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

Emer Smyth
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
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?
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

% HE expectations

Parents at 9 | Parents at 13 | YP at 13 | YP lower | Matched Match | YP higher

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90
Parental expectations are more strongly structured by social background, gender and SEN than those of young people.
### Model results: primary school experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Young person</th>
<th>Parent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEIS status</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading scores at 9</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths scores at 9</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+++</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liking Maths</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liking reading</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>NS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liking Irish</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic self-image (at 9)</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-emotional difficulties</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental exps (at 9)</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+++</td>
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## Model results: second-level school factors

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<tr>
<td>Fee-paying</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender mix</td>
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<td>NS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability group of class</td>
<td>++ (higher)</td>
<td>+++</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>NS</td>
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### Model results: second-level school experiences

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Young person</th>
<th>Parent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive interaction with teachers</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative interaction with teachers</td>
<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transition difficulties</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty of English</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in English</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty of Irish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Irish</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty of Maths</td>
<td>--</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Maths</td>
<td>+</td>
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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
• 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
• 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