

Exploring the Role of Family, Social Class, and Cultural Capital in the Formation of Academic Hope: A Grounded Theory Study

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ABSTRACT

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Purpose: This study aimed to develop a grounded theoretical model explaining how family characteristics, social-class position, cultural capital, and educational structures contribute to the formation, erosion, and revitalization of students' academic hope.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative study employed the systematic grounded theory approach of Strauss and Corbin. Participants were 15 experts in educational management, educational sciences, curriculum planning, and psychology who were selected through purposive and snowball sampling until theoretical saturation was achieved. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasting 60–120 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding. The emerging categories were organized according to the six components of the paradigmatic model, namely causal conditions, the core phenomenon, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. MAXQDA 2020 was used to manage the data and construct conceptual networks.

Findings: Academic hope emerged as a relational cognitive-motivational construct shaped by the interaction between pathways thinking and agency thinking within the family and educational contexts. Family cultural capital and economic support were identified as the principal causal conditions, while spatial inequality and macroeconomic instability constituted the main contextual conditions. Emotional insecurity, imposed perfectionism, and the intergenerational transmission of hopelessness functioned as intervening mechanisms that depleted cognitive resources and weakened intrinsic motivation. Family-centered interventions, reconstruction of emotional security, and school-based compensatory pathways were identified as the principal strategies. Their anticipated consequences included revitalized agency, stronger intrinsic motivation, lower dropout intentions, improved academic functioning, and preservation of human capital.

Conclusion: Academic hope is not exclusively an individual psychological attribute but a dynamic outcome of interactions among individual agency, family resources, social-class position, emotional security, and the political economy of education; therefore, reducing educational failure requires coordinated family, school, and structural interventions.

Keywords: Academic hope; family; social class; cultural capital; agency thinking; pathways thinking; grounded theory.

1. Introduction

Education is widely regarded as one of the principal mechanisms through which individuals acquire knowledge, develop capabilities, improve their socioeconomic position, and participate more effectively in social and economic life. Nevertheless, the realization of these functions depends not only on access to formal schooling but also on students' capacity to sustain motivation, envision attainable futures, and continue pursuing educational goals despite academic, familial, and structural obstacles. In this context, academic hope has emerged as a significant cognitive-motivational construct for explaining why some students remain engaged and persistent under difficult conditions, whereas others gradually experience disengagement, burnout, or withdrawal from education. Academic hope reflects students' perceived capacity to define meaningful educational goals, identify viable routes toward those goals, and mobilize the motivational energy required to continue along those routes. It therefore extends beyond a passive expectation that favorable outcomes may occur and instead involves an active orientation toward goal attainment, problem-solving, and adaptation in the face of barriers.

The contemporary importance of academic hope is particularly evident in educational environments characterized by socioeconomic inequality, heightened academic competition, rapid technological change, and uncertainty about the relationship between educational achievement and future occupational mobility. Under such circumstances, students may find it increasingly difficult to maintain confidence in the value of education or to imagine credible pathways from present effort to future success. Evidence suggests that hope is closely associated with students' academic thriving, adaptive coping, psychological balance, and capacity to maintain peace of mind when confronting educational demands (Shan & Xu, 2025). Academic hope may consequently function as a psychological resource that enables students to interpret academic setbacks as manageable and temporary rather than as evidence of permanent incapacity or inevitable failure.

The significance of academic hope is also reflected in its relationship with academic vitality and academic achievement. Students who possess higher levels of academic hope are generally more capable of recovering from poor performance, reorganizing their learning strategies, and preserving their commitment to educational goals. Research among secondary school students has

demonstrated meaningful relationships among academic hope, academic vitality, and academic achievement, indicating that hopeful students are more likely to respond constructively to educational difficulties and sustain productive academic functioning (Abri et al., 2025). Hope training has likewise been found to improve academic motivation, academic hardiness, and academic hope among school students, suggesting that hope is not merely a fixed personal attribute but a capacity that can be developed through purposeful educational and psychological interventions (Raeisi, 2025).

From a psychological perspective, academic hope is often understood through the reciprocal operation of pathways thinking and agency thinking. Pathways thinking refers to the ability to identify one or more feasible routes toward educational goals, particularly when an initial strategy becomes ineffective. Agency thinking refers to the motivational determination required to initiate and sustain movement along those routes. Students may have high aspirations, but without the ability to identify realistic pathways, their goals remain abstract. Conversely, students may recognize possible routes but lack the confidence or motivational energy to pursue them. Academic hope emerges when these two dimensions reinforce one another. This formulation is particularly relevant to management and educational leadership because schools and families may either strengthen students' perceived pathways and agency or contribute to their disruption.

Recent studies have shown that academic hope contributes to several dimensions of positive educational functioning. Academic encouragement appears to enhance academic well-being partly through the mediating roles of hope and perseverance, demonstrating that supportive messages and relational resources can be transformed into sustained educational motivation (Okur et al., 2023). Academic aspiration also influences academic hope through academic optimism, indicating that students' educational ambitions become more effective when they are accompanied by positive expectations regarding personal competence, teachers, and the broader educational environment (Panahi et al., 2023). These findings suggest that hope is embedded in a network of personal beliefs, social interactions, and institutional signals rather than being generated solely within the individual.

Academic hope is similarly associated with engagement and resilience. Research conducted from the perspective of secondary school educators has indicated that academic hope can predict academic engagement and that academic

buoyancy mediates this relationship (Feizi Shirabadi et al., 2024). Academic buoyancy refers to students' capacity to manage ordinary academic difficulties, such as disappointing grades, examination pressure, competing assignments, and temporary loss of motivation. Hopeful students are more likely to perceive such experiences as obstacles requiring alternative strategies rather than as definitive endpoints. This interpretive difference is critical because repeated encounters with academic difficulty may gradually produce either resilience or withdrawal, depending on the resources available to the student.

The relationship between hope and educational persistence becomes even more important among socioeconomically disadvantaged and minoritized students. Students from low-income backgrounds often encounter barriers that are not reducible to individual effort, including inadequate school resources, limited access to tutoring, financial instability, social exclusion, and weak institutional support. Hope can strengthen persistence among these students, but its development depends on whether educational systems provide credible opportunities, meaningful encouragement, and accessible pathways to achievement (Dixson, 2023). In other words, promoting hope does not mean persuading disadvantaged students to remain optimistic despite unchanged inequalities. Sustainable hope requires structural support capable of making academic pathways visible, plausible, and attainable.

This point is supported by research on low-income and underrepresented students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. A sense of belonging and academic hope have been identified as important predictors of persistence among students who may otherwise experience marginalization in academic environments (Hansen et al., 2023). When students perceive that they belong within an educational field and that their efforts can lead to meaningful outcomes, they are more likely to persevere. In contrast, when they repeatedly encounter signals that academic spaces are designed for others, their sense of agency and their ability to imagine viable educational pathways may decline. Accordingly, academic hope is closely connected with social recognition, institutional inclusion, and access to supportive networks.

The importance of social-support networks has also been demonstrated among at-risk youth. School belonging and hope are strengthened when young people receive academic support from family members, teachers, peers, and other significant individuals within their social environments

(Sulimani-Aidan & Melkman, 2022). Such support may include emotional encouragement, practical assistance, guidance in decision-making, access to educational information, and intervention during periods of academic decline. These forms of support create both motivational energy and alternative pathways, thereby reinforcing the two central dimensions of hope. Conversely, students who lack supportive relationships may interpret temporary difficulties as evidence that no viable route remains available.

The family is among the most influential social contexts in which academic hope is formed, maintained, or weakened. Parents shape students' educational expectations through their attitudes toward schooling, the meanings they assign to success and failure, the emotional climate they create at home, and the material and cultural resources they make available. Positive parenting practices can increase academic engagement, academic well-being, and hope for education among school students (Shirazi & Karami Baghtifouni, 2024). Such practices may include realistic encouragement, autonomy support, constructive responses to failure, and active involvement in learning. These findings indicate that parental influence is not limited to monitoring grades or enforcing study routines; it also involves shaping the emotional and interpretive frameworks through which children understand educational challenges.

Educational management within schools also affects students' academic hope and academic self-efficacy. Effective educational management can create orderly, supportive, and responsive environments in which students receive clear guidance, equitable opportunities, and timely assistance (Pouraslan, 2022). School leaders and teachers influence whether students perceive educational institutions as sources of possibility or as rigid systems that reproduce disadvantage. Through resource allocation, instructional quality, counseling provision, parent-school communication, and the management of academic failure, educational managers may directly or indirectly contribute to students' pathways thinking and agency.

Instructional practices represent another important source of academic hope. Scaffolding strategies, for example, support students by breaking complex learning tasks into manageable stages and gradually transferring responsibility to the learner. Such strategies have been associated with improved performance in secondary school physics and may promote creativity, self-confidence, and educational participation (Adebisi, 2024). From the perspective of hope theory, scaffolding provides students with visible and achievable pathways. When learners understand how to

proceed through a difficult task and receive support at critical stages, they are less likely to perceive academic challenges as insurmountable.

However, the development of academic hope cannot be separated from broader socioeconomic and geographical conditions. Rural students and learners from low-socioeconomic-status backgrounds frequently experience inadequate infrastructure, limited access to educational technologies, shortages of qualified teachers, and reduced opportunities for supplementary learning. Post-pandemic educational conditions have further revealed how rurality and poverty can function as both contextual constraints and determinants of academic resilience (Atibuni & Olema, 2024). Students' capacity to recover from educational disruption is therefore shaped not only by psychological characteristics but also by family resources, community conditions, and institutional responsiveness.

Technological transformation has introduced both opportunities and new inequalities into educational environments. Artificial intelligence and related technologies may facilitate individualized instruction, improve access to information, and enable more responsive educational support. Nevertheless, their benefits depend on the quality of implementation and the ability of disadvantaged students to access technological infrastructure. In academically constrained environments, artificial intelligence may help overcome certain instructional limitations, but it may also intensify existing inequalities when access is uneven or digital literacy is weak (Olusola et al., 2024). Thus, technological innovation can contribute to academic hope only when it expands credible educational pathways rather than creating additional divisions between socially advantaged and disadvantaged learners.

The relationship between hope and future orientation is particularly significant during adolescence, when students make educational and vocational decisions with long-term consequences. Future-perspective training has been shown to influence academic hope, psychological well-being, goal orientation, and time perspective among secondary school students (Norouzi, 2024). A coherent future perspective enables students to connect present academic tasks with personally meaningful future identities. Similarly, among vocational students, hope has been linked to the future work self and life satisfaction through the roles of career adaptability and academic self-efficacy (Zeng et al., 2022). These findings suggest that academic hope is strengthened when students can envision a realistic connection between

education, employment, personal development, and social participation.

Positive psychological interventions also appear capable of strengthening hope among students facing learning difficulties. Positive psychotherapy has been found to improve hope and the quality of academic life among slow-learning students (Herati Rad & Miri, 2024). A closely related report similarly documented the effectiveness of positive psychotherapy in enhancing hopefulness and academic quality of life in this population (Heratirad & Miri, 2023). These findings are important because students with learning-related challenges may repeatedly experience comparison, stigmatization, and failure, all of which can weaken their perceived agency and pathways. Interventions that emphasize strengths, meaning, positive emotions, and attainable goals may help reconstruct a sense of educational possibility.

Hope also plays an important role in students' psychological health under conditions of intense academic pressure. University students frequently experience stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and uncertainty regarding academic responsibilities. Research among dentistry and nursing students has documented the interrelationships among stress, anxiety, depression, resilience, hope, and spiritual well-being after the COVID-19 pandemic (Mangoulia et al., 2024). These findings emphasize that academic hope should be examined not only as a predictor of grades or persistence but also as an element of broader psychological adaptation.

The absence or erosion of hope may contribute to academic burnout. Perceived stress and hope have been identified as predictors of academic burnout among final-year undergraduate students (Tayyebati et al., 2022). Students approaching graduation may confront uncertainty about employment, financial pressures, and fear that their academic efforts will not translate into meaningful opportunities. Under such conditions, diminished hope may transform academic demands into chronic sources of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy. Academic burnout is therefore not always the product of excessive workload alone; it may also emerge when students no longer perceive convincing pathways between effort and valued outcomes.

Perfectionism represents another mechanism through which family and social-class expectations may undermine hope. Perfectionistic standards are sometimes interpreted as indicators of ambition or parental investment, yet they can become psychologically destructive when students perceive

that affection, acceptance, or social worth depends on flawless performance. Research has shown that perfectionism, academic burnout, loneliness, hopelessness, and fear of happiness are interconnected among university students (Dobos et al., 2024). In educationally competitive families, particularly those concerned about maintaining or improving social status, high expectations may shift from supportive aspiration to coercive pressure. The resulting fear of failure may weaken intrinsic motivation and reduce students' willingness to explore alternative educational pathways.

The relationship between meaning, hope, happiness, and academic vitality further demonstrates the multidimensional character of hopeful academic functioning. Models of academic vitality have shown that meaning and hope in life may influence students' educational resilience through the mediating role of happiness (Shadkam et al., 2022). Students are more likely to sustain academic effort when educational activities are integrated into a broader sense of purpose. When schooling becomes disconnected from personal meaning or is experienced solely as an externally imposed obligation, motivation may become fragile and dependent on grades, rewards, or avoidance of punishment.

Despite the growing body of research on the individual and educational consequences of academic hope, important conceptual and empirical gaps remain. Much of the existing literature examines hope as an individual psychological variable and evaluates its association with motivation, engagement, achievement, well-being, or burnout. Although these studies have produced valuable findings, fewer investigations have examined how academic hope is socially produced through interactions among family culture, social class, economic resources, emotional security, and educational structures. This gap is particularly important because students do not develop hope in social isolation. Their ability to imagine educational pathways is shaped by parents' knowledge of the educational system, access to supplementary resources, experiences of social mobility or occupational frustration, and the degree of stability within the home.

Cultural capital provides a particularly useful framework for understanding these processes. Families differ in their familiarity with academic language, institutional procedures, effective learning strategies, and the unwritten expectations of schools. Parents with greater educational experience may be able to interpret school requirements, communicate effectively with teachers, identify alternative educational routes, and intervene rapidly when their children encounter

difficulties. By contrast, parents with limited cultural capital may value education but lack the practical knowledge required to guide their children through institutional obstacles. As a result, similar academic setbacks may be experienced very differently across families. For one student, a poor grade may initiate tutoring, counseling, and strategic planning; for another, it may be interpreted as evidence that continued education is unrealistic.

Social class further shapes the material conditions under which academic hope is sustained. Economic capital allows families to purchase educational resources, provide quiet study environments, access private instruction, and absorb the short-term costs of prolonged education. For economically disadvantaged families, however, education may compete with urgent demands related to housing, food, debt, and employment. Under severe economic pressure, school dropout may become rationalized as a contribution to family survival rather than interpreted as an individual academic failure. Thus, the weakening of academic hope may reflect a realistic assessment of constrained opportunities rather than a simple deficiency in motivation.

The emotional climate of the family is equally important. Persistent parental conflict, economic anxiety, coercive expectations, and conditional approval can occupy students' cognitive and emotional resources. In such environments, the capacity to concentrate, plan, and sustain goal-directed action may be undermined. Conversely, emotional security, realistic encouragement, and supportive responses to failure can preserve students' agency even when material resources are limited. Academic hope should therefore be understood as the outcome of an interaction between personal cognition and the relational conditions in which that cognition develops.

A grounded theory approach is especially appropriate for investigating these relationships because it allows the meanings, processes, and mechanisms underlying academic hope to emerge from participants' lived experiences. Rather than imposing a predetermined explanatory model, grounded theory makes it possible to examine how educational hope is constructed, disrupted, and reconstructed within the family and social-class context. Such an approach can identify the causal, contextual, and intervening conditions affecting academic hope, the strategies adopted by families and educational actors, and the consequences of these interactions for engagement, achievement, burnout, and school continuation.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to develop a grounded theory model explaining the role of family, social

class, and cultural capital in the formation, erosion, and revitalization of students' academic hope.

2. Methods and Materials

Every credible scientific inquiry is rooted in a particular philosophical orientation and worldview that guides the selection of the methodology and data-collection instruments. Accordingly, the present study adopted a qualitative approach, specifically the grounded theory strategy, to explore and model the phenomenon of "academic hope" within the educational and family subsystems. Grounded theory is a systematic and inductive process that places the researcher directly in the field of study and enables the development of a coherent theory through the organized collection and analysis of data.

The selection of this strategy was based on three fundamental arguments. First, rather than merely describing the existing situation or testing conventional hypotheses, this study sought to discover and provide an in-depth explanation of the three dimensions of the phenomenon. Second, grounded theory facilitates the extraction of original, first-hand data from participants' lived experiences and prevents exclusive reliance on abstract concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Third, given the scarcity of research proposing an indigenous model in this area, this method provided the most appropriate avenue for addressing the existing scholarly gap. The approach adopted in the present study was based on the systematic design proposed by Strauss and Corbin, which emphasizes a three-stage coding process culminating in the development of a paradigmatic model.

Given the exploratory nature of the study, the participants were selected from among individuals possessing the greatest degree of involvement in and understanding of educational management and students' challenges. The participant-selection process was developmental and theory-driven. Initially, purposive sampling was employed to select a preliminary group of experts on the basis of rigorous criteria (Patton, 2015). Subsequently, snowball sampling was used to identify information-rich participants (Noy, 2008). This chain of referrals continued until theoretical saturation was reached, that is, until the analysis of new data no longer added any new category to the emerging model (Saunders et al., 2018). In the present study, theoretical saturation was achieved after the fifteenth interview.

The principal data-collection instrument in this phase was the in-depth, semi-structured interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Each interview lasted between 60 and 120

minutes. Before entering the research field, a detailed interview protocol was developed. Its questions were aligned with the components of the paradigmatic model and were designed to identify the core phenomenon, causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data were recorded simultaneously through note-taking and audio recording, and the interviews were transcribed immediately after the completion of each session.

To ensure the scientific rigor of the findings, the present study employed stringent qualitative evaluation criteria. With respect to validity, or credibility, five key strategies based on the framework proposed by Creswell and Miller were implemented, including member checking and peer review (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In addition, Lincoln and Guba's criteria of dependability and confirmability were carefully observed to ensure the overall trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The textual data obtained from the interview transcripts were analyzed through the systematic procedures proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The analysis was conducted in three sequential stages and culminated in the development of a paradigmatic model:

1. **Open coding:** At this stage, the raw data were carefully examined line by line, fragmented into discrete units, and assigned to preliminary concepts and categories representing the various dimensions of academic hope.
2. **Axial coding:** At this stage, the researcher connected the categories extracted during the preceding phase around a "core category" to construct a diagram or paradigmatic model. This model comprised six fundamental components:

Core phenomenon: The main idea and central focus of the study, which in the present research was academic hope.

Causal conditions: Events or factors that directly contribute to the emergence or development of the core phenomenon.

Contextual conditions: Specific environmental contexts and circumstances, such as family and school environments, within which strategies are formed.

Intervening conditions: General structural, facilitating, or constraining factors that affect actions, such as macroeconomic conditions or educational policies.

Strategies: Purposeful actions and reactions adopted by actors, including students, teachers, and parents, to manage and respond to the core phenomenon.

Consequences: The ultimate outcomes resulting from the implementation of strategies, such as academic achievement or school dropout.

3. **Selective coding:** This was the final stage, during which the researcher developed a “storyline” and systematically integrated the core category with the other categories to construct the final theory.

MAXQDA 2020, a specialized qualitative data-analysis software package, was used to manage the data, improve the accuracy of the three-stage coding process, and construct the model. The software facilitated the precise visualization of conceptual networks. The participants are presented below.

Table 1

Demographic and Professional Characteristics of the Participants Interviewed in the Qualitative Phase

No.	Gender	Age	Educational Level	Field of Study	Occupational Position	Years of Experience
1	Male	60	PhD	Educational Management	Senior Executive Manager	25
2	Female	59	PhD	Educational Sciences	University Assistant Professor	20
3	Male	54	Master's degree	Educational Sciences	Senior Executive Manager	20
4	Male	53	PhD	Curriculum Planning	University Assistant Professor	20
5	Male	58	PhD	Educational Management	University Associate Professor	25
6	Female	50	PhD	Educational Management	University Assistant Professor	17
7	Female	64	PhD	Educational Psychology	Senior Executive Manager	27
8	Male	65	PhD	Educational Management	University Professor	30
9	Male	48	PhD	Educational Sciences	University Assistant Professor	15
10	Male	51	PhD	General Psychology	University Assistant Professor	15
11	Male	57	PhD	Educational Management	Senior Executive Manager	28
12	Male	61	PhD	Educational Management	Senior Executive Manager	27
13	Male	64	PhD	General Psychology	University Associate Professor	26
14	Male	55	PhD	Curriculum Planning	University Assistant Professor	25
15	Male	57	PhD	Educational Psychology	University Assistant Professor	22

3. Findings and Results

The research problem was examined through grounded theory methodology to develop a contextually grounded explanation of the relationship between academic hope and family culture.

Open coding is the critical stage of fragmenting data, conducting constant comparison, and developing preliminary conceptualizations. At this stage, the participants' narratives were examined line by line, and their

units of meaning were extracted. The analysis primarily focused on disruptions in the two fundamental dimensions of Snyder's hope theory: “pathways thinking,” referring to an individual's cognitive capacity to generate alternative routes when encountering obstacles, and “agency thinking,” referring to the motivational energy and goal-directed determination required to move along those routes. By providing a “thick description,” the following table presents in detail the relationships among participants' raw statements, conceptual codes, and preliminary categories.

Table 2

Networking of Open Codes and Extraction of Fundamental Categories From the Raw Data

Narrative Examples Extracted From the Interviews: Empirical Evidence	Key Category/Concept	Open Codes and Subcategories
“When I struggle with physics or mathematics, my father says, ‘What did education ever do for us? Deal with it yourself.’ They do not understand the language of the school. At home, I have no role model for solving academic problems, and the first poor grade feels like the end of the road. It is as though no second pathway exists.”	Poverty of cultural capital	Lack of parents' academic and strategic literacy; inability to decode the educational field; premature blockage of pathways thinking; alienation from the language of schooling
“At night, when I hear my parents arguing about debts and rent, my mind freezes. The next day at school, instead of concentrating on my lessons, I spend the entire time worrying about what disaster may have happened by the time I return home. There is no mental space left for thinking about the future.”	Emotional insecurity within the home	Cognitive depletion caused by persistent tension; management of household crises by the child; reduction of psychological and cognitive energy; absence of an emotional refuge

“My mother treats my success as her personal project. If I receive a score of 19.5 out of 20, instead of encouraging me, she angrily asks why I lost the remaining half point. This perfectionism has destroyed my agency. I no longer study for myself; I study only to avoid her criticism.”	Imposed perfectionism	Projection of parents’ suppressed aspirations; middle-class fear of downward social mobility; conditioning parental affection on academic grades; destruction of self-determination
“My father is a day laborer and has been unemployed for months. When we cannot pay the rent, my studying feels like an enormous act of selfishness. My brother dropped out to work in a workshop. We do not call it laziness; we call it a sacrifice for the survival of our family.”	School dropout as a survival strategy	Child labor to compensate for household income deficits; prioritization of basic physiological needs; rationalization of withdrawal from the educational system; children’s economic self-sacrifice
“Although my father has a bachelor’s degree, he has worked as an informal taxi driver for years. When I see how exhausted he is, my intrinsic motivation to study completely collapses. I constantly ask myself why I should make an effort when this is how it ultimately ends.”	Intergenerational transmission of hopelessness	Direct observation of parental failure; collapse of the success schema; loss of meaning in academic effort
“Our school on the urban periphery does not even have a basic laboratory or specialized teachers. When I see in the news that the highest-ranked university entrance examination candidates all come from elite schools in the capital, my pathways thinking becomes blocked because our starting points are not equal at all.”	Spatial and geographical inequality	Center–periphery disparity in educational resources; perceived relative deprivation; systematic educational exclusion
“Whenever my friend’s performance declined on an examination, her family found a highly qualified counselor and private classes within less than a week and showed her a new pathway for recovery. For me, however, academic decline means a complete dead end.”	Pathway construction by advantaged families	Compensatory and parallel support; rapid intervention following academic decline; educational networking

During axial coding, the fragmented data generated in the previous stage were analytically reconnected. At this stage, the abstracted concepts were systematically organized around the “core category” to form a causal, contextual, and interactive network within a paradigmatic model.

Core Phenomenon

Academic hope as a multidimensional construct embedded in interactions: In the present study, academic hope was not treated as an individual and abstract trait but as a socially constructed and fully relational phenomenon. The data indicated that students’ academic hope directly reflects the quality of their interactions with the family subsystem and the ability of that subsystem to generate “pathways thinking” and maintain “agency” in the face of external shocks.

Causal Conditions

The causal conditions represent the point of departure in the formation of the phenomenon:

Cultural capital: According to the findings, parents who possess institutionalized cultural capital function as living road maps. By transmitting tacit skills, dispositions, and academic language, they institutionalize the capacity for “pathways thinking” in their children. A deficiency in this form of capital severely restricts students’ capacity for maneuvering through educational challenges.

Economic capital and parallel support: This refers to the degree of economic stability that enables families to rapidly provide alternative compensatory resources when academic crises or declining grades occur.

Contextual Conditions

These conditions represent the broader structural contexts within which strategies and actions occur:

Spatial injustice and the center–periphery structure:

This refers to inequality in the allocation of educational resources between developed central areas and disadvantaged peripheral regions. In peripheral provinces, the educational structure operates in a manner that, rather than empowering students, instills a sense of exclusion and accelerates school dropout as an apparently unavoidable exit strategy.

Political economy and the contraction of the horizon of expectations: Under conditions of inflation and macroeconomic instability, the horizon of disadvantaged social classes is reduced from the aspiration of “social mobility through education” to the immediate concern of “maintaining physical and everyday survival.”

Intervening Conditions

These are facilitating or constraining factors that affect the strength, weakness, and direction of causal relationships:

Emotional security and cognitive load: A conflict-ridden home environment fully occupies students’ cognitive bandwidth. The absence of emotional security redirects working-memory capacity, which should be devoted to learning and problem-solving, toward the continuous monitoring of threats and management of household tensions.

Middle-class imposed perfectionism: Because of persistent anxiety arising from economic insecurity and fear of downward mobility, middle-class parents impose psychologically burdensome and unattainable standards on their children. This intervention suppresses “intrinsic motivation” and reduces it to “avoidance motivation,” whereby students study merely to escape punishment and failure.

Intergenerational transmission of hopelessness: This is a psychosocial process through which parents' lived experiences of structural discrimination and occupational failure are transmitted to children through everyday discourse in the form of a "schema of failure and dead ends."

Strategies and Actions

In confronting this phenomenon, educational institutions and families need to adopt the following strategies:

Family-centered interventions to moderate expectations: Educating parents to develop a realistic understanding of their children's abilities and move beyond destructive perfectionism.

Reconstructing the emotional atmosphere of the home: Providing social-work and family-counseling services to reduce tensions and transform the home into a psychologically secure refuge.

Designing compensatory support pathways: Establishing school-based support mechanisms to compensate for the lack of cultural capital among families living in marginalized areas and to create alternative educational pathways.

Consequences

If the above strategies are implemented, the following outcomes may be achieved at the micro and macro levels:

Revitalization of agency thinking and enhancement of intrinsic motivation for continuous learning.

Termination of the rationalization of school dropout as a survival strategy and a substantial reduction in the number of out-of-school children.

Reduction of students' cognitive exhaustion and improvement in performance indicators, including the national grade point average.

Prevention of the waste and depletion of human capital at the national level.

The final stage of grounded theory analysis is selective coding, which integrates the categories into a coherent analytical narrative. The narrative developed in the present study demonstrates that contemporary educational crises, such as the sharp decline in provincial grade point averages—for example, the marked difference between an average of 7.7 in Sistan and Baluchestan and an average of 12.4 in Yazd—and the increasing number of out-of-school children, which has exceeded 911,000, cannot be attributed merely to students' individual negligence or intellectual deficiencies. Rather, they are direct outcomes of the interrelationship among family, class-based, and structural inequalities. To overcome educational obstacles, students require two powerful resources: cognitive fuel, represented

by agency thinking, and a road map, represented by pathways thinking. In disadvantaged families, parents' limited cultural capital and the crushing pressures of a subsistence economy undermine this road map before it can be fully developed. Within such a context, school dropout is no longer perceived as deviance or individual failure; rather, it is redefined and rationalized within the family as an "adaptive strategy for survival."

From a critical perspective inspired by the project of "decolonizing knowledge," the concept of "academic success" in the current educational system is often defined and hegemonized through centralist criteria and the coordinates of the urban middle class, such as obtaining perfect grades, participating in intense individualistic competition, and entering a limited number of prestigious academic disciplines. This dominant perspective causes "parentally imposed perfectionism" to appear outwardly as a caring value, whereas in practice it places students' human agency, creativity, and emancipatory capacities under severe pressure.

Decolonizing this concept requires the redefinition of success from "mechanical conformity to perfectionistic standards" toward the "cultivation of critical agency, global justice, and holistic human development." Only by disrupting this hegemony can the psychological burden of perfectionism and fear of downward class mobility be removed from families and a secure, equitable, and authentic learning environment be established.

Theoretical Propositions

Based on the network of relationships identified in the paradigmatic model, the following strategic propositions were formulated to explain the phenomenon:

Proposition 1: The reproduction of pathways through capital. The richness of parents' "institutionalized cultural capital" is a determinant of academic resilience, such that this capital directly predicts students' capacity to generate "alternative pathways thinking" when encountering educational barriers.

Proposition 2: The erosion of agency through perfectionism. Within the paradigm of anxious middle-class families, "imposed perfectionism" functions as a defensive mechanism against downward class mobility. Paradoxically, however, by undermining personal autonomy, it contributes to the emergence of academic burnout syndrome and the blockage of agency.

Proposition 3: Emotional security as a cognitive prerequisite. "Emotional security within the home" is not a peripheral variable; rather, it is a fundamental cognitive

prerequisite for learning. Its absence places the mind's central processing system in a continuous state of alertness and completely depletes the cognitive resources required for "agency thinking."

Accordingly, the following important conclusion may be drawn: "Academic hope is a dynamic function of the complex dialectic among individual agency, the capacities of the family subsystem, and structural position within the political economy of education." Policies aimed at reducing academic decline and school dropout will merely provide superficial remedies and ultimately reproduce the vicious

cycle of the "intergenerational transmission of hopelessness" if they neglect to neutralize the restrictive effects of cultural-capital deprivation, revise dominant perfectionistic standards, and enhance families' psychological security.

In this regard, to present a comprehensive, structured, and coherent representation of all stages of the qualitative analysis, the following table classifies and summarizes the principal findings according to the six components of the Strauss and Corbin paradigmatic model.

Table 3

Grounded Theory Paradigmatic Model: Revitalizing Academic Hope Within the Context of Family and Social Class

Dimension of the Paradigmatic Model	Axial Categories	Selective and Open Codes	Mechanism Affecting Academic Hope
1. Causal conditions	Volume of family cultural capital; economic-capital support	Parents' academic literacy; capacity for academic guidance; ability to provide remedial classes	Generation of pathways thinking; Providing tools and alternative cognitive road maps for overcoming educational obstacles
2. Core phenomenon	Academic hope within the family context	Pathways thinking; agency thinking	Central focus of the study: Fluctuation in the individual's cognitive-motivational structure under the influence of family atmosphere and social class
3. Contextual conditions	Spatial and geographical inequality; macroeconomic instability	Educational center-periphery divide; contraction of the horizon of expectations to survival; exclusion of peripheral communities	Determination of the context of action: Imposition of structural constraints that transform school dropout from a choice into an obligation
4. Intervening conditions	Emotional insecurity within the home; imposed perfectionism; intergenerational transmission of hopelessness	Persistent parental conflict; fear of downward mobility; observation of parental failure	Erosion of agency: Occupation of cognitive bandwidth, generation of anxiety, and depletion of students' psychological energy
5. Strategies	Family-centered interventions; creation of school-based support pathways	Moderation of parental expectations; provision of psychological security at home; compensatory counseling	Crisis management: Neutralizing the effects of cultural-capital deprivation and reconstructing the home as an emotional refuge
6. Consequences	Revitalization of agency; motivation to prevent educational exclusion	Reduction in intentions to drop out; improvement in academic performance averages; preservation of national human capital	Emancipation: Breaking the cycle of poverty reproduction and promoting comprehensive and equitable human development

Through a detailed examination of the field data, the hidden and complex mechanisms affecting academic hope within the context of the family subsystem and social classes were explored. As explained in the statement of the problem, academic hope is not a passive emotion; rather, it is a cognitive-motivational construct grounded in pathways thinking and agency thinking, which currently faces a serious crisis within Iran's educational system. The findings indicate that the sharp decline in the national grade point average and the increasing rate of educational exclusion are not merely statistical figures. Instead, they directly reflect blocked pathways and the collapse of agency within family relationship networks, which are intensified by macroeconomic pressures and spatial inequalities.

The data analysis clearly reveals the phenomenon of the intergenerational transmission of hopelessness, whereby the contraction of families' horizons of expectation from long-term planning to everyday survival directly paralyzes children's capacity to establish academic goals. In this respect, the findings confirm that the crisis of hope assumes entirely different configurations across social classes. Among disadvantaged groups and in geographically marginalized areas, the lack of cultural and economic capital causes the first instance of academic decline to be perceived as a definitive dead end, and school dropout is viewed not as an educational failure but as a rational strategy for family survival. Conversely, the data obtained from the middle class indicate the emergence of "anxious hope," a phenomenon in

which fear of downward class mobility drives parents toward imposed perfectionism and undermines students' internal agency to the point of academic burnout and psychological collapse.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate the central role of emotional insecurity and the absence of perceived social support in eroding students' psychological energy. The results reveal how the absence of strategic road maps and the presence of tensions within the home redirect individuals' cognitive concentration away from learning processes and toward the struggle for psychological survival. Accordingly, the subsequent structural modeling and qualitative analyses provide a comprehensive representation of how family-related variables interact, with the aim of identifying strategic approaches for revitalizing academic hope and preventing the extensive loss of human capital.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to explain how family, social class, and cultural capital contribute to the formation, erosion, and reconstruction of academic hope. The grounded theory analysis showed that academic hope is not merely an individual psychological trait but a relational, contextual, and socially produced phenomenon. The core category emerging from the data was "academic hope within the family context," which was constituted through the interaction of pathways thinking and agency thinking. The findings indicated that students' capacity to imagine alternative routes toward academic goals and sustain motivational energy was strongly influenced by the cultural and economic resources of their families, the emotional atmosphere of the home, parents' educational expectations, and broader structural inequalities. In this model, family cultural capital and economic support operated as causal conditions; spatial inequality and macroeconomic instability functioned as contextual conditions; emotional insecurity, imposed perfectionism, and the intergenerational transmission of hopelessness emerged as intervening conditions; and family-centered interventions and school-based compensatory pathways were identified as the principal strategies for revitalizing academic hope.

One of the central findings was that academic hope depends on the simultaneous availability of cognitive pathways and motivational agency. Students who believed that alternative routes were available when they encountered academic obstacles were more likely to persevere, whereas those who perceived academic failure as a definitive dead

end experienced a rapid decline in motivation. This finding is consistent with evidence showing that hope is associated with academic thriving, adaptive coping, and psychological equilibrium among students (Shan & Xu, 2025). It also aligns with research demonstrating positive relationships among academic hope, academic vitality, and academic achievement (Abri et al., 2025). Taken together, these findings suggest that hopeful students do not necessarily experience fewer academic difficulties; rather, they are more capable of interpreting difficulties as temporary, manageable, and responsive to alternative strategies.

The results further indicated that hope is not fixed and can be strengthened through purposeful intervention. Participants' accounts showed that students who received timely guidance, encouragement, and alternative academic options were able to reconstruct their pathways after setbacks. This interpretation is supported by findings that hope training improves academic motivation, academic hardiness, and academic hope among school students (Raeisi, 2025). Future-perspective training has similarly been shown to enhance academic hope, goal orientation, psychological well-being, and time perspective (Norouzi, 2024). These studies support the present model's emphasis on pathway creation and suggest that interventions are most effective when they enable students to connect present educational activities with attainable future goals.

A major contribution of the present study is its identification of family cultural capital as a causal condition in the production of academic hope. Parents with greater familiarity with academic language, institutional rules, educational planning, and problem-solving strategies were able to function as "living road maps" for their children. They could interpret school requirements, communicate with educators, identify compensatory resources, and help students construct alternative plans following academic setbacks. In contrast, parents with limited academic literacy were often unable to guide their children through educational barriers, even when they valued education. This finding extends previous research showing that educational management and structured academic guidance contribute to academic hope and academic self-efficacy (Pouraslan, 2022). It also complements evidence that scaffolding strategies improve academic performance by dividing difficult learning tasks into manageable stages and providing structured support (Adebisi, 2024). In both the family and school contexts, guidance functions as a pathway-generating mechanism.

The mediating role of academic buoyancy reported in previous research also helps explain the present findings. Academic hope has been shown to predict academic engagement through students' capacity to recover from ordinary academic difficulties (Feizi Shirabadi et al., 2024). The participants in the current study similarly described how families with greater cultural and economic resources responded to declining grades by providing counseling, tutoring, or alternative study strategies. Such responses prevented temporary failure from becoming a generalized belief in personal incapacity. In disadvantaged families, however, a single academic setback could be interpreted as proof that continued education was futile. Thus, academic buoyancy appears to depend not only on individual resilience but also on the availability of relational and material resources that allow students to recover.

The findings also revealed that economic capital functions as an important support mechanism for academic hope. Families with stable financial resources could rapidly mobilize private instruction, counseling, technology, transportation, and other supplementary educational opportunities. These resources widened the range of perceived pathways available to students. Conversely, in economically disadvantaged households, academic participation competed with basic needs such as housing, food, debt repayment, and employment. Under these conditions, leaving school was sometimes redefined as an adaptive strategy for family survival. This finding is compatible with research emphasizing the vulnerability of learners from low-socioeconomic-status backgrounds, particularly in rural and educationally deprived settings (Atibuni & Olema, 2024). It also supports arguments that hope among economically disadvantaged students must be reinforced through genuine structural opportunities rather than through motivational messages alone (Dixon, 2023).

The center-periphery divide emerged as another significant contextual condition. Participants described pronounced inequalities in school facilities, access to specialized teachers, counseling services, laboratories, and supplementary education. Students in marginalized geographical areas compared their limited opportunities with those available to students in privileged schools and consequently experienced relative deprivation and educational exclusion. This perception weakened pathways thinking because students felt that their starting positions were fundamentally unequal. The result is consistent with evidence that a sense of belonging and academic hope enhance persistence among low-income and

underrepresented students (Hansen et al., 2023). When educational environments communicate inclusion, possibility, and institutional commitment, students are more likely to maintain hope. When they signal exclusion or neglect, students may conclude that the educational system was not designed to support their success.

The findings regarding social support further reinforce this interpretation. Students who received academic encouragement from parents, teachers, peers, or counselors were more likely to preserve hope during periods of difficulty. Previous research has shown that academic encouragement contributes to academic well-being through the mediating roles of hope and grit (Okur et al., 2023). Similarly, academic support provided by social networks strengthens school belonging and hope among at-risk youth (Sulimani-Aidan & Melkman, 2022). The present study adds that social support is effective not only because it provides emotional reassurance but also because it generates concrete alternatives. Advice, information, advocacy, tutoring, and problem-solving support can transform a vague desire to succeed into a practical and navigable academic pathway.

Another important finding concerned the emotional atmosphere of the family. Persistent parental conflict, financial anxiety, and household instability consumed students' cognitive bandwidth and redirected attention from learning toward the monitoring of threats. Participants reported difficulty concentrating on schoolwork when they were preoccupied with domestic conflict, debt, unemployment, or the possibility of family disruption. This finding indicates that emotional security is not peripheral to educational functioning but a cognitive prerequisite for sustained attention, planning, and agency. The relationships among stress, anxiety, depression, resilience, hope, and well-being observed among students in demanding academic environments support this conclusion (Mangoulia et al., 2024). When psychological resources are depleted by chronic stress, students may be unable to maintain the cognitive and motivational processes required for hopeful goal pursuit.

The erosion of hope under prolonged stress also helps explain the relationship between hopelessness and academic burnout. The present data showed that students exposed to persistent household tension and repeated academic pressure experienced reduced motivation, emotional exhaustion, and a growing sense that effort was meaningless. Previous findings indicate that perceived stress and hope are significant predictors of academic burnout (Tayyebati et al., 2022). Academic burnout may therefore arise not solely

from the quantity of academic demands but from a perceived absence of control, support, and viable routes to success. When students believe that no amount of effort will change their circumstances, exhaustion is likely to be accompanied by disengagement and cynicism.

Imposed perfectionism was identified as a particularly important intervening condition among middle-class families. The findings suggested that parents' fear of downward social mobility sometimes led them to impose unrealistically high academic standards on their children. Although these expectations were often justified as concern for the child's future, they made parental approval contingent upon flawless performance and weakened students' autonomy. Students consequently shifted from intrinsic motivation toward avoidance-based motivation, studying primarily to escape criticism, punishment, or shame. This interpretation is consistent with evidence linking perfectionism with academic burnout, loneliness, hopelessness, and fear of happiness (Dobos et al., 2024). The findings therefore challenge the assumption that greater parental pressure necessarily produces greater academic success. When expectations are inflexible and emotionally coercive, they may undermine the agency that academic hope requires.

In contrast, positive parenting appeared to create conditions conducive to hope. Participants emphasized the importance of realistic expectations, emotional support, constructive responses to failure, and respect for the student's autonomy. These findings align with evidence that positive parenting training can improve academic engagement, academic well-being, and hope for education (Shirazi & Karami Baghtifouni, 2024). Positive parenting does not imply the absence of standards; rather, it involves combining expectations with warmth, guidance, flexibility, and recognition of individual differences. Such parenting preserves students' sense of ownership over their educational goals and enables them to interpret failure as feedback rather than as a threat to their worth.

The intergenerational transmission of hopelessness was another central category. Parents who had experienced unemployment, occupational mismatch, social discrimination, or the failure of education to produce upward mobility sometimes communicated their disappointment through everyday conversations. Students who repeatedly observed educated parents working in insecure or low-status occupations questioned the value of academic effort. This process weakened the perceived relationship between education and future opportunity. Research on vocational

students has shown that hope, future work identity, life satisfaction, career adaptability, and academic self-efficacy are closely interconnected (Zeng et al., 2022). The present findings suggest that when students cannot imagine a credible future occupational self, academic goals become less meaningful and motivational agency deteriorates.

This interpretation also clarifies why academic aspiration alone is insufficient. Previous research has shown that the influence of academic aspiration on hope is mediated by academic optimism (Panahi et al., 2023). Students may aspire to high levels of achievement, but these aspirations generate hope only when they are accompanied by confidence that educational institutions are supportive, teachers are responsive, and personal effort can produce meaningful outcomes. In environments marked by structural inequality and repeated experiences of blocked mobility, aspiration may instead become a source of frustration. Academic hope therefore requires both valued goals and credible expectations regarding the possibility of attaining them.

The findings also support the role of positive psychological interventions in reconstructing agency and meaning. Positive psychotherapy has been reported to improve hope and academic quality of life among slow-learning students (Herati Rad & Miri, 2024; Heratirad & Miri, 2023). These results are compatible with the present study's recommendation to provide family counseling, emotional support, and strengths-based educational services. Interventions that focus on meaning, strengths, attainable goals, and positive relationships may help students reinterpret their experiences and rebuild the motivational dimension of hope. Similarly, the association among meaning, hope, happiness, and academic vitality suggests that students are more resilient when education is integrated into a broader sense of purpose (Shadkam et al., 2022).

The study further highlighted the responsibility of schools and educational managers to compensate for unequal family resources. When students cannot access academic guidance at home, schools must assume a more active role in pathway construction. This includes counseling, mentoring, remedial education, career guidance, and early intervention following academic decline. Artificial intelligence and digital learning tools may also provide personalized support and expand access to educational resources, particularly in constrained academic environments (Olusola et al., 2024). However, such technologies can strengthen hope only when access is equitable and when they are integrated into supportive

educational relationships rather than treated as substitutes for teachers, counselors, and family engagement.

Overall, the paradigmatic model developed in this study demonstrates that academic hope is produced through a complex dialectic among personal agency, family capacities, social-class position, and the political economy of education. Cultural capital supplies interpretive and strategic knowledge, economic capital expands the range of available options, emotional security preserves cognitive resources, and supportive relationships sustain motivation. Conversely, poverty, spatial inequality, household conflict, coercive perfectionism, and repeated exposure to failed social mobility restrict both pathways thinking and agency. The findings therefore indicate that policies aimed at reducing academic decline and dropout cannot rely exclusively on individual motivational programs. Effective intervention requires simultaneous attention to family education, emotional security, school-based compensatory support, and the structural inequalities that shape students' educational horizons.

The present study had several limitations. First, because the research employed a qualitative grounded theory design and involved 15 participants selected through purposive and snowball sampling, the findings cannot be statistically generalized to all students, families, or educational settings. Second, the participant group primarily consisted of educational experts, university faculty members, and senior administrators; therefore, the model reflects professional interpretations of students' and families' experiences rather than relying exclusively on direct accounts from students and parents. Third, the findings may have been influenced by the social, economic, and educational conditions prevailing at the time and location of data collection. Finally, although strategies such as member checking, peer review, and systematic coding were used to enhance trustworthiness, qualitative analysis inevitably involves a degree of researcher interpretation.

Future studies should test the proposed paradigmatic model quantitatively using large and diverse samples from different provinces, school levels, and socioeconomic groups. Researchers could develop and validate a multidimensional instrument measuring family-based academic hope, including cultural capital, economic support, emotional security, pathways support, parental expectations, and intergenerational hopelessness. Longitudinal research is also needed to examine how academic hope changes over time and whether declining hope predicts absenteeism, burnout, academic failure, or school dropout. Comparative

studies could investigate differences between rural and urban students, public and private schools, and socially advantaged and disadvantaged families. Future qualitative research should include students, parents, teachers, counselors, and school administrators to provide a more comprehensive and multiperspectival understanding of the phenomenon.

Educational authorities should implement integrated programs that address both the psychological and structural determinants of academic hope. Schools should establish early-warning systems to identify students experiencing declining motivation, family conflict, financial pressure, or repeated academic failure. Parent-education programs should emphasize realistic expectations, autonomy-supportive parenting, constructive responses to poor performance, and the harmful effects of coercive perfectionism. Schools serving disadvantaged communities should provide free counseling, mentoring, remedial instruction, career guidance, and access to digital learning resources. Family-support and social-work services should be coordinated with educational institutions to reduce the cognitive and emotional burden created by household instability. Finally, academic success should be defined more broadly than examination scores and competitive university admission, with greater emphasis placed on personal growth, critical agency, vocational development, resilience, and sustained participation in education.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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Declaration of Interest

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Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were under the ethical standards of the institutional and, or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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