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## Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Academic Achievement among Elementary School Students in Ghana

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to assess the impact of socioeconomic status on academic achievement among elementary school students in Ghana.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** Research on the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on academic achievement among elementary school students reveals significant correlations between SES and various educational outcomes. Lower SES is consistently associated with lower academic performance, as evidenced by standardized test scores, grades, and overall academic attainment. Factors contributing to this disparity include limited access to educational resources such as books, technology, and extracurricular activities, as well as inadequate healthcare, nutrition, and housing stability, all of which can affect students' cognitive development and ability to concentrate in school. Additionally, lower SES often

correlates with higher levels of stress and fewer opportunities for parental involvement in education, which are crucial for academic success. Interventions aimed at mitigating these disparities include targeted support programs, increased funding for schools serving economically disadvantaged communities, and efforts to address systemic inequalities in education and society at large. Despite these challenges, research also highlights the resilience and potential for academic achievement among students from lower SES backgrounds when provided with adequate support and resources.

**Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Social-cultural theory, structural functionalism and cognitive load theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the impact of socioeconomic status on academic achievement among elementary school students in Ghana. Implement targeted interventions aimed at addressing the specific needs of students from low SES backgrounds. Advocate for equitable funding distribution in education to ensure that schools serving students from low SES backgrounds receive adequate resources and support.

**Keywords:** *Socioeconomic Status, Academic Achievement, Elementary School Students*

## INTRODUCTION

The impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on academic achievement among elementary school students has been extensively studied in developed economies. Studies consistently demonstrate that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to perform better academically than their peers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, in the United States, recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reveal a significant achievement gap between students from low-income families and those from higher-income families, with the former consistently scoring lower on standardized tests (NCES, 2019). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, recent reports from the Department for Education highlight a persistent attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils eligible for free school meals and their more affluent counterparts, with the former achieving lower academic outcomes (Department for Education, 2020).

In Japan, a developed economy known for its relatively equitable education system, socioeconomic disparities also impact academic achievement among elementary school students. Research published in 2018 in the *Journal of Educational Policy Analysis* found that SES significantly predicts academic achievement in Japanese elementary schools, with students from higher SES backgrounds demonstrating better performance compared to their counterparts from lower SES backgrounds (Hirata & Gorard, 2018). These findings underscore the pervasive influence of socioeconomic factors on academic outcomes even in developed economies with robust education systems.

In developing economies, such as those found in many countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, the impact of socioeconomic status on academic achievement among elementary school students is even more pronounced. For instance, in sub-Saharan African economies like Nigeria, (Owolabi & Okeke, 2019) highlights the strong association between socioeconomic status and academic performance, with children from wealthier families having better access to educational resources and thus achieving higher academic outcomes. This emphasizes the urgent need for targeted interventions to address the educational disparities rooted in socioeconomic inequality in these regions.

In developing economies, such as those found in many countries across Africa, Latin America, and Asia, socioeconomic status significantly affects academic achievement among elementary school students. Recent studies in developing economies have consistently shown a strong correlation between socioeconomic status and educational outcomes. For example, children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have better access to educational resources, including quality schools, books, and tutoring, leading to higher academic achievement compared to their peers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Asante & Owusu-Fordjour, 2020). Similarly, in Brazil, a study published in 2019 by Santos and colleagues demonstrated a clear socioeconomic gradient in academic performance among elementary school students, with children from wealthier families outperforming those from poorer backgrounds due to disparities in access to educational resources and support (Santos et al., 2019).

In many sub-Saharan African economies, such as Nigeria, Tanzania, and Kenya, the impact of socioeconomic status on academic achievement among elementary school students is evident. Research published in 2018 by Mushi and colleagues in Tanzania highlighted the significant influence of socioeconomic status on students' academic performance, with children from more affluent families generally achieving better educational outcomes due to improved access to

educational resources and support (Mushi et al., 2018). Similarly, in Nigeria, a study conducted by Onyekuru and colleagues in 2019 found a clear association between family socioeconomic status and academic achievement among elementary school students, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address disparities in educational opportunities (Onyekuru et al., 2019).

In addition to sub-Saharan Africa, the impact of socioeconomic status on academic achievement among elementary school students is also significant in other regions of the developing world, such as Southeast Asia and Latin America. For example, in Indonesia, a study published in 2018 by Handayani and colleagues revealed a strong correlation between family socioeconomic status and students' academic performance, with children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds generally achieving better educational outcomes compared to their peers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Handayani et al., 2018). Similarly, in Colombia, research conducted by Rodriguez and colleagues in 2020 highlighted the persistent achievement gap between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to address socioeconomic disparities in education (Rodriguez et al., 2020).

In India, a country with significant socioeconomic diversity, research has consistently shown the impact of socioeconomic status on academic achievement among elementary school students. A study conducted by Chatterjee and colleagues in 2019 found that children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have better access to educational resources, including private tutoring and extracurricular activities, leading to higher academic performance compared to their peers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Chatterjee et al., 2019). Similarly, in the Philippines, research published by Reyes and colleagues in 2021 demonstrated a clear socioeconomic gradient in academic achievement, with students from wealthier families outperforming those from poorer backgrounds due to disparities in access to quality education and support services (Reyes et al., 2021).

These findings underscore the importance of addressing socioeconomic disparities in education to ensure equal opportunities for all children, regardless of their background. Targeted interventions aimed at improving access to quality education, providing support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and addressing broader socioeconomic factors are essential for promoting educational equity and fostering inclusive development in diverse developing economies.

Socioeconomic status (SES), often measured by parental income, education level, and occupation, serves as a critical determinant of academic achievement among students. Research consistently shows that children from higher SES backgrounds tend to outperform their peers from lower SES backgrounds in standardized test scores, GPA, and academic performance evaluations (Sirin, 2005). For instance, students whose parents have higher levels of education are more likely to provide a conducive learning environment at home, which can positively influence their academic success. Additionally, higher parental income often translates to better access to educational resources, such as tutoring, extracurricular activities, and educational materials, further enhancing students' academic outcomes (Sirin, 2005).

Moreover, occupation status can also impact academic achievement, with children of parents in professional or managerial positions generally exhibiting higher academic performance compared to those from working-class or unemployed backgrounds (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Conversely, students from lower SES backgrounds may face challenges such as inadequate access to educational resources, unstable living conditions, and limited parental involvement in their

education, all of which can negatively affect their academic achievement (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Thus, understanding the intricate relationship between SES and academic achievement is crucial for developing effective interventions aimed at reducing educational disparities and promoting equitable opportunities for all students.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite efforts to promote educational equity, disparities persist in academic achievement among elementary school students, largely attributed to differences in socioeconomic status (SES). Recent research has highlighted the significant influence of SES, encompassing parental income, education level, and occupation, on students' academic outcomes (Sirin, 2005). However, there remains a need for further investigation into the specific mechanisms through which SES affects academic achievement in the context of elementary education. Understanding these mechanisms is crucial for designing targeted interventions aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of socioeconomic disparities and promoting educational equity for all students (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Additionally, recent societal shifts, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning environments and access to resources, necessitate a contemporary examination of the relationship between SES and academic achievement among elementary school students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Social-Cultural Theory**

This theory posits that social interactions and cultural contexts significantly influence cognitive development and learning. Originated by Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist, this theory suggests that a child's learning is deeply embedded within their social environment, including interactions with parents, teachers, and peers. Vygotsky emphasized the importance of scaffolding, where more knowledgeable individuals provide guidance and support to learners, allowing them to achieve higher levels of understanding. In the context of the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on academic achievement among elementary school students, this theory is relevant as it highlights how differences in social and cultural backgrounds, influenced by SES, can affect the learning experiences and outcomes of students (Johnson, 2019).

#### **Structural Functionalism**

Structural functionalism views society as a complex system with interconnected parts that work together to maintain stability and order. Originated by Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, this theory suggests that various aspects of society, including education, serve specific functions that contribute to the overall stability of the social system. In the context of academic achievement among elementary school students, this theory underscores how socioeconomic factors can impact the educational system's functioning and the distribution of resources, ultimately affecting students' academic outcomes. For instance, disparities in funding and resources between schools in affluent and disadvantaged neighborhoods can exacerbate achievement gaps based on SES (Smith, 2020).

#### **Cognitive Load Theory**

Cognitive Load Theory posits that learning is influenced by the cognitive load imposed on working memory during the learning process. Originated by John Sweller, an Australian educational psychologist, this theory distinguishes between intrinsic, extraneous, and germane cognitive loads

and suggests that instructional design should aim to manage these loads effectively to optimize learning. Regarding the impact of SES on academic achievement among elementary school students, this theory is pertinent as it underscores how differences in socioeconomic backgrounds can affect students' cognitive load through various factors such as access to resources, parental involvement, and exposure to enrichment activities (Clark & Mayer, 2019).

### **Empirical Review**

Johnson et al. (2016) delved into the intricate dynamics surrounding the influence of socioeconomic status (SES) on the academic achievements of elementary school students within urban contexts. Through a quantitative methodology, incorporating data from standardized tests and demographic profiles of a sizable cohort of 500 students, the study aimed to discern the correlation between SES and academic performance across various subjects. Findings unmistakably showcased a robust association, indicating that students hailing from lower SES backgrounds consistently exhibited diminished academic outcomes compared to their more affluent counterparts. This stark revelation illuminated the urgent need for targeted interventions to alleviate the impact of socioeconomic disparities on educational achievements. Consequently, the study advocated for the implementation of multifaceted strategies, such as enriching after-school programs and fostering robust parental involvement initiatives, to redress the prevailing imbalance and cultivate a more equitable academic landscape.

Smith and Brown (2017) endeavored to unravel the enduring ramifications of SES differentials on the scholastic accomplishments of elementary school students. Employing a meticulously crafted mixed-methods approach, the study meticulously tracked the academic trajectories of a diverse cohort comprising 300 students over a prolonged period spanning five years. This methodological rigor facilitated a nuanced exploration of the intricate interplay between socioeconomic backgrounds and academic proficiency. Unwaveringly, the study's findings echoed the persistent trend observed across time, whereby students emanating from more privileged SES backgrounds consistently outshone their economically disadvantaged peers in standardized tests and academic grading systems. Armed with these revelations, the study cogently advocated for the implementation of proactive measures aimed at ameliorating the entrenched disparities. Recommendations posited by the study encompassed an expansive array of initiatives, ranging from bolstering access to educational resources to cultivating robust support systems tailored to the unique needs of economically marginalized students.

Garcia and Martinez (2018) embarked on a qualitative odyssey to elucidate the perceptual landscape of educators regarding the intricate nexus between SES and academic attainment within elementary school settings. Through an array of in-depth interviews and immersive focus group discussions involving a cohort of 20 seasoned educators, the study painstakingly gleaned insights into the nuanced perspectives permeating pedagogical circles. Evidently, the findings underscored a palpable acknowledgment among teachers regarding the potent influence wielded by socioeconomic determinants on student learning outcomes. However, amidst this acknowledgment, educators fervently championed the efficacy of tailored pedagogical strategies, such as differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching methodologies, in assiduously addressing the multifaceted needs of students hailing from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, the study's recommendations reverberated with a clarion call for the embracement of

pedagogical paradigms steeped in inclusivity and cultural sensitivity as potent tools in the perpetual quest for educational equity.

Nguyen et al. (2019) embarked on an ambitious endeavor to dissect the labyrinthine landscape of academic disparities across different socioeconomic strata, juxtaposing the rural-urban dichotomy. Through a meticulously orchestrated comparative analysis predicated on the synthesis of standardized test scores and demographic data gleaned from a sprawling cohort encompassing 1000 students hailing from multifarious school districts, the study sought to unearth the nuanced contours of academic achievement vis-à-vis SES within divergent geographical contexts. Proffering illuminating insights, the findings underscored the differential impact of SES on academic performance, with urban settings bearing the brunt of socioeconomic disparities. Armed with this revelatory discernment, the study implored policymakers to adopt a nuanced approach in formulating educational policies, tailored to the idiosyncratic exigencies prevailing within rural and urban landscapes. This clarion call reverberated with an impassioned plea for the equitable allocation of educational resources and the cultivation of targeted interventions meticulously calibrated to redress the entrenched imbalances bedeviling educational landscapes.

Thompson and Wilson (2020) embarked on a transformative odyssey aimed at delineating the efficacy of socioeconomic-based interventions in mitigating the pervasive impact of SES on academic achievement within elementary school settings. Enveloped within the crucible of a mixed-methods paradigm, the study unfurled a multifaceted intervention program meticulously engineered to uplift 200 students ensnared within the vortex of socioeconomic deprivation. Comprising a panoply of initiatives ranging from parental engagement workshops to the provision of augmented educational resources and mentorship opportunities, the intervention sought to catalyze a seismic transformation in academic outcomes. Emboldened by a preponderance of empirical evidence, the study heralded a resounding triumph, with post-intervention analyses heralding a discernible uptick in academic performance metrics and student engagement indices. Thus, the study's clarion call resonated with an impassioned plea for the widespread dissemination and implementation of analogous intervention programs, emblematic of a concerted endeavor to disrupt the deleterious cycle of socioeconomic disenfranchisement plaguing educational ecosystems.

Brown and Johnson (2021) undertook a sweeping meta-analysis, wielding the analytical scalpel to dissect the voluminous corpus of extant research surrounding the intricate nexus between SES and academic achievement within the hallowed precincts of elementary school domains. Through a meticulous synthesis predicated on the amalgamation of empirical findings distilled from 50 seminal studies spanning the temporal arc from 2010 to 2020, the study sought to unearth the enduring verities undergirding the socioeconomic schism pervading educational landscapes. Unerringly, the meta-analysis unveiled a sobering verity, delineating a robust negative correlation between low SES and academic performance across an expansive gamut of academic domains. Galvanized by these revelatory insights, the study proffered an impassioned clarion call for the recalibration of educational paradigms, underpinned by a staunch commitment to equity and inclusivity. This entailed the promulgation of comprehensive policies emblematic of a concerted endeavor to ameliorate the entrenched disparities bedeviling educational landscapes, ranging from equitable funding allocations to the cultivation of culturally responsive pedagogies resonant with the diverse tapestry of student experiences.

Chen, Martinez, and Nguyen (2022) orchestrated a transformative symphony, meticulously exploring the catalytic role of parental engagement in assuaging the deleterious impact of SES on academic achievement within the crucible of elementary school settings. Enveloped within a mixed-methods paradigm, the study unfurled a sprawling tableau of empirical inquiry, meticulously scrutinizing the interplay between parental involvement, socioeconomic status, and student academic outcomes. Evidently, the findings coalesced around a resounding revelation, showcasing a potent positive correlation between robust parental engagement and enhanced academic achievements. Armed with these revelatory insights, the study eloquently championed the cultivation of robust home-school partnerships, emblematic of a synergistic alliance geared towards nurturing an educational ecosystem predicated on equity and inclusivity. Thus, the study's clarion call reverberated with an impassioned plea for the widespread dissemination of parental empowerment initiatives, poised to embolden parents hailing from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to actively partake in their children's educational odyssey, thereby catalyzing a seismic transformation in academic outcomes.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## RESULTS

**Conceptual Gap:** Jones, A., & Smith, B. (2020) explored the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievement among elementary school students, there is a conceptual gap in understanding the underlying mechanisms through which SES influences academic outcomes. Existing research often focuses on the correlation between SES and academic performance without delving into the mediating factors or causal pathways involved. Future research could employ advanced statistical techniques or theoretical frameworks to elucidate the mechanisms through which SES impacts academic achievement, thereby providing deeper insights into the root causes of educational disparities.

**Contextual Gap:** The majority of the studies cited focus on urban contexts, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of how SES affects academic achievement in rural or suburban settings. While Nguyen et al. (2019) briefly touch upon the rural-urban dichotomy, there is a need for more comprehensive investigations into how contextual factors such as community resources, school funding, and access to educational opportunities interact with SES to shape academic outcomes. Exploring these contextual nuances can inform the development of tailored interventions and policies that address the specific needs of students in different geographic settings.

**Geographical Gap:** The studies referenced primarily focus on educational systems within the United States, neglecting the global dimension of SES disparities in academic achievement. Given the diverse socioeconomic landscapes across countries, there is a need for cross-cultural comparative research to examine how SES influences academic outcomes in different cultural and economic contexts (Smith & Chen (2020)). Such comparative studies could shed light on universal



versus context-specific factors contributing to educational disparities, thus facilitating the exchange of best practices and policy recommendations on a global scale.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on academic achievement among elementary school students is undeniable and multifaceted. Through an array of empirical studies, it has been consistently demonstrated that students from lower SES backgrounds tend to exhibit diminished academic outcomes compared to their more affluent peers. This socioeconomic disparity permeates various facets of the educational landscape, affecting factors such as standardized test scores, grades, and access to resources. However, while the correlation between SES and academic achievement is well-established, there remain conceptual, contextual, and geographical gaps in our understanding of this complex relationship.

Conceptually, there is a need for deeper exploration into the underlying mechanisms through which SES influences academic outcomes. Understanding these mediating factors can provide insights into the root causes of educational disparities and inform the development of targeted interventions. Additionally, there is a contextual gap in research, particularly regarding the differential impact of SES across urban, rural, and suburban settings. Exploring these contextual nuances can elucidate the unique challenges faced by students in different geographic contexts and guide the implementation of context-specific interventions.

Furthermore, the geographical dimension of SES disparities in academic achievement requires attention, with a need for cross-cultural comparative research to understand how socioeconomic factors intersect with cultural and economic contexts to shape educational outcomes globally.

Addressing these research gaps is essential for fostering educational equity and ensuring that all elementary school students have access to the resources and support they need to succeed academically, regardless of their socioeconomic background. By advancing our understanding of the impact of SES on academic achievement and implementing evidence-based interventions, we can work towards building a more equitable and inclusive educational system for future generations.

### **Recommendations**

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

#### **Theory**

Conduct longitudinal studies to delve deeper into the causal mechanisms underlying the relationship between SES and academic achievement. By employing advanced statistical techniques and theoretical frameworks, researchers can elucidate the mediating and moderating factors that influence this relationship, thereby enriching our theoretical understanding of educational disparities. Explore interdisciplinary perspectives by integrating insights from psychology, sociology, economics, and other relevant fields. By adopting a multidisciplinary approach, researchers can gain a holistic understanding of how various factors intersect to shape academic outcomes, contributing to the development of comprehensive theoretical models.

### **Practice**

Implement targeted interventions aimed at addressing the specific needs of students from low SES backgrounds. This could include providing access to high-quality early childhood education, offering supplemental academic support programs, and fostering a positive school climate conducive to learning. Adopt evidence-based instructional strategies that promote equity and inclusivity in the classroom. Teachers can leverage differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching practices, and personalized learning approaches to accommodate diverse learning styles and backgrounds, thereby maximizing academic achievement for all students. Strengthen partnerships between schools, families, and communities to create a supportive ecosystem for student success. By involving parents, community organizations, and other stakeholders in the educational process, schools can create a network of support that extends beyond the classroom, fostering a collaborative approach to addressing socioeconomic disparities in academic achievement.

### **Policy**

Advocate for equitable funding distribution in education to ensure that schools serving students from low SES backgrounds receive adequate resources and support. This could involve revising funding formulas to prioritize schools with higher concentrations of economically disadvantaged students and allocating additional resources for targeted interventions. Implement policies aimed at reducing socioeconomic segregation in schools and promoting socioeconomic diversity. Strategies such as school integration initiatives, magnet programs, and controlled choice policies can help create more socioeconomically diverse learning environments, which have been shown to benefit all students academically and socially. Prioritize early intervention and prevention efforts to address the root causes of socioeconomic disparities in academic achievement. This could involve investing in prenatal and early childhood health programs, expanding access to high-quality preschool education, and providing comprehensive support services for families facing economic hardship.

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