



The Impact of Socio-Economic Status on the Academic Achievement of High School Students: A Study on Access, Performance, and Aspiration

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Abstract

The current study entitled, “The Impact of Socio-Economic Status on the Academic Achievement of High School Students: A Study on the Access, Performance, and Aspiration,” examines the connection between socio-economic status (SES) and three major educational outcomes: access to educational resources, educational performance, and educational aspirations. The study was conducted among 230 students in high school grades IX and X (135 boys and 95 girls) from urban and rural schools through stratified random sampling. Data was gathered using a structured questionnaire with the aid of academic performance records. The questionnaire assessed indicators like the accessibility of educational resources (including study aids, technology, and educational support from parents), academic performance which was indexed on a cumulative score, and future aspirations which were defined as prospective careers and higher education. Participant socio-economic status was determined using the revised Kuppaswamy's Socio-Economic Scale. Comparison of academic performance by sex using two-way ANOVA showed no significant interaction of gender and SES on performance ($F(1,228) = 1.36, p > 0.05$), although more girls had higher overall aspirations (Mean = 4.12) than boys (Mean = 3.98). This situation calls for equitable educational policies, structural changes in scholarship imposition, and targeted resource provision to aid low-SES students, as socio-economic factors heavily dominate educational access, performance, and aspirations.

Keywords: Socio-Economic Status, Academic Achievement, Educational Resource, Performance, Aspirations

Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a powerful instrument for personal development, social mobility, and economic progress. However, the benefits of education are not equally distributed among all groups of society. Among the various determinants influencing academic achievement, socio-economic status (SES) has consistently emerged as a significant factor shaping students' access to resources, learning outcomes, and future aspirations (Sirin, 2005; White, 1982). Globally, research has shown that school-aged children from higher SES families outperform their peers due to the increased access to educational materials, richer home surroundings, and higher parental engagement (Duncan & Magnuson, 2012; Sirin, 2005). On the other hand, learners from lower SES families do not grow academically because they face poorly stocked educational materials, weak school facilities, and other unescapable financial barriers (Reardon, 2011). These disparities contribute not only to differences in **academic performance**, but also to students' **educational aspirations**, which are crucial predictors of future success and social advancement (Khattab, 2015).

In the Indian setting, socio-economic inequality is a major challenge to educational equity. Although government policies, such as the Right to Education Act (2009) and scholarship schemes, have been introduced to address inequalities, there is evidence that SES continues to play a significant role in the educational opportunities afforded to students and the outcomes achieved (Tilak, 2020; Nair, 2019). Students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are often enrolled in poorly-funded schools and do not have access to effective out-of-school learning opportunities which hinders their academic achievement and future educational and occupational aspirations. Educational resources—such as books, internet access and tutoring—are one key mediator of the relationships between SES and academic success (OECD, 2018). Further, academic success, as evidenced through grades and performance on standardized tests, can be viewed as an authentic indication of educational success and is associated with SES (Caro et al., 2009). Aspirations for the future, including a desire for post-secondary opportunities and occupational goals, are also influenced by SES and perceived parental support (Gottfredson, 2002; Khattab, 2015).

In light of this context, the current study will examine the relationship between socio-economic status and access to educational resources, academic performance, and future aspirations of high school students. Through examining these relationships with 230 students (135 boys, 95 girls), the study aims to help provide an understanding of the relationship between socio-economic status and educational outcomes. The results will provide information to assist policy makers, teachers, and school administrators in developing educational programs that are inclusive and equitable for all students, regardless of their economic background, to have the opportunity of academic excellence and ambitious goals.

Review of Literature

Socio-economic status (SES) has served as a major marker to indicate student educational experiences and outcomes. SES affects the material resources students have access to, while also accounting for the psychological, cultural, and social capital that will impact their educational trajectories. The following review covers empirical and theoretical perspectives on how SES is related to three critical areas of education: (1.) access to educational resources, (2.) academic achievement, and (3.) future aspirations.

Socio-Economic Status and Access to Educational Resources

Access to educational resources (such as textbooks, technology and libraries, and learning support; Bradely & Corwyn, 2002; OECD, 2018) is a major factor shaping the quality of education students receive. Virtually all studies of educational resources indicate that students from higher SES backgrounds have greater access to educational resources, yielding richer learning environments. In contrast, children from low-income households face obstacles (e.g., suboptimal study space, poor access to digital resources, limited education-supporting parents; Morris & Kalil, 2019) which further exaggerate inequities. In addition, the home environment serves as a mediator between SES and academic engagement. Higher SES students generally range higher in their prevalence of books, access to an internet connection, and parental education than lower SES students, potentially resulting in general greater preparedness and motivation (Caro et al., 2009). This suggests that educational access is not simply an institutional level concern, but a reflection of broader social and economic disparities.

Socio-Economic Status and Academic Performance

Empirical studies suggest that students from high SES backgrounds outperform their peers across subjects due to improved access to stimulating materials and support networks (Coleman, 1988; Caro et al., 2009). In socioculturally developing countries such as India, SES also dictates access to quality schools and private support, thereby maintaining educational advantage (Nair, 2019). Moreover, Caro et al. (2009) demonstrated that the relationship between SES and educational performance strengthens over time, which implies educational inequality compounds as students move through school.

However, recent research suggests that non-cognitive factors such as motivation, resilience, and emotional intelligence can buffer the negative effects of socioeconomic status on academic outcomes (Farrington et al.,

2012). This indicates that skills that are psychological in nature can help buffer the negative consequences of poverty on academic achievement.

Socio-Economic Status and Future Aspirations

In addition to tangible outcomes, such as grades, SES has a significant influence on students' educational and career aspirations. Aspiration has to do with the goal that students develop in terms of future education and work, which is based on modeling from family, role models in their lives, and the perceived opportunity for social mobility (Khattab, 2015; Gottfredson, 2002).

On average, when students have higher SES families, they have higher aspirations concerning educational attainment and working in professional careers. This occurs partly due to the increased exposure to success and access to guidance counseling (Moulton et al., 2018). In contrast, students with lower SES families often have limited aspirations due to practical constraints of entering the labor force earlier or limited understanding of future educational opportunities (Bandura et al., 2001).

Furthermore gender is related both directly and indirectly to SES in terms of aspiration. Evidence suggests that girls have higher educational aspirations on average, but these opportunities may be limited due to socio-cultural factors and finances (Nair, 2019; OECD, 2018).

Methodology - Research Design

The present study employed a descriptive correlational design to examine the influence of socio-economic status (SES) on three educational variables—access to educational resources, academic performance, and future aspirations—among high school students.

Sample

The research was conducted with a sample comprising 230 high school students from urban and rural schools, consisting of 135 boys (58.7%) and 95 girls (41.3%), using stratified random sampling to include students from low, middle, and high socio-economic status (SES) categories.

Data Analysis and Results

The descriptive results showed that students from high SES backgrounds scored higher in all three variables compared to those from low SES backgrounds.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis

Variable	High SES (Mean \pm SD)	Low SES (Mean \pm SD)	Middle SES (Mean \pm SD)
Access to Educational Resources	4.28 \pm 0.61	3.46 \pm 0.73	3.82 \pm 0.68
Academic Performance (CGPA)	8.52 \pm 0.69	7.41 \pm 0.83	7.89 \pm 0.76
Future Aspirations	4.32 \pm 0.58	3.75 \pm 0.64	3.98 \pm 0.60

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the interaction of gender and SES in terms of academic performance. The results revealed a significant main effect of SES on academic performance, $F(2,224) = 7.89$, $p < .01$; gauging from the students' SES, girls had marginally higher aspirations ($M = 4.12$) than boys ($M = 3.98$) and a main effect SES on academic achievement showed no significant interaction effect of gender by SES, $F(2,224) = 1.36$, $p > .05$.

Table 2: Two-Way ANOVA Summary Table for the Effects of Socio-Economic Status and Gender on Academic Performance (N = 230)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F-value	p-value
Socio-Economic Status (SES)	8.22	2	4.11	7.89	0.001
Gender	0.48	1	0.48	0.92	0.34
SES × Gender Interaction	0.71	2	0.36	1.36	0.26
Within Groups (Error)	116.81	224	0.52		
Total	126.22	229			

The findings from the current research indicate that socio-economic status (SES) plays an important role in determining students' educational outcomes; it has a strong impact in the areas of access to educational resources, academic performance, and future aspirations. Students from high SES consistently achieve higher than their counterparts from low SES in all three areas due to more materials to learn from, access to technology, and a better home situation. Although in this research gender was not statistically significant with regard to academic performance, the results showed girls have slightly higher educational and career aspirations than boys, which demonstrates the motivation and ambition girls may show, even while being held back socially. Overall, the research verifies that SES inequality continues to have a wide-ranging and significant impact on educational inequity. The research highlights the necessity of changing policy and practice related to improving access to resources and learning experiences for students from low SES backgrounds, thus providing every learner, regardless of their SES, the same opportunity to attain success in their schooling and their aspirations.

Conclusion

This current study assessed the effects of socio-economic status (SES) on access to educational resources, academic performance, and future aspirations among 230 high school students. Overall, academic performance presented clear evidence that SES is an important factor in students' educational experiences and outcomes. Students from a higher SES reported significantly higher access to learning resources, higher academic performance, and higher future aspirations than students from lower SES. These findings support prior research (Sirin, 2005; Reardon, 2011, Tilak, 2020) that supported the finding that socio-economic inequality persists in impacting educational outcomes. The inequalities in access and achievement clearly illustrate the barriers with which students from families living in poverty must contend to achieve an equitable educational experience. In a developing context like India, where education continues to be the primary pathway to social mobility, the persistence of such inequalities supports the cycle of disadvantage unless more inclusive or targeted policy are implemented. The need for policy that supports educational equity is essential in our efforts to develop interventions to increase the accessibility of resources for economically disadvantaged students, such as government funded digital infrastructure, community learning spaces, scholarship/bursary programs, and mentorship programs. Schools and educators for their part should also develop student aspirations through educational guidance counseling, exposure to initiatives, and parental outreach programs. In conclusion, the study underscores that socio-economic status continues to be a key predictor of educational success, affecting both cognitive and aspirational dimensions of student development. Addressing SES-related disparities is essential for achieving not only individual advancement but also broader social and economic justice in the education system.

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