International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

A Review of the Influence of Socioeconomic Status on School Students' Educational Experiences

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Abstract

This review paper has discussed the multiple impacts of socioeconomic status on the educational experiences of school students. This paper has synthesized this review paper by going through multiple databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, PubMed, and Semantic Scholar. This paper has analysed multiple aspects of students' overall learning experiences, i.e., conceptualizing SES in educational research, **academic achievement**, access to educational resources, student motivation and academic engagement**.** The findings systematically prove that the lower SES is the greatest indicator of a lower level of educational results. It primarily comes from limited teaching and learning aids, an increased level of learnings problems, lower parental educational expectations, and attendance at under-resourced schools. Further reviewing the literature, the researcher finds that there exists a great impact of mediating and moderating variables such as cognitive stimulation, academic self-efficacy, teacher-student relationships, and school leadership. The review, lastly, gives policy recommendations and interventions to reduce the discrimination of the gap between Socioeconomic level and learning achievement

Keywords: socioeconomic status, academic achievement, educational inequality, learning achievement, academic self-efficacy, learning experiences,

1. Introduction

Researchers have established socioeconomic status (SES) as the most important factor that determines how students experience education and achieve academic results. The "Big 3" indicators which include family income and parental educational attainment and occupational prestige create a multidimensional structure for measuring socioeconomic status (SES) that shows a person's social and economic status while determining their access to learning resources and educational opportunities and essential developmental environments (Van Ewijk & Sleegers, 2010; Sirin, 2005)

Research studies conducted over several decades demonstrate that individuals with low socioeconomic status experience academic difficulties and educational challenges and reduced opportunities for success in life. The umbrella review conducted by Tan in 2024 analyzed 48 previous reviews to establish that socioeconomic status serves as a reliable and stable indicator of student academic performance, which shows that students from low-SES backgrounds face major obstacles in all areas of their cognitive abilities and motivational skills and social connections and environmental factors. Research studies that perform systematic reviews and meta-analyses of data from PISA and TIMSS and national assessments like NAEP

have demonstrated that socioeconomic status achievement gaps exist in almost all countries while these gaps have shown persistent existence or even increased size in numerous locations throughout the last 30 years (Chmielewski, 2019; Hanushek et al., 2020).

The essential value of this subject because of its impact on educational fairness and social advancement and economic efficiency. The socioeconomic achievement gap costs the United States economy hundreds of billions of dollars every year through decreased productivity and higher social service dependency according to estimates (Ballard Brief, 2023). The economic effects of SES-related educational disparities represent a crucial justice matter because they provide advantages to children from privileged backgrounds while limiting opportunities for children from underprivileged backgrounds.

This review aims to provide an integrative synthesis of various research published, drawing on studies identified through Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, PubMed, and Semantic Scholar. The paper is organized around key thematic domains: (a) conceptualizing SES in educational research, (b) SES and academic achievement, (c) access to educational resources, (d) student motivation and academic engagement, and (e) intervention strategies and policy implications. By synthesizing evidence across these domains, this review seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of how SES shapes students' educational experiences and to identify promising avenues for reducing inequality.

2.1. Conceptualizing Socioeconomic Status in Educational Research

Socioeconomc status is something which fixes the position of an individual or groups in a society and that individual or group is being assessed by economic, social, ad cultural differentiations. Family income, parental level of education, and parental occupational status, which are also known as the Big 3, are generally used indicators of the Socioeconomic Status of a student. These are employed in almost every major assessment of PISA and TIMSS (Van Ewijk & Sleegers, 2010).

However, there is a growing sense of consensus among the scholars that a comprehensive conceptualization of Socioeconomic Status is needed. Tan (2024), had done a review of 48 reviews where he argued that we need to view SES in a comprehensive lens where we will include both objective and subjective evaluations, individual and collective attributes, and emphasis on students' mobilization of capital rather than an objective, individual attributes which measures the differences in hierarchy in access to resources.

(A theoretical framework provided by Pierre Bourdieu's (1986, as cited in Springer, 2019) has acknowledged the influence of three distinguished domains in SES, which are economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. The framework says that all the three capitals are possessed by the higher SES families are in better position to channelize the advantages to their offsprings. Specially the Cultural capial allows higher socioeconomic status parents to prepare their offsprings of implicit demands of schooling that is largely organized around middle class expectations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, as cited in Perinetti Casoni, 2026).

Researchers have started to include people's social status perceptions into their social economic status measurement frameworks. People who study social status through subjective economic status have found that their self-assessment of social standing predicts educational outcomes better than existing social economic status measures (Tan, 2024). The recognition that social economic status depends on both student self-perceptions of their socioeconomic status and their actual material wealth enables educators to develop better intervention strategies.

2.2. Socioeconomic Status and Academic Achievement

2.2.1. Meta-Analytic Evidence

The relationship between socioeconomic status and educational success is one of the most confirmed results in academic research. Sirin's (2005) foundational meta-analysis, covering 74 published studies and involving over 100,000 students, established a moderate-to-strong relationship between SES and academic achievement (r = .299). Recent meta-analyses have confirmed these results across different countries and international research studies.)

Van Ewijk and Sleegers (2010) conducted a meta-analysis examining the impact of peer SES the average socioeconomic composition of a school's student body, on individual academic achievement, finding a moderate effect size (d = 0.32). A subsequent meta-analytic study by Markalousová (as cited in PMC, 2025) similarly reported a moderate effect size (d = 0.33) for the influence of peer SES on academic performance. The research demonstrates that socioeconomic status influences educational success through both family economic resources and the socioeconomic makeup of educational institutions.)

Tan (2024) conducted a second-order meta-analysis which included 48 previous studies and demonstrated that learning outcomes show SES-related disparities across various student groups and academic disciplines and different countries. The review showed that SES effects function through various mediating pathways which include home learning environments and parental expectations and cognitive stimulation and self-concepts and stress responses. Kuncel et al. (2010, as cited in Tan, 2024) found that students' test scores and their grades maintained their original correlation when researchers controlled for SES effects which resulted in a correlation of 0.47 for test scores and 0.44 for grades.)

2.2.2. Racial and Ethnic Achievement Gaps

Research findings demonstrate that socioeconomic status functions as a primary factor which creates racial and ethnic achievement disparities throughout the United States. The researchers Morgan and Hu (2024) conducted an analysis of Early Childhood Longitudinal Study data from the 1998-99 and 2010-11 Kindergarten classes, which revealed that multiple family socioeconomic status factors accounted for 34 to 64 percent of the Black-White achievement gap and 51 to 77 percent of the Hispanic-White achievement gap depending on the subject and grade level. Researchers identified household income as the socioeconomic status factor which most effectively explained the Black-White achievement gap, while mother's educational attainment level served as the most accurate predictor of the Hispanic-White achievement gap.

The research by Morgan and Hu 2024 proved that different socioeconomic status indicators showed consistent power to explain racial achievement gaps throughout the two studied cohorts which ranged from 1998 to 2010. The existing situation requires ongoing public policy solutions which need to operate permanently instead of depending on temporary approaches.

2.2.3. Long-Term Trends

Hanushek et al. (2020) used LTT-NAEP, Main-NAEP, TIMSS, and PISA data to study achievement gaps between socioeconomic status groups in the United States which have remained unchanged for fifty years since 1961. The students showed academic improvement between ages 14 and 17 yet their progress during the last 25 years did not result in better performance at age 17. The authors discovered that persistent achievement gaps between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrate that educational policies have failed to reduce these discrepancies.)

Chmielewski (2019) conducted a global study which analyzed data from 51 years of international assessments that occurred between 1964 and 2015 and involved approximately 5.8 million students from

100 countries. The finding received support from Tan's (2024) umbrella review which showed that four contributing reviews documented increasing SES-achievement effect sizes in the United States and other countries through time.)

The educational experiences of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds experience their most significant impact through their ability to access high-quality educational resources. Schools that serve mostly low-income students receive less funding than schools that serve wealthier student populations. Students in low-income schools face greater difficulties because they lack access to qualified teachers and smaller classes and advanced classes and well-equipped libraries (Clotfelter et al., 2006, as cited in APA, 2017).

The research conducted with PISA 2015 data showed how school resources affect achievement gaps between different socioeconomic status groups. The research discovered that school resources demonstrate mixed effectiveness but resource differences between high-SES and low-SES student schools create additional inequalities. Higher-SES students achieve better academic outcomes through high-quality teachers than their disadvantaged classmates who experience reduced benefits from these teachers especially in non-OECD countries (Kim & Kim, 2022). The data demonstrates that low-SES schools need resource increases but achievement will only improve through equal resource distribution.

The relationship between socioeconomic status and academic performance at home which depends on educational resources serves as an essential link between these two factors. Children from low-income households have less access to books, computers, educational toys, and skill-building lessons compared to their higher-SES peers (Bradley et al., 2001, as cited in APA, 2017). Research demonstrates that the home literacy environment which includes book ownership and parent-child reading activities determines how well children read at their first assessment (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). The lack of educational resources in poor households prevents them from building effective home learning spaces which creates an initial educational disadvantage for their low-SES children before they start school.

Library access represents another dimension of resource inequality. Schools serving students from the highest poverty levels operate with fewer library staff members and shorter library operating times and less complete library collections than schools serving middle-income students according to Pribesh et al. (2011) who were cited in the APA (2017) publication. Students lose access to library resources which prevents them from doing independent reading and self-directed learning because these activities play a crucial role in developing their vocabulary skills and reading comprehension abilities.)

2.3. Student Motivation, Academic Engagement, and SES

Motivation and academic engagement functions as key pathways through which socioeconomic status (SES) impacts educational experiences and outcomes. Research shows that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrate reduced academic motivation and school engagement and self-belief in their abilities compared to students from higher SES backgrounds (Tan, 2024; Liu et al., 2025).

A large-scale high school study conducted by Liu et al. (2025) investigated how childhood socioeconomic status affects the academic engagement of adolescents. The researchers showed that childhood socioeconomic status affects academic engagement through two main pathways which include students developing learning motivation and experiencing learning burnout. Students from lower SES backgrounds demonstrated weaker internalized motivation—characterized by self-determined, autonomous forms of engagement—and higher rates of learning burnout which professionals define as persistent physical and emotional exhaustion that relates to academic demands. The findings of this study support Self-

Determination Theory, which states that students who learn autonomously will achieve better academic results than students who learn through external control methods.

Parental educational expectations establish essential academic motivation pathways which drive students toward their future career goals. Rakesh et al. (2024) discovered that parents who maintain high academic expectations create home environments which promote better learning outcomes for their children. Low-SES parents who experienced negative educational outcomes themselves tend to establish lower academic expectations for their children, which creates a cycle that maintains socioeconomic disadvantages through multiple generations.

Academic self-efficacy—students' beliefs in their own academic success capacity—functions as a crucial mediating mechanism. Low-SES students demonstrate lower academic self-efficacy which leads them to put forth less effort while they tend to avoid difficult problems and show decreased ability to continue working during tough situations (Liu et al., 2025; Tan, 2024). Interventions that focus on developing growth mindset together with building academic self-efficacy have shown positive results through Yeager et al. (2019, as cited in Rakesh et al., 2024) who proved that a brief online growth mindset training program helped struggling students achieve better academic results.

2.4. Mediating, Moderating, and Protective Factors

Research has established that low SES negatively impacts educational outcomes yet researchers found multiple factors which can either mediate or moderate or buffer this relationship. The development of effective interventions requires understanding these mechanisms. The role of school leadership needs further investigation because it serves as an important element that helps close achievement gaps between different socioeconomic groups. Smith and Gümüş (2022) conducted a longitudinal study in Danish public schools and identified two leadership factors—leadership competency and teacher-leader dialogue about student outcomes—that were associated with reduced SES-based achievement gaps in mathematics and reading. The researchers found that school leaders create pathways to achieve fair educational results when they operate in schools which grant instructors freedom to decide how to teach.

Researchers study academic resilience because it helps students from low socioeconomic backgrounds achieve educational success. Langensee et al. (2024) discovered that cognitive abilities functioned as a mediator between SES and academic performance because students with strong cognitive skills could offset their socioeconomic disadvantages. The research study showed that social-emotional learning programs and mentoring initiatives and growth mindset interventions all help low-SES students build academic resilience (Rakesh et al. 2024).

Parents who participate in their children's education together with parents who provide their children educational support these two factors create a protective shield for students who face educational challenges. Parents who want their children to succeed academically need to establish educational goals according to research conducted by Davis-Kean in 2005. Schools should implement programs that assist parents from low-income backgrounds to develop and express their academic expectations for their children because these programs will work as a budget-friendly intervention method.

2.5. Policy Implications and Intervention Strategies

The accumulated evidence reviewed in this paper points to several critical areas for policy intervention and educational practice aimed at reducing SES-related educational disparities.

The first point of intervention through early childhood education needs to get implemented because it yields maximum educational impact. Research shows that performance gaps between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds start developing during early childhood and need targeted

intervention to eliminate these gaps (García & Weiss, 2016). High-quality early childhood education programs provide cognitive stimulation and language-rich environments and social-emotional support which help children from low-SES backgrounds to reach school readiness.

The second requirement calls for all schools to receive fair distribution of their resources. The funding system which links school financial support to local property tax revenues creates a disadvantage for schools that serve low-SES communities according to Ballard Brief (2023). The funding reform programs which use weighted student funding formulas to distribute extra resources to schools that serve large numbers of disadvantaged students need implementation because they will help eliminate structural educational opportunity gaps.

Third, targeted professional development for teachers can help reduce SES-related biases in instructional practice and improve the quality of teacher-student relationships in high-needs schools. The educational programs which train teachers to identify and address their implicit biases toward students from different socioeconomic backgrounds together with the requirement to establish high academic expectations for all learners and develop trusting relationships with students from various backgrounds lead to improved educational results for low-SES students according to Rakesh et al. 2024.

Fourth, technology equity initiatives are necessary to address the digital divide. The COVID-19 pandemic showed that all students especially those from low-income and rural communities require access to devices and stable internet connection for their educational needs. The implementation of digital infrastructure development and device subsidy programs together with digital literacy education for students and their families represents essential elements needed to achieve educational equity in the modern digital learning environment.

The fifth point shows that mental health programs in schools provide solutions to handle the psychological effects which result from socioeconomic disadvantage. The combination of school-based mental health services together with social-emotional learning programs and trauma-informed teaching methods will enable students from low-SES backgrounds to acquire essential emotional and behavioral competencies for their academic work.

Rakesh et al. (2024) emphasized that researchers need to study how poverty affects children's cognitive development and academic performance because this understanding will help them create effective targeted interventions but the main solution needs to focus on poverty reduction. The structural changes that society requires to reduce educational inequalities linked to socioeconomic status demand implementation of policies which boost family income and enhance neighborhood conditions and provide access to healthcare and high-quality housing.

3. Conclusion

The review has combined multiple research studies to demonstrate how socioeconomic status affects educational experiences of school students from different backgrounds. The research findings demonstrate that low socioeconomic status serves as a strong indicator which leads to decreased academic performance and limited access to quality educational materials and contact with teachers who lack expertise and hold negative biases, and reduced student motivation and academic participation.

The literature indicates that various factors function as mediators and moderators and protective elements that determine how socioeconomic status affects students' educational pathways. The educational outcomes of disadvantaged students can be improved through five identified factors which include

cognitive stimulation and supportive teacher-student relationships and academic self-efficacy and school leadership competency and parental educational expectations.

The existence of educational gaps that stem from socioeconomic status has shown no signs of decrease throughout multiple decades across different countries. The development of effective solutions requires organizations to solve two main problems. The first problem involves distributing resources unfairly between different groups. The second problem requires organizations to develop teaching capacities at schools which have the highest demand for educational resources. The third problem needs organizations to establish educational programs for young children and school-based mental health services. The final problem needs organizations to create educational programs which include mental health services within classroom environments. Working toward true progress in closing SES-based learning gaps throughout educational systems demands that society unites to fight against economic disparities while creating educational chances for every child who enters this world.

Future research should continue to advance understanding of the mechanisms and contextual moderators of SES effects on educational experiences, with particular attention to three research areas. The first area investigates educational experiences of students from different national and cultural backgrounds. The second area studies how educational disparities based on socioeconomic status develop throughout a person's lifetime. The third area assesses how multi-component interventions which target both in-school and out-of-school factors impact educational results.

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