations of adolescent learners in transforming higher education spaces.
- 2) To examine the collective contribution of all the factors to educational expectation of adolescent learners in transforming higher education space.
- 3) To determine the relatives contribution of each of the factors to educational expectation of adolescent learners in transforming higher education space.

### 1.6. Research Questions

In other to achieve the objectives of this study, the following research questions were asked:

- 1) What pattern of relationship exists between the factors parental engagement, academic self-efficacy, school connectedness and educational expectation of adolescent learners in transforming higher education spaces in Kwa-Dlangezwa in uThungulu District Municipality, South Africa?

- 2) To what extent will parental engagement, academic self-efficacy and school connectedness, when combined, forecast educational expectation of adolescent learners in transforming higher education spaces in Kwa-Dlangezwa in uThungulu District Municipality, South Africa?
- 3) Does each of the variables (parental engagement, academic self-efficacy and school connectedness) forecast educational expectation of adolescent learners in transforming higher education spaces in Kwa-Dlangezwa in uThungulu District Municipality, South Africa?

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Design

The study adopted the quantitative research approach using the principle of descriptive design of correlational type.

### 2.2. Population

The study comprised adolescent learners studying in senior secondary classes in Kwa-Dlangezwa, which is one of the suburb townships of the city of uMhlatuze, located in uThungulu District Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. The purpose of selecting this population was to analyze factors that are common to the educational expectations of the Black South Africans in order to suggest early and appropriate interventions.

### 2.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

Simple random procedure was used to select a total of 100 adolescent learners in grade 12 for the study from five selected secondary school in Kwa-Dlangezwa District. It was assumed that the selected samples have common characteristics or elements of the population of the study.

### 2.4. Instruments

Validated instruments were used for data collection, which contained Educational Attainment Scale developed by Moore and Dunworth (2011), which consisted of 10 items with a response format ranging from Strongly Agree = 4 to Strongly Disagree = 1 using a four point Likert format. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for the scale was .89. The second scale was the Academic Self-Efficacy scale (Midgley et al., 2000) with fifteen (15) items that had a response format ranging from Strongly Disagree = 1 to Strongly Agree = 5 using a five point Likert format. Its reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was reported as .88. The study also employed School Connectedness Tool developed by Edens (2006) consisting of twenty (20) items with .92 Cronbach alpha value. Further, this study adapted Parental Engagement Tool by Catsambis (2001) with twenty (20) items with Cronbach alpha of .89. Succinctly, all the items were adapted for the study.

### 2.5. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using Multiple Regression Analysis and Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical tools to answer the three research questions asked in the study.

### 2.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethics are morality of research. The study adhered to ethics of research by respecting the voluntary participation of the participants, ensured confidentiality, and guaranteed that no harm would be done to the participants during the administration of the questionnaires and would use the information for research purposes only.

### 3. RESULTS

**Research question one:** What pattern of relationship exists between parental engagement, academic self-efficacy, school connectedness and educational expectation of adolescent learners in transforming higher education spaces?

**Table-1.** Descriptive Statistics and Inter-correlations among the independent and dependent variables.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Educational Expectation	51.82	9.310	1.000			
Parental engagement	51.85	9.12	.643**	1.000		
Academic self-efficacy	51.64	9.46	.986**	.036**	1.000	
School connectedness	52.74	10.61	.627**	.113**	.033**	1.0

Source: Correlation table showing inter-correlation among variables.

Table 1 reveals that there was a positive and significant relationship among the factors: Educational attainment expectation correlated positively with parental engagement ( $r = 0.643$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); academic self-efficacy ( $r = 0.986$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); school connectedness ( $r = 0.627$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The positive significant among factors of educational attainment expectation implied the three factors had something to do with educational attainment expectation of the participants.

**Research question two:** To what extent will parental engagement, academic self-efficacy and school connectedness when combined forecast educational expectation of in adolescent learners in transforming higher education spaces?

**Table-2.** Multiple Regression Analysis showing joint contribution of the independent factors on educational attainment expectation.

Multiple R of componential factors = 0.987

Multiple R<sup>2</sup> = 0.873

Multiple R<sup>2</sup> (Adjusted) = 0.743

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean of square	F-Ratio	P
Regression	22948.899	3	4589.780	1949.335	<.05
Residual	628.661	96	2.355		
Total	23577.560	99			

Source: Regression table showing.

Table 2 shows that all the independent factors (parental engagement, academic self-efficacy and school connectedness) jointly contribute to educational attainment expectation of the study participants. The table reveals a multiple coefficient correlations (R) of 0.987 and multiple adjusted R square of 0.743. This means that 74.3% of the total variance in educational attainment expectation of the participants is accounted for by all the three predictors when taken together. The remaining 25.7 % variance is beyond the score of this current study. The analysis of variance of the multiple regression data yielded an F-ratio value which was found to be significant at 0.05 Alpha level,  $F(5, 294) = 1949.335$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . The joint contribution of the variables indicates that parental engagement, academic self-efficacy, and school connectedness have a very strong effect on educational attainment expectation among the study participants in transforming higher education spaces.

**Research question three:** Does each of the variables (parental engagement, academic self-efficacy and school connectedness) forecast educational expectation of adolescents' learners in transforming higher education spaces?

**Table-3.** The relative contribution of each of the independent factors to educational attainment expectation.

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	P
(constant)	1.229	.601		2.047	.042	<.05
School connectedness	.290	.014	.528	20.710	.000	<.05
Parental engagement	.957	.014	.973	67.524	.000	<.05
Academic self-efficacy	.210	.042	.301	5.000	.000	<.05



### 3.1. Dependent –Factors: Educational Attainment Expectation

Table 3 indicates the contribution of each of the independent variables to the prediction of educational attainment expectation among the study participants. In terms of magnitude of the contribution, parental engagement contributed most to the prediction of educational attainment expectation ( $\beta = 0.973$ ,  $t = 67.524$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) followed by school connectedness ( $\beta = 0.528$ ,  $t = 20.710$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) followed by academic self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.301$ ,  $t = 5.000$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The implication of this is that each of the independent factors is a potent forecaster of educational attainment expectation among the study participants.

## 4. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

In response to the research question 1 which inquired about pattern of relationship existing among the variables (parental engagement, academic self-efficacy, school connectedness and educational attainment expectation) of adolescent learners in KwaDlangezwa in uThungulu District Municipality, South Africa It was found that there was a positive and significant relationship among the factors. This implies that parental engagement, academic self-efficacy, school connectedness were statistically correlated with educational attainment expectation in transforming higher education spaces. This finding is in line with Fite et al. (2014) who discovered some familiar factors that significantly related to educational attainment expectation. Similarly, the result is in consonance with the study of Koskel (2014); Pajares and Usher (2008) and Aremu (1999) who established that interrelationship exists among parental involvement, self-efficacy, interest in school, school connectedness and career aspirations of senior secondary school students.

Research question 2 inquired what extent school connectedness; academic self- efficacy and parental engagement when combined will predict the educational attainment expectation of adolescent learners. The result shows that all the independent variables (parental engagement, academic self-efficacy and school connectedness) jointly contributed significantly to educational attainment expectation. The combination of the independent variables accounted for 74.3% of the total variance in educational attainment expectation. In line with this finding, a combination of variables like parental engagement and academic self-efficacy has been observed by Luthuli (2017) on higher educational attainment while the combination of variables like school connectedness and parental engagement have also been observed by Achilles, Krieger, Finn, and Sharp (2003) on educational attainment expectation.

Research question 3 was framed to know which of the variables (school connectedness, academic self-efficacy and parental engagement) forecast educational expectation of adolescent learners. The result revealed that each of the independent variable relatively contributed to educational attainment expectation. The implication of this is that parental engagement, academic self-efficacy and school connectedness are potent predictors of educational attainment expectation of secondary school students. This finding is in line with the study of Ersanli (2015); Wernersbach et al. (2014); Loukas and Pasch (2013); Chapman et al. (2013); Adeyinka (2012) and Gottfredson and Hussong (2011) who found that the above variables have independent effect on educational attainment expectation of adolescent learners in secondary school.

### 4.1. Implication for Transforming Higher Education Spaces

Higher education remains the only tool for social transformation in our society. Therefore, it implies that parental engagement must be evident in high educational expectation of wards and children. The learners must also develop academic self-efficacy and be connected to school events. Towards this end, counselors and all other helping professionals must be alert and sensitive to these growing trends of higher education transformation. The implication of this is that all concerned stakeholders in educational sectors of South Africa should demonstrate serious involvement in higher educational attainment of their young ones especially the Blacks who hitherto remained academically unequal to their white counterparts.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Society transformation requires collaborative efforts, and in order to build a nation of our dreams educational attainment expectation of our future leaders must be encouraged. Parents, counselors, educationists, school administrators, non-governmental agencies and policymakers have to spring up to assist in combating the issue of non-attainment of high educational aspiration of the Black South Africa adolescents at various school levels comprising the primary, the secondary, and the tertiary. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- (a) Parents and guardians should demonstrate interest in education attainment expectation of the adolescents by encouraging them to desire highest level of education possible. Parents and guardians are also encouraged to adopt good parenting styles that would help motivate their wards through their academic endeavors.
- (b) Academic self-efficacy should be enhanced among adolescent learners so as to enhance their educational attainment expectation. Schools should provide psychosocial support for these learners through adequate guidance and counseling services within the school system so that they can be committed to the transformation of higher education spaces.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study established that there is a positive relationship between school connectedness, academic self-efficacy, parental engagement and educational attainment expectation. All these independent factors when combined had positive effect on educational attainment expectation of the adolescent learners. From this template, it becomes necessary that all the factors considered in this study require attention so that adolescents' educational attainment expectation can be achieved and this will help in transforming higher education space.

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