

Attitudes, Intentions and Participation

LSAY Research Report 41

Siek Toon Khoo and John Ainley

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From previous research, based on a variety of methods and approaches, there is evidence that student attitudes to school and the intentions formed by students by the time they are in the early years of secondary school are related to subsequent participation in education and training. However, there is less research literature that provides an indication of how attitudes influence decisions to continue with school and education beyond school. The analyses in this report are based on propositions from the Ajzen (2001) theory of planned behaviour that intentions act as a mediating influence on actions, and that attitudes to school as well as other factors operate through their influence on intentions.

The analyses are based on data from the 13,600 young people who were sampled when they were in Year 9 of school in 1995 and whose educational and occupational activities were followed annually from that time onwards. For these young people, there are data concerning their participation in Year 12, in higher education and in tertiary (higher plus other post-school) education. There are also data on their educational intentions (Year 12, higher education or tertiary education), attitudes to school, achievements in literacy and numeracy, and background. Student background was reflected in indicators of socioeconomic status, parental education, language background, home location and gender.

The strength of the relationship between intentions at Year 9 to complete Year 12 and participation in Year 12 can be seen in the following results:

- 87 per cent of those who indicated that they planned to proceed to Year 12 did in fact do Year 12.
- 79 per cent of those who indicated that they planned to leave school before Year 12 did leave school before Year 12.
- The correlation between intention to proceed to Year 12 and actual participation is very high ($r = 0.80$).

Overall, 33 per cent of those who were in Year 9 in 1995 participated in university study. The strength of the relationship between intentions and university participation is evident in the following results:

- 52 per cent of those who intended to enter university did in fact participate in university.
- Only 14 per cent of those who indicated that they did not intend to proceed to university eventually participated in university.
- The correlation between intention and entry to higher education is moderately strong ($r = 0.59$).

The results of the analyses of these longitudinal data indicate that intentions for continuing with education as expressed in junior secondary school are important indications of actually continuing in education. A range of factors, including attitudes to school, influences those intentions. The importance of attitudes to school is evident in the observations that:

- The associations between attitudes to school and educational intentions are moderately strong ($r = 0.37$ for Year 12 and $r = 0.33$ for university).

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- Attitudes to school are more strongly related to educational intentions than any aspects of student background included in the analysis, including socioeconomic background.

Other things being equal, students who are positively oriented to their schools and are actively engaged in its academic work and other activities are more likely to develop an intention to continue through school and beyond. Results in this report also show that attitudes to school are relatively independent of both proficiency in literacy and numeracy and student background. In other words, attention to what happens in the middle and early secondary years of school including nurturing of favourable attitudes to school can influence educational intentions and subsequent participation.

Most of the aspects of student background that are associated with participation in Year 12 and education beyond school also operate by influencing intentions that later become manifest as participation. Educational intentions are influenced not only by attitudes to school but also by achievements in the foundation areas of literacy and numeracy and various aspects of student background.