

# Parental Expectations and Aspirations: Impacts on Academic Outcomes from School to Pre-University Education – A Review

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# Parental Expectations and Aspirations: Impacts on Academic Outcomes from School to Pre-University Education – A Review

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** *This paper examines how parents' academic expectations shape School and Pre-University students' learning experiences. Expectations can motivate when balanced, but cause stress when excessive. The review explores this delicate balance, highlighting the role of communication gaps between parents and students and considering cultural differences in how expectations are expressed. The goal is to understand their impact on academic performance and emotional well-being and to suggest ways to foster healthier parent-student relationships.*

**Methodology:** *Instead of reporting on one study alone, this paper brings together insights from many different kinds of research. Some studies rely on numbers and statistics, others use interviews and personal stories, and a few combine both. By weaving together these different approaches, the review highlights where researchers agree, where they differ, and what lessons can be learned from their findings.*

**Results/Analysis:** *Evidence shows that high but realistic expectations enhance student performance and confidence, whereas overly rigid or extreme expectations can lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout. Peer comparison and fear of failure further affect mental health. Responses vary according to gender, family income, and cultural background. A key finding is that students flourish when parents pair expectations with open communication, understanding, and emotional support.*

**Originality/Value:** *This review emphasizes the human dimensions of education- emotions, relationships, and cultural context- beyond grades and exams. It shows that academic support rooted in empathy and balance fosters both achievement and resilience. For parents, educators, and policymakers, these insights offer practical guidance for nurturing young learners without undue pressure.*

**Type of the paper:** *Review Article.*

**Keywords:** Parental Expectations, Pre-University Students, Academic Pressure, Student Performance, Emotional Well-being, Parent-Student Relationship, Educational Motivation, Academic Stress, Socio-Cultural Influence, Adolescent Education.

## 1. INTRODUCTION :

Parental expectations have long influenced students' academic journeys, affecting their performance and emotional well-being. The gap between how students actually perform in college and what their parents expect from them may be linked to students' emotional stress. (Kanter Agliata, A., Renk, K. (2009). [1]). In India, education is often viewed as the only path to success and stability. As a result, these expectations can hold significant importance. For the past fifty years, psychologists and sociologists have paid a lot of attention to how parents' expectations influence children's academic progress (Yoko Yamamoto & Susan D. Holloway. (2010). [2]). Parents, motivated by love, ambition, and sometimes societal pressure, set high academic goals for their children, hoping to pave the way for a successful future. While these aspirations can encourage students to work harder, they can also blur

the line between support and overwhelming pressure. For students who already navigate competitive exams and crucial career choices, this balance is especially important. The review of related literature indicated that parents play an important role in shaping their child's behaviour across different areas of life (C. Subramani & J. Venkatachalam. (2019) [3]). In India, what parents expect from their children plays a big role in shaping how well adolescents perform in their studies (Dr. Chatterjee Ishita et. Al. (2013) [4]). Past studies show that when parents set goals that are both ambitious and realistic, students often do better in their studies. This balance can be especially helpful for urban students, as it gives them the push to aim higher while still feeling supported (H. Jeynes William et. Al. (2022). [5]). Over the years, several theoretical frameworks have been applied to explain how parental expectations influence student outcomes. In the broader body of parenting research, it is regularly noted that parents' goals are important factors that influence their behaviour as well as the results that children encounter (Melissa Washington-Nortey et. Al. (2025). [6]).

According to social capital theory, families serve as support systems in which children receive cultural capital from their parents. Self-determination theory emphasizes the conflict between intrinsic (student-driven) and extrinsic (parent-driven) motivation, demonstrating that expectations that promote autonomy frequently result in superior learning outcomes. By highlighting the fact that academic pressures are linked to larger cultural and economic realities, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model further contextualizes expectations within layers of the family, school, and society. According to the study, parents' expectations are more sensitive to actual student performance in rural and lower-socioeconomic-status families than in urban or higher-SES families (W. Shen et. Al. (2025). [7]).

Parents' high expectations have a greater negative impact on confident students than on less confident ones. The way that expectations affect the well-being of teenagers is also influenced by family ties (Feng Zhang et. Al. (2025). [8]).

This research examines how these expectations- whether they match or clash with students' own goals-affect their academic results and mental health. It looks into the complex relationship among cultural norms, socio-economic factors, and family communication patterns. The goal is to understand when expectations inspire achievement and when they lead to stress, anxiety, or burnout. By focusing on the pre-university stage, a critical moment in a student's educational path, this study aims to highlight how parents can offer the right kind of support. This support should foster ambition while also maintaining emotional strength. The findings revealed that parents' expectations of students did not differ noticeably between boys and girls.

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER :**

Parents holding high academic expectations for their pre-university kids can drastically influence students' performance emotionally and shape their future career paths significantly. Parental influence becomes particularly significant at the pre-university stage, where students prepare for cutthroat exams and divergent career pathways. Parental expectations spawn motivators and stressors that profoundly impact individuals in deeply personal and often confounding ways. It endeavours quite vigorously to evaluate the degree of alignment or stark conflict between parental desires and personal aspirations of students. By doing so, the paper attempts to understand how various communication styles, cultural norms, and deeply ingrained socio-economic factors influence the way expectations get set. Shedding light on the psychological impacts of academic pressure reveals whether it fosters resilience or contributes heavily to anxiety and burnout subsequently.

Research offers practical solutions for parents, educators, and policymakers, creating quite a healthier academic environment slowly over time. Paper, at its core, seeks a deeper understanding of supporting students in achieving academic success alongside emotional well-being pretty profoundly.

## **3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE :**

A recurring theme in the reviewed literature is that parental expectations vary by socioeconomic class, gender, and academic track. For example, lower-income households might place more importance on immediate employability, whereas middle-class families tend to emphasize professional stability through engineering or medicine. Another factor is gender: girls may be expected to perform well academically while also carrying out traditional family responsibilities, while boys may be under more pressure to perform well on competitive tests. These findings are supported by international research,

which indicates that students' expectations are significantly influenced by how success is framed in their culture.

**Table 1:** A descriptive summary of the literature reviewed

S. No.	Area of Research	Focus and Outcome	Reference
1	Impact of parental expectations and communication on college students' emotional distress.	Expectation mismatches raise anxiety, depression, and anger, while reciprocal communication reduces distress.	Kanter Agliata, A., Renk, K. (2009). [1]
2	Sociocultural influences on parental expectations and children's academic performance.	The review shows that parental expectations strongly shape student achievement, with their effects varying across cultural and social contexts	Yoko Yamamoto & Susan D. Holloway. (2010). [2]
3	Relationship between parental expectations and academic stress among school students.	The study finds that higher parental expectations are directly linked to increased academic stress in students.	C. Subramani & J. Venkatachalam. (2019). [3]
4	Students' perceptions of parental academic expectations and their psychological effects.	The study reveals that perceived parental expectations influence boys' and girls' stress, anxiety, and overall psychological well-being	Dr. Chatterjee Ishita et al. (2013). [4]
5	The link between parental expectations and students' academic achievement.	The meta-analysis confirms that higher parental expectations significantly and positively predict better student academic performance	H. Jeynes William et al. (2022). [5]
6	Parental expectations for children with developmental disabilities.	The review finds that parents' expectations vary widely across contexts and strongly influence children's developmental and educational outcomes.	Melissa Washington-Nortey et al. (2025). [6]
7	Parental educational expectations in relation to children's academic performance across family contexts.	The study shows that parents adjust their educational expectations based on children's performance, with the extent of adaptation shaped by family background.	W. Shen et al. (2025). [7]
8	Influence of parental expectations on adolescents' happiness.	The study finds that self-efficacy and parent-child connectedness mediate the link, with supportive expectations enhancing happiness while excessive ones may reduce it.	Feng Zhang et al. (2025). [8]
9	Parental expectations for children with cochlear implants in the Indian context.	The study reveals that parents hold high expectations for their children's speech, education, and social integration after implantation.	Kumar Prawin et al. (2015). [9]
10	Parental expectations and their psychological impact on Indian emerging adults.	The study shows that high parental expectations increase fear of negative evaluation, with maladaptive perfectionism acting as a key mediator.	Sanjana Menon et al. (2024). [10]

Children's academic performance and psychological health are significantly impacted by parental expectations. Children are inspired to perform better, their self-efficacy is increased, and family ties are strengthened when expectations are reasonable and conveyed with warmth. Children's resilience and

happiness are frequently enhanced by supportive expectations, which also support their academic and emotional development. However, stress, anxiety, and a fear of failing can result when expectations become unrealistic or excessive. Distress, including anger and depression, is frequently caused by perceived differences between what parents expect and what children believe they are capable of accomplishing. By serving as a buffer against pressure, open, reciprocal communication between parents and kids helps lessen these detrimental effects. Cultural norms and familial backgrounds also influence expectations, which change based on how well kids perform. (Table 1).

#### 4. METHODOLOGY :

In order to investigate the impact of parental expectations on the academic experiences and psychological health of students, a thorough review of the literature was carried out. Peer-reviewed journals were searched for pertinent studies that addressed both Indian and international contexts. The chosen articles featured studies that used both qualitative and quantitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and Likert-scale surveys. Academic priority, effort expectations, career direction, performance comparison, and parental support were among the important dimensions examined in various studies. In order to illustrate the dual effects of parental expectations on motivation, stress, and family dynamics, as well as patterns of alignment and misalignment between students' and parents' perceptions, the results of these studies were combined. This methodology ensured a comprehensive understanding of the topic through an integrative review of prior research, emphasizing both statistical trends and qualitative insights.

#### 5. THE LANDSCAPE OF PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS :

Parental academic expectations during the Pre-University stage are frequently influenced by cultural, economic, and complex social frameworks. In numerous Indian households, education is perceived not solely as an individual endeavour but as a collective family objective significantly influenced by societal expectations. Parents frequently expect children to pursue prestigious fields such as engineering, medicine, and other high-status professional courses like chartered accountancy. Aspirations of this nature often present a clear trajectory for advancement within social hierarchies and the attainment of long-term financial stability. The aspirations of parents reveal a comprehensive vision for their children's future, spanning academic, social, and personal achievements (Kumar Prawin et. Al (2015). [9]). As a result of internalizing their parents' high standards, emerging adults frequently adopt an unachievable standard of perfection, which feeds a strong fear of receiving unfavourable criticism (Sanjana Menon et. Al. (2024). [10]).

Academic success is often associated with respect, status, and moral worth, which are deeply embedded in various cultural beliefs and traditions. Parental expectations can be a double-edged sword because, although they can motivate students to do well in school, they can also be a major source of stress that negatively impacts their wellbeing (Rizwan Muhammad et. Al. (2020). [11]).

Essentially, test anxiety increases with the amount of academic pressure students face; however, a well-considered set of parental expectations can reduce that stress and even increase students' self-assurance in their ability to control their emotions (Guo Zheng et. Al. (2023). [12]). The achievement of a child is frequently regarded as evidence of effective parenting in many households today. Societal comparisons increase expectations, leading to evaluations of students against peers or relatives in a consistently high-pressure environment. Similar to how stress and psychological strain are exacerbated when academic expectations, frequently from parents, increase, exam anxiety can exacerbate the same emotional wounds (Deb Sibnath, Strodl Esben & Sun Hansen (2015). [13]).

Several economic factors actively contribute to these expectations. Education is regarded as a significant investment for future prosperity in households facing financial difficulties, characterized by limited resources and disposable income. Parents often prioritize lucrative

career paths for their children, frequently disregarding the students' interests and aptitudes. A systemic mindset frequently leads to a narrow definition of success, where anything less than top-tier performance is perceived as a complete failure. Such environments can increase stress and limit academic focus among students; despite good intentions, they often promote intense competition.

It's crucial to remember that expectations are rarely created in a vacuum. Peer pressure from family members, competitive coaching facilities, and media representations of "successful careers" all influence parental goals. The flourishing private coaching sector in India, which frequently promotes success stories that heighten parental concerns, serves to further reinforce strict academic trajectories. As a result, expectations shift from focusing on the personal development of each student to focusing on meeting social standards of success.

## **6. PERCEPTION GAPS BETWEEN STUDENTS AND PARENTS :**

Parents' perceptions significantly differ from the sentiments held by students. Most parents in the study believed their lofty expectations motivated kids, but merely 41% of students concurred with that assessment rather strongly. Learners frequently characterize such high expectations as overwhelmingly burdensome or impractically unrealistic, particularly when associated with inflexible career trajectories such as engineering. Children often experience frustration due to familial expectations and parental pressure that compel them to pursue paths contrary to their own aspirations. The fear of disappointing family members significantly inhibits open discussions, resulting in a deep emotional disconnection among individuals. The gap adversely affects students' academic performance and can significantly impair their overall well-being. Addressing this gap requires open dialogue and a significant shift towards more adaptable and supportive parenting approaches. In the pre-university arena snapshot from Karnataka, almost 90% of teenagers struggle with high academic stress and the weight of parental expectations; nearly a third experience noticeable anxiety, and over 50% say that the pressure is negatively affecting their general well-being (Pienyu Khriebeizonuo et. Al. (2024). [14]).

### **6.1. Differing definitions of success:**

Parents often equate success with high grades, prestigious courses, and career stability, while students may view success in terms of personal growth, passion, or balanced well-being. Heavy workloads, inadequate support, rigorous attendance requirements, placement concerns, and a lack of extracurricular activities are the main causes of stress for many technical students (Garima Verma & Hemraj Verma. (2020). [15]). This difference in definition can lead to misunderstandings, with parents perceiving alternative aspirations as a lack of ambition, and students feeling their personal goals are undervalued. Shinde Sadhana Sudhir et. Al informs that in Pune, over three-quarters of adolescents are under intense stress from parental expectations, while the rest still grapple with a noticeable, though slightly lower, level of stress (Shinde Sadhana Sudhir, L Sushiladevi, and Apte Sundari. (2017) [16]).

### **6.2. Communication barriers:**

Open and honest dialogue between parents and students is not always present. Many students avoid sharing their true academic interests or struggles due to fear of disappointment or criticism. A significant barrier in communication emerges when students feel only partially supported by their parents- this gap in understanding prevents them from openly sharing their struggles and adds to the weight of academic pressure (Kanderi Anand. (2025). [17]). Similarly, parents may fail to express their expectations in a supportive way, leading to assumptions rather than clear understanding on both sides.

### **6.3. Impact of peer and social comparison:**

Parents, consciously or unconsciously, compare their children's achievements with those of peers, relatives, or societal standards. Adolescents are much more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviour issues when they and their parents have low expectations for their education, meaning that neither expects to pursue higher education (Almroth Melody et al. (2019). [18]). Many parents have high expectations for their kids, and when their real performance doesn't meet these expectations, it can put pressure on them. This can sometimes inspire them, but it can also undermine their confidence because they feel like they're being evaluated based on ideals rather than practical comparisons (Nikita

Sivakumar, Pradeep Kumar & Dhanraj Ganapathy (2021). [19]. While intended as motivation, such comparisons often create feelings of inadequacy in students, who may perceive these comparisons as pressure rather than encouragement.

#### 6.4. Emotional misinterpretation:

High parental expectations can cause anxiety, low motivation, or even alienation in some students who interpret them as pressure rather than support (Sabila Naseer (2024). [20]). Adolescents' inner drive diminishes when they feel that their parents have unrealistically high or low expectations for them because they misinterpret these expectations and see them more as burdens than as motivators (Deepika Kushwaha & Taresh Bhatia (2019). [21]).

Parents may interpret a child's stress, withdrawal, or reluctance as laziness or disinterest, whereas these behaviours may actually stem from anxiety. Some teenagers incorrectly interpret parental expectations as unrelenting demands rather than signs of concern, which causes them to feel anxious and inadequate when they feel they can't meet those standards (Akash Roy (2022). [22]). Similarly, students might misread their parents' firm tone as a lack of empathy, when it may be rooted in concern. This mutual misreading deepens the emotional gap.

#### 6.5. Divergence in coping strategies:

While some adolescents distance themselves or resort to avoidance in order to safeguard their emotional well-being, others lean toward studying more in order to satisfy parental expectations (Kritika Kapoor & Prashant Srivastava (2019). [23]). When academic challenges arise, parents may believe in stricter discipline or increased study hours, while students might seek mental breaks, creative outlets, or peer support. The mismatch in coping strategies can lead to friction, with each side doubting the other's commitment to academic success. When school involvement, parental expectations, and personal goals coincide, adolescents have a higher chance of attending college (Ioannis Katsantonis (2024). [24]).

### 7. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS :

Understanding and addressing perception gaps between parents and students comes with challenges. One major issue is the cultural mindset that ties academic success to personal worth. In many families, this belief has been handed down for generations, making it hard to shift the conversation toward overall success. Also, socio-economic factors often lead parents to set high, sometimes inflexible, expectations to protect against financial instability, even when these do not match the student's interests or abilities. In India, cultural barriers, limited educational backgrounds, and socioeconomic disparities frequently limit parental involvement, which limits how effectively parents can support their children's learning (Anitha Raj Yadav et al. (2025). [25]).

Another significant limitation is the lack of structured spaces where parents and students can have guided, open discussions about academic goals. Schools often focus on covering the syllabus and preparing for exams, leaving little time for workshops or counselling that tackle these relationship dynamics. Moreover, the emotional toll of mismatched expectations is often overlooked. Parents and educators frequently miss early signs of anxiety, low self-esteem, or disengagement from academics. Tackling these challenges needs a well-rounded approach that includes cultural understanding, psychological insight, and community support to close the gap.

### 8. STRATEGIES FOR BRIDGING THE EXPECTATION GAP :

#### 8.1. Encouraging open dialogue:

Creating a safe space for conversations is crucial. When parents communicate expectations honestly and match them with their children's own objectives, their children are more likely to succeed in their higher education (Qadeer et. Al. (2025). [26]).

Parents and students should have regular, non-judgmental discussions about academic goals, personal dreams, and mental health. Listening without rushing to judge helps students feel appreciated and encourages them to share openly. It is most effective to match parental expectations with teenagers' goals when there is open and encouraging communication (Oscar David Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al. (2025). [27]).

### 8.2. Aligning goals through mutual understanding:

Parents can gain from understanding modern career options, evolving job market trends, and the need for various skills beyond academic grades. When both sides collaborate to set realistic, shared goals, it reduces tension and builds teamwork instead of division.

### 8.3. Involving third-party support systems:

Teachers, school counsellors, and career advisors can serve as mediators, helping convey concerns and expectations into actionable steps. Organized activities, like parent-student workshops, can change the atmosphere from conflict to cooperation.

### 8.4. Promoting balanced definitions of success:

Emphasizing achievements beyond grades, like problem-solving abilities, creativity, and resilience, can help both parents and students appreciate progress in broader ways. This change in viewpoint allows students to take pride in their unique strengths.

### 8.5. Supporting emotional resilience:

Parents should learn to notice signs of stress or burnout and respond with understanding rather than just discipline. Simple actions- such as recognizing effort, celebrating small achievements, and allowing time to rest- can greatly improve a student's emotional health while maintaining motivation. High parental expectations can help students feel good, but unattainable goals can unintentionally make them feel more anxious and less proud, which emphasizes the value of balanced support in fostering emotional resilience (Huiqin Dong, Xiaoran Wang & Min Zhou (2025). [28]). Teenagers' academic achievement is greatly impacted by their parents' educational expectations, underscoring the significance of encouraging parental participation in building psychological flexibility (Ahmad Noorlila et al. (2023). [29]).

Future studies must look at how parental expectations are changing in the digital age. Today's students might not entirely fit their parents' traditional ideas of academic success because of their growing exposure to international educational systems, online career options, and alternative career paths like entrepreneurship. Schools and legislators must actively engage parents in conversations about changing opportunities in order to bridge this generational divide and help them see beyond traditional high-status occupations.

## 9. CONCLUSION :

Parental expectations greatly influence a student's academic journey and emotional strength. When these expectations are realistic, understanding, and match a student's goals, they can motivate and build self-confidence. However, if expectations are strict, driven by comparisons, or ignore a child's unique abilities, they can lead to stress, anxiety, and a sense of disconnect within the family. This study shows that the solution is not to eliminate expectations, but to reshape them to support both achievement and well-being. A balanced approach is essential for promoting overall student well-being and achieving the best learning outcomes, as parental involvement- whether supportive or pressuring- significantly influences students' academic experiences (Vineeta Gupta and Pradeep Kumar Sharma (2025). [30]).

To achieve this balance, parents, students, and educators need to work together to improve communication, redefine success to include more than just grades, and create a culture that values effort as much as results. Schools can play a vital role by providing guidance, encouraging open conversations, and giving families the tools for emotional and academic support. Ultimately, fostering a healthier parent-student relationship is not just about getting better grades. It's about developing confident, self-aware young people who can make informed choices and succeed in the various challenges of life.

**Author contributions:** K. Nagaraj conceived the study, designed instruments, and led data collection and interpretation. Prathweesh U Shetty helped discuss results and contributed to the final manuscript.

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