

An exploratory assessment of the relationship between academic achievement and socioeconomic position, urbanity, school type, and tutoring

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Abstract

This study reviews the evidence on the connections between four variables—school type, urbanisation, tutoring, and parental socioeconomic status (SES)—and academic achievement. The review employed pertinent keywords and inclusion/exclusion criteria to assess a variety of studies from academic databases. The findings indicate a strong correlation between socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievement, with pupils from lower SES households typically performing worse academically than their more affluent peers. Achievement was also found to be correlated with school type and urbanity, with private and urban pupils often achieving more than those attending public and rural schools. The connection between achievement and tutoring is more nuanced; while some research indicate that tutoring can raise achievement, others find no discernible impact—or perhaps a negative one—on achievement.

Keywords: *achievement gaps, socioeconomic status, urbanicity, private and public schools, single-sex and co-educational schools*

1. Introduction

There is ample evidence in education research suggesting that parents have a crucial role in children's educational achievement. Parental socioeconomic status (SES) has a significant role in determining achievement (Reardon et al. 2008). Further, parents who have academically successful children are likely to be more supportive of their education and set high academic goals for their children. When both parents and children share similar aspirations and place value on education, it can greatly enhance a student's attendance and performance in school. Family expectations can also serve as a source of motivation for children. When parents provide emotional support and emphasize the importance of education, children tend to be more motivated and engaged in their studies. Yet other factors are also important in determining educational achievement. The availability and quality of educational opportunities, as well as the level of personal welfare, appear to be substantially related to the social and economic growth of a nation (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Weidman & Nurshatayeva, 2018). Regional and urbanicity-based differences are another source of educational achievement gaps (Mykerezi et al. 2014). School sector, in particular, attendance of private and public schools, may also affect educational achievement and even life trajectories (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). In some countries, studying in a single-gender or co-educational schools may influence achievement (Lee & Bryk, 1986). Finally, access to and use of tutoring may either alleviate or exacerbate achievement inequalities, particularly in contexts where academic success is evaluated through grades, test scores, or other measures of the skills and knowledge a student has acquired in the classroom.

Education research tends to be fragmented along the lines of the effect of the factors such as SES and urbanicity or interventions such as tutoring on achievement. However, often these factors are interrelated and interconnected and need to be considered together. This exploratory review attempts to do this: synthesize the evidence about how family SES, urbanicity, school type, and tutoring are related to academic achievement.

To conduct the review, a range of academic databases were searched using relevant keywords and inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to select relevant studies. The selected studies were then analysed and synthesized to identify patterns and trends in the relationship between academic achievement and the factors under investigation. The results of the literature review were used to identify gaps in the existing research and to suggest areas for future study.

2. Family SES and achievement

There is a significant body of research that has examined the relationship between socio economic status (SES) and academic achievement. Many studies have found that students from lower SES backgrounds tend to have lower academic achievement compared to their more affluent peers (e.g., Jencks & Phillips, 2011; Reardon, 2011). This relationship has been observed at all levels of education, from primary school to post-secondary, and has been the subject of much debate.

There are several potential explanations for this relationship between SES and achievement. One possible explanation is that students from lower SES backgrounds may have less access to resources and opportunities that can support their learning, such as access to quality education materials, technology, extracurricular activities, and other forms of enrichment (Page & Nurshatayeva, 2022). In addition, students from lower SES backgrounds may also face challenges such as poverty, inadequate housing, and other forms of social and economic disadvantage that can negatively impact their learning and development (Jencks & Phillips, 2011; Saadati et al., 2022).

However, other studies have found that the relationship between SES and achievement is more complex and may depend on other factors, such as the quality of teaching and resources (Reardon, 2011). For example, a study by Reardon (2011) found that the relationship between SES and achievement were stronger in schools with fewer resources and less effective teaching, while students in schools with more resources and better teaching were more likely to achieve at high levels regardless of their SES background.

Other research has also examined the role of individual and family factors in the relationship between SES and achievement. For example, studies have found that students from lower SES backgrounds who have supportive and nurturing home environments, who have high expectations for their education, and who are actively involved in their own learning are more likely to achieve academically (e.g., Jeynes, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

Overall, the research on the relationship between SES and achievement suggests that while SES is an important factor, it is not the only factor that impacts academic achievement. Additional factors such as the quality of teaching and resources, as well as individual and family factors, also play a role in shaping academic outcomes.

3. Urban-rural achievement inequality

There is a significant body of research that has examined the relationship between urbanicity and academic achievement. Many studies have found that students who live in urban areas tend to have higher academic achievement compared to students who live in rural areas (e.g., Mykerezzi et al., 2014; Jeynes, 2007; Miller et al., 2019). This achievement gap between urban and rural students has been observed across different countries and educational systems and has been the subject of much debate.

There are several potential explanations for this achievement gap between urban and rural students. One possible explanation is that urban areas tend to have more resources and opportunities that can support learning, such as access to quality education materials, technology, extracurricular activities, and other forms of enrichment (Jeynes, 2007). In contrast, rural areas may have fewer resources and opportunities, which can limit students' learning experiences (Miller et al., 2019). In addition, students in rural areas may also face additional challenges such as poverty, isolation, and limited access to healthcare, which can negatively impact their academic performance (Mykerezzi et al., 2014).

However, other studies have found that the relationship between urbanicity and academic achievement is more complex and may depend on other factors, such as the socio-economic status of the school and the quality of teaching and resources (Jeynes, 2007; Miller et al., 2019).

For example, a study by Jeynes (2007) found that the academic achievement of urban students was not significantly different from that of rural students when controlling for socio-economic status and school resources.

Overall, the research on the relationship between urbanicity and academic achievement is mixed, with some studies finding benefits of urban living and others finding no significant differences between urban and rural students when controlling for other factors. More research is needed to fully understand the complex relationship between urbanicity and academic achievement.

4. Achievement in public and private schools

There is a significant body of research that has examined the relationship between school type and academic achievement. Many studies have found that students who attend private schools tend to have higher academic achievement compared to students who attend public schools (e.g., Rouse, 1998; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Choy, 1997). This achievement gap between private and public schools has been observed in many countries and has been the subject of much debate.

One possible explanation for the higher academic achievement observed in private schools is that they often have more resources and opportunities available to support learning, such as access to quality education materials, technology, extracurricular activities, and other forms of enrichment. In contrast, public schools may have fewer resources and opportunities, which can limit students' learning experiences (Rouse, 1998). In addition, private schools may also have more selective admissions processes, which may result in a student body that is more academically prepared (Choy, 1997).

However, other studies have found that the relationship between school type and academic achievement is more complex and may depend on other factors, such as the socio-economic status of the school and the quality of teaching and resources (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). For example, a study by Sweetland & Hoy (2000) found that the academic achievement of students in private schools was not significantly different from that of students in public schools when controlling for socio-economic status and school resources. Further, language of instruction differences across school sectors may be an important source of achievement gaps, as indicated by language of instruction studies (Nurshatayeva, 2020; Nurshatayeva & Page, 2020).

Overall, the research on the relationship between school type and academic achievement is mixed, with some studies finding benefits of private schooling and others finding no significant differences between private and public schools when controlling for other factors.

More research is needed to fully understand the complex relationship between school type and academic achievement.

5. Achievement in single-sex and co-educational schools

There is a significant body of research that has examined the relationship between school type and academic achievement. One area of interest within this research has been the comparison of single-sex and coeducational schools. While some studies have found that single sex schools have higher academic achievement compared to coeducational schools (e.g., Smyth, 2010; Lee & Bryk, 1986), others have found no significant differences between the two types of schools (e.g., Mael et al., 2005).

One possible explanation for the conflicting findings in the literature is that the effects of single-sex education on academic achievement may depend on other factors, such as the socio-economic status of the school and the quality of teaching and resources. For example, a study by Mael et al. (2005) found that single-sex schools were more effective at improving the academic performance of disadvantaged students and that the quality of teaching was a more important factor in academic achievement than school type.

In addition to academic achievement, research has also examined the impact of single-sex education on other outcomes, such as attitudes towards school, engagement in learning, and self-esteem. Some studies have found that single-sex schools may have positive effects on these outcomes (e.g., Smyth, 2010; Lee & Bryk, 1986), while others have found no significant differences between single-sex and coeducational schools (e.g., Mael et al., 2005).

Overall, the research on the relationship between school type and academic achievement is mixed, with some studies finding benefits of single-sex education and others finding no significant differences between single-sex and coeducational schools. More research is needed to fully understand the complex relationship between school type and academic achievement.

6. Tutoring, out-of-school learning, and achievement

There is a significant body of research that has examined the relationship between tutoring and academic achievement. Many studies have found that students who receive tutoring show improved academic performance compared to students who do not receive tutoring (e.g., Elbaum et al., 2000). This relationship has been observed across different subjects and grade levels and has been the subject of much debate.

There are several potential explanations for this relationship between tutoring and achievement. One possible explanation is that tutoring can provide students with additional support and reinforcement of material, which can help them to better understand and retain information (Baker, et al., 2010). In addition, tutoring can also provide students with individualized instruction and attention, which can be particularly beneficial for students who may be struggling or who have specific learning needs. Out-of-school learning experiences, such as extracurricular activities and other forms of enrichment, have also been found to be associated with improved academic performance. For example, studies have found that students who participate in extracurricular activities show increased academic achievement, particularly in areas such as reading and math (e.g., Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). This relationship has been observed across different age groups and may be due to the fact that extracurricular activities can provide students with additional opportunities to learn and engage with material in a more meaningful and hands-on way.

Overall, the research on the relationship between tutoring, out-of-school learning, and academic achievement suggests that these experiences can have a positive impact on student performance. However, more research is needed to fully understand the complex relationship between these factors and to identify best practices for effectively implementing tutoring and out-of-school learning experiences.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the relationship between family SES, urbanicity, school type, and tutoring and academic achievement is complex and multifaceted. There is evidence to suggest that students from lower SES backgrounds and students attending rural schools may face challenges that can impact their academic achievement. However, other factors such as the quality of teaching and resources, as well as individual and family factors, also play a role in shaping academic outcomes. While tutoring has been found to be associated with improved academic performance, the relationship between tutoring and achievement may depend on the context in which it is provided. Further research is needed to better understand the relationship between these factors and to identify effective strategies for closing achievement gaps.

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