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Understanding the educational aspirations of ELT students for higher education

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Abstract

The present study examined the association between English Language Teaching (ELT) freshman student's educational aspirations and factors that influence these aspirations. A sample of 400 male (N=250) and female (N=150) ELT students from three international state universities in Ankara/Turkey was selected. The data for the study were collected through a questionnaire consisting of 30 items measuring ELT students' educational aspirations. A hierarchical multiple regression indicated that *commitment to schooling, academic self-concept, family* and *educational environment* were related significantly to educational aspirations and explained a significant proportion of the variance. The results suggest the high aspirations of students are mediated through strong academic self-concept, positive peer support, a commitment to schooling and high educational aspirations in the home while low educational aspirations may have different mediating influences in different students.

Introduction

With the population growth in the ever-changing world, the number of young people who continue in education and training after the end of compulsory schooling at age 18 has increased as well. This is seen as important not only for the supply of educated and trained labor for the economical and industrial development of the societies, but also for the future and well-being of the young people concerned (Payne, 2003). The need for well-trained and competent teachers to educate the young and prepare them for the future life is now a well-documented fact. Most of the students graduating from high schools are now inclined to continue their studies in one of teaching programs, especially teaching English as a

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foreign or a second language. Therefore, appreciating educational aspirations of students entering teaching programs have become important factors in realizing and achieving educational goals in general, and preparing skillful teachers, especially English language teachers, in particular.

There is a consensus between researchers (Garg, Melanson, & Levin, 2007; Sánchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2006) about the factors that are highly effective in determining students' educational aspirations. They maintain that a constellation of familial factors exert significant influence on the educational aspirations and academic achievements of university students. Among those salient factors are *commitment to schooling, academic self-concept, family and educational environment*.

Academic expectations and academic self –concept are closely related to educational aspiration and in fact, they can be better understood as educational aspirations, which refer to a student's view and perception of his or her intention to pursue or obtain additional education in the future (Campbell, 1983). Sánchez, Reyes, and Singh (2006) believed that the effects of parental involvement as a form of social capital have both negative and positive impact on ultimate attainment and educational success and/or failure of the students. Factors such as 'low parental school involvement, socioeconomic status, and educational level' have proved to be vital in educational failure. Kao and Tienda (1998) maintained that parent's education and family background are also deriving forces resulting in educational aspirations. Teachers, peers, and parents in particular are considered as the most significant others in shaping aspirations since, as Hung and Majoribanks (2003) rightly puts it, they provide students with necessary 'opportunities, encouragement and support' for learning. Hence, evolving from this global perspective, our conceptualization of educational aspirations of ELT students for academic achievement refers to their self-evaluation of the personal, social, familial and educational factors. Given these salient factors, the reasons behind their choices and the degree to which they are capable of achieving their goals also become more and more important.

Consequently, the association between ELT students' educational aspirations and commitment to schooling (to what extent an individual is eager to learn and his / her enthusiasm for academic achievement) academic self-concept (one's self-efficacy, the extent to which an individual believes the self to be capable, significant, successful in his/her ultimate attainment to become an English language teacher and living up to their promises and desires in achieving educational goals), home and educational environment(parental involvement, teachers' and peers' role, degree of home and college control) is the subject of inquiry in present paper. The purpose is to examine each of these factors in relation to their potentials as important predictors of ELT students' aspirations for studying English and, eventually, their desire for becoming English language teachers with some emerging as having greater direct effect.

With this in mind, this study aimed at exploring the influence of commitment to schooling, self-concept, family, school, and peer factors on educational aspirations of the Turkish ELT students in Ankara /Turkey. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between demographic factors such as age and gender and high school background and educational aspirations of ELT students?

2. Is there a relationship between commitment to schooling and educational aspirations of ELT students?

3. Does ELT students' self concept have any influence on their educational aspirations?

4. Does the peer variable (support and encouragement) influence the educational aspirations of Turkish students?

5. Of the significant predictors of educational aspirations, which one has the strongest influence on educational aspirations of ELT students?

2. Methodology

The participants were 400 ELT freshman students in state universities of Ankara/Turkey. There were250 males (62.5 %) and 150 females (37.5%) teacher students in the study. The data for the study were collected through a questionnaire consisting of 30 items measuring educational aspirations of ELT students in subscales of commitment to schooling (5 items), academic self-concept (6 items), and home and educational environment (18 items) consisting family (8 items), instructors (4 items), and peers (8 items) each of which uses a four-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly agree' (1) to 'strongly disagree' (4). The internal consistency reliability coefficient, as determined by the Cronbach's alpha value, for all items of the questionnaire was r =.797. The dependent variable, educational aspiration, for the study was created by calculating and analyzing student's answers to the questions about educational aspirations included in the questionnaire. SPSS version 19.0 for Windows was used to obtain descriptive statistics in frequencies, percentages and related computations. Multiple regression analyses were used to determine the potential relationship between the dependent and independent variables since there was only one dependent and five independent variables.

3. Results

The results of the screening multiple regression test revealed that the age (R= .113; R^2 .013, p<.05), gender (R=.118; R^2=014, p<.05) and high school graduating (R=.089, R^2=.008; P<.05) variables were not significant in predicting educational aspirations of the respondents. The other significant variables are offered in the following sections.

3.1. Association between Commitment to Schooling and Educational Aspiration

The examination of the multiple regression analysis showed that the variable of 'commitment to schooling' was a significant predictor of educational aspirations of Turkish ELT students because the R for the model was .588, which indicates an acceptable correlation between this variable and educational aspirations. The R^2 is .346. Thus; the commitment to schooling variable can explain nearly 35% of the variability of educational aspirations of ELT students.

The analysis of the Beta weights, which contains the coefficients that indicate the magnitude of predictions for a variable, the commitment to schooling is a strong predictor in the model of increased educational aspirations because the un-standardized coefficient is positive (B=.17). This means that as commitment to school increases, the educational aspirations of the participants increase too. The analyses of Anova (P=.000; P<.05) and Coefficients (t=14.500; t > 2) also confirmed that the model is a strong predictor of participants' educational aspirations. The collinearity diagnostics condition index (7.823) was less than 30 in this model. The significant score needs to be less than 30 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). See table 4.

Table 4. Association between Commitment to Schooling and Educational Aspiration

Model		R	R Square	Anova Sig. F		Beta value	Coefficient t	Condition index
Commitment To Schooling	4	.588	.346	.000		210.244	.17	14.500	7.823

3.3. Association between Self-Concept and Educational Aspiration

The results of multiple regression analysis for the self-concept revealed that this variable was significant in determining relationship between students' self-concept and their educational aspirations because the R was .526, which indicates a moderate correlation between self-concept variable and educational aspirations. The R^2 is .277 and this follows that the model can approximately account for the 27% of the variability of educational aspirations of ELT students. The examination of the Beta weights (B=.134), Anova (P=.000; P<.05) and coefficients t value (t=12.350; t > 2) confirmed that the self concept can be considered as an effective predictor in determining educational aspirations of ELT students (see table 5).

Table 5. Association between Self-Concept and Educational Aspiration

Model		R	R Square	Anova Sig. F		Beta value	Coefficient t	Condition index
Self-Concept	5	.526	.277	.000		152.525	.134	12.350	8.757

3.4. Association between Family and Educational Aspiration

The results of multiple regression analysis showed that family variable was a significant predictor in determining students' educational aspirations because the R was .600, which indicates a rather high correlation between family variable and educational aspirations. The R^2 is .360. Thus, the model explains 36% of the variability of educational aspirations of ELT students. The Beta weights, Anova and coefficients t value for this model (B=.139; P=.000; P<.05; t=14.959, respectively) confirmed that the family variable is a strong factor in determining educational aspirations of ELT students (see table 6).

Table6. Association between Family and Educational Aspiration

Model		R	R Square	Anova Sig. F		Beta value	Coefficient t	Condition index
Family	6	.600	.360	.000		223.787	.139	14.959	11.189

7. Association between Instructor Support and Educational Aspirations

The multiple regression analysis was also conducted to examine the relationship between instructor support variable and educational aspirations and results(R=.477; R^2 = .228; P<.05) showed that this variable was also a significant predictor in determining students' educational aspirations . Therefore, the

model explains almost 23% of the variability of educational aspirations among the participants. The P value for ANOVA (P=.000; P<.05), the Beta value (B=.155) and Coefficients value (t=10.836;t > 2) also confirmed that the model is a strong predictor of participants' educational aspirations (see table 7).

Table 7. Association between Instructor Support and Educational Aspiration

	Model	R	R Square	Anova Sig.	F	Beta value	Coefficient t	Condition index
Instructor Support	7	.477	.228	.000	117.414	.155	10.836	8.912

8. Association between Peers and Educational Aspiration

The results of regression analysis for the peers variable showed that the R for peer variable was .274, the R^2 = .075. Although the R^2 for peers variable was less than that of the other variables, the P value for Anova (P=.000; P<.05), the Beta value (B=.065) and Coefficients value (t=5.676; t > 2 and P=.000; P<.05) showed that this model was an effective predictor of participants' educational aspirations. The collinearity diagnostics condition index (11.872) was also less than 30, which shows normal distribution of the dependent variable in this model (see table 8).

Table 8. Association between Peers and Educational Aspiration

	Model	R	R Square	Anova Sig.	F	Beta value	Coefficient t	Condition index
Peers	8	.274	.075	.000	32.222	.065	5.676	11.872

3.6. The Significant Variables for Predicting Educational Aspirations

The last multiple regression analysis was conducted to find out which of the three significant predictors from the previous analyses was the strongest predictor of educational aspirations .The examination of the Beta weights for the five significant predictors revealed that the strongest predictor of educational aspirations of the Turkish ELT students was family variable with the highest Beta weight of .347. The second strongest predictor of educational aspirations was self-concept factor with a Beta weight of .263, the third significant predictor was commitment to schooling with a Beta weight of .242, the fourth strongest predictor was instructor support factor with a Beta weight of .145 and the fifth predictor was peers factor with a Beta weight of .049. The entire model has an R of .756, which is an acceptable, multiple correlations between the independent variables and educational aspirations. The R2 is .571; thus, 57% of the variability of educational aspirations of the participants can be accounted for by the five independent variables treated in the study. The histogram and probability plots for the significant predictors of educational aspirations (figure 1 and 2) confirm that the dependent variable is normally distributed in the model.

Table 9. The Significant Variables for Predicting Educational Aspirations

	Model	R	R Square	Anova Sig.	F	Beta Weights	coefficient t	condition index
	1	.756	.571	.000	105.094			
Commitment	-	-	-	-	-	.242	5.891	11.398
Self-Concept	-	-	-	-	-	.263	6.956	13.339
Family	-	-	-	-	-	.347	8.983	14.287
Instructor	-	-	-	-	-	.145	3.760	17.449
Peers	-	-	-	-	-	.049	1.374	22.184

Figure 1. Histograms for significant variables predicting educational aspirations
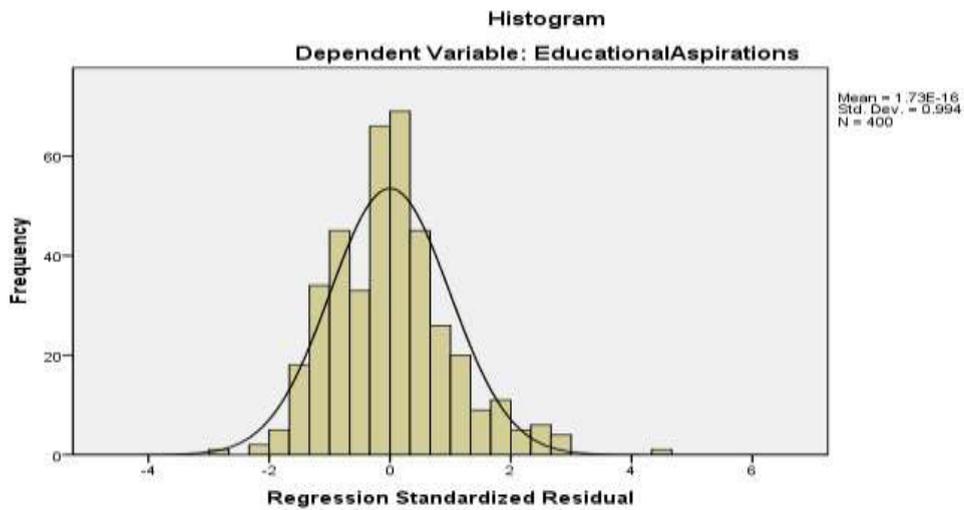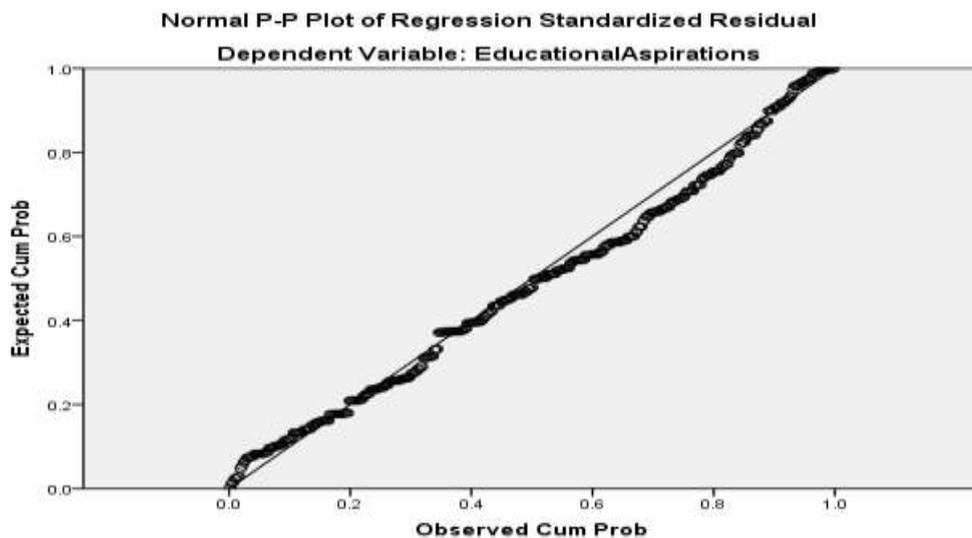

Figure 2. Normal probability plot for significant variables predicting educational aspirations

4. Discussion

The present study was designed to explore the influence of self-concept, family, school, instructors and peers on the educational aspirations of ELT students in state universities of Ankara /Turkey. The conceptual framework for this study built upon the Strand and Winston's' (2008) study on educational aspirations of students, but operationalized the variables differently for ELT students' perception of educational aspirations. The research questions for this study were formulated from the conceptual framework of the study.　The study addressed five research questions all of which were aimed at testing the relationship between the dependent variable, that is, the educational aspirations and the related independent variables. The study consisted of 8 models.　The first three models including age, gender and the type of high school (i.e., private, science, vocational, etc.) did not meet the necessary conditions needed for normality and linearity assumption.

The results showed that the commitment to schooling variable was significant. The effects of school experiences evident in many of the analyses show that doing well in school has the predictable positive effect of wanting to stay longer in an educational setting for ELT students. Plucker, (1998) asserted that students with positive internal representations of education tend to value education, have confidence in their academic ability and perceive the educational process as positive and rewarding. Also, according to he results, there is a significant relationship between self-concept variable and educational aspirations. This means that self-concept leads to increasing the educational aspirations of ELT students.　Higher self-concept as a key significant factor in predicting educational aspirations of ELT students should be enhanced by counselling and personality development programs. This will influence student's expectations about plans regarding their educational career.

As stated earlier, family variable was a significant predictor in determining students' educational aspirations. This suggests that parental support and involvement, their background and behaviour may positively influence the educational aspirations of students. The results of research carried out by Hossler, Schmidt, and Vesper, (1999), Cabrera and LaNasa (2000) support the findings of this study. The findings also showed that support from teachers is the significant variable in predicting educational aspirations of students. This means that support from teachers may prove advantageous to provide support for ELT students and increase their educational aspirations. The findings of this study indicated 23% of correlation between instructor support variable and educational aspirations of the ELT students.

Finally, the findings identified that the peer variable also affects educational aspirations of ELT students. Looker and Thiessen (2002, p. 60) argue that "those who do not receive encouragement at home may be convinced to continue their education by others. The fact that those with more academically oriented peers have higher educational aspirations is consistent with this argument".

5. Conclusion

The study aimed at measuring the educational aspirations of Turkish ELT students, determining which variables can be considered as the key predictors of their educational aspirations. The results revealed that age, gender and high school graduate variables were neutral to participants' educational aspirations, that there was a significant relationship between commitment to schooling , self-concept, family, instructor effect and peers and educational aspirations among ELT students, and that the dominant predictor of participants' educational aspiration is family variable. These findings may be beneficial to educational policy makers, researchers, and practitioners if they want to better serve ELT students, develop a positive educational environment for them. Therefore, financial assistance, instructor support, family and effective

peer support affecting their performance should be provided in order to increase the educational aspirations of students for higher education. If ELT students' educational and academic needs are met and nurtured through appropriate training, personality development and counselling programs, this may, in turn, help the nation by training and producing a more qualified, talented and competent teachers.

This research contributes to our understanding of the issues affecting educational aspirations of freshman ELT students. It is urgent to design and implement programs to meet the needs of the ELT students regarding aspirations of higher education in order to have a better and fruitful future. Such programs are of greater value when students keen; family and educational environmental effect, instructors, and positive peers' understand the value of educational aspiration and try to be more considerate. Fulfilling the needs of successful education requires the collaboration and efforts of instructors, parents, peers, and policymakers. It is important that we advance from theory to practice to develop a vision for the future and understand the value not only for the individual, but for society as a whole (Grieve, 2009). Collaboration of students, families, schools, and administrators is essential for enhancing the ELT student's educational aspirations.

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