

# **Social Stratification Shaping: The Types of High School and Self-Efficacy**

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**Abstract:** This essay mainly discussed about how the types of school education influence self-efficacy of adolescents and thus strengthen social stratification. Through the methodology of Peter J. Buke's identity control theory and a review of results from previous studies, it was discussed in three aspects: self-efficacy contribute to adolescents' achievement, adolescents' goals are shaped since they are from different families with different social status and capital and thus enter into different educational settings, those goals have a direct and indirect impact on adolescents' self-efficacy through social comparison and thus further influence their motivation and future development, which is a key to transcend social stratification and achieve social mobility. According to this, I want to illustrate the inequality in education and social stratification in the perspective of self-efficacy, which is a key of self-identity.

## **1. Introduction**

Social class influence parents and students' choices of schools. Different educational settings and track further affect students' self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a key point of students' motivation and achievement, which contribute to their future development and class mobilization. A lot of studies focus on the concept, beliefs and subjective factors of self-efficacy as well as influence on academic performance of self-efficacy but less attention is paid to the influence of the type of school settings on it.

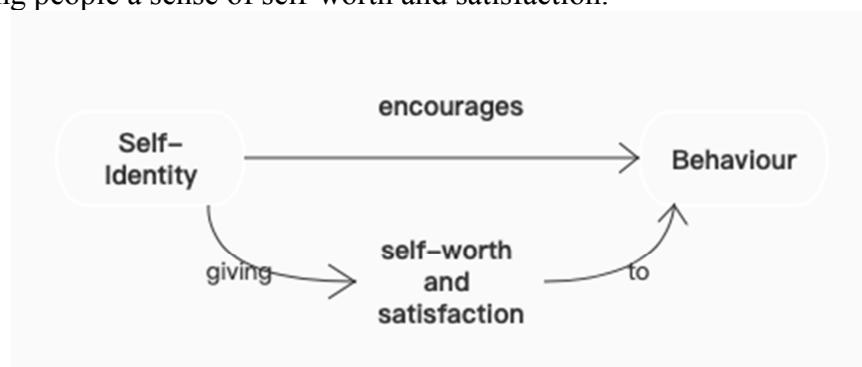
According to the identity control theory proposed by Peter J. Buke, behavior is the result of individual's internal and external combined actions. People always compare the perceived self-meaning from the surroundings with their own identity standard. If they are consistent, the identification is confirmed and the behavior is maintained. If not, the identity confirmation fails, the actor will automatically adjust his behavior. Thus, interactive others may challenge the identity of the subject, while the subject should adjust their behaviors in time to maintain their identity. It means that external factors are important as well. Educational settings has an impact on the goals students pursue and their social comparison, which are highly relevant to self-efficacy. So we have to figure out how the types of high school shapes adolescents' self-efficacy. Because only then can we know how schooling influence educational inequality and social stratification from the perspective of self-efficacy and then find an educational environment more conducive to the formation of self-identity.

## **2. Self-Efficacy Contribute to Adolescents' Achievement**

Self-efficacy was perceived as personal judgment of his or her capabilities to organize and execute actions to achieve specific goals by Albert Bandura. Bandura believed that this judgment is a intermediary system between cognition and behavior, which has a decisive influence on the choice of behaviors. From this point of view, we can't regard self-efficacy as a simply acquired skill of an individual or a necessary symbolization of the individual's true ability, but the individual's affirmation of his or her own action in the task context.

### **2.1. Academic Self-Efficacy have a Positive Impact on Student's Performance**

Researches revealed that one of closest constructs to self-efficacy is self-concept. Erikson (Erikson, 1968) proposed that self-identity can give people guidance and encourage people's behavior by giving people a sense of self-worth and satisfaction.



**Figure 1.** Erikson's view on Self-Identity

In addition, self-efficacy plays an important role in academic motivation which helps boost students' performance (Neuville, Frenay, & Bourgeois, 2007). The key indices of academic motivation affected include the difficulty of participating in tasks, persistence, emotional reactions, and level of effort. Studies show that self-efficacious students are more likely to take more challenging and difficult tasks, persist longer, work harder and feel less stressful or depressive. Students who are more capable of judging themselves to be will get higher grades, set more challenging goals, and better monitor their studying time (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Brown, & Hackett, 2002; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990; Schunk, 2003)

Furthermore, Self-efficacy also give students a sense of agency to learn through self-regulatory processes like goal setting, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and strategy use (Bandura, 1997). Through some meta-analytic studies which reports moderate effect sizes, academic self-efficacy positively correlates with academic performance (Richardson, Bond, & Abraham, 2012). Students' self-efficacy exerts direct and indirect influence on their achievement based on grades and ability levels (Schunk, 2003; Carmichael & Taylor, 2005; Lane, Lane, & Kyprianou, 2004)

## 2.2. Factors of Self-Efficacy's Formation

Bandura ascribed self-efficacy to enactive mastery attainment, vicarious experience, social persuasions and physiological and psychological states. Lots of researches from 1980s examines the potency of these factors. These researches demonstrated these factors as goal setting (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Schunk & Schwartz, 1993), modelling (Relich, Debus, & Walker, 1986; Zimmerman & Ringle, 1981), rewards (Schunk, 1983c, 1984); Feedback (Schunk & Cox, 1986), task strategies (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Schunk & Gunn, 1986; Graham & Harris, 1989a, 1989b; Schunk, 1989b; Schunk & Cox, 1986), self-evaluation (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999), and assessment (Brookhart & DeVoge, 1999; Pajares & Miller, 1997), which can improve self-efficacy. Besides, the types of schools and educational settings should be considered as an external factor of students' self-efficacy. Fewer researches focused on this factor.

## 3. Educational Settings Shape Adolescents' Goals

Social class, status, economic conditions influence the position and transition of adolescents in educational systems. (Biggart, Järvinen, and Parreira do Amaral 2015; Iannelli and Smyth 2008 ) According to studies, there is a stronger tendency for adolescents in rural areas to choose vocational schools than adolescents in urban areas for some reasons. (Maria Rönnlund, Per-Åke Rosvall & Monica Johansson, 2018 )

### 3.1. Evidence

First, there are limited local labor market and fewer higher education chances in rural areas than

that in urban areas (cf. Geldens and Bourke 2008) Second, adolescents' thought and experience about the society were shaped and mediated through the communities with specific classed relations and structural constraints. Many students will choose upper secondary education in line with their growth environment that they have been exposed to. (cf. Geldens and Bourke 2008) Third, due to the disadvantage of family capital, it is difficult for children in rural or bottom level to have high-quality education resources and opportunities in their education acquisition process, which leads to that rural students become the main source of students in vocational schools. (Saba Rasheed Ali & Ellen Hawley McWhirter. 2006)

### **3.2. Schooling Plays a Dual Impact on Society**

On the one hand, schooling is beneficial in keeping society running smoothly. Functionalists believe that schools are essential in socialization, which instill shared norms and values in each generation by providing students with skills, knowledge and even free childcare. Thus, conflicts in society are kept to a minimum and people are more likely to adhere to social regulations.

On the other hand, schools may let conflicts and inequality in society continue. Conflict theories point out that schools reproduce the class structure—keeping the top at the top and the bottom at the bottom. Critical Race Theory and Interactionist theories focus on racial inequality and teachers' bias for intelligent students. To be more specific, class, race and gender have an impact on students' access to educational resources and their experience in school since they are major factors in tracking to sort students into different groups, where they are trained differently. In addition, according to Max Weber, your social status is closely related to your life chances, or opportunities to provide yourself with material goods, positive living conditions, and favorable life experiences. Thus, students receive differentiated education because of their family's social background and status. At the same time, students trained differently will form deep-rooted concepts about social class and social cognition, which affect their behaviors and choices. Therefore, It is difficult to break down class barriers and achieve class mobility. Because of this, schools reflect and reproduce inequality and social stratification.

### **3.3. Students Coming From Different Educational Environment Develop Different Future Goals**

Schooling settings as well as educational track have a huge impact on individual's goals. For example, girls in co-educational schools attach greater importance to interpersonal, freedom-autonomy goals and appearance while those in single-sex school focus more on educational goals and report more career aspiration in natural sciences (Carroll, 2002) as well as higher career goal (Watson, Quatman & Edler, 2002). In addition, in single-sex school, girls are more likely to commit more to goals and keep more stable career aspiration. (Carroll, 2002; Watson et al., 2002)

More importantly, the action orientations of college-preparatory students differ from that of vocational training students. Compared to college-preparatory students, vocational training students wouldn't project adult anticipation and career anticipation goals farther into the future, placed less emphasis on career preparation, and made more internal attributions for negative outcomes as well as less internal attributions for positive outcomes. However, career anticipatory goals were more important to college-preparatory than to vocational students. College-preparatory students placed more emphasis on career preparation, and paid less attention on adult preparation and attainment of adult status (Paul A. Klaczynski and Hayne W. Reese, 1991). They were more likely to make internal attributions for positive educational goals and less likely to attribute negative educational goals to themselves (Paul A. Klaczynski and Hayne W. Reese, 1991)

Compared to regular senior high schools which make paths to universities, most rural students enrolling in secondary vocational schools just to find a way to survive and pay less attention to future goals and career preparation.

#### **4. Achievement Goals, Social Comparison and Self-Efficacy**

Because of the differences in the schooling settings, students hold different attitudes to their future goals. Besides, achievement goals closely related to students' academic self-efficacy.

##### **4.1. Achievement Goals**

Elliot divided achievement goals into four categories: mastery-approach goal, mastery-avoidance goal, performance-approach goal, and performance-avoid goal according to the definition of capability and the valence of capability (Elliot A J, McGregor A H. 2001).

Mastery-approach goal means trying to complete tasks and improve abilities. Mastery-avoidance goal refers to trying to avoid failing tasks or losing existing knowledge and skills (Elliot A J, Thrash T M.,2001).Performance goal focus on the comparison with others: Performance-approach goal focuses on acting better than others in order to get positive assessment about abilities while performance-avoidance goal focuses on not being worse than others in order to avoid negative judgments about abilities(Elliot A J, Harackiewicz J M. ,1996).

Researchers found a significantly positive correlation between mastery goals and self-efficacy.(Bell & Kozlowski,2002) . But researchers hold different views on the relationship between performance goals and self-efficacy. In general, achievement goal will affect social comparison and academic self-efficacy of individual (Individuals' confidence and belief in their own learning ability), at the same time, social comparison will also affect individual academic self-efficacy.

##### **4.2. Social Comparison**

Social comparison is a common psychosocial phenomenon. Festinger pointed out that social comparison is a process of comparing his own state with the state of others to obtain a clear self-evaluation. From the perspective of comparison, social comparison can be divided into two types: upward comparison and downward comparison. Upward comparison refers to the comparison between the individual and others who are superior to themselves. Downward comparison refers to the comparison between the individual and others who are inferior to themselves.

School is a miniature of society. Spending much time staying in school, peers have impacts on students' goals and behaviors. Studies show that the effect of schools and peers is greater than that of family(Cohen & Cohen, 2001). adolescents who spent more time with peers with risky behaviors are more likely to deviate goals. Nevertheless, peer support, good behaviors and expectations may foster adolescents' career and academic aspirations. (Dubow, Arnett, Smith &Ippolito, 2001)(Ali, McWhirter, & Chronister, 2005). In addition, secondary education stage is a critical period for individuals' physical, mental development and knowledge acquisition. Facing peer pressure, students pay attention not only to the mastery of tasks, but also to learn about others and make a comparison.

##### **4.3. Relationship between Achievement Goals, Social Comparison and Self-Efficacy of Students under Secondary Education**

A study shows that there is a significantly positive correlation between mastery-approach goal and upward comparison, ability self-efficacy, behavior self-efficacy. Mastery-avoidance goal is negatively correlated with behavior self-efficacy. Performance-approach goal is positively correlated with upward comparison, ability self-efficacy and behavior self-efficacy. Performance-avoidance goal is positively correlated with downward comparison, ability self-efficacy and behavior self-efficacy. Upward comparison is positively correlated with the ability self-efficacy and behavior self-efficacy. Downward comparison is negatively correlated with ability self-efficacy and behavior self-efficacy (Xunjun Bai, 2013).

In summary, achievement goal has a direct impact on self-efficacy. Besides, achievement goal also can indirectly affect students' self-efficacy through social comparison.

In the context of vocational school settings, students attach less importance on career preparation and make fewer career anticipation goals into the future as well as attribute more negative educational goals to themselves, which means that students in vocational school set more avoidance goals. They are more likely to tend to avoid tasks or seek external help in completing tasks instead of sticking to the end. The goals and surroundings may cause more downward social comparison and lower self-efficacy of students in vocational school.

Social environment is crucial in shaping individual's identity and cognition. Individuals are affected by complicated and multi-faced factors from external society. People in society are shaped by social structure including a set of social statuses, roles, groups, networks and institutions. Those are relevant to people's behaviors, chances, values. And school is a miniature of society and the key of socialization. School environment is critical in shaping students and helping them better adapt to the whole society. Education influence a person not only through imparting knowledge into him or her, but also changing the way of thinking and even the cognition of identity such as self-efficacy due to the school collective environment like teaching environment, relationship between students as well as between teachers and students.

According to Peter J. Burke's identity control theory (Burke PeterJ,1991), students in vocational school would compare their self-meaning from the surroundings with their own identity standard and thus make some adjustments to their identity(including self-efficacy) and further change their behaviors, which have a profound impact on thier personal development. Because of the influence of environment and comparison, self-efficacy affected will further has an impact on students' motivation and achievement.

## 5. Conclusion

Schools are institutional machines that maintain and lead to social class reproduction. Due to differences in social backgrounds including status, class, and income of family and so on, students enter into diversified types of school and receive different educational resources, which in turn influence students' future development. Educational environment promote collective consciousness and socialization as well as classify students according to intelligence, knowledge, and academic performance. Additionally, school setting can also influence students' self-identity like self-efficacy, which plays an important role in boosting students' performance and personal development through the way influencing goals setting and social comparison. All of these are important reasons of educational inequality and difficulties in class mobilization.

In order to improve the situation of inequality in education, besides ameliorating examination system, investing in funds and resource of education and poverty alleviation, there is a new perspective of adjusting the educational settings and track system which influence self-efficacy. Besides, quantitative Studies on the relationship between school types and self-efficacy should be conducted further.

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