



## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT & SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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*“The present market based global village puts up a barrier in front of those who ‘cannot read or write or count, and cannot follow written instructions’ (Sen, 1998).*

### Abstract

Education is the basic requirement and the ‘Fundamental Right’ of the citizens of a nation. While Higher Education is important; the Elementary Education system serves as the base over which the Super-structure of the whole education system is built up. Student’s education is closely linked to their life chances, income, and well being. Therefore, it is important to have a clear understanding of what benefits or hinders his/her educational attainment. There are several relevant areas that are most commonly linked to academic performance while the most influencing factor is Socio-Economic Status of the family. Socioeconomic status (SES) is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. Low SES and its correlates, such as lower education, poverty, and poor health, ultimately affect our society as a whole. The main aim of the present paper is to produce a comprehensive literature review of reliable research evidence on the relationship between students’ educational attainment and parents’ socio economic status.

**Keywords:** Education, Socio-Economic Status (SES), Educational Attainment, Academic



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### Performance

**Introduction:** Education is the basic requirement and the ‘Fundamental Right’ of the citizens of a nation. While Higher Education is important; the Elementary Education system serves as the base over which the Super-structure of the whole education system is built up (Mukherjee, 2004). Student’s education is closely linked to their life chances, income, and well being. Therefore, it is important to have a clear understanding of what benefits or hinders his/her educational attainment. There are several relevant areas that are most commonly linked to academic performance while the most influencing factor is Socio-Economic Status of the family. Socioeconomic status (SES) is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. Low SES and its correlates, such as lower

education, poverty, and poor health, ultimately affect our society as a whole. Research indicates that children from low-SES households and communities develop academic skills more slowly compared to children from higher SES groups (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009). Initial academic skills are correlated with the home environment, where low literacy environments and chronic stress negatively affect a child's pre academic skills (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). Family factors, school factors, and peer pressure are the main factors which influence the educational attainment of the student. The environment at home is a primary socialization agent and influences a child's interest in school and aspirations for the future. Family background has also been found to influence the educational attainment of the student. Family background is the key to a students' life and outside the school, influences student learning and includes factors such as socio-economic status (education of parents, occupation of parents, income of parents), parental involvement, and size of the family. Families from low-SES communities are less likely to have the financial resources or time availability to provide children with academic support. Children's initial reading competence is correlated with the home literacy environment, number of books owned, and parent distress (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). However, parents from low-SES communities may be unable to afford resources such as books, computers, or tutors to create this positive literacy environment (Orr, 2003).

A student's educational outcome and academic success are greatly influenced by the type of school that they attend. School factors include school structure, school composition, and school environment. The school one attends is the institutional environment that sets the parameters of students' learning experience. The school systems in low-SES communities are often under resourced, negatively affecting students' academic progress (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). Peer influences can also affect student performance. Research indicates that school conditions contribute more to SES differences in learning rates than family characteristics (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). Schools in low-SES communities suffer from high levels of unemployment, migration of the best qualified teachers, and low educational achievement (Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll, & Russ, 2009). A teacher's years of experience and quality of training is correlated with children's academic achievement (Gimbert, Bol, & Wallace, 2007). The following factors have been found to improve the quality of schools in low-SES neighborhoods: a focus on improving teaching and learning, creation of an information-rich environment, building of a learning community, continuous professional development, involvement of parents, and increased funding and resources (Muijis et al., 2009). Improving school systems and early intervention programs may help to reduce these

risk factors, and thus increased research on the correlation between SES and education is essential.

Research continues to link lower SES to lower academic achievement and slower rates of academic progress as compared with higher SES communities. Children from low-SES environments acquire language skills more slowly, exhibit delayed letter recognition and phonological awareness, and are at risk for reading difficulties (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). Children with higher SES backgrounds were more likely to be proficient on tasks of addition, subtraction, ordinal sequencing, and math word problems than children with lower SES backgrounds (Coley, 2002). Students from low-SES schools entered high school 3.3 grade levels behind students from higher SES schools. In addition, students from the low-SES groups learned less over 4 years than children from higher SES groups, graduating 4.3 grade levels behind those of higher SES groups (Palardy, 2008). Perception of family economic stress and personal financial constraints affected emotional distress/ depression in students and their academic outcomes (Mistry, Benner, Tan, & Kim, 2009).

It is widely recognised that if students are to maximise their potential from schooling they will need the full support of their parents. According to the European Commission, for example, “the degree of parental participation is a significant indicator of the quality of schooling”.

#### **Theoretical background of the reviewed literatures:**

Most of the empirical studies are based on these theories

- The theory of cultural capital by Pierre Bourdieu, (1986) who stated that education leads to social reproduction and a stratified society by honoring the cultural capital of the elite classes.
- The theory of concerted cultivation by Annet Lareuae, (2003) which stated that lower-income families have children who do not succeed to the level of the middle-income children.
- The theory of credentialism by Collins Randall 1979 stated that public schools are socializing institutions that teach and reward middle-class values of competition and achievement.

**Objectives:** The aims of the review are to investigate the impact of:

- Parents’ level of education, e.g. the impact of parents with higher education on children’s attainment; and

- Parental support (e.g. the provision of parenting skills training, advice and guidance for parents) on student achievement/attainment;
- Parents' level of income on student achievement/attainment; and also the impact of parents' occupation on the same.

The main aim of the present paper is to produce a comprehensive literature review of reliable research evidence on the relationship between students' educational attainment and parents' socio economic status.

### **Parents' level of education and student's educational attainment**

Students with families where parents have less education tend to systematically perform worse than students whose parents have more education. According to Nannyonjo H. 2007 students with parents who did not finish primary or just finished primary, students with parents who finished senior four or senior 6 or university performed considerably better. Students are getting better marks whose male parents had a university degree. Compared to earlier research, for example by Hanushek, found female parents' education has a significant effect on student's educational attainment. Male parents' education had a stronger influence than female parents. Those results possibly reflect the ability of parents to support the students' school work, and likely interactions of literate parents with their children in school related or literacy nurturing activities as well as their ability to support their children with home work or help with difficult home work questions. Similarly Okumu et al (2008) in a study of Socio-Economic Determinants of Primary School Dropout found that High academic attainment of a female parents and male parents significantly reduces chances of primary school drop out for both boys and girls in rural and urban areas. For a female Parents, this phenomenon could be attributed to the fact that educated female parents reduce the time spend doing household chores while increasing the time spend with their children than their uneducated counterparts. Also educated female Parents are more effective in helping their children in academic work. In doing so, they are also able to monitor and supervise their children's academic progress. While for Male Parents it's attributed to the fact that educated male parents are also interested in their children thus they would be willing to spend more time in helping their children in academic problems. Educated male Parents are as well aware of the possible returns to their children and they are more likely to have access to information and social networks necessary for their children to engage into relatively human capital intensive activities yielding high returns to education.

### **Parent' income and pupil's educational attainment**

Income shocks do not only affect investment in children's education but also children's performance. When families are constrained by fewer resources and there are differences in boys and girls access to resources, children's learning is consequently affected. According to Bjorkman M (2005), a negative income shock has two effects on the female student's performance: marginal girls will be withdrawn from school than boys and the resources (food) provided will fall more for girls than for boys. On the other hand as girls are provided with less resources within the household, or alternatively, have to spend more time on domestic work as compared to boys and this effect causes girls to perform compare to boys. According to Alissa 2010, Children's results are lowest when poverty persist across the generations, and highest when material advantage is long-lasting On the other hand, while good social skills also appeared to be linked across generations, these do not make a significant direct contribution to the current gap in the result between rich and poor children. Alisa found that the gap in attainment between children from the poorest and richest backgrounds grew particularly fast during the primary school years. By age eleven, only around three-quarters of children from the poorest fifth of families reached the expected level at Key Stage 2, compared with 97 per cent of children from the richest fifth. according to Alisa, Poorer children who performed well in exams at age seven were more likely than better-off children to fall behind by age eleven, and poorer children who performed badly at seven were less likely to improve their ranking compared with children from better-off backgrounds – an important factor behind the widening gap.

Akanle, (2007) identified Parental income in this work to be a cogent factor upon which the academic/vocational successes of secondary school students lie. He found Parental income not to be sufficient to sustain the academic and personal social life of the student in sub rural school areas. This to a large extent affects the psychological balance or homeostatic balance in the class room, which causes low concentration, low perception, frustration, sickness and emotional disability in academic performance of the students. Therefore when a child is deprived of the essential needs he may be found to perform poorly in his school work. This is consistent with Bugembe et al 2005 finding that child welfare at school is a determinant of child retention and also incorporates the rights of children to adequate living standards (shelter, nutrition and healthcare, water, and sanitation services) that are vital for child growth and development. Bugembe explained that In urban areas, most poor families can hardly afford the cost of water, resulting in children from poor families being sent on long treks in

search of water, often having to stand in long queues and consequently being late or absent from school.

### **Parents' occupation and educational attainment**

Checchi D. & salvi A. (2010: 16) found that in Ghana some negative correlation emerged with the probability of enrolment and low income jobs. In Mauritania they found that, there is also positive association with household head working as public employee, which is typically associated with less volatile higher earnings. For Uganda, the coefficients of both male parents and female Parents education exhibited a nicely increasing trend, suggesting an increasing pressure on educating the offspring, especially when the main source of income comes from 'transfer', which helps to raise school attendance. However one third of Ugandans classified as unemployed were actually taking up unpaid family jobs, thus agreeing with Okumu et al 2008, finding that a large percentage of the economically active persons are economically unproductive; thereby vindicating the household's dependence burden implying that educated workers accept only high quality jobs and possibly experience long spells of unemployment and or migration. This squeezes out the household's resources, resulting into students in the family dropping out of school. Another problem is that Dr Dunne and her colleagues, who presented their findings to the British Educational Research Association's annual conference, examined pupil-placement decisions in English and Math in 44 secondary schools and 124 primaries. Their analysis included information on students' prior attainment, gender, ethnicity and home neighborhood and found that working-class students are more likely to be placed in lower sets than middle-class students who have the same test results, and that, students from middle-class backgrounds more likely to be assigned to higher sets, irrespective of their prior attainment. The schools said that prior attainment and perceived ability were the main criteria on which setting decisions were based. However, over half the students with low prior attainment in English ended up in middle or high sets. Setting decisions were therefore clearly not made on this basis alone. Teacher judgments and pupil behavior influenced setting decisions but social class was more important. This phenomenon is present in Uganda where students who wish to transfer from a rural school to urban schools are often placed in lower classes due to perceived low attainment in their previous schools.

**Conclusion:** By the way of summing up we can say that there is a huge complexity of reasons why students from low socio economic status are less likely to excel in education. These range from family and community expectations due to possible returns of education for the family, financial hardship, parents ambivalent attitudes to education, poor attendance patterns due to need for child labor. Likewise there are also many reasons why students from

high socioeconomic status excel in education. These include ability of literate parents to support students with home and school work, monitoring and supervision of children's school work and access to information and social networks necessary for their children's success in life. Inadequate education and increased dropout rates affect children's academic achievement, perpetuating the low-SES status of the community.

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