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Developmental Path to Generalized Entitlement in a South African Higher Education Institution

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Abstract. Academic entitlement in South African higher education institutions is a complex issue, deeply rooted in the country's history of apartheid. Despite numerous educational reforms aimed at addressing challenges related to access, equity, and quality within the South African education system, socio-economic disparities persist, contributing to feelings of inadequacy and a generalized sense of entitlement among students from

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disadvantaged backgrounds. This study examines the perceived sense of academic entitlement among 348 students from a higher education institution in South Africa, using a descriptive survey design and quantitative methods. Descriptive and inferential statistics reveal significant differences in academic entitlement scores across demographic variables ($p < 0.05$). Older students, female students, second-year students, students from rural areas, and international students exhibited statistically higher levels of entitlement. Conversely, African students demonstrated significantly lower levels of entitlement compared to students from other racial groups. The findings highlight the complexity of academic entitlement and its demographic dimensions, emphasizing important implications for institutional policy and practice. One potential policy response is the adoption of the Basic Education Laws Amendment Act of 2024, which would promote inclusivity and equity regarding the language of instruction at all educational levels. The study also recommends the development of tailored support programs, such as mentorship initiatives for second-year students, empowerment workshops for female students, and integration programs for international students and those from rural areas. These interventions aim to address the unique challenges and perceptions contributing to academic entitlement, fostering a more equitable and supportive educational environment.

Keywords: academic entitlement; apartheid; demographic characteristics; higher education institution; planned behaviour

1. Introduction

The topic of student entitlement has become increasingly prominent within academic discourse, particularly among educators working with undergraduate students (Cain et al., 2012; Carollo, 2020; Cownie, 2017; Schaefer et al., 2013). This phenomenon, characterized by a shift in student learning culture, was first identified by Delucchi and Korgen (2023). Delucchi and Korgen (2023) observed that students began viewing education as a commodity, adopting a consumerist mindset where they perceived themselves as paying customers deserving of high levels of satisfaction and service (Delucchi & Korgen, 2023; Sohr-Preston & Bosweel, 2015). Delucchi and Korgen (2023) further expressed concerns about declining academic standards, where achievement became increasingly associated with a sense of entitlement to high grades and degrees, regardless of genuine learning. This culture of entitlement poses a significant threat to the integrity of higher education institutions, potentially undermining the value of conferred degrees.

For clarity, precise definitions of psychological and academic entitlement are crucial. Psychological entitlement is described as a pervasive belief that one deserves more than others (Irshad et al., 2024), while academic entitlement refers specifically to entitlement within an academic context (Greenberger et al., 2008). Traditionally, the culture of entitlement has been studied in the Northern Hemisphere. However, recent research trends have shifted focus to other parts of the world, particularly the global

south, with South Africa serving as a notable example (Alfonso, 2022; Cownie, 2017; Curtis et al., 2022; Fromuth et al., 2019; Hanna, 2016; McLellan, 2019; Reinhardt, 2012).

The South African education system faces numerous challenges, including unequal distribution of resources, inadequate teacher training and support, student underachievement, and social and systemic issues. While apartheid can be blamed as the root cause of some of these problems, the post-apartheid period has not yet delivered the significant positive changes needed (Legotlo, 2014; Mensah et al., 2018; Mushtaq & Khan, 2012; Wills & van der Berg, 2022). In the absence of a level playing field for educational opportunities, many students now perceive formal education not as a means of knowledge dissemination, innovation, and intellectual discourse, but as a transactional process primarily aimed at achieving social justice.

This study examines the developmental trajectory of entitlement from pre-tertiary to tertiary education, with a specific focus on undergraduate students in a South African higher education institution. While much of the existing literature has examined entitlement primarily through a general lens, there is a noticeable gap in research regarding how entitlement evolves in the South African higher education context, particularly considering the unique socio-economic and historical factors that shape students' perceptions. This study aims to contribute to the existing literature on academic entitlement by assessing the extent of entitlement among these students and exploring the correlations as well as differences between students' demographic characteristics and their academic entitlement.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Developmental Path of Entitlement in the South African Education System

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 institutionalized a racially segregated and inferior education system for black South Africans, deliberately restricting their access to quality education and economic opportunities (Moore, 2023). This act ensured that white students had access to superior educational facilities, fostering a sense of entitlement rooted in privilege. In contrast, black students were systematically excluded from quality education, leaving a legacy of socio-economic disparities that persist to this day. These inequalities are evident in resource allocation, infrastructure, and the overall quality of education available to previously disadvantaged communities (McKeever, 2017).

In the post-apartheid era, significant strides have been made to transform the education system through policies emphasizing access, equity, and redress. Black South Africans, who were historically marginalized, have been at the forefront of demanding improvements in the education system, advocating for equity and quality in higher education institutions. This advocacy, while addressing systemic injustices, has also contributed to a growing sense of entitlement among some students, driven by expectations of rectifying historical inequalities (Jooste & Hagenmeier, 2022). On October 20, 2009, the Department of Education (DOE) task team recommended the introduction and implementation of a unified, concise curriculum and assessment

policy for the General Education and Training (GET) and Further Education and Training (FET) phases. This move aimed to rectify past mistakes and address current shortcomings. The Annual National Assessment was launched to bridge the gap between content demands for progression and achieving social justice within the South African education system.

The introduction of the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) resulted in many learners failing to meet the minimum pass requirements due to inadequate foundational skills and knowledge (Legotlo, 2014). The persistent challenge of students not mastering these foundational skills can be traced back to the lack of effective assessment integration in past education reforms. To address this issue, the policy of condonation was established to ensure that no child was left behind. Condonation involves relaxing promotion requirements, with the aim of allowing learners to advance to the next grade even if they have not met the minimum pass requirements (DBE, 2011).

In response to the introduction of CAPS and persistent assessment failures, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) implemented a mark adjustment policy for the GET and FET phases from 2015 to 2020. This policy aimed to assist struggling learners in progressing through the education system. National Assessment Circular No. 3 of 2015, issued by the DBE, outlined a sliding scale approach, adding percentage marks to failing learners' original scores. The increments decreased annually, starting with 7% in 2015 and ending at 2% in 2018 (DBE, 2015, p. 4). National Assessment Circular No. 2 of 2019 extended the policy for 2019 and 2020, allowing a maximum of 2% to be added and granting condonation (a chance to progress despite failing) to those who failed a subject crucial for their progression (DBE, 2019). This policy aimed to help learners meet the subject-specific pass requirements: 40% for mathematics and First Additional Language, and 50% for Home Language. Despite these efforts, many learners continued to struggle and fail grades.

Currently, South Africa does not have an aggregate pass mark, unlike the previous apartheid regime. Instead, learners can pass a grade despite receiving a 30% mark in a particular subject, provided they meet the other requirements detailed in the National Promotion and Progression requirements (DBE, 2011). The National Promotion and Progression requirements outline the pass requirements for the GET phase, along with the associated ratings, as follows:

- Adequate achievement (Level 4: 50% - 59%) in one language at Home Language level
- Moderate achievement (Level 3: 40% - 49%) in the second required official language also referred to as First Additional Language (FAL) level
- Moderate achievement (Level 3) in mathematics
- Moderate achievement (Level 3) in any three of the other required subjects.
- At least an elementary achievement (Level 2: 30% - 39%) in any two of the other language required.

The pass requirements for the three achievements levels which are bachelors, diplomas and national certificates are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Pass requirements at the National Senior Certificate level in South Africa

Bachelor's degree	Diploma	Certificate pass
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pass 6 of 7 subjects - At least 50% in four subjects - At least 40% in Home Language - At least 30% in Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) - At least 30% for one other subject 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pass 6 of 7 subjects - At least 40% in four subjects - At least 40% in Home Language - At least 30% in Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pass 6 of 7 subjects - At least 40% in Home Language - At least 40% in two other subjects - At least 30% for four other subjects

The Basic Education Minister has confirmed that the 2014 ministerial committee, which proposed various changes to the National Senior Certificate (NSC) (many of which were implemented), did not recommend altering the minimum passing threshold. The minister argues that the current system accommodates different achievement levels through the three distinct NSC pass levels: Bachelor's pass, diploma pass, and certificate pass. However, the Minister of Basic Education has also stated that a 30% passing grade indicates proficiency in essential skills (Business Tech, 2023). If proposals to modify the minimum passing requirement are implemented, South Africa would have one of the world's lowest pass rates, comparable to Myanmar's 29% and lower than India's 33% (Business Tech, 2018). Since the typical passing score in South Africa is currently 50%, it is expected that this standard will be maintained across all educational levels. If not this could create a disparity when students enter tertiary institutions. Accustomed to a system with positive reinforcement and potentially inflated grades (Hanna, 2016), these students might face challenges adjusting to the expectations of university faculty.

3. Conceptualizing Academic Entitlement

The definition of entitlement is generally challenging to establish (Hanna, 2016), as it is subjectively described based on the specific context of a study. Different contexts can lead to varying conceptions of entitlement, as shown by Chowning and Campbell (2009) and Kopp et al. (2011). Miller (2013) identifies entitlement as a trait within the equity sensitivity scale, alongside benevolence and equity sensitivity. According to Miller (2013), this trait involves individuals, or students in this case, comparing the outcomes they receive to the efforts they put in, to determine if they have been adequately rewarded. In the South African context, students' entitlement can be seen as institutionalized, as noted by Kopp et al. (2011), indicating a widespread form of entitlement. Additionally, entitlement behaviours often carry a social justice component (Lerner, 1987). This type of entitlement can lead to animosity, dominance, relationship issues, violence, malice, greed, and the unjust appropriation of others'

property (Kopp et al., 2011). Generalized student entitlement fosters narcissism, as it instils an expectation of unquestioning compliance from lecturers and, in extreme cases, even from governments when it comes to student demands. A notable example is the “FeesMustFall” movement, which pressured the government to enact ambitious academic reforms in favour of tertiary education students (Greeff et al., 2021).

The focus on establishing avenues for academic entitlement in higher education may have a social justice aspect that is influenced by societal values emphasizing collectivism (Greeff et al., 2021). The desire for social justice and harmony, along with a sense of responsibility towards others, can contribute to the development of entitlement among students. This occurs because students anticipate receiving “assistance” to achieve good grades. In South Africa, where pre-tertiary public education is provided free of charge in many institutions, students may develop expectations of entitlement due to the segregated system of education that existed in the past.

4. Academic Entitlement and Student Demographic Characteristics

While the relationship between age and academic entitlement remains understudied, existing research presents conflicting findings. Some studies suggest younger students exhibit higher levels of entitlement (Chowning & Campbell, 2009), while others find no significant age differences (Greenberger et al., 2008). These inconsistencies may stem from variations in sample characteristics, measurement tools, and cultural contexts. One potential explanation for the age-entitlement link lies in developmental psychology. As individuals progress through adolescence and young adulthood, they undergo significant cognitive, emotional, and social changes that can impact their educational attitudes. For instance, emerging adulthood, a period marked by identity exploration and increased independence (Tribble, 2015), may be associated with shifts in entitlement beliefs.

Furthermore, generational differences might also influence the age-entitlement relationship. Research suggests that generations like Millennials and Gen Z may hold distinct views on education, potentially impacting academic entitlement (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Fromuth et al. (2019) suggest a possible link between age and academic entitlement, with younger students potentially exhibiting higher levels. This could be related to cognitive egocentrism, a developmental stage where individuals primarily view the world from their own perspective, prioritizing their needs over others (Fromuth et al., 2019). This egocentric thinking may contribute to a sense of entitlement in academic settings, as younger students tend to have higher levels of entitlement due to these cognitive tendencies.

Gender plays a significant role in shaping academic entitlement, as illustrated in research conducted by Aksoy and Sural (2022), Mozahem et al. (2021), Cundiff et al. (2013) as well as Knepp and Knepp (2022). These studies explain how stereotypes contribute to individuals’ expectations of entitlement within academic environments.

For example, the study by Cundiff et al. (2013) demonstrated that women who performed well academically but deviated from traditional gender roles had lower entitlement beliefs compared to women who conformed to stereotypical expectations. This suggests that societal expectations regarding gender roles can impact entitlement beliefs among women. Similarly, a comparative study by Greenberger et al. (2008) found that male students were more likely to hold entitlement beliefs regarding grades, while female students were more likely to emphasize effort and hard work.

Considering the intersectionality of identities, including race, is crucial in understanding entitlement beliefs. McCall (2006) emphasizes the importance of examining how individuals' entitlement experiences and perceptions are shaped by the combination of their racial identity with other identities, such as gender, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation. The literature highlights the significance of adopting an intersectional framework when studying entitlement (McCall, 2006).

Societal factors and experiences also influence entitlement among students from different racial groups, with certain racial groups experiencing higher levels of entitlement than others. Historical and current systemic privileges and advantages, such as access to better education, economic opportunities, and social networks, contribute to a sense of entitlement among individuals from privileged racial groups. Research by Cote et al. (2021) suggest that individuals from historically privileged racial groups may have a higher sense of entitlement due to perceived superiority.

Studies exploring academic entitlement among international students are scarce. Hudson (2017) suggests that international students facing pressure from family or financial constraints may exhibit higher expectations for grades, potentially leading to increased entitlement. However, the limited research base makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions. In contrast, there is a more established body of research on academic entitlement among local students. Studies have yielded mixed findings, with some suggesting that younger local students display higher levels of entitlement (Chowning & Campbell, 2009).

Theorists such as Hofstede (1980) for example state that several factors might contribute to potential discrepancies in academic entitlement between international and local students. Some of these are cultural values, academic background, and adjustment challenges. According to Hofstede (1980), cultural values with respect to education, effort, and authority have the potential to influence student entitlement beliefs. On the other hand, collectivistic cultures might prioritize respect for teachers and group harmony, leading to lower entitlement levels in some instances (Hofstede, 1980).

Courtois (2018) state that international students are more likely to exhibit higher entitlement levels compared to their local counterparts because of their academic background. This is especially true in situations where international students have

studied under high-pressure educational systems that focus primarily on grades rather than learning. Similarly, Byram and Feng (2004) cite adjustment challenges as a factor that may lead to international students feeling more entitled compared to their local counterparts. According to Byram and Feng (2004), a new academic environment, language barriers, and social isolation could be contributing factors.

One variable that has been proposed as a potential influencer of academic entitlement is the students' year of enrolment. The feeling of entitlement can take on varying forms as students progress through different phases of their academic journeys. First-year students, who are newcomers to the university setting, might display indications of academic entitlement as they transition from high school to college. They may harbour unrealistic expectations concerning the simplicity of their coursework and the accommodations they anticipate. Research has demonstrated that freshmen students often overestimate their academic capabilities, leading to elevated levels of entitlement (Carollo, 2020). As students advance to their second year, they commonly experience a reality check. The initial enthusiasm for university life may diminish as they encounter more demanding coursework. Consequently, this can lead to a decline in academic entitlement as students gain a better understanding of the effort required for success (Seipel & Brooks, 2020).

During the final year of undergraduate student's education, students typically develop a deeper comprehension of their chosen fields and may commence taking greater responsibility for their education. Consequently, academic entitlement may diminish further as students become more dedicated to their career aspirations and the pragmatic aspects of their education (Chowning & Campbell, 2009). In contrast, graduate students may exhibit distinct patterns of academic entitlement compared to their undergraduate counterparts. Although they may possess an elevated sense of entitlement regarding the quality of their education, they often display a greater willingness to exert the necessary effort to attain their objectives (Carollo, 2020). Graduate students frequently view their education as an investment in their future careers, which encourages them to be more proactive in seeking academic resources and opportunities.

The relationship between socioeconomic status and academic entitlement has been extensively studied (Broton, 2017; Ciani et al., 2008; Knepp & Knepp 2022). There are divergent perspectives on whether students from higher or lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to exhibit higher levels of entitlement. Factors such as upbringing, available resources, cultural and societal norms, family influence, parental attitudes, and economic mobility have been identified by researchers like Chowning and Campbell (2009), Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015), Kraus et al. (2012), and Jackson et al. (2020) as contributors to a sense of entitlement among students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Conversely, a study by Collie et al. (2024) found that individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds show stronger preferences for redistributive policies, indicating a desire for compensation. Additionally, Grubb and Exline (2016) noted that individuals experiencing resource scarcity are more likely to

exhibit entitled behaviour when resources become available. Similarly, Chen et al. (2014) highlight resentment, social comparison, external influences, and stereotypes as factors that can elevate entitlement levels in students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

5. Study Objectives

The broad objective of the study is to examine the development, extent, and factors influencing academic entitlement among students in a South African higher education institution, with a particular focus on the relationship between demographic characteristics and entitlement expectations. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- To determine the extent of academic entitlement expectations among students in a higher education institution in South Africa.
- To explore the correlation between students' academic entitlement and their demographic characteristics within a higher education institution in South Africa.
- To determine whether there are significant differences between students' demographic variable groupings and their academic entitlement.

6. Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), introduced by Ajzen in 1991, offers a valuable framework for addressing the primary objective of this study: exploring the relationship between student sense of academic entitlement (attitude and behaviour) among undergraduate students and their demographic characteristics. The TPB extends the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen, 1991) and suggests that to predict a specific behaviour, one must consider attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and behavioural intention associated with that behaviour. Subjective norm refers to an individual's perception of how others important to them would approve of their behaviour, while perceived behavioural control relates to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour.

Behavioural intention, on the other hand, represents the willingness to carry out a given behaviour. The TPB assumes that human behaviour is primarily goal-directed and influenced by social factors (Ajzen, 1991) and that individuals make rational and logical decisions. According to the TPB, if each component of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control is favourable, the behaviour is more likely to be carried out. Attitudes can be divided into cognitive (beliefs) and affective (feelings) components. Therefore, the TPB was chosen for this exploratory study to provide precise definitions for the construct of academic entitlement among undergraduate students in relation to their demographic characteristics (Ajzen, 1991). Furthermore, a substantial body of correlational research supports the validity of this theory in education (Fromuth et al., 2019; Khathayut, Walker-Gleaves & Humble, 2022; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). The TPB also offers a straightforward and efficient framework for determining an individual's intention to engage in behaviour specific to a particular context. It takes into account both internal factors (abilities)

and external factors (opportunity) that may influence behaviour (Armitage & Conner, 2004), which is crucial in an educational setting where control factors can impact students' behaviour.

7. Methods

7.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey design using quantitative methods. This allowed researchers to explore student attributes like conduct, attitudes, and beliefs regarding their sense of entitlement.

7.2 Population of the Study

The study was conducted in a higher education institution in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The target population consisted of 443 undergraduate Bachelor of Education students at a university within the province. This diverse population, encompassing various socio-cultural and academic backgrounds, provided a strong basis for analyzing entitlement-related behaviours in higher education.

7.3 Sample Size

The study focused on undergraduate students, selecting a sample of 348 from a total population of 443. The sampling process ensured that participants reflected the diverse demographic groups within the target population, as detailed in Table 2. This approach was aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to generalized entitlement among students, ensuring the findings represented the broader characteristics of the student body.

7.4 Sampling Technique

The study utilized a stratified random sampling technique to ensure the sample was representative of the population, which comprised 443 undergraduate Bachelor of Education students at a university in the Eastern Cape Province. Stratification was based on demographic detailed in Table 2. A total of 348 students were proportionally selected from each stratum, enhancing the study's reliability and validity by minimizing bias and incorporating diverse perspectives on entitlement-related behaviours in higher education.

Table 2: Participants' demographic profile (n = 348)

Demographic variables	Parameters	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18 to 24 years	227	65.23
	25 to 34 years	89	25.57
	35 years or older	32	9.20
Gender	Male	151	43.39
	Female	197	56.61
Race	African	244	70.11
	Indian	36	10.34
	Coloured	68	19.54
Student status	International	36	10.34
	Local	312	89.66
Year of study	Year 1	156	44.83
	Year 2	120	34.48
	Year 3	32	9.20
	Year 4	40	11.49
Socioeconomic status	Urban	136	39.08
	Rural	212	60.92

7.5 Measuring Instrument

To address the research gap, the authors built upon existing academic entitlement measures (e.g., Chowning & Campbell, 2009). They adapted a questionnaire to capture the South African context, resulting in 29 items across two dimensions: externalized responsibility (13 items) and entitled expectations (16 items). Examples include: "If I fail, it's the lecturer's fault, not mine" and "Completing coursework guarantees passing, regardless of quality."

A seven-point Likert scale measured agreement (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The self-report format aligned with existing literature and assessed student responsibility and expectations within the South African context. The instrument addressed limitations found in Chowning and Campbell's work (Wasioleski et al., 2014). To ensure the instrument's validity, the authors assessed internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) for the two dimensions (see Table 3). Alpha coefficients ranged from 0.91 (externalized responsibility) to 0.89 (entitled expectations) and 0.95 (overall entitlement), indicating good internal consistency.

7.6 Statistical Analysis

The study used descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) to summarize the data. Cronbach's Alpha assessed the questionnaire's internal consistency (reliability). Inferential statistics (correlations, t-tests, analysis of variance [ANOVA]) explored relationships and differences between demographic variables and academic entitlement scores. Analysis was conducted using Intellectus Statistics software.

8. Results

8.1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliabilities

Table 3 summarizes the instrument's reliability (Cronbach's alpha). All dimensions (Entitled Expectation, Externalized Responsibility, and Overall Entitlement) scored between 0.89 and 0.95, indicating excellent internal consistency according to George and Mallery (2018).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics, alpha coefficients and number of items of academic entitlement instrument (n = 348)

Instrument	Mean	Standard deviation	Number of statements	Reliability	Reliability interpretation
Entitled expectation	4.75	0.92	16	0.89	<i>Good</i>
Externalized responsibility	4.61	0.90	13	0.91	<i>Excellent</i>
Overall academic entitlement	4.68	0.86	29	0.95	<i>Excellent</i>

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) revealed a high level of academic entitlement among participants (Table 3). All mean scores exceeded 4.0, indicating agreement with statements reflecting entitled behaviours. The highest score (M = 4.75) was in the "entitled expectations" subscale, suggesting a strong belief in deserving good grades without significant effort. The "externalized responsibility" subscale (M = 4.61) showed a tendency to blame lecturers for failures. The overall mean score (M = 4.68) suggests a substantial level of academic entitlement, meaning participants felt they deserved more benefits than their effort warranted.

8.2 Correlations between the Demographic Variables and Academic Entitlement

A Spearman correlation analysis (Table 4) examined links between participant demographics and academic entitlement. To adjust for multiple comparisons, the correlation results were examined using the Holm correction at $\alpha .05$. Age showed a weak positive correlation with feelings of deserving good grades (entitled expectations; $r = 0.17$; $p=020$, 95.00% CI = [.07, .27]), and a moderate positive correlation with blaming others for failures (externalized responsibility; $r = 0.45$; $p < .001$, 95.00% CI = [.36, .53]) and overall academic entitlement ($r = 0.36$; $p < .001$, 95.00% CI = [.26, .45]). This suggests a slight increase in entitled behaviours with age. Gender

only correlated weakly with feeling entitled to good grades, suggesting minimal influence.

Table 4: Spearman correlations between demographic variables and academic entitlement (n=348)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Age	-								
Gender	-.33*	-							
Race	.62*	-.41*	-						
Student status	-.28*	.22*	-.35*	-					
Year of study	.40*	-.18*	.39*	-.23*	-				
Socioeconomic status	.19*	.05	.16*	-.08	.14	-			
Entitled Expectation	.17*	.18*	.20*	-.05	-.03	.18*	(0.89)		
Externalized responsibility	.45*	.14	.38*	-.16*	.25*	.17*	.70*	(0.91)	
Overall academic entitlement	.36*	.11	.33*	-.15	.15	.18*	.89*	.92*	(0.95)

Cronbach's alpha coefficients values shown in bold; *. $p \leq 0.05$; $r < 0.29$ small effect; $r \geq 0.30 < 0.49$ medium effect and $r > 0.50$ large effect (Cohen, 1992). Source: Study results

Table 4 further reveals race was positively related to entitled expectation ($r = .20$; $p = .003$, 95.00% CI = [.10, .30]), externalized responsibility subscale ($r = .38$; $p < .001$, 95.00% CI = [.29, .47]), and overall academic entitlement ($r = .33$; $p < .001$, 95.00% CI = [.24, .42]). This suggests a slight increase in entitled behaviours with race. Student status was positively associated with only externalized responsibility ($r = 0.16$; $p = .037$, 95.00% CI = [-.26, -.05]). Year of study correlated positively with only externalized responsibility ($r = .25$; $p < .001$, 95.00% CI = [.15, .35]), whereas, socioeconomic status correlated positively with entitled expectation ($r = 0.18$; $p = .013$, 95.00% CI = [.07, .28]), externalized responsibility ($r = 0.17$; $p = .020$, 95.00% CI = [.07, .27]), and overall entitlement instrument ($r = 0.18$; ($p = .014$, 95.00% CI = [.07, .28])). This suggests that race, year of study and socioeconomic status exert a minimal influence on entitled behaviours.

8.3 Demographic Variables Subgroups Comparison on the Measured Academic Entitlement

Given the significant links between demographics and academic entitlement (Table 4), the authors performed subgroup analyses. Independent samples t-tests and ANOVAs were performed to see if different demographic groups scored differently on the academic entitlement instruments.

8.3.1 Comparison between males and females on the measured academic entitlement

The researchers compared academic entitlement scores between males and females. Data normality and equality of variances were tested using the Shapiro-Wilk tests and Levene's test. The Shapiro-Wilk test results revealed that academic entitlement between males ($W = 0.93, p < .001$) and females ($W = 0.85, p < .001$) were not normality distributed. The results of Levene's test were also significant at $\alpha .05, F(1, 346) = 26.26, p < .001$, indicating unequal variances for the gender groups. Thus, a Welch's t-test was used (better for unequal variances). The results (Table 5) showed a significant difference between gender groups $t(274.69) = -3.23, p = .001$, indicating that male and female scores differed on academic entitlement.

Table 5: Independent sample test for gender subgroups, student status subgroups, and socioeconomic subgroups on academic entitlement

	Male			Female					
<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Academic.entitlement	4.50	0.96	151	4.81	0.74	197	-3.23	.001	0.36
<i>Note.</i> N = 348. Degrees of Freedom for the <i>t</i> -statistic = 274.69. <i>d</i> represents Cohen's <i>d</i> .									
		Intern ational			Local				
<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Academic.entitlement	4.92	0.77	36	4.65	0.87	312	1.82	.069	0.34
<i>Note.</i> N = 348. Degrees of Freedom for the <i>t</i> -statistic = 346. <i>d</i> represents Cohen's <i>d</i> .									
		Urban			Rural				
<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Academic.entitlement	4.51	0.87	136	4.78	0.84	212	-2.88	.004	0.31
<i>Note.</i> N = 348. Degrees of Freedom for the <i>t</i> -statistic = 346. <i>d</i> represents Cohen's <i>d</i> .									

To confirm the prior finding, a Mann-Whitney U test (a non-parametric alternative) was conducted (Table 6). The results again showed a significant difference in academic entitlement between genders ($U = 12890, z = -2.13, p = .033$). Females had a higher median score (Mdn = 5.13) than males (Mdn = 4.52), suggesting they felt slightly more entitled.

8.3.2 Comparison between student status groups on the academic entitlement

An independent samples t-test was used to compare academic entitlement scores between local and international students. Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated non-normal data for international ($W = 0.79, p < .001$) and local ($W = 0.90, p < .001$) groups, but Levene's test for equality of variance showed equal variances $F(1, 346) = 1.05, p = .307$. While the t-test results (Table 5) showed no significant differences $t(346) = 1.82, p = .069$, the Mann-Whitney U-test (a non-parametric alternative) results revealed a significant difference ($U = 7176, z = -2.73, p = .006$) (Table 6). International students

had a higher median score (Mdn = 5.32) than locals (Mdn = 5.08), suggesting a slightly higher sense of academic entitlement.

Table 6: Two-tailed Mann-Whitney Test for academic entitlement by gender, student status and socio-economic status

	Male		Female				
Variable	Mean Rank	<i>n</i>	Mean Rank	<i>n</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Academic.entitlement	161.36	151	184.57	197	12,890.00	-2.13	.033
	International		Local				
Variable	Mean Rank	<i>n</i>	Mean Rank	<i>n</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Academic.entitlement	217.83	36	169.50	312	7,176.00	-2.73	.006
	Urban		Rural				
Variable	Mean Rank	<i>n</i>	Mean Rank	<i>n</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Academic.entitlement	152.51	136	188.61	212	11,425.00	-3.27	.001

8.3.3 Comparison between socioeconomic groups (urban and rural) on the academic entitlement

Similar to student status, t-test and Mann-Whitney U-test were used to compare the scores of urban and rural students. The Shapiro-Wilk test shows non-normal data for both urban ($W = 0.97$, $p < .003$) and rural ($W = 0.82$, $p < .001$) groups, however, Levene's test for equality of variance revealed equal variances $F(1, 346) = 2.57$, $p < .109$. The results of both the t-tests ($t(346) = -2.88$, $p = .004$) and Mann-Whitney U tests ($U = 11425$, $z = -3.27$, $p = .001$) (Tables 5 & 6) revealed a significant difference in academic entitlement means between socioeconomic groups. Rural students (Mdn = 5.18) had a higher median score than urban students (Mdn = 4.54), indicating a stronger sense of academic entitlement.

8.3.4 Comparison between age subgroups on the academic entitlement

The differences between the academic entitlement means of the different age groups were computed using an ANOVA. The ANOVA results (Table 7) revealed significant differences in academic entitlement means between age groups ($F(2, 345) = 28.62$, $p < .001$). Age explained about 14% (eta squared = 0.14) of the variation in academic entitlement.

Table 7: ANOVA results for academic entitlement by age

Term	SS	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
AGE	36.40	2	28.62	< .001	0.14
Residuals	219.37	345			

$p < 0.05$

Table 8 shows the means and standard deviations. A post-hoc multiple comparison analysis was performed. The Tukey HSD p-value adjustment was employed to correct for the effect of multiple comparisons on the family-wise error rate. The results revealed that younger students aged 18 to 24 ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.90$) had a significantly lower sense of academic entitlement compared to both those aged 25 to 34 ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 0.57$), $p < .001$ and 35+ ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 0.45$), $p < .001$. Students in other age groups did not differ significantly.

Table 8: Means, standard deviations, sample size for academic entitlement by age, race and year of study

Variable	Combination	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Age	18 to 24 years	4.44	0.90	227
	25 to 34 years	5.15	0.57	89
	35 years or more	5.02	0.45	32
Race	African	4.52	0.84	244
	Indian	4.88	0.94	36
	Coloured	5.14	0.68	68
Year of study	Year 1	4.42	0.90	156
	Year 2	5.13	0.61	120
	Year 3	4.59	0.87	32
	Year 4	4.38	0.75	40
<i>Note.</i> A '-' indicates the sample size was too small for the statistic to be calculated.				

8.3.5 Comparison between racial groups on the academic entitlement

Similarly, an ANOVA was computed to assess whether there were significant differences between the academic entitlement means for the racial groups. The ANOVA results (Table 9) indicated significant differences in academic entitlement means between racial groups ($F(2, 345) = 16.24$, $p < .001$). The eta squared was 0.09 implying race explained about 9% of the variation in academic entitlement. Table 8 shows the means and standard deviations.

Table 9: ANOVA results for academic entitlement by race

Term	SS	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
RACE	22.01	2	16.24	< .001	0.09
Residuals	233.75	345			

$p < 0.05$

A post-hoc comparison analysis with Tukey's Honest Significant Difference test was performed. The results revealed that African students ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.84$) felt less

academically entitled than both Indian ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 0.94$), $p = .036$ and Coloured ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 0.68$), $p < .001$ students. No significant differences were found between Indian and Coloured groups.

8.3.6 Comparison between year of study subgroups on the academic entitlement

An ANOVA was again conducted to assess whether there were significant differences between the academic entitlement means for the year of study groups. The ANOVA results (Table 10) demonstrated significant differences in academic entitlement means between year of study groups ($F(3, 344) = 20.67$, $p < .001$). Year of study explained approximately 15% of the variation in academic entitlement (eta squared = 0.15). The mean and standard deviations are reported in Table 8.

Table 10: ANOVA results for academic entitlement by year of study

Term	SS	df	F	p	η_p^2
Year of study	39.06	3	20.67	< .001	0.15
Residuals	216.71	344			

$p < 0.05$

A further post-hoc analysis was conducted using the Tukey HSD test. The results showed year one students ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.90$) felt less academically entitled than year two students ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 0.61$), $p < .001$. Year two students also felt more academically entitled than year three ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.87$), $p = .003$ and year four students ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.75$), $p < .001$. Students in other year groups did not differ significantly.

9. Discussion

The study had three objectives: (1) to determine the extent of academic entitlement expectations among students at a South African higher education institution, (2) to explore the correlation between students' academic entitlement and their demographic characteristics within a South African higher education institution, and (3) to determine if there are significant differences in academic entitlement between different demographic groups of students. Findings indicated a high level of academic entitlement among participants, aligning with previous research (e.g., Greef et al., 2021). This finding may be influenced by several factors. Some of these factors may include but are not limited to the South African educational context, historical factors and the pursuit of social justice, rooted in a previously inequitable education system.

Further, the findings demonstrate that age has a weak to moderate positive correlation with entitled expectations, externalized responsibility and overall academic entitlement. Gender was related positively with only entitled expectations. Race showed weak to moderate positive association with entitled expectation,

externalized responsibility, and overall academic entitlement. Whereas, student status, year of study, and socioeconomic status showed weak positive correlations with some, but not all, academic entitlement measures. Overall, the findings suggest that, to some extent, students' demographic variables have a positive influence on their propensity to exhibit entitled behaviours in a higher education environment. The findings are consistent with the literature that found students' demographics to impact their academic entitlement (Aksoy & Sural, 2022; Cohen, 1992; Fromuth et al., 2019; Knepp & Knepp, 2022).

In terms of the differences in academic entitlement means amongst the demographic subgroups, our findings suggest that older students may exhibit slightly more entitled behaviours compared to younger students. Although contextual factors at the university might influence this, the relationship between age and academic entitlement remains relatively underexplored. Another reason may stem from the historical past, older students in the study context may have added familial, social, and financial responsibilities they need to work to provide for their younger family members. The added responsibilities may give them little time to apply themselves fully in their academic work. Thus, in terms of the theory of planned behaviours, such individuals may intentionally engage in entitled behaviours and expect favours from lecturers to pass. This observation does not align with the previous findings in the literature (Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Fromuth et al., 2019; Greenberger et al., 2008).

Regarding gender, females displayed slightly higher levels of academic entitlement compared to their male counterparts. However, other factors could explain this result beyond academic entitlement alone. For instance, females may demonstrate more diligent study habits, stronger study skills, and better test-taking strategies compared to males. Societal expectations might also influence the slight differences in academic entitlement beliefs between genders (Cundiff et al., 2013). In South Africa, affirmative action policies and a progressive constitution might encourage females to assert their presence in traditionally male-dominated fields.

An intriguing finding is that African students reported lower levels of academic entitlement compared to Indian and Coloured students. This discrepancy may stem from several factors. African students, often coming from backgrounds with fewer educational resources or being first-generation university students, might develop a stronger work ethic and a diminished sense of academic entitlement. This finding supports Cote et al. (2021), who suggest that individuals from historically privileged racial groups may exhibit a higher sense of entitlement due to perceived superiority. Furthermore, the experiences students have in the pre-university school system can shape their views on education. African students who faced more challenges or had less privileged educational backgrounds might value their university opportunity more and feel less entitled to success. However, as not all students within a racial group have uniform experiences, further research may yield different results.

The study also revealed that second-year students reported higher levels of entitlement compared to first, third, and fourth-year students. This pattern is intriguing and may be explained by several factors. The first year might be a period of adjustment during which students are uncertain about university expectations. This uncertainty could lead to a heightened sense of entitlement in the second year, as students may expect good grades without corresponding effort. Contrary to studies by Cohen (2018) and Collie et al. (2024), which suggest that freshmen often overestimate their capabilities and subsequently experience a decline in entitlement, our study found that first-year students underestimated their capabilities and experienced an increase in entitlement. Increased course difficulty and shifting focus in the second year could contribute to this elevated sense of entitlement.

In terms of socio-economic status, rural students exhibited higher levels of entitlement compared to their urban counterparts. This may be due to the high value placed on education in disadvantaged rural communities, where students are expected to succeed, and effect change in the family and community. The financial strain faced by rural students could also contribute to their belief that they deserve good grades in exchange for overcoming relative disadvantages compared to urban students. This aligns with Kraus et al. (2012), who found that individuals experiencing resource scarcity are more likely to display entitled behaviour when resources become available.

Regarding student status, international students reported a higher sense of entitlement compared to local students. This finding aligns with Hudson (2017), as well as Hofstede (1980) and Byram and Feng (2004) who attribute this state of affairs to the significant financial and personal sacrifices international students are likely to make to study abroad. According to Hudson (2017), the pressure to succeed and justify their investment of time, money, and effort can weigh heavily on the minds of international students.

Additionally, in terms of the theory of planned behaviours, challenges such as adapting to a new educational system, language barriers, and cultural differences might lead international students to feel entitled to good grades without necessarily putting in the extra work. TPB suggests that behaviour is determined by one's intention, which is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Malebana, 2014). In the context of international students, language barriers and cultural differences can affect their attitudes towards studying, subjective norms regarding academic success, and perceived control over their academic performance. For instance, language barriers may hinder students' understanding of course material and communication with instructors, leading to negative attitudes towards studying and a perception of reduced control over their academic outcomes. Moreover, cultural differences can influence students' subjective norms, as they may come from educational systems where success is defined differently or where the grading criteria are distinct. This discrepancy in norms can

create a sense of entitlement to good grades, especially if students believe that their efforts are sufficient based on their previous educational experiences.

10. Conclusions

The study highlights the nuanced and multifaceted nature of academic entitlement in a South African higher education context, revealing the complex interplay of demographic variables and contextual factors. Academic entitlement, while often viewed negatively, emerges here as a phenomenon influenced by systemic, historical, and social dynamics unique to the South African educational landscape. Key findings suggest that demographic characteristics such as age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, student status, and year of study significantly shape students' academic entitlement behaviours, albeit to varying degrees. For instance, older students and international students demonstrated higher levels of entitlement, influenced by distinct factors such as increased familial responsibilities and the pressures associated with studying abroad. Similarly, differences in entitlement levels among racial groups and students from rural versus urban backgrounds underscore the role of historical inequities and socioeconomic disparities in shaping students' academic attitudes.

The findings challenge one dimensional interpretations of academic entitlement by contextualizing it within broader societal and cultural frameworks. For instance, the observation that African students exhibit lower levels of entitlement compared to other racial groups may reflect their resilience and a deeper appreciation for educational opportunities, shaped by their backgrounds. In contrast, elevated entitlement among students in their second year of study suggests a transitional phase of adjustment and shifting expectations, highlighting the need for targeted academic support during this critical period. These insights extend theoretical frameworks such as the TPB, illustrating how perceived behavioural control interacts with cultural, linguistic, and systemic barriers to shape entitlement behaviours. For international students, factors like language proficiency and cultural adaptation emerge as significant determinants, suggesting that entitlement may sometimes reflect coping mechanisms rather than mere attitudes of undeserved privilege.

11. Implication and Recommendation

The post-apartheid context in South Africa necessitates transforming higher education to promote equity and global competitiveness, making it essential to consider historical and political factors when examining academic entitlement. Decolonizing the curriculum is pivotal in fostering inclusive entitlement by integrating responsive lived experiences and diverse perspectives (Ajani & Gamede, 2021). Internationalization also influences student perceptions of entitlement, highlighting the importance of understanding its impact (Jooste & Hagenmeier, 2022). Inclusivity in fostering entitlement, particularly for students with disabilities, is crucial for enhancing belonging and empowerment. Additionally, the role of language and multilingualism in education is a significant factor that should not be overlooked.

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 entrenched a racially segregated and inferior education system for black South Africans, denying them access to quality education and economic opportunities while privileging white students with superior resources, fostering entitlement rooted in privilege. These systemic disparities persist in resource allocation, infrastructure, and educational quality for previously disadvantaged communities.

In the post-apartheid era, policies such as Section 4 of the Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Act of 2024 have aimed to address these inequalities by promoting inclusivity and multilingualism (Republic of South Africa, 2024). Historically marginalized African languages are now being prioritized in schools, empowering learners by enabling education in their mother tongues a proven method for improving cognitive and academic outcomes. This inclusive approach reframes entitlement as a legitimate demand for equitable resources and opportunities, countering privilege-based entitlement.

Despite progress, inequalities persist in higher education, where institutional leadership plays a crucial role in shaping equitable policies and fostering a developmental path of entitlement rooted in empowerment. A comprehensive study on entitlement in South African higher education must consider historical, political, cultural, and leadership factors, as well as issues like equity, decolonization, inclusivity, internationalization, disability support, language diversity, and crisis management. Collaboration between the Department of Higher Education and Training, DBE, and stakeholders is vital for minimizing entitlement behaviours while promoting a more inclusive and just education system.

12. Limitation and Future Direction

One limitation was the need to ensure the measurement invariance of the tools used to assess entitlement across different groups like gender and academic rank. Failing to establish measurement invariance could lead to biased results and misinterpretations of entitlement levels among different subgroups within the institution (Khojasteh & Keener, 2018). Another limitation was the lack of a longitudinal design to track the developmental trajectories of entitlement over time (Yeung & Ho, 2020). Without a longitudinal approach, capturing the dynamic nature of entitlement development among students in the South African higher education context may be challenging. Therefore, future longitudinal studies should examine how academic entitlement evolves over time and explore the role of faculty in managing entitlement behaviours in higher education institutions.

The study also faces limitations related to cultural differences in entitlement perceptions (Emery et al., 2021). Cultural nuances could influence how entitlement is understood and expressed among students in a South African institution, necessitating a careful consideration of these cultural factors in the study design. Future research could benefit from incorporating qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to entitlement among students.

Qualitative insights could provide a richer context for interpreting entitlement trajectories in the South African higher education setting. In addition, conducting comparative analyses with other countries, could offer valuable insights into how entitlement manifests differently in diverse cultural and educational contexts.

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