

# The Adverse Impact of Low Socioeconomic Status on Children's Learning and Academic Outcome

[<sup>1</sup>] Nicole Jafari, [<sup>2</sup>] Peggy Shoar

[<sup>1</sup>]The Department of Applied Clinical Psychology, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, CA, USA

[<sup>2</sup>]The Department of Child & Adolescents Studies, California State University, Fullerton, CA, USA

Corresponding Author Email: [<sup>1</sup>]njafari@thechicagoschool.edu, [<sup>2</sup>]pshoar@fullerton.edu

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**Abstract**— *Socioeconomic Status, a categorization based on education, occupation, and income, also encompasses quality of life and the opportunities and privileges afforded to individuals within society [1]. Children living in low SES lack such opportunities and privileges, which significantly impacts overall developmental milestones, particularly in school readiness, academic success, and social skills. The adverse effect of lack of opportunities and absence of such resources in low SES has been linked to decreased educational success [2]. This research study aims to demonstrate the negative impact of low SES on children's overall developmental milestones. To attain this objective, the authors conducted a systematic review of the existing literature relevant to the focus of our study that also met the specific criteria set by the authors to prevent any biases posed by sources and evidentiary selections.*

**Index Terms:** *Low SES, Academic Achievement, Educational Outcome.*

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## I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Socioeconomic Status (SES), as defined by the American Psychological Association's (APA) Dictionary of Psychology (2023), is based on education, occupation, and income [1]. These three factors significantly influence an individual's quality of life, opportunities, physical and psychological health, and societal privileges. Low SES encompasses a range of factors that collectively impact all aspects of an individual's well-being rather than just a financial struggle. Children living in low SES households lack opportunities and privileges, which notably affects their developmental milestones, particularly in terms of school readiness, academic success, and social skills. The adverse effects of this lack of opportunities and resources have been linked to decreased educational success [2].

Low SES is a widespread issue that contributes to inequality in the distribution of wealth, resources, and opportunities, necessitating urgent universal efforts to reduce the wide gap in socioeconomic status. Research by Morgan et al. (2009) suggests that children in low-SES households and communities develop academic skills faster than children in higher-SES households [3]. However, it is not just the children who are affected. The school systems in low-SES communities are often underfunded, negatively impacting students' academic progress and outcomes, including memory and socioemotional processing. These systemic issues require urgent attention and contribute to poor income and health in adulthood because early education and formal academic educational training can impact an individual's life span development in education, occupation, and income and further into their college and career success [4].

## II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to delve into the multi-factorial impact of low SES and its impact on student learning and academic achievement, explore the nature of the correlation between SES and school achievement, examine the context of various factorial determinants between low academic outcomes and SES, find any other existing correlation between SES and educational success, identify the risk factors for such adversities, and finally propose protective factors and interventions that could significantly improve the overall outcome. The main objective of this review was to identify and synthesize the existing literature on the effects of socioeconomic status on education, academic outcomes, achievements, and subsequent individual development.

## III. METHODOLOGY

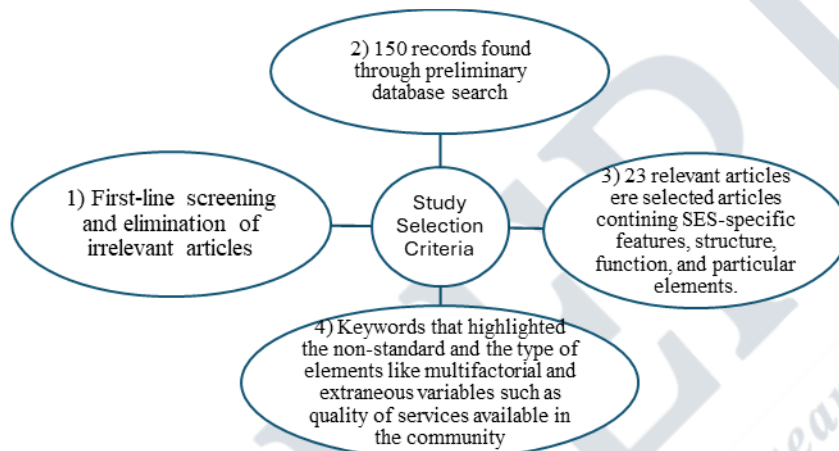
For this narrative review/opinion article, we searched PsychINFO, PubMed, Google Scholar, and Web of Science databases to identify relevant articles on topics, including the "SES Academic Achievement," "SES and Impact on Learning," "Low Academic Success Determinants," "Parenting Style," and "Implications of Low School Achievement." To eliminate duplicity and maintain uniformity in the definition of SES, academic achievement, and various contributory factors, the authors exercised extreme caution to prevent unintentional bias. The initial search for scientific peer review in relevancy to research produced 150 articles, which were screened again for inclusion and exclusion criteria. The authors concluded the search by selecting a total of 23 articles for this paper.

Since this paper is NOT a systematic review, as a literature review methodology, the researchers used keywords such as SES and academic achievement in the title or abstract of any

peer-reviewed study published by high-impact publications. The selected keywords were grouped into two main categories: 1) A group of keywords was set to identify articles whose goal of the study was to define SES and related elements, such as parental techniques and involvement, the role of community, the quality of schooling, and the impact on school successful outcome. 2) The next category was groups of keywords used to describe keywords that highlighted the multifactorial and extraneous variables such as the child's characteristics, student/teacher relationship, and the quality of services available in the community.

**A. Exclusion and Inclusion Criteria**

The review process entailed various research techniques, such as longitudinal or cross-sectional, across various lengths of periods and students' educational outcomes. Screening was conducted using select inclusion and exclusion criteria in order of title, abstract, and full text, then relevant articles that included SES, educational outcome, and academic success were included; those who did not were excluded. The remaining articles were screened and selected for inclusion criteria such as education, occupation, economic security, and pursuit of continued education. Assessed outcomes included measures related to physical health, cardiovascular disease, mental health, and oral health (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Research Studies Selection Criteria

**IV. FINDINGS**

**A. Socioeconomic Status and Educational Issues**

Children from low-SES families are disadvantaged as they are less likely to develop pre-literacy skills such as phonological awareness, vocabulary, oral language, and social skills [5]. Students in low-income communities often face challenges such as an underfunded school system and classrooms, higher teacher burnout or turnover, and higher dropout rates. These are all alarming signs that highlight the urgency for increased research on the multifactorial correlations between Low SES and academic achievement, highlighting the gravity of the situation.

**B. Socioeconomic Status and Academic Outcome**

Low SES communities lack opportunities and privileges, which need to be addressed urgently. Children living in low SES are adversely impacted in the following areas: developmental milestones, School readiness, Academic Success, and Social skills. The absence of such resources in low SES has been linked to decreased educational success [2]. Children in low-SES households and communities develop academic skills slower than children in higher-SES groups [3]. Comparing academic success and progress between low and higher SES shows that low-SES students

fall five years behind the higher-income communities in literacy skills and five years behind high-income students [6]. In a study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), it was revealed that the high school dropout rate among 16–24-year-olds was highest in low-income families (11.6 percent) compared to high-income families (2.8 percent) [7]. Another crucial fact is that achieving success in scientific fields such as engineering, technology, and mathematics is also at a slower rate for children in low-SES households. Factors contributing to the lagging academic success in these areas are attributed to the lack of foundational preparation and background in said disciplines of Statistics [8].

**C. Socioeconomic Status and Family Resources**

The existence of literacy gaps in children from different socioeconomic backgrounds even before formal schooling begins is a significant challenge. However, it is essential to remember that change is possible. Children's initial reading competency is closely tied to the home literacy environment, the number of books owned, and parent distress [4], [9]. We can create a positive literacy environment by providing low-income households better access to learning materials and experiences, such as books, computers, stimulating toys, skill-building lessons, or

tutors [10], [11]. Prospective college students from low-SES backgrounds can be empowered with better access to informational resources about college [12]. Furthermore, compared to their high-SES counterparts, young adults from low-SES backgrounds can be supported to avoid accumulating student loan debt burdens that exceed the national average [13].

#### **D. Socioeconomic Status and Parents' Education**

A Parent's level of education significantly impacts the child's academic outcome and consequent long-term successes. Children raised in a diverse household with some degree of parental continued educational level and socioeconomic status have a more positive outlook on the importance of the academic outcome [14]. Given the multiple factors determinants of a child's academic success, conducting comprehensive research in this area is crucial. This will help us understand the depth of parental education and its impact on students' academic success [14].

#### **E. Socioeconomic Status and Community**

Inadequate education and increased dropout rates affect children's academic achievement, perpetuating the community's low-SES status. Communities that house low-SES populations often grapple with higher crime, unsafe neighborhoods, and inaccessibility to resources and services such as public libraries, parks, healthy food, medical and mental care facilities, and safe and quality public education. The low-SES neighborhood often needs to focus more on family support for literary and professional development, parental involvement, and funding necessary resources to promote healthy developmental milestones [4].

#### **F. Multifactorial Determinants**

According to the Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health report in 2012, early on in early childhood, exposure to violence, resource scarcity, or neglect, which are indicative of a low SES neighborhood, can negatively impact a child's learning, behavior, and physical and mental health [15]. Therefore, it is essential to remember that children living in lower socioeconomic households, despite being at double the risk of developing learning incompetencies and behavioral problems, family economic stress, and personal financial constraints, affected emotional distress/depression in students and their academic outcomes [16].

### **V. DISCUSSION**

The gap in literacy between low and high SES starts before a child starts formal education. Children's education begins at home, where a home life that promotes pre-literacy, like reading to children, a stress-free environment, and financial stability prepares them for schooling [4], [9]. However, it is crucial to recognize that poverty-stricken households often

lack access to learning materials and experiences, such as books, computers, stimulating toys, skill-building lessons, or tutors, to create a positive literacy environment. Understanding this need is the first step towards bridging the gap [10], [11].

Evidence showed that inadequate educational systems permeate teacher's qualifications, resources scarcity, parental educational background, and community structure contribute to increased school drop-out rate, adverse academic outcomes consequently impact the well-being of the community in its entirety, which urgently necessitates a call for action for educators, researchers, law, policymakers, and community leaders. Better understanding and focus on further research studies are critical, as delaying proactiveness will only be a problem. Not prioritizing these crucial factors that strongly impact children's academic achievement is a guaranteed prediction for higher crimes, unsafe neighbors, and deterioration of communities. Without an optimal home environment, often found in low SES homes and community life, a high-quality school environment can provide more protective factors [7].

Investing in high-quality elementary-grade classrooms is about more than just achieving academic success; it is about transforming lives. It is about giving students the tools to reach higher education, make better choices, earn higher wages, and live in safer communities. This investment concerns the present and securing a more promising future for all [4], [17]. High-quality education and qualified teachers are instrumental in breaking the cycle of poverty, and children living in low-SES communities often need access to such well-qualified teachers [18]. However, the current state of education in low-SES communities is alarming. [Include specific data on teacher qualifications, student performance, and resources in low-SES schools. Children in low-income schools are often deprived of well-qualified teachers and high-quality education, which exacerbates the challenges to learning and academic success [19].

The trajectory of career success, particularly in terms of future financial achievement, is significantly influenced by socioeconomic status (SES). Racial, ethnic, and SES factors can pose barriers, impacting an individual's future aspirations and vocational choices [20]. SES plays a crucial role in shaping vocational choices, as a study revealed that individuals from a lower social class generally had less career-related self-efficacy regarding vocational aspirations [21]. On the other hand, students from higher SES backgrounds are often more successful in their career choices, mainly due to their better preparedness to explore their options [22].

### **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The review of the impact of low SES on a child's academic success raised many factors contributing to the adversity of

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low SES children's academic success. To name a few, the quality of the community, access to resources, classroom environment, teacher's qualification, family's financial distros, and other factors. Focusing on improving teaching and learning, creating an information-rich environment, building a learning-oriented community, continuous professional development, parent involvement, and increased funding and resources are crucial in reversing the effect of low SES on academic outcomes [23]. Implementing these strategies can motivate change and improvement, offering hope for the future of educational equity.

The authors stress the necessity of robust statistical analysis in studies concerning various factorial determinants. An in-depth analysis of each variable, including SES and academic success, is crucial to determine the strength between the two. To ensure the validity of such research, future studies must include (ANOVA) an analysis of the variance and standard deviation of the difference between the means of low SES and learning outcome. This will lead to a deeper understanding of each factor and instill confidence in the research findings. Future studies must also include a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) since multi-determinant factors may contribute to children's learning outcomes. These statistical tools are functional and crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the data.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Low SES does not single-handedly cause an adverse outcome in academic achievement; however, its many factorial determinants afford a series of complex issues characterized by multiple physical and psychosocial stressors that result in substandard and often failed academic outcomes. Crucially, Socioeconomic Status (SES) emerges as a powerful and consistent predictor of a broad spectrum of life outcomes, from physical health to psychological well-being. Children from low-SES families are significantly disadvantaged, as they are less likely to have experiences that foster the development of fundamental reading acquisition skills, such as phonological awareness, vocabulary, and oral language. Given the significant disadvantages faced by children from low-SES families, it is clear that individual efforts alone are not enough. Therefore, the results call for collective efforts, in which educators, researchers, policymakers, and community leaders all play a crucial role, to make a difference and ensure that children of all SES spectrums benefit from fulfilling their hierarchy of developmental and psychological needs, including universally high-quality educational programs, pre-literacy, and literacy. More research is needed on a cross-sectional sample population encompassing ethnicity, demographics, culture, and ecological assessment to understand better the hierarchy of needs and the nature of such a universal educational program. Improving academic outcomes in low-SES neighborhoods requires a collective effort.

Educators, communities, and policymakers can make a significant difference by providing family support for literary and professional development, increasing parental involvement, and funding necessary resources.

During the screening process for this review paper, it was discovered that SES can impact educational outcomes, academic success, health resiliency, and overall development. However, further discovery led to more extensive impacts of SES on lifespan, for instance, quality of life, accessibility to health care and essential services, and availability of essential services such as libraries, parks, and playgrounds. The depth of low SES on an individual's development from birth to late adulthood has yet to be researched and investigated. The possibility of finding undiscovered factors necessitates that the SES and correlational factors indicators be further studied, as the outcome can ultimately influence an individual's life span.

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