

## PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS AND CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN AZAD JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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### Abstract

We conducted this research on parental expectations and children's academic performance in public schools of Mirpur, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The study aimed to examine the nature and extent of parental engagement in relation to their children's academic performance in schools. We used a qualitative research design and interviewed 13 parents through an interview guide, employing purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that cultural capital is central to understanding how parental involvement shapes children's academic performance. Families from different socio-economic backgrounds bring distinct forms of cultural capital into the schooling process, influencing not only how success is defined but also how it is pursued. For disadvantaged groups, education is often viewed as a tool for survival and mobility, whereas privileged families regard it as a space for creativity, independence, and self-fulfillment. Despite these differences, education across all contexts remains deeply tied to dignity, respect, and family pride. Parental involvement, whether through monitoring, encouragement, or collaboration with teachers—further highlights the role of cultural capital in reinforcing academic discipline and motivation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Parental aspirations play a central role in shaping children's academic journeys, as they often provide the foundation upon which children develop their own educational goals (Klyachko, Semionova, & Tokareva, 2019). Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) conducted a study on parental expectation and argued that parents tend to define academic success in diverse ways, ranging from high grades and examination performance to the attainment of prestigious professions. While Zhan (2006) conducted study with families those from lower socio-economic backgrounds asserted that education

is primarily viewed as a means of upward social mobility and economic stability, with expectations centered on securing stable employment and financial independence. In contrast, Jeynes (2007) and Davis-Kean (2005) stated that parents from more affluent or educated families may emphasize broader educational goals, such as critical thinking, creativity, or participation in extracurricular activities, alongside academic achievement. These differences, Jeynes (2005) noted, reflect not only economic capacities but also cultural values and social positions that influence how success is framed. While some

parents equate academic success with discipline (Bowen et al., 2012), hard work (Klyachko et al., 2019), and respectability (Neuenschwander et al., 2007), others associate it with competition and social recognition (Kaplan, Liu, & Kaplan, 2001). Such variations reveal that parental aspirations are not uniform but deeply embedded in socio-economic contexts (Englund et al., 2004), which in turn affect student' learning approach (Goldenberg et al., 2001), set their own goals, and navigate academic pressures within public school environments (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

Parental involvement is a significant factor influencing children's academic achievements. Fan and Chen (2001) described that the level and nature of support children receive at home directly shape their learning experiences. Fan (2001) argued that parents engage in their children's schooling in various ways, including helping with homework, attending parent-teacher meetings, monitoring progress, and maintaining regular communication with teachers. In public schools, Noguera (2003) stated, where resources may be limited, parental support often compensates for gaps in institutional guidance. Jeynes (2003) explored that some parents actively supervise daily study routines, set schedules, and provide additional learning materials, while others may adopt a more encouraging role by motivating children to stay focused and confident in their abilities. The impact of such involvement, Wilder (2023) viewed, however, is twofold: when parents provide encouragement and constructive feedback (Abdullah, Sultana, & Nisar, 2025; Hill et al., 2004), students often develop self-confidence (Lee & Bowen, 2006), responsibility, and improved performance (Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006). Conversely, Hill and Taylor (2004) excessive pressure, such as constant comparisons with peers or unrealistic expectations, may result in stress, anxiety, and disengagement from studies. Thus, Jeynes (2024) stated that balance between support and pressure becomes critical. Bouchouna (2024) explored that students who experience parental involvement as a form of guidance and encouragement are more likely to view education positively, whereas those who feel pressured may associate schooling with fear of failure.

Sengonul (2022) found that children's academic journeys are strongly influenced by how they perceive and internalize their parents' expectations. Kim (2022) added that many children view their parents' academic goals as guiding principles that shape their own ambitions, often striving to meet or exceed these expectations to gain approval and maintain family pride. For some, Wilder (2023) emphasized that parental expectations serve as a source of motivation, instilling discipline, confidence, and a sense of responsibility toward their studies. Students may feel inspired to set higher goals for themselves, seeing education as a pathway to success and social mobility. However, not all interpretations are positive. When expectations are perceived as overly demanding or unrealistic, children may experience stress, anxiety, and fear of failure (Abdullah, Sultana, & Nisar, 2025; Yang et al., 2023). In such cases, rather than motivating, parental pressure may create feelings of inadequacy or conflict, especially if children's personal interests or academic abilities differ from their parents' aspirations. Schmid and Garrels (2021) described that some children may struggle silently, torn between fulfilling their parents' hopes and pursuing their own passions, which can affect both performance and emotional well-being (Abdullah, Nisar, & Ahmed, 2025). Ultimately, Bradley, Ferguson, and Zimmer-Gembeck (2021) highlighted that children's perceptions reflect the dual role of parental expectations: while they can encourage achievement and resilience, they can also generate stress and conflict, depending on the nature and intensity of the expectations placed upon them (Abdullah, Nisar, & Malik, 2024).

The relationship between school and home plays a pivotal role in shaping children's academic achievements, as consistent communication between teachers and parents helps create a supportive learning environment (Ates, 2021; Abdullah, Matloob, & Malik, 2024). Effective collaboration allows parents to stay informed about their children's progress, strengths, and areas needing improvement, while also enabling teachers to understand the home circumstances that may affect performance (Abdullah & Ullah, 2022; Ma, Liu, & Li, 2022). In public schools, Yang and Wang (2022) revealed where academic challenges are often compounded by limited resources, regular parent-teacher meetings,

progress reports, and open dialogue become essential in aligning educational goals (Abdullah et al., 2024). When communication is strong, parents are better equipped to provide appropriate guidance at home, whether through encouragement, additional practice, or reinforcement of classroom lessons (Abdullah & Ullah, 2016; Xiong et al., 2021). However, Tus (2021) said that nature of parental involvement, whether supportive or pressurizing—directly influences children’s outcomes. Supportive parents, who offer encouragement and constructive feedback, often nurture motivation and resilience, leading to improved academic results (Abdullah & Nisar, 2024; Hill, 2022). On the other hand, Klapp, Klapp, and Gustafsson (2024) noted that excessive parental pressure, particularly when expectations exceed children’s capabilities, can lead to stress, disengagement, and declining performance. Thus, the interplay between school communication and parental responses is critical in determining actual achievements. A balanced approach, where teachers and parents work together with realistic yet aspirational goals, fosters both academic success and emotional well-being in children.

**Objective**

This study was guided by the following objective.

1. To examine the extent and nature of parental engagement in relation to their children’s academic performance in schools.
- 2.

**Theoretical framework**

Bourdieu’s (1984) Social Capital Theory offers an important perspective for explaining the relationship between parental expectations and children’s academic achievements in public schools. Social capital, in Bourdieu’s view, refers to the resources and advantages individuals access through their social networks, relationships, and group

No	Participants
1	Parent-1
2	Parent-2
3	Parent-3
4	Parent-4
5	Parent-5
6	Parent-6
7	Parent-7
8	Parent-8

memberships. Within the family context, parental expectations operate as a form of social capital that shapes children’s educational pathways. Parents with higher levels of education and stronger social connections often have the cultural and social resources to set ambitious academic goals, provide guidance, and navigate institutional structures such as schools and examinations. For example, they may regularly attend parent-teacher meetings, arrange extra tuition, or create a home environment that values learning. Conversely, parents from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds may hold equally high aspirations but lack the resources, networks, or familiarity with the education system to fully support their children’s progress. Despite this, their expectations still function as symbolic capital, motivating children to work harder and view education as a means of upward mobility. Thus, Bourdieu’s theory highlights that parental expectations are not only personal beliefs but are also embedded within larger structures of inequality, where access to social and cultural capital strongly mediates students’ academic outcomes.

**Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore parental expectations and children’s academic achievements in public schools. This study was conducted in public schools of Mirpur, AJK. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of parents’ perspectives, experiences, and interpretations within their social and cultural contexts. A total of thirteen parents, representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds, were selected through purposive sampling. This sampling strategy was adopted to ensure the inclusion of participants who could provide rich and relevant insights into the research problem.

<p>9 Parent-9          10 Parent-10          11 Parent-11          12 Parent-12          13 Parent-13</p>	<p>Data          were          collected          through          semi-structured interviews using an interview guide developed around key themes such as parental aspirations, involvement, perceptions of academic success, and school-home dynamics. The guide provided flexibility, enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences while allowing the researcher to probe for clarity and depth. Each interview was conducted in a setting convenient for the participants, recorded with prior consent, and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. To maintain ethical standards, strict confidentiality and</p>	<p>anonymity were observed; participants' names and personal identifiers were replaced with pseudonyms to protect their identities. For data analysis, thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns emerging from the interview transcripts. The process involved coding the data, categorizing similar codes, and developing overarching themes that reflected the experiences and expectations of parents. This method enabled the researcher to systematically capture both shared and divergent perspectives. By integrating participants' narratives into thematic categories, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how parental expectations shape students' academic performance in public schools.</p>
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**Key Findings**

We extracted the following key themes from the sub-themes and discussed the findings.

Table 1

Themes and sub-themes of the study.	
<p><b>Parental Aspirations and Educational Goals</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How parents define academic success for their children.</li> <li>• Differences in expectations across socio-economic backgrounds</li> </ul>
<p><b>Parental Involvement and Support</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ways parents engage in their children's schooling (homework help, meetings, monitoring).</li> <li>• Impact of encouragement or pressure on student performance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Parental Aspirations and Educational Goals</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How parents define academic success for their children.</li> <li>• Differences in expectations across socio-economic backgrounds.</li> </ul>
<p><b>School-Home Dynamics and Performance Outcomes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of communication between teachers and parents.</li> <li>• Influence of parental pressure or support on students' actual academic achievements.</li> </ul>

**Theme 1: Parental Aspirations and Educational Goals**

Parents' aspirations strongly influence how children understand and pursue education, as academic success is often defined through the lens of family values, economic position, and cultural expectations. Many parents in public schools equate success with

high grades, discipline, and entry into prestigious professions. One parent explained, “For me, a successful child is the one who becomes a doctor or an engineer, because only then can they secure a good life.” Such views reflect a strong emphasis on upward mobility and financial security, particularly among lower socio-economic groups, where education is often perceived as the primary tool to escape poverty. In contrast, parents from relatively better-off backgrounds may articulate broader goals that go beyond financial gain. As one respondent noted, “I want my child to be educated enough to think critically, to make decisions, not just to pass exams.” These differences highlight how socio-economic contexts shape aspirations: while disadvantaged families often focus on stability and status, privileged families may value creativity, self-fulfillment, or holistic development. Nonetheless, across backgrounds, parents consistently see education as a pathway to dignity and respect. This indicates that parental goals, though varied, play a central role in shaping children’s motivation, identity, and overall academic trajectories.

**Theme 2: Parental Involvement and Support**

Parental involvement significantly shapes children’s academic progress, as the way parents engage in schooling directly influences motivation and outcomes. Many parents take an active role by helping with homework, attending school meetings, or regularly monitoring performance. One parent emphasized, “I always check my son’s notebooks every evening and make sure he finishes his assignments on time.” Such practices provide structure and accountability, encouraging children to stay disciplined in their studies. Similarly, parents who attend meetings and communicate with teachers often build a stronger bridge between home and school. However, children interpret this involvement differently depending on whether it comes as encouragement or pressure. A parent shared, “When my children do something special, I feel pride and appreciate their small achievements.” In contrast, another admitted, “Sometimes the pressure is too much, they compare with their cousins, they feel heavy load.” These excerpts illustrate that while supportive involvement fosters confidence and improved performance, excessive pressure can lead to

stress, anxiety, and even disengagement. Therefore, the balance between encouragement and demands becomes crucial, with positive involvement serving as a motivating force, and unrealistic pressure undermining both academic success and emotional well-being.

**Theme 3: Parental Aspirations and Educational Goals**

Parental aspirations are deeply tied to how families conceptualize academic success, often reflecting both cultural values and socio-economic realities. For many parents, achievement is defined in terms of grades, discipline, and entry into respectable professions. One father expressed, “For us, good marks mean a bright future; without them, there is no chance to progress in life.” Such perspectives, particularly common among families from modest economic backgrounds, highlight education as a means of social mobility and financial security. Parents struggling with limited resources often place greater emphasis on their children excelling in school, as one participant stated, “We couldn’t study, but our children must become something better, maybe a teacher or an officer.” In contrast, parents from relatively stable or educated households frequently hold broader definitions of success that go beyond examination. A respondent explained, “I don’t only want my child to score marks, I want them to be confident, to think for themselves.” These differences show how socio-economic position shapes aspirations: for some, education is a survival tool, while for others, it is a space for self-fulfillment and growth. Despite these variations, a shared theme emerges—parents view education as the key to dignity, progress, and family pride.

**Theme 4: School-Home Dynamics and Performance Outcomes**

The interaction between school and home plays a critical role in shaping children’s academic outcomes, as communication between teachers and parents often determines the level of support children receive. In many cases, parents rely on teachers for updates on progress and areas of weakness. One participant explained, “When parents attend meetings regularly, we are guided on how to help their children at home, and the results are

visible in their performance.” Parents who respond with encouragement often reinforce learning, creating a positive cycle of achievement. Another shared, “Whenever the teacher tells me my daughter is doing well, I encourage her more, and she studies with greater interest.” However, when communication is limited, children may lack guidance and feel disconnected from their learning. Moreover, the way parents act on feedback significantly impacts outcomes. While constructive support fosters motivation, excessive pressure can undermine performance. A participant admitted, “After every report card, we scold children instead of helping them to improve, and that makes us afraid.” These accounts suggest that effective school-home collaboration, combined with balanced parental support, strengthens academic performance, while poor communication or harsh pressure risks discouraging students and lowering achievements.

### Discussion

Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of cultural capital helps explain how parents’ aspirations and socio-economic contexts shape children’s educational trajectories. Parents transmit cultural capital through values, expectations, and everyday practices, which in turn influence how children interpret academic success. Among lower socio-economic families, aspirations often reflect the pursuit of institutionalized cultural capital—good grades, discipline, and entry into prestigious professions such as medicine or engineering. For these parents, education is viewed as the primary vehicle for upward mobility and economic stability, especially when material resources are limited. The statement, “For me, a successful child is the one who becomes a doctor or an engineer,” reflects how disadvantaged families use education as a strategy to accumulate status and secure financial security. In contrast, families with more economic and cultural resources emphasize embodied cultural capital, valuing qualities such as confidence, critical thinking, and creativity. Their aspirations extend beyond exams to holistic development and self-fulfillment, showing that privilege affords the ability to define success in broader terms. Despite these differences, education is universally framed as a pathway to dignity and respect, illustrating how cultural capital operates

differently across class positions while shaping similar desires for social recognition.

Parental involvement further demonstrates how cultural capital is enacted in daily life. Practices such as checking homework, monitoring progress, and engaging with teachers provide children with structured guidance and a sense of accountability, reinforcing school values within the home. This aligns with Bourdieu’s view that families actively reproduce cultural capital by supporting children in navigating educational demands. However, the effects of involvement vary depending on whether it is delivered as encouragement or pressure. Positive reinforcement fosters motivation and confidence, while excessive comparison or scolding generates stress and disengagement. For example, students who receive appreciation for small achievements interpret involvement as supportive, whereas those subjected to constant pressure perceive it as overwhelming. This dynamic reveals how parental engagement can either enhance or hinder the accumulation of cultural capital. Moreover, school-home collaboration strengthens the transmission of educational norms when teachers and parents work together. In this sense, cultural capital is not only embodied in parental aspirations but also reproduced through everyday interactions, shaping children’s academic identities, motivation, and overall well-being.

### Conclusion

The findings illustrate that how parental aspirations and involvement shape children’s educational outcomes. Families from different socio-economic backgrounds bring distinct forms of cultural capital into the schooling process, influencing not only how success is defined but also how it is pursued. For disadvantaged groups, education is often seen as a tool for survival and mobility, while privileged families can frame it as a space for creativity, independence, and self-fulfillment. Yet, across all contexts, education remains deeply tied to dignity, respect, and family pride. Parental involvement, whether through monitoring, encouragement, or collaboration with teachers—further reflects the role of cultural capital in reinforcing academic discipline and motivation. However, the balance between encouragement and pressure is crucial, as excessive

demands may erode well-being. Overall, these findings highlight education as a site where cultural capital is transmitted, negotiated, and reproduced within family-school dynamics.

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