

## **FACTORS INFLUENCING EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATION OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN WUNTHO TOWNSHIP**

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### **Abstract**

This study aimed to explore some factors affecting on Educational Aspiration of High School Students in Wuntho Township. In this study, as the factors of Educational Aspiration, gender, grade, previous achievement, parents' education, parents' occupation, parents' expectation, school engagement, school motivation and school environment were investigated. A total of 613 high school students (263 males and 350 females) selected from four schools in Wuntho Township participated in this study. Educational Aspiration Scale developed by Prasad and Sherly (2007) was used to measure level of educational aspiration. To measure the students' engagement in school, school motivation and school environment of high school students, Students' Engagement in School developed by Veiga (2013), the Inventory of School Motivation (ISM) developed by McInerney et al. (1997) and the School Environment Inventory (SEI) developed by Mishra (1983) were used respectively. The data were analyzed by the Regression Analysis. Among the student-related factors, gender was the only significant predictor of educational aspiration. Among the parent-related factors, parents' occupation and parents' expectation were found as the significant predictors of educational aspiration. Lastly, school engagement, motivation and school environment were found as the positive significant school-related factors of Educational Aspiration.

**Keywords:** Educational Aspiration, School Engagement, Motivation, School Environment

### **Introduction**

Nowadays, education has been recognized as a major instrument which societies can use to direct the process of change and development towards desired goals. An educated person is expected to be more rational in his thinking and be able to fulfill the political, economic, and cultural functions in a better way. And the concern of education has shifted from economic development to human development by emphasizing the development of people's capabilities in terms of improved health, knowledge, and skills, besides its contribution towards the growth of income. Schooling has a close link with the development of these capabilities. Investment in education has been emphasized a great deal in bringing about meaningful development in any country (Elizabeth, 2000). It is very clear how education is important for a nation and what an educated person is capable of.

Therefore, education becomes one of the top priorities in our country, For example, our country's enrollment rate of students aged 5+ in Grade 1 is 98.47% in 2011-2012 (Education for All: Access to and Quality of Education in Myanmar) and the percentage is increasing year by year. Literacy rate is over 89.5% (Census Report, 2014).The grade promotion rate of Myanmar has been calculated as 93.3 percent (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2009 – 2010).

But, data extracted from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey conducted in 2009-10 (UNICEF, 2011,cited in Hayden, 2013) showed that the main loss of students occur during the first two years of primary school, mainly for reasons of affordability and access. The data also show that by the end of the primary school years, only about 70% of students who commenced in primary school five years earlier remain enrolled, and that the transition from primary to secondary school brings about a further loss of students. By grade 6, only about 50% of students

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who commenced in primary school six years earlier remain enrolled. The loss continues, and by grade 10 only 23% of students who commenced in primary school 10 years earlier remain enrolled. Between grade 10 and grade 11, there is a further significant loss, and by the final year of secondary school only 10% of the students who commenced in primary school 11 years earlier remain enrolled (UNICEF, 2011, cited in Hayden, 2013).

According to “the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Thematic report on education”, less than 7 per cent of the population 25 years of age and over reported ‘graduate’ as their highest level of education (7.6 per cent of women and 6.1 per cent of men) and only 0.6 per cent of women and 0.3 per cent of men had completed a level of education higher than graduate (postgraduate diploma, master’s degree or PhD) as a consequence of high dropout rate. This amount is terribly low for a nation and our country needs much more educated persons.

By taking a look at that student enrollment rate, literacy rate, the grade promotion rate and the ratio of graduated persons of Myanmar, it can obviously be seen that there is the problem with the educational aspiration of our people who have little interest in higher education. High rate of literacy alone cannot drive our country into a higher level. We have to train highly educated persons as many as we can. Most of Myanmar people always say “I can read and write, and that’s enough.” They never try for higher education. They have no interest in higher education. On the other hand, they are lack of educational aspiration for higher education. That is why secondary education is marked by high rates of student dropout and failure to graduate, leaving the majority of youth without access to most forms of technical and vocational education training (TVET) or higher education according to “Improving Post-Primary Education Outcomes in Myanmar, 2016”.

Aspiration means a strong desire to achieve something high or great. According to Sirin, Diemer, Jackson and Howell (2004, cited in Kaur, 2012), “Aspirations have been defined as the educational and vocational dreams that students have for the future”. Educational aspiration is an important variable in predicting academic achievement and may be seen as an element in academic achievement motivation, focusing as they do on the desire for success and the development of goals to succeed in particular educational fields or to gain a particular degree.

Like the researcher said earlier, high education which can be achieved by high educational aspiration is needed for a nation, especially developing nations. In order to elevate the educational aspiration, firstly, we have to access the level of educational aspiration of our students. So we have to try to know how the secondary school students are planning about their future. Is graduating part of their plan? Do they have higher educational aspiration? How do we create high educational aspiration to them? Which factors affecting them? For example, family members emerged as influential individuals in students’ academic lives (Bregman, 2010 ) and more engaged students will present a lower probability of leaving school and, consequently, will be more likely to have higher school aspirations (Veiga et al, 2013). According to these papers, these factors seem influence on educational aspiration.

In this study, the researchers will examine the effect of three groups of factors such as student-related factors, parent-related factors and school-related factors on Educational Aspiration of High School Students. First, students-related factors include gender, grade and achievement (GPA). College Choice Model (Hossler & Stage, 1992, cited in Suslu, 2014) is a well-accepted and cited theoretical model framework for the college aspiration. Demographic characteristics, achievement and gender are the key variables for this model. Hossler and Stage

(1992, cited in Suslu, 2014) founded a positive significant relationship between school activities, grades and students' aspirations.

Second, parents-related factors include parents' education, occupation and expectation. As a concept in sociology, Status Attainment Model (Blau & Daucan, 1967, Sewell et al., 1969, cited in Suslu, 2014) focuses on individual's position in society, and educational and occupational attainments are regarded as the outcomes of this model. Family variables such as parents' occupation, education and income, along with children's academic ability and achievement, influence educational outcomes through their effects on parental and peer influences and on shaping educational aspirations (Marshall, 1998, cited in Suslu, 2014). Hossler and Stage (1992, cited in Suslu, 2014) founded that parents' expectations had the strongest relationship to students' educational aspiration.

Third, school-related factors include school motivation, school engagement and school environment. In achievement goal theory, goals are cognitive representations of the purposes students adopt for their learning in achievement situations (Pintrich, Marx & Boyle, 1993, cited in Yeung & McInerney, 2005). Apart from academic achievement, importance outcomes as a function of achievement goals may include education and career aspirations (Yeung & McInerney, 2005). According to the Developmental Contextual Model of Career Development (Vondracek, Lerner & Schulenberg, 1986, cited in Suslu, 2014), school engagement is variable that influences on educational aspiration of students. The school environment is an important factor which helps in shaping the aspiration of the students (Bora, 2016).

For those reasons, this study aims to study factors affecting on educational aspiration of high school students, especially factors of parents' education, occupation etc. By doing this study, the researcher can expect that this study will provide knowledge about the factors affecting on Educational Aspiration of high school students. Then, this knowledge will help in finding the ways that will promote the Educational Aspiration.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The main aim of this study was to explore some factors affecting on Educational Aspiration of High School Students. The specific objectives were:

- (1) To investigate level of Educational Aspiration of High School Students,
- (2) To investigate whether some student-related factors (gender, grade and previous academic achievement) can predict Educational Aspiration of High School Students or not,
- (3) To investigate whether some parent-related factors (education, occupation and expectation) can predict Educational Aspiration of High School Students or not, and
- (4) To investigate whether some school-related factors (school motivation, school engagement and school environment) can predict Educational Aspiration of High School Students or not.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

**Educational Aspiration:** Educational aspiration is a student's perception of his/her intention to follow further education after high school (Suslu, 2007).

**School Motivation:** School motivation or achievement motivation is multidimensional, forming eight sub categories: mastery (task, effort), performance (competition, social power), social (affiliation, social concern), and extrinsic (praise, token rewards) (Yeung & McInerney, 2005).

**Students' Engagement in School:** Students' engagement means the experience of centripetal connection of the student to the school in specific dimensions- cognitive, affective, behavioral and personal agency (Veiga, Robu, Moura, Goulao, & Galvao, 2013).

**School environment:** School environment implies the psycho-social climate of schools as perceived by the students. It is the quality and quantity of the cognitive, emotional and social support that has been available to the students during their school life in terms of teacher-pupil interactions (Bora, 2016).

## **Materials and Method**

### **Research Design**

The design adopted in this study was quantitative research. Descriptive survey method was used in this study.

### **Sampling**

By using simple random sampling technique, the schools and students were selected from Wuntho Township, Sagaing Region. Two high schools and two high schools (branch) were chosen, and the students from these schools were randomly selected to participate in this study. A sample of 613 students (263 male (42.9%) and 350 female (57.1%)) participated in this study.

### **Instrumentation**

The collected data for this study included demographic factors, educational aspiration, school engagement, school motivation and school environment. Students' demographic factors include gender, grade, previous achievement, parents' education, parents' occupation, parents' expectation, subject combination and school location. Where, gender was coded as 1=male, 2=female, grade was coded as 1=Grade 10, 2=Grade 11 and previous achievement was coded as 1=D, 2=C, 3=B, 4=A. Parents' education was coded as 1=Primary, 2=Middle, 3=High, 4=Bachelor, 5=Post Graduate, parents' occupation was coded as 1=unskilled manual worker, 2=skilled manual worker, 3=low level non-manual, 4=medium level non-manual, 5=high level non-manual) and parents' expectation was coded as 1=High School, 2=College, 3=Bachelor, 4=Master, 5=Ph.D. The Educational Aspiration Scale (EAS) developed by Prasad and Sherlay(2007) was used to investigate the levels of educational aspiration of high school students. The Students' engagement in School (SES-4DS) developed by Veiga (2013) was used to investigate students' engagement in school. The Inventory of School Motivation (ISM) developed by McInerney et al. (1997) was used to investigate school motivation. The School Environment Inventory (SEI) developed by Mishra (1983) was used to examine the perception on school environment. All items in all questionnaires can be answered with five point likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Very Agree and Strongly Agree).

After preparing research instruments, the expert review was conducted for content validity with the help of seven experts from Department of Educational Psychology. Pilot study was conducted with a sample of 50 students from Swan Chat Basic Education High School (Branch), Sagaing Township to test the internal consistency of the instruments.

**Questionnaire for Educational Aspiration:** The Educational Aspiration Scale developed by Prasad and Sherly (2007) included 30 items. The internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) for Educational Aspiration Scale was 0.922.

**Questionnaire for School Engagement:** Students' Engagement in School (SES-4DS) is a 20-items measure of school engagement developed by Veiga et al. (2013). There were 4 sub-scales such as cognitive, affective, behavioral and personal agency. The internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) for school engagement questionnaire was 0.706.

**Questionnaire for School Motivation:** The Inventory of School Motivation (ISM) developed by McInerney et al. (1997) included 15 items. There were 4 sub-scales such as task, effort, competition and praise. The internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) for school motivation was 0.894.

**Questionnaire for School Environment:** The School Environment Inventory (SEI) developed by Mishra (1983) included 32 items. There were 6 sub-scales such as creative stimulation, cognitive encouragement, acceptance, permissiveness, rejection and control. The internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) for school environment was 0.865.

### Findings

The participants' level of educational aspiration was investigated by the use of Educational Aspiration Scale.

**Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Educational Aspiration of High School Students**

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Educational Aspiration	613	51	150	112.04	16.84

As shown in Table 1, the resulted mean value (112.04) was greater than the theoretical mean value (90). Therefore, students' level of educational aspiration was satisfactorily good.

### Effect of Student-related Variables (Gender, Grade and Previous Achievement) on Educational Aspiration of High School Students

A simultaneous multiple regression was conducted to predict educational aspiration from a combination of student-related factors (gender, grade and previous achievement).

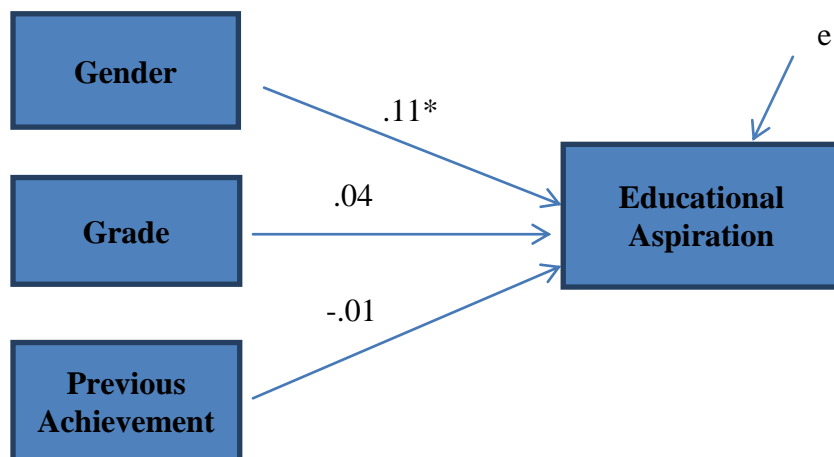
**Table 2 Simultaneous Multiple Regression Analysis Summary for Gender, Grade and Previous Achievement Predicting Educational Aspiration**

Variables	B	SEB	$\beta$
Gender	3.58	1.40	.11*
Grade	1.38	1.46	.04
Previous Achievement	-.21	.66	-.01
Constant	104.95	3.57	

Note:  $R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(3,609) = 2.76$ ,  $p < .05$

\* $p < .05$

According to the result, a significant regression equation was found ( $F(3,609) = 2.76$ ,  $p < .05$ ) with an  $R^2$  of 0.01. This indicates that nearly 1% of the variance in educational aspiration was explained by the model. Since the percent explained by the model is very low, the regression equation will not be presented. The results showed that only gender significantly predicted educational aspiration when all three variables were included. It can be predicted that female students' educational aspiration exceeded 3.58 units than males' educational aspiration.



**Figure 1** Multiple Regression Model for Predicting Educational Aspiration from Student-related Factors

Path Values are Standardized Regression Coefficients.  $*p < .05$

### Effect of Parent-related Variables (Parents' education, Parents' occupation and Parents' expectation) on Educational Aspiration of High School Students

A simultaneous multiple regression was conducted to predict educational aspiration from the combination of parent-related factors (parents' education, parents' occupation and parents' expectation). The result was presented in Table 3.

**Table 3** Simultaneous Multiple Regression Analysis Summary for Parents' Education, Parents' Occupation and Parents' Expectation Predicting Educational Aspiration

Variables	B	SEB	$\beta$
Father's Education	1.131	1.05	.055
Mother's Education	.114	1.10	.005
Father's Occupation	-1.124	.54	-.085*
Mother's Occupation	-1.102	.50	-.091*
Parents' Expectation	.861	.19	.177***
Constant	105.721	2.58	

Note :  $R^2 = .043$ ,  $F(5,607) = 5.418$ ,  $p < .001$

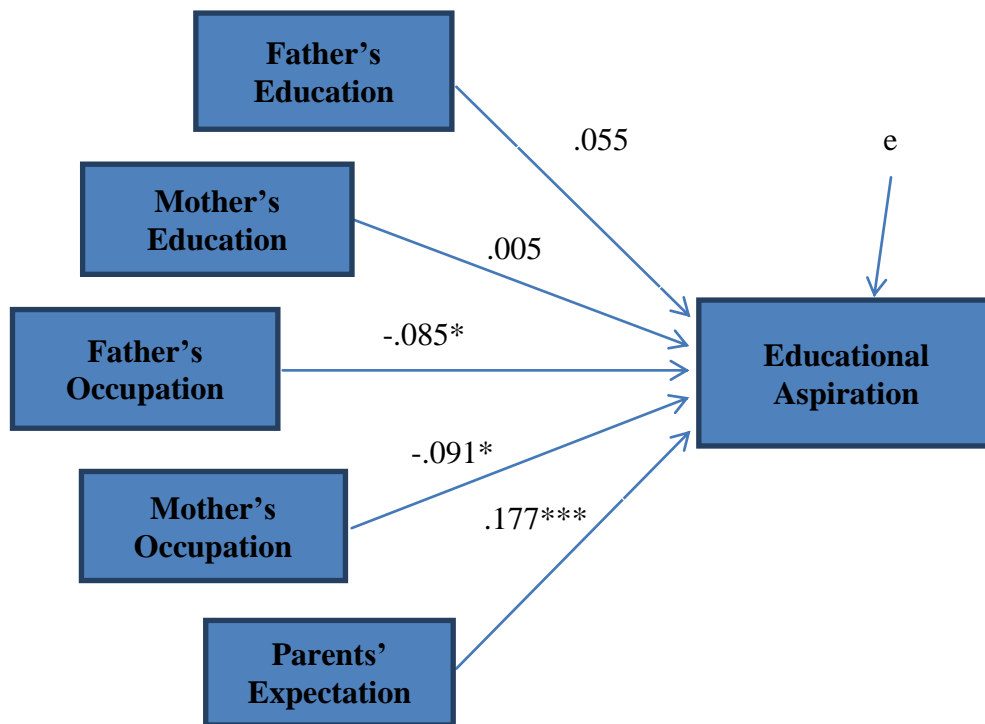
\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

According to the result, a significant regression equation was found ( $F(5,607) = 5.418$ ,  $p < .001$ ) with an  $R^2$  of 0.043. The results showed that father's occupation, mother's occupation and parents' expectation significantly predicted educational aspiration when all these variables

were included. This indicates that nearly 4.3% of the variance in educational aspiration of students was explained by the model. The model can be defined by the following equation:

$$\text{Educational Aspiration} = 1.131 \text{ Father's Education} + 0.114 \text{ Mother's Education} - 1.124 \text{ Father's Occupation} - 1.102 \text{ Mother's Occupation} + 0.861 \text{ Parents' Expectation} + 105.721$$

It can be predicted that educational aspiration of high school students will increase 1.131 units for the increase in one level of father's education, will increase 0.114 units for the increase in one level of mother's education, will decrease 1.124 units for the increase in one level of father's occupation, will decrease 1.102 units for the increase in one level of mother's occupation, and will increase 0.861 units for the increase in one level of parents' expectation.



**Figure 2** Multiple Regression Model for Predicting Educational Aspiration from Parent-related Factors  
 Path Values are Standardized Regression Coefficients. \*p<.05

**Effect of School-related Variables (School Motivation, School Engagement and School Environment) on Educational Aspiration of High School Students**

A simultaneous multiple regression was conducted to predict educational aspiration from the combination of school-related factors.

**Table 4 Simultaneous Multiple Regression Analysis Summary for School Motivation, School Engagement and School Environment Predicting Educational Aspiration**

Variables	B	SEB	β
School Motivation	.53	.06	.33***
School Engagement	.46	.08	.23***
School Environment	.23	.04	.23***
Constant	26.09	4.82	

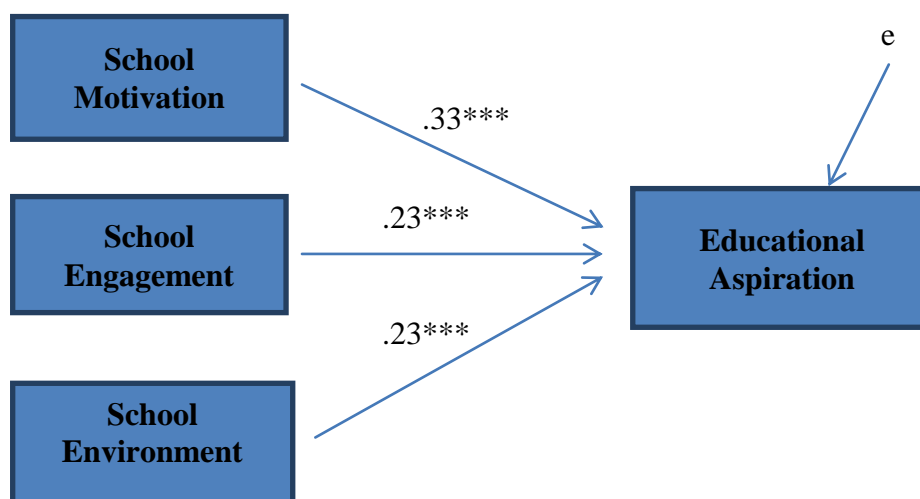
Note :  $R^2 = .41$ ,  $F(3,609) = 141.74$ ,  $p < .001$

\*\*\* $p < .001$

According to the result, a significant regression was found ( $F(3,609) = 141.74, p < .001$ ) with an  $R^2$  of 0.41. The results showed that all of these three variables significantly predicted educational aspiration when all these variables were included. This indicates that nearly 41% of the variance in educational aspiration was explained by the model. The model can be defined by the following equation:

$$\text{Educational Aspiration} = 0.53 \text{ School Motivation} + 0.46 \text{ School Engagement} + 0.23 \text{ School Environment} + 26.09$$

It can be predicted that educational aspiration of high school students will increase 0.53 units for the increase in one unit of school motivation, 0.46 units for the increase in one unit of school engagement and 0.23 units for the increase in one unit of school environment.



**Figure 4.4** Multiple Regression Model for Predicting Educational Aspiration from School-related Factors

Path Values are Standardized Regression Coefficients. \*\*\* $p < .001$

### Discussion and Conclusions

As the result of regression analysis, although gender significantly predicted educational aspiration of high school students, the remaining two variables (grade and achievement) cannot predict it. Therefore, there was significant difference in educational aspiration of high school students by gender. Female students had higher educational aspiration than males.

Women are exposed to higher normative restrictions than men and for this reason have higher standards for good behavior (Gottfredson & Hirshi, 1990, cited in Rampino & Taylor, 2013). According to Fox (1977, cited in Rampino & Taylor, 2013) even at very young ages girls are encouraged to show more passive and controlled conducts than boys in order to comply with what he refers to as the “nice girl” construct. Women and girls internalize this construct to the point where their aspirations coincide with the control level the society is willing to exert on them. Hence the fact that girls are more likely than boys to report that doing well at school means a great deal, reflects the fact that they have been brought up to display more responsible and socially acceptable behaviors. This implies that greater educational expectations among girls are fostered by higher parental control for daughters (Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2011, cited in Rampino & Taylor, 2013). Under tighter parental and social supervision girls develop more responsible



educational attitudes which can foster better educational attainments and ultimately higher educational aspirations. Therefore, it may be that female students had higher education aspirations than male students in this study.

As the result of second regression analysis, although parents' occupation and parents' expectation significantly predicted educational aspiration of high school students, the remaining variable, parents' education, cannot predict it. Therefore, there was no significant difference in educational aspiration of high school students by parents' education.

Parents who did not attend university may be eager for their children to enjoy higher education opportunities that they themselves did not have (Howard, Kotsiras, Dixon, Elasmir, Hall, Harkness & Herbert, 2009). The primary contributions of parents were their motivation, good intentions and encouragement (Wimberly & Noeth, 2004, cited in Frigo et al., 2007). Regardless of socioeconomic status (income, education, occupation), most parents want their children to do well in life (Frigo et al., 2007). Discrepancy in parents' educational achievements is far less important in motivating children to high-level aspiration and achievement than is consistently high educational achievement of both parents (Bregman, 2010). Therefore, it may be that there was no difference in educational aspiration among students with different parents' education levels in this study.

There was a significant difference in educational aspiration of high school students by parents' occupation. Students with lower level of parents' occupation had higher level of educational aspiration than those with higher level of parents' occupation.

Children do not want to remain as poor as their parents (Tafere, 2014). For example, the rural parents did not want their children to be farmers like them. They wanted their children to have a different livelihood (Tafere, 2014). For poor people, aspirations are also motivators to change their current state of life, rather than remaining immersed in it. According to Tafere (2014), despite living in poverty, poor families and their children were trying their best to bring success to children's education over the years. Aspirations are more influenced by perceived opportunities than current situation (St Clair & Benjamin, 2011, cited in Tafere, 2014). Therefore, parents' occupation is a significant negative predictor of Educational Aspiration of high school students.

There was significant difference in educational aspiration of high school students by parents' expectation. Moreover, parents' expectation was positively correlated with educational aspiration of high school students. Students' with higher parents' expectation had higher educational aspiration than students' with lower parents' expectation.

Parents with high expectation on children's education provide facilities and learning resources, help the child to develop goals and motivate, encourage success in learning through reward, follow up with the child's progress. Moreover, they help in solving problems, enrich their children's experiences through social and environmental situations and instill a love of learning from the earliest age (Hassan, 2004, cited in Graman & Ahmad, 2016). School involvement of parents is positively related to children's educational aspirations (Jung & Zhang, 2016). Aspirations of parents are one of the main predictors of academic achievement and social development of children, especially in decision making on the future education (Graman & Ahmad, 2016). Therefore, parents' expectation is a significant positive predictor of Educational Aspiration of high school students.

Finally, all of the three variables (school motivation, school engagement and school environment) significantly predicted educational aspiration of high school students when all these variables were included.

Motivation includes achievement goals. Students' achievement goals guide and direct their cognition, behavior, and affect as they engage in academic tasks (Pintrich, Marx & Boyle, 1993, cited in Yeung & McInerney, 2005). Achievement goals are presumed to be linked to achievement outcomes (Yeung & McInerney, 2005). Students' academic behavior and achievement are thought to be closely associated with their motivation (Ames, 1992, Dweck, 1989, Lepper & Hodell, 1989, Marsh & Yeung, 1997, 1997, Pintrich & Maehr, 1995, Wentzel, 1998, cited in Yeung & McInerney, 2005). Therefore, it may be that school motivation is a significant predictor of Educational Aspiration.

One of the aims of the curriculum in education is to maximize student engagement (Hargreaves, 2005, cited in Khodaeifaal, 2017). Involvement, engagement, and participation in the process of schooling seem to influence students to achieve successful school completion and bring them "a sense of belongingness and commitment" (Christenson, Sinclair, Lahr & Godber, 2001, Shernoff et al., 2003, cited in Khodaeifaal, 2017). The attitudes toward school appear to be the main condition for the development of educational aspirations (Geckova, Tavel, Van Dijk, Abel & Reijneveld, 2010, cited in Khodaeifaal, 2017). Therefore, it may be that school engagement is a significant predictor of Educational Aspiration.

School environment has significant role in influencing and shaping the behavior and thoughts of a child especially in the development of aspiration and attitude (Bashir & Kaur, 2017). School environment plays a crucial role in developing educational aspiration of students by participating various school activities like seminars, workshops, debates and by other aspects (Bashir & Kaur, 2017). According to Gupta and Bashir (2017), schools have a significant impact on students' education and progress as an association to the exterior environment and the place where they pass a large time of their day. Therefore, it may be that school environment is a significant predictor of Educational Aspiration.

Based on the above three groups of factors such as student-related factors, parent-related factors and school-related factors, students, parents and teachers should notice and consider some points to improve educational aspiration of high school students.

In order to improve Educational Aspiration of high school students, **students** should;

- strive to get better life than their parents have.
- apply well opportunities that they received and should not blame on the current situations they have.

In order to improve Educational Aspiration of high school students, **parents** should;

- train boys to have higher standard for good behaviors,
- set appropriate parental control although males should be given freedom,
- be eager to support physically as well as mentally in their children education,
- help students to possess the desire to get valuable career outcomes through education,
- encourage students' success in learning and follow up with the child's progress,

- instill a love of learning from the earliest age,
- be more involved in children's educational activities, and
- set realistic aspiration for children's education.

In order to improve Educational Aspiration of high school students, **teachers** should:

- help to raise their students' optimism and self-confidence,
- make students to have a sense of belongingness and commitment,
- help students to have achievement goals that can guide and direct their cognition and behavior,
- encourage students to have good educational attitudes toward school,
- help them to involve, engage and participate in school process,
- suggest the school to hold school activities such as seminars, workshops, debates and extracurricular activities.

And finally, the government should join tertiary education with the appropriate jobs and create the opportunities to apply educated persons' skills to develop their lives and country.

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