



## **Making Australia Internationally Competitive: Driving Educational Attainment by Academic Motivation, Self-Concept, Engagement, And Aspirations**

There has been a worldwide decline in enrolments in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) over the last two decades, resulting in young people who may not have the skills needed to compete in a modern technology-based society and worldwide shortages of students pursuing university qualifications in these disciplines (OECD, 2011).

Despite wide acknowledgement of the importance of school engagement and continuing education, key reviews of Australian higher education (eg Bradley Report, Cutter Report) indicate that our international competitiveness is declining in relation to the number of people with tertiary degrees. Indeed, this problem will likely worsen as the current generations of children begin to make choices about their futures.

We propose that part of the solution facing the Australian policy makers attempting to increase education attainment levels lies in student motivation and self-concept. Hence, the overarching purpose of this research is to address this national priority – namely how to keep students engaged in schooling.

Led by Professor Herb Marsh from the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (IPPE) at ACU, this Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project specifically aims to demonstrate that motivation and self-concept are the keys to solving the problem, and offer new, revolutionary extensions of existing theoretical models to explicate how this can be achieved. In a novel approach to this problem we utilise an innovative synergy of secondary data analyses from the most appropriate national/international databases, and a pioneering primary data study that builds on, and is fundamentally enhanced by, results of the secondary data analysis.

Substantively, we will apply these theoretical advances to issues of student engagement and educational transition choices to provide a powerful framework for understanding young peoples' educational decision-making processes. In the long term, we seek to fundamentally alter the way motivation is conceptualised in policy/practice to improve student engagement and attainment, thereby maximising the potential of young Australians, resulting in strategies to meet ambitious Australian governmental targets.



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