



## Effects of Family Background on Poor Academic Performance of Grade 12 Learners

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to describe the effects of family background on poor academic performance of Grade 12 Learners. Based on the literature reviewed, theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu cultural reproduction theory, the study's findings concluded that socio-economic status of parents/guardians has an impact on the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. With parents from low socio-economic background, the Butterworth community is also not able to supplement these insufficient instructional resources. The study adopted the mixed method approach to obtain data from teachers, parents, and grade 12 learners. This study utilized the cultural reproduction theory of Bourdieu (1977) to explore a system of education in industrialized communities and the way it works to illuminate class differences in academic performance and achievement of Grade 12 learners. The study recommend that department of education should prioritise schools of the lower-class when it comes to teaching and learning resources, school libraries, information literacy should be provided as well as technological recourses in schools of the lower-class.

**Keywords:** *Academic Performance; Family Background*

### **Introduction**

Family background is a major determinant of academic performance, with learners from a good socio-economic background performing better and those from low socio-economic background performing poorly at school. This is aligned to the notion of the study which states that as socio-economic background determines access to teaching and learning instructional material, children from poor families have little access to these instructional materials such as textbooks and libraries, thereby resulting in poor academic performance. This links well with the theoretical framework of the study driven by Bourdieu's concept of cultural reproduction, which indicates that

because children from the elite classes have access to educational resources, both at home and school, they perform excellently academically.

The study argues that learners from poor backgrounds perform poorly compared to those from elite backgrounds; this corresponds with the major arguments of the cultural reproduction theory by Bourdieu, which indicates that learners from elite families perform excellently in their academics because they have all the required resources both from home and school. Therefore, learners from poor backgrounds do not have enough resources at school and home. This paper discusses the literature review, theoretical framework, research methodology, and the findings based on effects of family background on academic success. The findings are explained using frequency tables and interview responses which are summarized and backed up by literature and theory.

## ***Literature***

Motivation from home is largely driven by socialization within the family and academic environment, so learners' development is affected by the social system of which they are a part (Piotrkowski & Katz, 1982). Parents are important role models in learners' social systems. There is some evidence that parents' level of education and perceptions about education play an important role in the development of their children's core beliefs and behavioural tendencies relating to educational pursuit (Piotrkowski & Katz, 1982). There is a rising knowledge in the significance of parents' role in the advancement and educational development of their children. The background of the family is the most essential and profound factor in influencing educational performance of any learner (Adell, 2002).

Educationally dynamic provinces, such as Gauteng, support the dynamic enthusiasm of parents, family, and members of the community, which is lacking in the Eastern Cape. Black learners show a high failure rate in Grade 12, including a high dropout bringing about tremendous pool of unskilled labour (Themane, 1989). Themane (1989) adds that there is lack of interest by parents or guardians in the education of their children. Learners who do not get assistance for their homework become discouraged, and this leads to result in poor year-end results that deny them access to university (Rammala, 2009). In rural areas, some homes have death and, separation of parents caused by substance abuse, and household fights by parents or guardians result in child negligence. Research on poor academic performance was also conducted on African Americans (Saiduddin, 2003). The study found that factors affecting poor academic performance are teenage pregnancy, unstable homes, cultural differences, poverty, and drug abuse similar to South Africa. Drawing from the above, one may conclude that having support from your parents or guardian can help most of the learner's academic performance as research proves that family background plays a role in every learner's academic performance.

African Americans had little authority over their educational setting and perceived their educator's expectations of them as low and frequently performed inadequately. Thus, their underperformance at that point fortified their negative self-image. Where such help does not exist because parents being migrant workers, learners battle to adjust to new school requirements, while their academic performance is negatively affected, thus keeping them from accomplishing required results for university entrance (Wilson & Black, 1978). Aligning of adolescence with negative role models from an early age adds to poor performance and dropping out. Therefore, research has discovered that children from influential homes were less inclined to repeat a school grade while learners from poor families are troubled and for that reason, tend to fail (Adell, 2002). In South Africa, it was discovered that guardians and parents who misuse substances could not encourage and support their children; however, poor academic performance exists even in other countries that are classified as developed. The main point that

should emerge from above is that poor academic outcomes is not only a problem faced by South Africans even other countries have faced the similar problem more especially the lower-class and the immigrants.

There are particular reasons why socio-economic status is the most important variable in determining academic achievement of students. Families with high socio-economic statuses are often successful in preparing their young children for school since they have access to a wide range of resources to promote and encourage young children's development (Delaney, Harmon, & Redmond, 2011). They can provide their young children with high-quality care, amenities, and facilities (Fredman & Doughney, 2012). Children from low socio-economic statuses do not have access to extra learning facilities, so opportunities to get to the top of their educational ladder may not be very easy.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

#### **Cultural Reproduction Theory**

This theory of cultural capital was developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron to break down the impact of culture in the class system and the connection among activities and social structure (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Bourdieu (1977) indicated that the system of education in industrialized communities works to legitimate class differences, so academic achievement in the system of education is influenced by ownership of higher-class habitus and cultural capital. Grade 12 learners from lower classes do not have this cultural capital, so the failure of these learners is unavoidable. This clarifies class imbalances in academic achievement. Bourdieu claims that social imbalances are legitimated by the educational credentials held by those in dominant positions. This implies that the education system has a key role in keeping up the status quo (Sullivan, Cultural capital and educational attainment, 2001). In this way, for Bourdieu, educational credentials help to reproduce and legitimate social imbalances, as higher-class individuals are believed to deserve their place in the social structure (Sullivan, 2002).

Schools are not socially impartial institutions but rather reflect the experiences of the dominant class. Grade 12 learners from this class enter school with key social and cultural signs, while lower class learners must gain the information and skills to deal with their educational experience after entering school. Despite the fact that they can acquire linguistic, social, and cultural competencies which depict the upper-middle and white-collar class, they can never accomplish the characteristic nature of those born to a class and are academically punished on this basis. Since differences in scholarly achievement are normally explained by differences in ability instead of cultural resources transmitted by the family, social transmission of privileges is itself legitimized for scholastic benchmarks and is not viewed as incapacitating lower-class learners. Cultural reproduction theory comprises informal academic standards, which are class attributes of the dominant class. These standards and characteristics are informal knowledge about the school, traditional humanist culture, etymological skill and explicit frames of mind or individual style (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Bourdieu does not deny that privilege can be acquired through methods other than the procurement of educational certifications. Legacy of property and occupational advantage gained through social networks are clear instances of this. It is critical to Bourdieu's theory that cultural capital facilitates educational achievement, and that educational achievement is related with occupational advantage, regardless of whether this is a method for legitimating class imbalances (Sullivan, Cultural capital and educational attainment, 2001).

### Methodology

The study adopted a mixed method approach (questionnaires for grade 12 learners and in-depth interviews for teachers, and parents). The rationale for use of mixed methods approach was confirm and complement the findings of the other. Quantitative data was analysed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) software to generate descriptive statistics showing frequencies and percentages, while the qualitative data was analysed manually by creating themes to generate results. Ethical clearance was obtained before data collection from the university research committee and participants below the age of 18 years consent forms for participating in the study was given to the parents so that they can give researcher the permission.

### Results and Discussion

This section discusses socio-economic status on academic performance. Factors discussed in the section are socio-economic status' comparatively strong effect on academic performance, parents' socio-economic status and learners' pass rate in major subjects and parents' socio-economic status influencing the choice of subjects by learners. The study noted that Grade 12 learners who come from a low socio-economic status have a pass rate negatively influenced by this factor. Since their parents' socio-economic status is low, they are not able to help learners to choose subjects when they enter high school because they are illiterate and unsupportive. Therefore, the main argument is that Grade 12 learners with parents of low socio-economic status suffer in school because they do not get support at home emotionally and financially to buy required educational resources. Table 1 bellow discusses the socio-economic status, which is argued to have a comparatively strong effect on academic performance.

Table 1: Socio-economic status has a comparatively strong effect on academic performance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	37	33.9	33.9
	Agree	29	26.6	26.6
	Neutral	9	8.3	8.3
	Strongly disagree	9	8.3	8.3
	Disagree	25	22.9	22.9
	Total	109	100.0	100.0

The above table illustrates that 37 or 33.9% of research participants strongly agree that socio-economic status has comparatively strong effects on academic performance. The findings also indicate that 29 or 26.6% of respondents agree that socio-economic status has comparatively strong effects on academic performance. Furthermore, the study indicates that 9 or 8.3% of respondents strongly disagree that socio-economic status has comparatively strong effects on academic performance. More so, findings reveal that 25 or 22.9% of respondents disagree that socio-economic status has comparatively strong effects on academic performance. Lastly, 9 or 8.3% of respondents were neutral. Parents are important role models in learners' social systems. There is evidence that parents' level of education and perceptions about education play an important role in the development of their children's core beliefs and behavioural tendencies relating to educational achievement (Piotrkowski & Katz, 1982). According to Adell (2002), the background of the family is the most essential and profound factor in influencing the educational performance of any learner.

Table 2: Parents' socio-economic status and learners' pass rate in major subjects

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	34	31.2	31.2
	Agree	31	28.4	28.4
	Neutral	20	18.3	18.3
	Disagree	14	12.8	12.8
	Strongly disagree	10	9.2	9.2
	Total	109	100.0	100.0

The data findings of the study illustrate that 34 or 31.2% of respondents strongly agree that parents' socio-economic status affects the academic performance of Grade 12 learners whilst 31 or 28.4% agree that parents' socio-economic status affects the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Furthermore, the study indicates that 10 or 9.2% of respondents strongly disagree that parents' socio-economic status affects the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. However, 14 or 12.8% of respondents disagree that parent's socio-economic status affects the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Lastly, 20 or 18.3% of respondents were neutral. Quotes from the in-depth interviews concur as these respondents answered in the following manner:

*"...Firstly, we as parents are not well educated and most of us in rural areas do not have matric, we do not have jobs. It is difficult to help our children with their homework and with buying them resources that can help them in their studies" (Interviewee 1, Kwa Feni, September 2019).*

*"...I am a single parent and unemployed. I try by all means possible to support my children where I can. The only thing I make sure is that they do not sleep on an empty stomach, and they are clothed. I cannot afford to take them to an expensive school so that they can get a quality education. As a parent, I am quite sure their background affects their schoolwork because sometimes I cannot pay for things that their teachers want because I do not have an income." (Interviewee 2, Centane, September 2019)*

The findings of the study revealed that learners from low socio-economic status struggle in their academics because their parents cannot afford resources that can help them do better academically. This results in them not coping in their major subjects as these subjects require resources like calculators, dictionaries, experiments and so on. The schools also are not well equipped with resources. Walberg (2003) stated that the most important factor of academic success for learners from low socio-economic status is the home environment. It is more crucial than other factors affecting academic achievement, such as parental income and education. To add, Abdu-Raheem (2015) pointed out that family background is a significant source of difference in learners' educational outcomes. Mohammed (2018) highlighted that learners' academic performance is affected negatively if they come from an economically disadvantaged family, which links with the findings of this study. De Graaf (1986) observed that family income and family size determined the amount of money that could be used to buy education.

Based on the foregoing, the core argument of this study is that the socio-economic status of parents/guardians has an impact on the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Children with high socio-economic statuses are more likely to perform better at school because they have access to better educational materials and better schools; children from poor socio-economic statuses are less likely to achieve high marks at school.

Table 3: Parents’ socio-economic status influences the choice of subjects chosen by learners

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	22	20.2	20.2
	Agree	42	38.5	38.5
	Neutral	13	11.9	11.9
	Strongly Disagree	13	11.9	11.9
	Disagree	19	17.4	17.4
	Total	109	100.0	100.0

The above table illustrates that 22 or 20.2% of research participants strongly agree that socio-economic status influences the choice of subjects by learners when they enter high school. The findings also indicate that 42 or 38.8% of respondents agree that socio-economic status influences the choice of subjects by learners. Furthermore, the study indicates that 13 or 11.9% of respondents strongly disagree that socio-economic status influences the choice of subjects chosen by learners. However, findings reveal that 19 or 17.4% of respondents disagree that socio-economic status influences the choice of subjects by learners. Lastly, 13 or 11.9% of respondents were neutral.

*“...As a guardian I want to be involved and support my children but am uneducated. I know nothing about physics or accounting, I told them to choose subjects on their own or ask their teachers to help them in choosing. What I know is that I make sure that they go to school so that they can change our situation back at home.” (Interviewee 1, Kwa Feni, September 2019)*

*“...My child said she wants to be a nurse I convinced her to take science subjects so that she can become what she wants. I also asked if she is passionate about nursing, and she said yes.” (Interviewee 3 Kwa Feni, September 2019)*

Socio-economic status also has an impact on the choices of subjects that learners choose in high school, thus involvement of parents plays a big role in helping a child choose subjects that they are strong in and passionate about. Parents with a low level of education do not have the knowledge to help their children. Scholars such as Maswikiti (2005) agree that children from a high socio-economic status group generally perform better academically compared with children from a low socio-economic status because of the involvement of parents in helping their children choose major subjects. It was recognized by Muchunku (2014) that families from a high socio-economic background are more involved in the educational process of children than those from a low socio-economic background.

Children from working-class backgrounds tend to experience economic hardship more than any other class; this is often linked to material deprivation, which these children are exposed to throughout their life. Material deprivation in social class has been closely linked to underachievement of working-class pupils in schools since the 1960s when sociologists claimed that a child's attainment could be linked to deprivation of any kind. Lack of money and the things that money can buy, combined with a lack of skills and a negative attitude contribute to a child's achievement in school.

## Conclusions

This study showed, through findings, that family background is a major factor in the academic performance of learners. It also shows that good family background is linked to performing better academically, while learners from low socio-economic background perform poorly at school. This argument is aligned to the notion of the study, which states that as socio-economic background determines learners access to learning material, children from poor families have little access to instructional materials such as textbooks and libraries, resulting in their poor academic performance. This links very well with the theoretical framework of the study driven by Bourdieu's concept of cultural reproduction; this indicates that because children from the elite class have access to educational resources, both at home and at school, they perform excellently at school. The findings revealed that conditions at homes of Grade 12 learners and lack of facilities in school, such as instructional resources, have a negative impact on academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Furthermore, the study recommend that department of education should prioritise schools of the lower-class when it comes to teaching and learning resources, school libraries, information literacy should be provided as well as technological recourses in schools of the lower-class.

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