

Shaping educational expectations: the perspectives of 13 year olds and their parents

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Introduction

- Educational expectations and their influence on actual outcomes play a very significant role in the intergenerational reproduction of social inequality
- Much research has focused on young people towards the end of their schooling career but often decisions about educational pathways (tracks, subjects and levels) are taken earlier when plans have not fully crystallised
- This paper draws on GUI child cohort survey data to focus on the phase of transition to second-level education and the extent to which parental and young people's expectations are shaped by similar factors



Research literature

- Large body of research on parental influences on the educational intentions and pathways of their children
- Dates back to status attainment theory; evidence from different contexts and over time
- Direction of research:
 - Increasing recognition of role of school factors
 - Attention to educational (and occupational) aspirations among younger age groups
- Role of congruence between child and parental expectations in shaping academic outcomes

Research questions

1. What aspects of social background influence parental and young people's educational expectations at 13?
2. To what extent do primary and second-level school experiences make a difference, taking account of social background?
3. Do similar factors shape parental and young people's expectations? What factors account for any mismatch?

Data

- Waves 1 and 2 (9 and 13 years old) of the child cohort of GUI
- Analyses exclude those not in second-level education
- Educational expectations: ‘How far do you expect [your child] to go in your [his/her] education?’; collected from parents at 9 and 13 years, young person at 13 years of age
- More differentiated categories for parents so both sets of responses are dichotomised into higher (tertiary) education v. lower expectations

Social background factors

- Gender
- Social class (dominance; CSO measure – 4 categories, including inactive)
- Mother's educational level
- Household income (equivalised; quintiles)
- Lone parent v. two parent family
- Immigrant family
- Having a special educational need (SEN)/disability

School characteristics

- Primary school:
 - Social mix (disadvantaged population) – 4 categories based on DEIS status
- Second-level school:
 - Social mix (DEIS status) – binary
 - Fee-paying (private)
 - Gender mix

Primary school experiences

- Drumcondra reading and maths test scores at 9
- Attitudes to reading, maths and Irish at 9
- Academic self-image at 9 (Piers-Harris)
- Socio-emotional difficulties (SDQ), as reported by mother



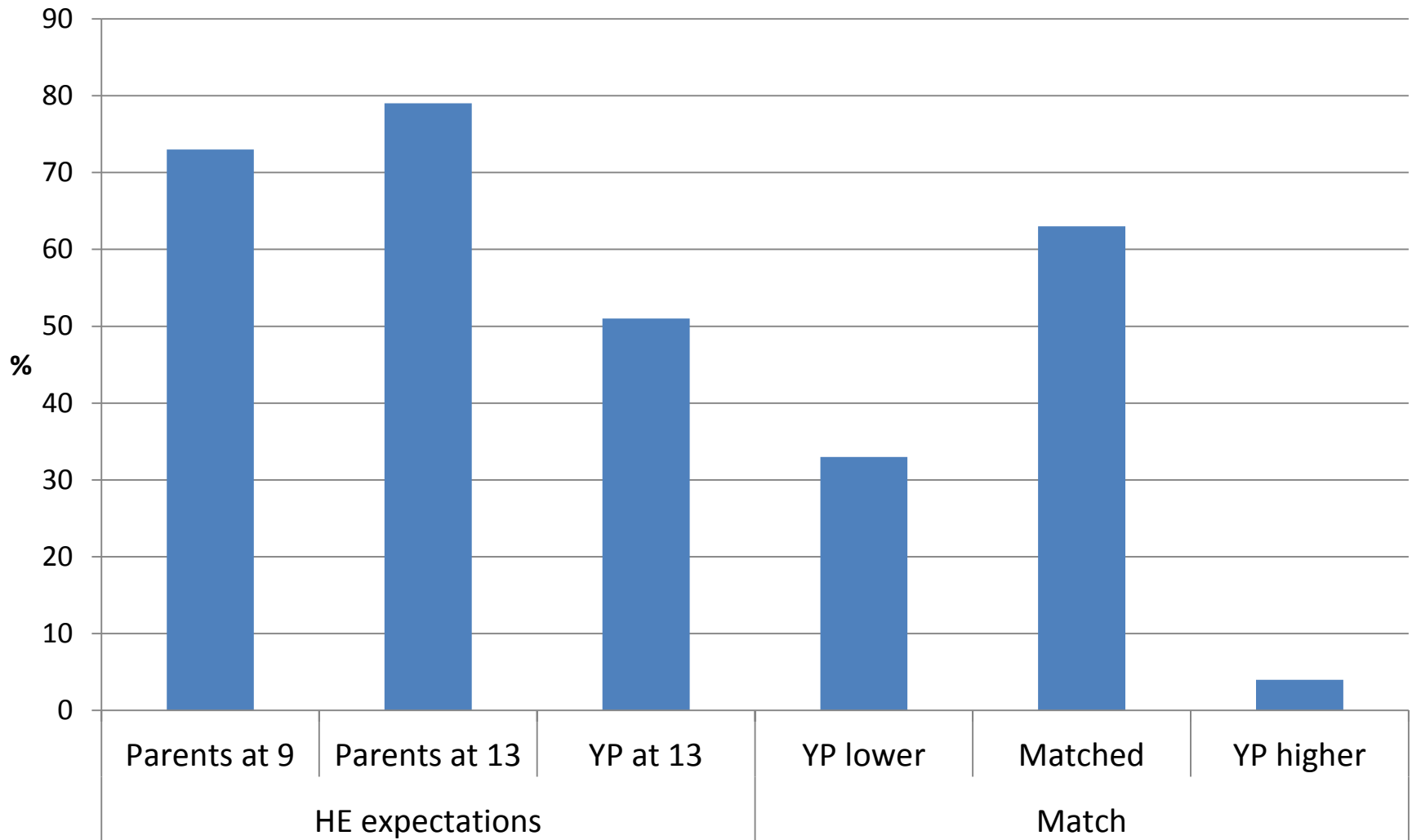
Second-level school experiences

- Transition difficulties (parental report)
- Ability group of class (parental report)
- Attitudes to English, Irish and Maths: perceived difficulty and interest
- Year group (1st or 2nd year)
- Quality of interaction with teachers: positive; negative

Methodology

- Sample was clustered by primary school
- Active school choice means that primary and second-level schools do not map neatly onto one another
- So use cross-classified multilevel models to estimate the simultaneous effects of the primary and second-level schools attended

Descriptive results





Model results: social background

	Young person	Parent
Female	++	+++
Social class	++	+++
Mother's education	+++	+++
Household income	++	+++
Lone parent family	NS	-
Migrant parent(s)	NS	(+)
SEN	---	---

- Parental expectations are more strongly structured by social background, gender and SEN than those of young people



Model results: primary school experiences

	Young person	Parent
DEIS status	NS	(-)
Reading scores at 9	+++	+++
Maths scores at 9	+++	+++
Liking Maths	+++	+
Liking reading	NS	NS
Liking Irish	+	NS
Academic self-image (at 9)	++	NS
Socio-emotional difficulties	--	---
Parental exps (at 9)	+++	+++



Model results: second-level school factors

	Young person	Parent
DEIS status	NS	NS
Fee-paying	NS	+
Gender mix	NS	NS
Ability group of class	++ (higher)	+++
2 nd year	NS	--



Model results: second-level school experiences

	Young person	Parent
Positive interaction with teachers	+++	NS
Negative interaction with teachers	---	--
Transition difficulties	---	---
Difficulty of English	(-)	NS
Interest in English	(+)	NS
Difficulty of Irish	-	NS
Interest in Irish	NS	NS
Difficulty of Maths	--	--
Interest in Maths	+	NS

School effects

- Young people's expectations vary significantly by the primary and second-level school they attend
- Parental expectations vary by second-level school but this is because of higher expectations among those who send their children to fee-paying schools



Model results: matching expectations

- Matching is higher among:
 - Children of graduate mothers
 - Those with higher reading and maths scores at age 9
 - Those who find second-level Maths and Irish ‘not difficult’
- Young people have lower expectations where:
 - They have more negative and less positive interaction with second-level teachers
- Young people have higher expectations where:
 - They have a SEN
 - They are in 2nd year

Conclusions (1)

- Educational plans have not fully crystallised at this transition phase: young people hold lower expectations than their parents and than actual HE transition rates
- But young people's intentions are socially structured and influenced by school experiences at primary and second-level: foundational skills, subject engagement, transition experience and teacher interaction

Conclusions (2)

- Parental expectations are even more strongly socially structured than those of their children
- Parents rely on a number of signals from the school in shaping their views (achievement, attitudes to Maths, ability group, teacher reprimands)
- Mismatch between parental and teenager expectations heightens importance of middle-class parents as a source of advice in helping make educational choices that impact on their pathways into upper secondary education (senior cycle) and beyond