

TO EXPLORE THE SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND STUDY HABITS OF
TOPPER STUDENTS AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL: A CASE STUDY OF
UNIVERSITY OF PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This study aimed, to explore the socio-economic status and study habits of topper students at undergraduate level. The study was qualitative in nature and the population of this study was the undergraduate students of University of Peshawar (UoP), Pakistan. The study adopted purposive non-probability sampling technique with 13 social science departments and the sample of the study was 26 students namely the top two students of 6th or 8th semester of the social science departments. The semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, and Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis technique was used for analysis. It was found that the majority of the top performing students are from upper middle-class families that value education. They tend to have highly educated families with supportive environments, which are conducive to academic success. These pupils have greater access to nearly all types of educational resources and opportunities which help to achieve their academic success. The study revealed that socioeconomic status (SES) profoundly affects the students' academic experiences, psychological wellbeing, and self-confidence. The students from higher socioeconomic status have better access to educational resources and those from lower socioeconomic status experience difficulties, such as a lack of financial resources, or an inferiority complex. The study also identified some crucial study habits in the classroom and at home that are highly beneficial to the success of these students. These are habits of mind: regular class attendance, active note taking, daily study/reading, effective time management, anticipation of exams, and preferred quiet, organized setting for individual study. Furthermore, students with high achievement levels demonstrate high levels of self-belief, highly active involvement in the co-curricular program and motivation from family and teachers. The study suggests that financial assistance should be directed towards students and good study habits promoted through workshops and counseling services within educational institutions. The government should make attempts to ensure equity in access to educational resources for students from all socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, parents should instill a positive and

encouraging atmosphere at home that encourages children to learn from a young age to have effective study skills. Further studies are recommended on pure science students with the same methodology and investigations of the effect of digital learning tools on improving study habits by future researchers.

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of factors that influence academic achievement at the BS level, among them socioeconomic status (SES) and study habits. Socio-economic status (SES) is the combination of family income, parental education, and occupational status, and affects students' access to educational resources and opportunities, in a way that has a significant impact on their academic performance (Sirin, 2005; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Although much research has been conducted on the relationship between SES and academic performance, little is known about the specific ways in which these factors affect the habits and success of the top performing students. This study aims to examine the general characteristics of BS level topper learners in terms of their socioeconomic background and study habits in order to find out the factors that might explain their high achievement level.

The identification of these factors will give insights to educators and policy makers for achieving academic excellence for a diverse population of students. The strategies for studying, including time management, note-taking, and learning strategies, are a critical factor in academic success. Good habits and learning strategies are usually cited as some of the characteristics of high-achieving students (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Sadi et al., 2022). These practices are crucial to grasp in competitive academic environments like those in South Asia to maximize learning outcomes and overcome educational gaps.

This study examines the relationship between SES and study habits of top performing students to provide a holistic model for improving student achievement. The results have implications both for improving institutional policies, pedagogy,

and support measures to foster a culture of excellence.

Literature Review

The literature review shows that socioeconomic status (SES) has a great impact on academic success, especially in higher education for high-achieving students. SES including income, education, and occupational prestige affects access to resources, parental support, and learning environments (Sirin, 2005). High SES families offer better educational opportunities, private tutoring, and extracurricular activities that lead to academic success (Alon, 2009). Cultural capital, including knowledge of academic norms and critical thinking, is also a factor in the performance of students from privileged backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1986).

In contrast, students from low SES backgrounds often experience resource constraints, which can result in more time to acquire skills, and ultimately, lower achievement (Morgan et al., 2019). The education of parents and their income are important factors in academic success: Well-educated parents provide an environment that is conducive to learning (Davis-Kean, 2005). But school differences in resources (like qualified teachers and learning facilities) also contribute to the SES difference in educational outcomes (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). Also, students with lower SES have been found to be more stressed, to have learning difficulties, and to have fewer career opportunities, which can impact their psychological well-being and aspirations (McLaughlin & Sheridan, 2016).

Consistent behaviors and strategies that facilitate efficient learning are essential for academic success and are called study habits (Credé & Kuncel, 2008). The habits that have been discussed are time management, structured schedule, active reading, note taking, and goal

setting, which greatly impact academic performance (Rao, 2012). Motivational strategies and self-regulation are used by high achieving students while poor habits are more likely to result in underperformance (Lee & Lee, 2012). The factors of psychological (motivation, satisfaction, stress management) also have positive relationship with the study habits, which means that the psychological factors that are related to the study habits are important (Russell & Petrie, 1995).

Children at Topper are very motivated, set goals and have self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2000). These are actively involved in classes and attend regularly (Newble & Entwistle, 1986). In the home environment, they have a routine and use strategies such as active recall and spaced repetition (Cepeda et al., 2006). Breaks like those used in the Pomodoro Technique (Dewar et al., 2012) help to increase focus and retention. Also, co-living in a hostile environment promotes shared learning environment and access to resources but needs a good management of distractions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This review highlights the complex relationship between SES and study habits and their effects on education, with emphasis on how such interventions can be used to promote equitable educational opportunities (Chetty et al., 2011).

Research Methodology

This study was conducted to investigate the socioeconomic status and study habits among the topper students in the BS program. Below is a description of the research design used, the population, sampling technique, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and data collection instrument employed in the study.

Research Design

This study used qualitative, non-experimental research design. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding phenomena in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln 1994), a type of research appropriate for this exploratory study.

Population of the Study

The participants comprised of high achieving BS students from 48 departments of University of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Only the students who were consistently outstanding academically over the course of their degree programs.

Sampling Technique

The participants were selected through non-probability purposive sampling technique. In total, 13 social sciences departments of the University of Peshawar shared their departments and a total of 26 students were selected from these departments.

Sample Inclusion Criteria

The sample consisted of the highest two scores in each of the 13 social sciences departments, and were students currently studying in 6th and 8th semester.

Data Collection Tool

Twenty-seven self-developed semi-structured interview guide questions were used. A few questions had been formulated in advance and some were spontaneously asked during the interview. Two students who were not included in the final sample were pilot-tested to demonstrate the guide.

Procedure of data collection

All the social science departments were visited and the researcher personally conducted one on one interview with each participant. All interviews were conducted with the interviewee's consent and audio recorded with a mobile phone. The duration of each interview ranged from 27 to 30 minutes.

Data Analysis Process

The study adopted qualitative approach based on the thematic analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) that encompasses identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) in data. Interviews were done in Urdu

and transcribed by listening to the audio recordings.

The data analysis was done in the following systematic steps of Braun and Clarke's method.

- **Step 1: Translation and transcription of the data**

All interviews were initially translated into English and then transcribed. To ensure accuracy, the researcher listened to each recording three times. The translation and transcription process was done within the same week of every interview in order to avoid ambiguity and clarify the data. In this way, the researcher was able to get to know the content very well (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

- **Step 2: Initial Coding**

The researcher translated and transcribed the data, and then read and re-read these data to become familiar with it. The initial coding was theory-driven and followed the research questions as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

- **Step 3: Identifying Themes**

A coded data was created to structure themed information, in line with the participants' point of view. These maps were used to cluster similar codes, and also to underscore links between them, thereby identifying major and minor themes.

These relationships were then used to create themes and sub-themes.

- **Step 4: Refining themes and developing explanations**

The coded data were examined to provide a further development and finalization of themes. Sub-themes that were overlapping were combined if they were relevant to the same theme. Each theme was then identified and discussed with respect to the research questions, with relevant extracts from the data and quotes from the participants.

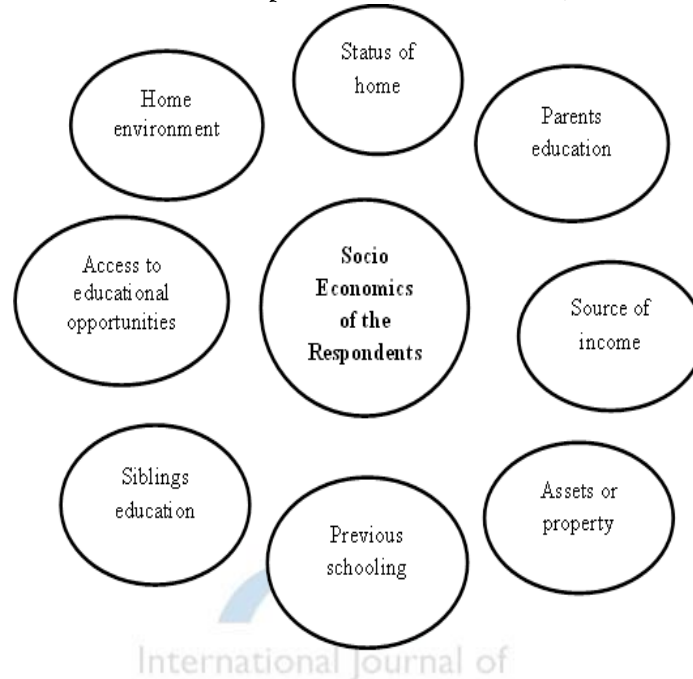
Ethical Consideration

Ethical aspects were given special considerations throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were allowed to avoid answering any questions they did not want to answer. The researcher assured confidentiality, minimized the potential for harm and followed ethical guidelines to protect the rights and well-being of participants.

Themes and Sub-themes extracted from the data

The data was analyzed qualitatively, resulting in the emergence of three major themes, each comprising several sub-themes.

Theme 1: Socio Economics Status of the Respondents (Sub Themes 8)



Theme 2: Classroom related study habits of the respondents (Sub Themes 12)

Class attendance	Classroom Related Study Habits of the Respondents	Never Rely on teacher Provided material only
Punctual Always on time		Regular studying and reading habit
Note taking during lecture		Limited Friend circle
Active listening During lecture		Attend seminar and workshops
Ask questions from teachers		Active participation in co-curricular activities
Active engagement in class discussions		Try to fulfill Teachers and Parents expectations

Theme 3: Home related study habits of the respondents (Sub Themes 12)

Do individual study	Home Related Study Habits of the Respondents	Completion of assignments on time
Revision on daily or weekly basis		Avoid procrastination
Specific study timings		Strong Self-belief
Take regular breaks during study		Living away from home
Proactive exam preparation		Feel a sense of responsibility to excel
Well supported study environment		Use of internet for academic purpose

Findings

The results of this study showed that there is a considerable amount of information that can be gotten from the socio-economic status and study habits of top performing BS level students. Most of these children are from middle-upper class

families; their parents and siblings are well-educated, but a large number of mothers lack education. The families come from underdeveloped regions and migrate to the cities like Peshawar and Islamabad for various reasons including job offers, company, or to seek better

opportunities for their offspring. They have property connections in their home country as well as in their current country and have attended some of the best schools and colleges.

Important to note, however, none of these students expressed that they were missing out on education opportunities because of socio-economic issues. The study makes it clear that socio-economic status (SES) has a significant impact on students' education and personality in general. Higher socioeconomic background students have access to better educational opportunities and resources, which has a positive effect on their academic achievement, mental wellbeing and self-esteem. The reverse side, however, is that pupils from less affluent backgrounds may be constrained by their finances, and may suffer from a feeling of inferiority.

The participants highlighted the need of giving financial support and scholarships to underprivileged students to the government to bridge the educational financial gap and support them. The study also investigates the study habits which are leading to the success of the students. Attendance is regular and the rates of absence are low throughout the semester. Toppers always take notes in the lecture, are always attentive and are always punctual. They establish their own daily study schedule, read the books recommended by the teacher, and read other books including newspapers, magazines, and self-help books. They are able to manage their time effectively; they do work on or before time and do not procrastinate.

They are actively engaged in class discussions, ask questions to help them understand, and constantly review key points. These students are not just passively consuming what their teachers provide them but take initiative in their learning, and usually learn in a quiet, orderly setting. Some other habits that are important include breaking up study sessions with time to relax and rest (walking, napping, exercising). Toppers prefer to be in small groups, have small friends' circles and avoid attending social functions, instead preferring to focus on academic and personal

development. They are actively involved in co-curricular activities, seminars and workshops to provide them with knowledge and skills.

They have a high level of self-belief and confidence in what they can achieve which encourages them to do well in their studies. They are prepared to take the exams and don't feel pressured by it if they have prepared in advance, which makes them happy. The majority of these students have their accommodations in hostels where they enjoy a conducive environment for study. They use the internet in research and to keep up with advanced concepts which also help them achieve their academic goals. Finally, the family and teacher as a supportive and motivating influence in their accomplishments is essential. These figures set expectations and motivate students to do their best and attain their objectives. The results of the study have given a clear picture of some of the socio-economic and study factors that have contributed to the academic success of the topper students; thus, it is clear that the environment of the students, their motivation and study habits are very crucial.

Discussion

The results of the present study are consistent with the previous study on the study habits of top students, which showed that there are similarities between the two studies. The majority of the topper students are from upper middle-class families, with high education level and ample educational resources, which are consistent with the findings of (Sirin, 2005) and (Jeynes, 2007) that socioeconomic background is a factor that significantly affects academic achievements. Moreover, this study corroborates Davis-Kean's (2005) results of the strong correlation between parental education and income level and academic achievement.

The study also highlights the huge influence of social-economic status on academic life, psychological health and self-esteem. Those in disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are sometimes unable to afford the necessary schooling to access it, as found by McLaughlin and Sheridan (2016), and Committee on

Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health et al. (2012) which resulted in a feeling of inferiority in the students. In terms of study habits, the toppers attend the classes regularly, take notes regularly, follow reading and studying routine, manage their time effectively and participate actively in classes. These findings are consistent with the findings of (Friedman et al., 2011).

Topper learners also regularly revise key concepts, use extra learning resources to aid their learning, and like to study on their own in a quiet, organised environment. Studies, like that of Pecorari, Shaw & Malmstrom (2011), support these behaviors. In addition, frequent mini breaks during studies are a common trait of the best students, which increases learning as well as productivity. They also tend to have a smaller circle of friends and do not attend social events, as described by Crosnoe (2011), more academic oriented networks. Rarely is there a lack of self-belief among top students, which is linked to better achievement, as indicated by Zimmerman (2000).

The top students also prepare for exams proactively and begin preparation far before the examinations so that they are not stressed about the exams, mainly studying in early morning and late-night hours, which is consistent with the results obtained by Haq and khalil (2022). In relation to the study of Deci & Ryan (1985) family and teacher motives/expectations are important factors to propel top students to excel. The internet is used extensively by top performing students for academic work. The internet offers access to various resources including academic articles, online courses and educational videos, in line with the studies of (Anderson, 2008; Rainie & Wellman, 2019). Lastly, hostel living significantly impacts students' academic communal environment and peer support. This study is similar to the studies by (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Conclusion

This research paper investigated the study habits and socio-economic status of the top performing

BS level students. Most came from families of upper middle class and highly educated backgrounds, which were pro-academic. The research has brought to light the strong relationship between the socio-economic status of students and their academic performance, mental health and self-esteem of the students. There is a wide gap between students from higher and lower socio-economic status (SES), with the latter experiencing obstacles to success while the former is well supported, thus necessitating a call to action for scholarships and government assistance.

Common key study habits of toppers as revealed in the study were regular attendance in class, active participation in class, note taking, regular study routine, time management, pro-activity in exam preparation and individual study in quiet places. They also demonstrated self-discipline, minimal social distractions and involvement in co-curricular activities. They also had the support of others, specifically self-confidence, support from their families and teachers' encouragement. The results of this study further confirm the vital role of both SES and effective study skills in academic performance.

Recommendations

Based on findings, the following recommendations are made:

For Educational Institutions:

- Provide scholarships for students from low socio-economic backgrounds
- Provide counseling to teach students good study habits

For Government and Policy Makers:

- Expand the funding of programs for disadvantaged students
- Establish policies for equal access to educational resources for all

To Parents and Guardians:

- Set up a positive family attitude toward education
- Promote and foster good study skills at a young age
- Ensure sufficient supports are in place to assist children in their learning

For Future Researchers:

- Make comparisons between the study habits and socio-economic status of pure science and social science students
- Provide long term research into the impact of socio-economic status and study skills on academic achievement
- Discuss how digital learning tools affect students learning

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