

Witold Ostafiński

Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Techniczno-Ekonomiczna
im. ks. B. Markiewicza w Jarosławiu

witold.ostafinski@pwste.edu.pl  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1366-9024>

The Influence of Family and Religion on Youth Decisions in Higher Education English Literature Review

*Wpływ rodziny i religii na decyzje młodzieży
w wyborze studiów wyższych
Przegląd literatury angielskojęzycznej*

Abstract: The literature review explores the influence of family and religion on youth decisions in higher education. The study examines articles on how parental influence and religion impact the youth's horizons of actions. The research identified three significant influencers linked to academic performance and college readiness: parental figures, educators and peers. Parental influence has become an emergent factor in enrolling in higher education. Parental guidance and experience can impact willingness to enroll in higher education and highlight the importance of obtaining a college degree. The findings of this study may be used to create resources for parents that did not attend college or those in lower socioeconomic status communities to more readily gain access to college information, which may aid in the enrollment process.

Keywords: family, religion, higher education, youth decisions

Abstrakt: Przegląd istniejącej literatury przedmiotu i wyniki dotychczas przeprowadzonych badań ukazują znaczący wpływ rodziny i religii na decyzje młodzieży w wyborze studiów wyższych. W niniejszym opracowaniu dokonano przeglądu i analizy istniejącego na ten temat stanu badań. Zidentyfikowano

trzy znaczące czynniki mające wpływ na wyniki uczniów w nauce i gotowość do podjęcia studiów: rodzice, nauczyciele i rówieśnicy. Wpływ rodziców stał się jednak czynnikiem determinującym przy wyborze studiów wyższych. Zachęta i doświadczenie rodziców znacząco wpływa na wyniki, chęć podejmowania i ukończenia studiów. Wyniki niniejszych badań mogą zostać wykorzystane w procesie rekrutacji na studia oraz do poszerzenia świadomości rodziców, którzy nie posiadają wyższego wykształcenia lub są o niższym statusie społeczno-ekonomicznym.

Słowa kluczowe: rodzina, religia, szkolnictwo wyższe, decyzje młodzieży

Introduction

According to the National Center for Education Statistics in USA (NCES, 2019), in 2017, an estimated 5.5 million persons aged 18–24 enrolled in higher education. The enrollment rate of 38% of students suggests an increase within the past decade from 35% of secondary students in 2005 (McFarland et al., 2019). The increase in enrollment has been attributed to the increased need for higher education for employment opportunities, increased globalization of many job roles, and the introduction of novel technological advancements within the workplace. These trends are expected to persist in the future (Fentenot et al., 2018). While degree attainment from a higher education system cannot guarantee employment, most secondary students are encouraged to obtain a degree to acquire economic security, social mobility, and positive social influence in adulthood (Marginson, 2016). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), as reported by Fontenot, Semega, and Kolla (2018), individuals aged 25 years and older that possess a high school diploma and no college degree experience poverty more often than persons of the same age that have attended higher education. An estimated 13% of persons without college experience are impoverished compared to 9% of individuals with a college education (Fentenot et al., 2018).

Educational achievement has been associated with levels of unemployment. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2020) reported that 3.7% of individuals with no college degree were unemployed, while 2.7% of individuals with an associate's degree were unemployed. Of individuals with a bachelor's degree, only 2.3% were unemployed, and finally, 1.1% of persons with a doctorate are unemployed (BLS, 2020). Moreover, persons with no college degree earned approximately \$500-\$1,000 less per week than individuals who graduated

from higher education (BLS, 2020). Moreover, persons with no college degree earned approximately \$500-\$1,000 less per week than individuals who graduated from higher education (BLS, 2020). While most students have access to higher education, other factors affect student capacities to enroll in collegiate institutions (Tsoi-A & Bryant, 2015). These factors include socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity, and other sociodemographic factors such as parental influence (Benner et al., 2016). These factors can be especially pronounced for African American students, as they are of ethnic minority and are more likely to be from lower socioeconomic status (Schak & Nichols, 2018). Cartledge et al. (2015) argued that, even though most higher education institutions have set strategies to attract individuals of the ethnic minority, the enrollment of secondary education students of racial minority groups, especially African American students, has remained low.

The study explores the influence of family and religion on youth's higher education decisions. Much research has examined the significance of parental characteristics on children, particularly those that have influenced Black American males to attend and graduate from post-secondary education. Studies have found that some characteristics of parents can encourage college enrollment (Schak & Nichols, 2018). In contrast, other characteristics have been found to hinder or obstruct children's paths toward college enrollment and, therefore, create non-opportunities for their children to earn a Bachelor's degree from a higher education institution (Cho et al., 2019; Luani, 2018; Moon-Seo et al., 2021). The literature has focused on the characteristics that parents have exhibited during the adolescence stage of their children's development. Studies have also described parental participation as critical to African Americans' educational achievement during their middle- and high-school years and trajectories towards their enrollment in post-secondary education (Cho et al., 2019; Reza, 2020). This research distinguishes between parenting styles and parenting practice to better expound their influence on the college enrollment process and college readiness. Parental practices are considered certain goal-oriented behaviors through which parents perform their parental roles to achieve the objective of this study. Parenting style is considered a cluster of attitudes toward the students that parents communicate to the student to create a dynamic environment that reflects the parents' behaviors (Candelanza et al., 2021; Cho et al., 2019; Reza, 2020). The following section presents an overview of parenting styles across ethnic groups, income groups, and various family structures. The section examines studies on parenting practices related to college readiness and the enrollment process in the context of parenting involvement, expectation, and aspiration.

The Influence of Parenting Styles on Youth Decisions in Higher Education

Parenting style entails parenting that denotes the emotional environment where the children are raised. The literature outlines four parenting styles: permissive, authoritative, neglectful authoritarian. The authoritarian parenting style is attributed to its significant level of control or demandingness and low warmth and responsiveness (Moon-Seo, Sung, Moore, & Koo, 2021). This parenting style establishes a familial context that limits students' independence by imposing strict rules about their behavior through punitive measures such as withholding benefits and allowance for violations. The authoritative parents place strict limits on their children and do not allow open discussion regarding the limits (Debbarma & Bhattacharjee, 2018). Specifically, the authoritative parents discourage questioning adults. Children under authoritarian parents are dependent on their parents to make decisions, resulting in adverse outcomes; they grow older and need to make their decisions (Debbarma & Bhattacharjee, 2018). Students under authoritarian parenting style are expected to have low self-esteem, social incompetence, and child psychopathology. Besides, these students should describe how their parents desire them to make correct life decisions. Debbarma and Bhattacharjee (2018) demonstrate the adverse outcomes of authoritarian parenting, such as chronic stress and emotional adjustment. However, Calzada, Sales, and O'Gara (2019) noted that their results were impacted by the cultural context in which it was developed. A focus on cultural context as the likely influence of various parenting styles may require a qualitative approach to collect in-depth data on how authoritative parenting styles influence college enrollment and readiness among African American students. Helicopter parenting describes a parent who hovers over their children to provide unwanted support. Sergin et al. (2012) consider helicopter parenting as a parenting style that exceeds the needed quality of involvement. Parents use impeding developmental approaches to stay involved in their children's lives when children are needed to assume adult responsibilities. The permissive parenting style is defined based on its significant level of acceptance, warmth, responsiveness, and low level of control or demandingness (Sahithya, Manohari, & Vijaya, 2019). Students under this theme are expected to have limited controls imposed on them. Authoritative parents are responsive and warm yet firm and demanding. Moon-Seo et al.'s (2021) quantitative study found that authoritative style influenced self-esteem among college students and improved their college adjustment.

The Influence of Parental Involvement on Youth Decisions in Higher Education

Parental involvement entails various behavior related to the use and investment in children's educational resources. The intention of these investments happens in or outside the learning environment is to improve students' academic outcomes. Puccioni (2018) found that parental involvement in children's schoolwork at home, such as homework, is a significant predictor of school readiness measures. In turn, children who are more prepared and ready for school result in positive academic outcomes such as the development of prosocial behaviors and academic achievement (Puccioni, 2018; Puccioni et al., 2020). Puccioni et al. (2020) and Puccioni (2018) underscored how parental involvement is a significant predictor of school readiness or how prepared students are to succeed within the classroom environment. These findings underscore the impact of parental involvement on school readiness, which is an early indicator of college readiness (Conley, 2014; Puccioni, 2018). Conversely, the lack of home-based parental involvement is significantly associated with students' conduct problems, lower achievement outcomes, and inattention issues (Puccioni, 2018; Puccioni et al., 2020). Hence, parents must step in and hold a role in the development of their children, as parents have a crucial role in shaping their children's school readiness and subsequent college readiness.

Parental involvement has been more recently linked to college enrollment and college readiness amongst students (Cartledge et al., 2015; Crosnoe & Muller, 2014). Parental influence, or parental involvement, as they are often used interchangeably, has been shown to impact decisions and perceptions of African American post-secondary students' about joining higher education institutions and increasing college readiness (Cartledge et al., 2015; Crosnoe & Muller, 2014; Means et al., 2015). Within this context, parental influence refers to opinions based on experience or anecdotal evidence passed from parent to child regarding college selection, major or course selection, college readiness efforts, enrollment, and other facets related to participation in higher education (Hegna & Smette, 2017). Raque-Bogdan et al. (2013) examined the impact of parental influence on college readiness and student performance. These studies indicated that students considering participation in higher education valued parental influence (Hegna & Smette, 2017; Raque-Bogdan et al., 2013). Hegna et al. (2017) found that although Caucasian and minority students valued parental influence similarly, minority students valued parental influence during decision-making. Raque-Bogdan et al. (2013) supported that when parental influence in higher educational choices was lacking, students were often more likely to underperform in higher education. The lack of parental

involvement associated with inadequate preparation for college education among secondary school students can be attributed to insufficient parental support (Raque-Bogdan et al., 2013). The findings of Hegna and Smette (2017), Means et al. (2015), and Raque-Bogdan et al. (2013) illustrated that parental influence plays a role in decision-making regarding higher education enrollment, as well as college readiness. Hegna et al. (2017) found that this was especially true amongst the minority groups who tend to have less exposure to information regarding college applications, enrollment, and the relevant qualifications needed for higher education. This lack of exposure can be explained, at least in part, by the discrepancies in higher education attainment between African American parents and their Caucasian counterparts.

In addition to parental influence within the home, parental influence within educational settings has also been associated with increased college readiness (Puccioni, 2018). Parental influence outside the home can be realized through parental cooperation or collaboration with their children's schools (Li & Fischer, 2017). Parental cooperation and collaboration, which includes volunteering, attending school meetings, participating in school-sponsored activities, and interacting with students, has enhanced academic success and college readiness. For example, Li and Fischer (2017) examined this topic and focused on factors of school neighborhoods, parental networks, and parental involvement at a selected elementary school. Among the factors at focus, parental involvement and collaboration in their children's schools helped increase their child's school readiness (Li & Fischer, 2017). The impacts of school readiness were most significant in families from lower socioeconomic areas and were shown to mitigate the adverse impact of poverty on academic outcomes (Li & Fischer, 2017). Thus, parental involvement in schools, such as volunteering at school and actively participating in parent-teacher organizations, effectively enhances their child's college readiness and thus student achievement outcomes.

Studies have shown that students' success in school determines their perceived attachment to their parents and family members, which has influenced their racial identity development, racial socialization and self-pride, and self-esteem in secondary and higher education contexts. Extended family members, or kin, have also been shown to influence Black American sixth graders' future orientation and the ethnic identity of Black American teenagers. Love (2008) employed attachment theory to examine the influence of maternal and paternal attachments on their children and found overprotective and invasive Black American parents associated with college students' psychological distress. However, the parents who exhibited warmth and care toward their children decreased their levels of stress and anxiety (Gebre & Taylor, 2017).

Children's negative interactions with their parents, including emotional abuse and neglect, have contributed to their development and dissociation of attachments.

The Influence of Family Aspirations and Expectations on Youth Decisions in Higher Education

The level to which parent aspiration and expectation for students' education achievement influence their college readiness and enrolment. Asamsama et al. (2016) describe parental aspiration as an internal model of desired outcomes parents hold of their children. Asamsama et al. (2016) completed a quantitative study involving 587 high-school-aged participants who had previously enrolled in a college readiness preparatory course. Asamsama et al. sought to determine factors that increase or were most important to college readiness. When parents indicated that higher education was essential and involved in college decisions, students expressed higher college readiness levels. Parental influence impacts college readiness among African American and Latino students. College-bound students with involved parents identify their parents as positive examples (Hegna & Smette, 2017; Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018). Hegna and Smette (2017) surveyed 2029 youths on their experiences making difficult decisions, including choices about higher education. They found that participants relied on parental influence during the decision-making process, regardless of ethnicity. Thus, minority students rely on parents' influence to a higher degree and value parents' opinions more than other groups (Asamsama et al., 2016; Hegna & Smette, 2017). Like Hegna and Smette (2017), Mitchall and Jaeger (2018) also surveyed students regarding their thoughts on parental influence. However, Mitchell and Jaeger the concepts of motivation and discouragement regarding academic-based decisions. Specifically, when parents discouraged involvement in higher education, children were less likely to demonstrate college readiness. However, when parents encouraged college attendance, children were more prepared for higher education. These findings were congruent with Asamsama et al. (2016), reinforcing how parental attitudes and beliefs towards higher education impact college readiness among minority students. Minority youths from various economic backgrounds tend to depend on their parents' perceptions and ideas regarding college through the decision-making process (Hegna & Smette, 2017; Langenkamp, 2019). Understanding parental influence through the perceptions of first-year African American college students may help further expand how college readiness can be better facilitated among African American students specifically (Curry & Milsom, 2017; Hegna

& Smette, 2017; Kusaeri et al., 2018). Asamsama et al. (2016), Harris et al. (2017), and Hurtado et al. (2020) have also supported the importance of parents as a pivotal factor in college readiness. There is a prevalent need to support the challenges African American students face as a population group (Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019; Kurlaender et al., 2018). If adolescent, college-bound students continuously feel unsupported by their parents, academic outcomes are negatively impacted, resulting in a lack of college readiness (Espinosa et al., 2019; Mwangi et al., 2019). However, these studies are primarily quantitative and lack the specificity and detail of qualitative research. There is a gap in the literature regarding how African American college students perceive the impact of parental influence on decision-making during enrollment and college readiness (Espinosa et al., 2019; Gee et al., 2020).

African American students' experiences and perceptions and the identification of their needs in preparation for college were among the least explored constructs in the literature (Harrington & Rogalski, 2020). Additionally, past research has not examined further why African American students are more likely to have low college readiness levels (Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019). Previous research indicated factors that could significantly impact college readiness among African American students: race, school composition, academic performance, participation in school programs, and socioeconomic factor (Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019). Thus, findings from this current research add evidence to this phenomenon, as describing the perceptions of first-year African American urban college students is imperative when considering the college readiness of this cohort.

The Influence of Religion on Youth Decisions in Higher Education

Although religion has influenced the development of educational institutions since the times of colonial America, Christian schools defined as private, Protestant Christian schools were not formed until the twentieth century (Slater, 2012). In 1947, the first Christian private school organization, known as the National Association of Christian Schools (NACS), was organized. The purpose of the NACS was to unite the approximately 150 Christian schools formed in the early 1900s. When NACS was organized, the primary reasons for enrolling students in Christian schools were to avoid the secular ways of the public school system and establish educational institutions with biblical values held by the Christian families. Parents were willing to make financial sacrifices to send their children to Christian schools to avoid the secular values of the

public education system. The Christian school movement rapidly spread throughout America during the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Most recently, over 15% of private schools were identified as Protestant Christian schools in a study conducted during the 2015-2016 school year (Council for American Private Education, 2020).

Christian schools have become a more feasible option with the expansion of the school choice scholarship system during the early 2000s. Scholarship programs, including tax credit scholarship programs, were developed by state government officials to give parents the ability to choose where to educate their children by providing assistance through financial aid or offering more publicly funded schools, such as charter schools (Logan, 2018). State scholarship programs have enabled students from families of various socioeconomic levels to attend Christian schools. Students who meet the established requirements for the school choice programs have had the opportunity to attend schools approved by the state at no cost or a substantially reduced cost for their families. Due to the increase of children who have received financial assistance to attend Christian schools, more Christian schools have opened around the country (Davis, 2011).

The factors that influence parents' decisions to enroll their children in Christian schools have expanded beyond the original desire to be separate from the secular values of the public education system. According to data from a grounded theory study conducted by Prichard and Swezey (2016), factors that influenced parents' decisions to enroll their children in a Christian school were (a) the Christian environment, (b) the parents' own school experiences, (c) financial status, and (d) student satisfaction. However, the parents prioritized Christian values and the support Christian school teachers and administrators provided to them. In their study, researchers Pelz and Dulk (2018) discovered that families accepted financial assistance from the state school scholarship programs and enrolled their children in Christian schools because of their importance in maintaining religious identity. Warmbier (2018) conducted a correlation study on the factors influencing Christian school enrollment and researched the influence of school facilities and culture on the parents' decision to enroll their children in Christian schools. The results indicated that school facilities have no significant influence on parents' decision-making, and there is a mild correlation between parents' decisions and the school culture. However, a study conducted by Ava Davis (2011) found that the factors that influenced parents' decisions on private school enrollment were the same regardless of the school choice.

As universities become inclusive, scholars discuss how to integrate contemplative, spiritual inquiry into school cultures (Subbiondo, 2011). Educational

leaders can learn how students consider altruism, spirit, morality, and connectedness to understand college students' naturally occurring spiritual quests (Astin et al., 2011). A spiritual quest has the ultimate goal of facilitating a spiritual awakening. Awakening to humanity's spiritual nature occurs when people are allowed to explore religious or spiritual teachings to find a sense of purpose (Duffy & Dik, 2013). According to the study conducted at private schools with various religious affiliations, parents valued the school's perceived quality of education and the overall characteristics. The data from the study revealed that a desire for children to be taught in a religious environment with religious values was not the only motivating factor in parents' school choice decisions. The factors influencing parents' decisions to enroll their children in a private school include the academic quality and the spiritual environment.

Conclusion

Previous research has identified many factors that may impact college readiness. Relevant factors associated with college readiness include:

- Academic achievement.
- The development of cognitive strategies.
- The skill necessary to navigate higher education successfully.

Researchers have also identified three significant influencers linked to academic performance and college readiness: peers, educators, and parental figures. Parental influence has become an emergent factor in enrolling in higher education. Parental guidance and experience can impact willingness to enroll in higher education and highlight the importance of obtaining a college degree. Social learning theory has been used in research on decision-making, the impact on the environment, and college readiness amongst post-secondary students (Barkley & Major, 2020). With the applicability of the SLT (Social Learning Theory) to the problem of this research study, results could bolster the use of SLT to underpin studies regarding enrollment in higher education, especially amongst urban African American students. This study could reinforce the use of SLT to describe parental involvement in the enrollment of children into higher education. Finally, this study understands how both urban African American parents and post-secondary students perceive the influence of parental involvement in the enrollment process. As such, the findings of this study may be used to inform these populations during college enrollment or bolster parental involvement. The findings of this study may be used to create resources for parents that did not attend college or those in lower

socioeconomic status communities to more readily gain access to college information, which may aid in the enrollment process.

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