

Parents as a Determinant for Students' Attitudes and Intentions toward Higher Education

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Abstract : Attaining a higher level of education has become an increasingly important prerequisite for people's economic and social independence and mobility. Young people who do not pursue higher education are not as attractive as potential employees in the modern work environment. Although completing a higher education degree is not a guarantee for getting a job, it substantially increases the chances for employment and, consequently, the chances for a better life. Despite this, it's a fact that in several regions in Sweden, fewer students are choosing to engage in higher education. Similar trends have been emphasized in, for instance, the US where high dropout patterns among young people have been noted. This is a threat to future employment and industry development in these regions because the future employment base for society is dependent upon students' willingness to invest in higher education. Much of prior studies have focused on the role of parents' involvement in their children's school work and the positive influence parents involvement have on their children's school performance. Parental influence on education in general has been a topic of interest among those concerned with optimal developmental and educational outcomes for children and youth in pre-, secondary- and high school. Across a range of studies, there has emerged a strong conclusion that parental influence on child and youths education generally benefits children's and youths learning and school success. Arguably then, we could expect that parents influence on whether or not to pursue a higher education would be of importance to understand young people's choice to engage in higher education. Accordingly, understanding what drives students' intentions to pursue higher education is an essential component of motivating students to aspire to make the most of their potential in their future work life. Drawing on the theory of planned behavior, this study examines the role of parents influence on students' attitudes about whether higher education can be beneficial to their future work life. We used a qualitative approach by collecting interview data from 18 high school students in Sweden to capture students' cognitive and motivational mechanisms (attitudes) to influence intentions to engage in higher education. We found that parents may positively or negatively influence students' attitudes and subsequently a student's intention to pursue higher education. Accordingly, our results show that parents' own attitudes and expectations on their children are keys for influencing students' attitudes and intentions for higher education. Further, our finding illuminates the mechanisms that drive students in one direction or the other. As such, our findings show that the same categories of arguments are used for driving students' attitudes and intentions in two opposite directions, namely; financial arguments and work life benefits arguments. Our results contribute to existing literature by showing that parents do affect young people's intentions to engage in higher studies. The findings contribute to the theory of planned behavior and have implications for the literature on higher education and educational psychology and also provide guidance on how to inform students about facts of higher studies in school.

Keywords : higher studies, intentions, parents influence, theory of planned behavior

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