

## **Influences of parental socio-economic status on academic achievement: A case study of rural communities in Kailali, Nepal<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze the relationship between the parental socio-economic status and academic achievement of students. The research question of the study was: How does the parental socio-economic status influence on academic achievement of students? This study focused on the interrelated dimensions of parental income, educational status, and its effect on children's education. The study was conducted with a qualitative case study research design. Altogether 15 informants from parents, teachers, and students were selected by the purposive sampling method. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observation techniques were followed during data collection. Data were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis. The study found that the majority of students of low socio-economic status have poor academic achievement. Parents of low economic background have been found less interested in the education of their children. Students from low socio-economic status more emphasized on employment rather than further study after secondary education. Such students were found to be pursuing unskilled jobs in labour market. This study recommended conducting free technical and vocational education. Schools and concerned authorities need to conduct parental awareness and education programs.*

**Keywords:** Academic achievement; Parental education; Parental income; Parental involvement; Socio-economic status

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<sup>1</sup> Cite this article as: Pant, K. R. (2020). *Contemporary Research: An Interdisciplinary Academic Journal*, vol. 4 (1)

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Article history: Received on August 1; Accepted on October 7; Published on October 30

Peer reviewed under the authority of CRAIAJ, academic journal of Ghodaghodi Multiple Campus, Kailali, Nepal, with ISSN 2717-4611 (Print) and ISSN 2717-462X (Online).

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## **Introduction**

Several studies claimed that the academic achievement of a student highly influenced by socio-economic factors of the family (Ahamad, 2016; Hanfi, 2008; Smith, 2011). Socio-economic status of Parents refers to an income, education attainment, and occupation. Saifie & Mehmood defined "Socio-economic status (SES) is a combined measure of an individual's or family's economic and social position relative to others, based on income, education, and occupation" (2011, p.119). Researchers have claimed that the low socio-economic status of parents is one of the factors of low academic performance of their children. "Children growing up in poverty may suffer from more developmental delays and learning disabilities than children from higher-income homes"(Kapinga, 2014). Parents of low economic status may not be able to support the children adequately. Children have difficulties managing teaching materials, books, copies, school dress due to the lack of resources, whereas the students from middle and high economic class do not feel the lack. Parents of high and medium socio classes have controlled over the economic sources and educational material, whereas low socio-economic has controlled for sustenance (Lareau, 2003). Saifie & Mehmood further claimed, ". . . [s]table socio-economic status of a family brings comfort, positive attitude, and a healthy environment which leads to high academic achievements at the parts of students" (2011, p.127).

Parental education is a social capital for the academic achievement of the children. Hanafi (2008) claimed that most of the research of developed countries proved the positive relationship of academic achievement with their parent's education. Bakar et al. have also posited ". . . [p]arents with high educational qualifications perform well than those from parents with lower educational qualifications" (2017, P. 296). Educated parents support their children in their educational activities. Kapinga (2014) concludes that those parents who reached a certain level of education could assist their children's assessment assigned by the school. Parental education acts as the social capital of the family. Educated parents involved in supporting their children to in homework, enhance a learning environment at home (Tsung & Gao, 2012). Parental education acts as the human capital of the family. De serf (2000) emphasized more importance to the mother's education. Children's actions often reflect their mothers' actions and attitudes. Ahmad

has emphasized on the parents' educational background as encouraging factor for children in their educational achievement: "When children observe their parent's behavior, it will indirectly promote children's response toward their parent's behavior which encourages and is involved in their education; the reciprocal process will occur, it will encourage and motivate the children to be successful in their studies" (2016, p. 659). The academic performance is influenced by their socio-economic background. Laurea (2003) claimed that parents of the middle class participate in children's education and development, and parents of lower-income do not participate. Thomson, (2018) claims that student of the low socio-economic class remains disadvantaged in school due to lack of home environment, which influences their academic success at school. Parents with higher socio-economic status can provide their children with support and home resources for individual learning.

The purpose of the study was to explore the influence of parental socio-economic status on the learning achievement of their children in rural communities in Nepal. Parental socio-economic status refers to a broader concept, but research delimited this study within the boundary of parental income, parental educational status, and involvement of parents. The research mainly focused on the research question: How does the parental socio-economic status influence the academic achievement of student achievement?

This study is based on the theoretical concept of Social capital theory. Concept of social capital was first introduced by French philosopher Piere Bourdieu and later by several sociologists. Ideas of American Sociologist James Samul Colmen and Annett P. Lareau are underpinned by this study. According to Colman report (1966) role of the family is more important in student's academic achievement than schools and communities. Coleman (1988) discussed a way to conceptualize the impact of families and their environments. He argued that the impact of families could separate into three different components: financial capital, human capital, and social capital. According to Colman, "Human capital is approximately measured by parents' education and provides the potential for a cognitive environment for the child that aids learning" (Colman,1988). The cultural capital theory stresses that family cultural resources and environment determine children's educational aspirations and performances.

### **Parental income on academic performance**

The income of a family is the most influential factor for the education of their children. Several researchers have explained that the economic status of parents positively influenced the academic achievement of the children. Parents of low economic levels are unable to invest sufficiently in the education of their children. Becker (1964); Ahamad (2016); and Lareau (2003) stated that poor and working-class parents primarily focused their responsibility to provide for the physical needs of their children, such as clothing, food, and housing. Bjorman (2005) stated that when families constrained by inadequate resources, children's educational attainment is consequently affected. Further, Ahmad (2016) claimed that parents of low economic status are unable to pay attention to the academic activity of children. They failed to create an educational environment in their home as their priority became searching for the source of income. Kainuwa and Yusuf (2013) urged that student of low socio-economic status drop the school or parents not interested in sending their children to school because they were unable to pay the registration fee, admission fee, PTA fee, exam fee, the cost of the book, cost of uniform, cost of transportation fee from home to school, and other daily monetary demands of children is the primary reason of poor parents not to send their children to school.

Parents of low socio-economic engaged in multi work due to the low remuneration for longer working hours. They were unable to provide time, attention, and energy to their children's education, according to Jensen as cited in Elia (2015). Lareau (2003) argued that socio-economic status of a family as a social and cultural capital that children of poor and working-class parents mostly spent their time watching TV, whereas high economic class is engaged in the computer, coaching class, tuition. Although it is contradictory that families of a high economic class are consuming more mobile phones, online games than television. Parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds may also provide higher levels of psychological support for their children through environments that encourage the development of skills necessary for success at school, according to Thomson (2018).

### **Parental education and academic performance of children**

Researchers claimed that the education of parents plays a positive role on the academic performance of their children (Colmen, 1988; Sewell & Hauser, 1993; Nicholas, 2010; and Ahamad, 2016). Parents are the closest people to students as they obtain their early education from them. The study of Pong et al. (2005) showed that parental educational participation, such as discussing school things with children, checking their homework, and participating in school activities, could improve children's academic performances. Ahamad (2016) further added that children of the high socio-economic class get an opportunity for psychological support from their parents. Colman (1988) emphasized Parental education and involvement of educational activities as the social capital of children. Parents of the high socio-economic class are participating in the academic activity of their children, and they support their children to successful learning, they pay more attention to the academic progress of children, they regularly interact with their teacher, manage the children's school absence and other difficulties. Bakar et al. (2017) also support the argument that children of educated parents get these advantages than the children of uneducated parents. Sewell and Hauser (1993) further added the performance of junior students has significantly affected by parent's education. Educational aspirations of parents found to be the most consistent factors affecting; Kaninuwa and Yusuf (2013) has emphasized mother's education to act as human capital in the family. Moreover, mother's attitude and behavior has been observed to be reflected in the children. Educated mothers can pay more attention to the educational activity of their children.

### **Parental involvement in academic activities of children**

The involvement of the parent in their children's education is an essential mediator of the influences of family SES on the academic achievement of children (Li & Qiu, 2018). The involvement of parents in the home and school activities are equally important for their children's education. Boonk et al. (2018) argued about the home-based and school-based involvement of the parent in their children's education. Home-based involvement has a strong association with academic achievement, but School-based involvement has a mixed type of association. ad (2013) further added, ". . . participating parents performed such home-based parental involvement tasks as communicating with children, creating a favorable learning environment at home,

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supporting the child's personality development, and helping their homework relatively more often". Fan and Williams (2010, p. 70) argued, "When parents are engaged with school-related activities, they can strengthen the bond between home and school and demonstrate that they value their children's education". Coleman (1988) defined parent involvement as social relations that imbued with norms of trust, obligation, or reciprocity. He further claimed that the relationship among parents and children as the social capital of family which promotes the success of children's education.

### **Home environment and culture of learning**

A home environment is also an essential factor in learning. Social, cultural, and human capitals support the learning environment. Researchers argued that interaction of parents, their education and knowledge act as social capital (Coleman, 1988; Pong et al., 2005; Saifia & Mehmood, 2011). According to Saifia and Mehmood (2011), the Family background is key motivator to the student for learning outside school. They further added that the environment at home is the primary socialization for children and influences the interest of children's inspiration for the future carrier. Thomson (2018) also revealed that parents of high socio-economic background psychotically support and encourage their children to develop necessary skill for the success of learning. The psychological support of parents creates an environment of learning at home. Parents with rich cultural capital are more aware of school compared to families with insufficient cultural capital, parents with rich cultural capital are more aware of the rules of schools, invest more cultural resources, pay more attention to inspire and create interest, they support to curricular activity and enable them to outstanding performances (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990).

### **Influence of parental socio-economic status on Nepalese context**

Disparities of academic performance are observed in society by the socio-economic status of parents. Parents of high socio-economic class send their children to private boarding. Fees of private schools are highly expensive and above the affordable range of the low economic class. Although primary and secondary education is free in Nepal by constitutional provision. According to the provision in article 31 of the

Constitution of Nepal 2015 "...every citizen has the right to free education up to the secondary from state"(GoN, 2015).

The government of Nepal has to provide free textbooks and scholarships to students in community-school but the academic performance of community-school<sup>2</sup> is not better as compared to private<sup>3</sup>. Waving tuition fee and free distribution of book not only support to the academic performance of children. Parents of high socio-economic class send their children to private boarding. Researches claimed that due to the lack of permanent income recourses and economic crisis, educational intervention by government and agencies is noteworthy. A case study of Muktakamaya in Banke district by Chaudhary & Maharjan, (2019, p. 4) has been stated:

After the liberation of Kamaiya,<sup>4</sup> Educational intervention by different agencies is noteworthy. Elders gained informal education, and they started to send their children to school. Most of the boys and girls educated up to the primary level and school dropout is high due to the economic crisis entering into the informal labour market, and even some girls into the bondage child labour called Kamlari<sup>5</sup> system.

Researchers exclaimed, most of the students of low economic were involved in economic and households to support their parents in Nepal. Parents of low socio-economic background are more interested in economic activities than sending them to school. Chaudhary & Maharjan (2019) and NLFS (2019) supported Bishwakarma

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<sup>2</sup>"Community School" means those schools that have obtained approval or permission and receiving a regular grant from the Government of Nepal. Education up to the secondary level is free in Nepal

<sup>3</sup> The schools started by Personals or group of people with motives to profits are private schools. Parents of the high economic class are motivated to send their children to private schools rather than community school. These private schools are delivering much higher quality education to the students compared to their public counterparts. However, most private schools operate like profit-oriented business firms.

<sup>4</sup> Kamaiya is a Bounded labour system for agriculture. Kamaya system imposed on the Tharu community of the western part of terai Kailali, Kanchanpur, Banke, Bardiya, Dang district. Nepal's government abolished the system in 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Kamalari system was a practice of keeping domestic worker to a young girl. It was practicing in a bonded labour system. The Government of Nepal abolished the Kamalari system in July 2013.

(2016, p. 5) that ". . . [t]he government of Nepal has made school education free still poor families could not send their children to the school . . . wanted to send their children to the works to earn money around the city".

Most of the studies claimed that the low socio-economic status of parents is one of the factors of low performing academic achievement of a community school in Nepal. However, a report published by NASA (2020) posits different result than this claim. The report shows less effect of socio-economic performance in mathematics and Nepali in grade eight. The report also shows that students of terrain from low Socio-economic status performed well in mathematics. Although some previous study has found that the socio-economic status influenced the performance. Pangen (2014) has made similar claim, ". . . children with educated parents and in homes with greater material resources exhibited better academic performance, which suggests that educational policies should focus on families as well as schools". This study, however, focuses on the effect of financial, human, and social capital as originated from parental socio-economic and educational status affecting academic achievement of the children, especially targeting the parents, teachers, and children from the rural communities in Kailali district of Nepal.

### **Methods and materials**

A qualitative case study research design was adapted to data collection. "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (Robert Yin 1989, p. 23). The study was conducted in a rural village of the Bhajani Municipality of Kailai district. Samples were selected by purposive sampling method. Three types of informant—parents, students, and teachers— were selected among them five parents, five students, and four teachers included in the sample. A semi-structured interview protocol was adopted in the study. Trustworthiness has been maintained by recognizing the respondents through the Pseudo-name. Data were collected by in-depth interviews, observation of the students, and their academic record. Observation research is largely based on observer notes, logs, diaries, audio, and video recording administered with the respondents. An individual in-depth interview was administered with parents, teachers, and students. The detail of respondents of the study is as:

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### Description of sample respondents

#### (1) Teacher

S. N.	Pseudo-name	Sex	Age	Position
1	Gopal	Male	44	Head-teacher of School A
2.	Ram Singh	Male	55	Teacher school A
3.	Silu	Female	35	Teacher of School B
4	Ramesh	Male	65	Retired teacher

#### (2) Parents

S. N.	Pseudo-name	Sex	Age	Occupation
1.	Nita	Female	35	Housewife
2.	Sita Devi	Female	52	Housewife
3.	Budha Ram	Male	55	Muktakamaya (farmer)
4.	Dhannu	Male	32	Messon
5	Rita	Female	38	Teacher

#### (3) Students

S. N.	Pseudo-name	Sex	Age	Class
1	Bina	Female	20	12
2	Sudhir	Male	17	11
3	Anil	Male	19	12
4	Raju	Male	16	10
5	Ramita	Female	15	9

## Findings and discussion

### Parental income and academic achievement of student

It is observed from this study that parental income is an influential factor in the academic achievement of students. Students of low economic backgrounds found low academic performance compared to high economic class. Parents of poor economic backgrounds found to be engaged in agricultural as well as other skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled work. Adult students found to be motivated to labour forces in construction, transportation, agricultural farms, hotel and restaurant, business industries, household workers, and other sectors as unskilled labour. Problems of regularity, low attendance, and dropout during the academic session are common

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problems among the student of low economic class. The tendency of seasonal migrating towards different cities of Nepal, India, and abroad is common among the youths. One of the school teachers, Silu, argued: "Students of low socio-economic backgrounds are less motivated to higher study after completing secondary education. Most of them engaged in the household activity and labour market".

The same case was studied with a parent Budharam. He belongs to Muktakamaya, living with eight family members. He has two sons and a daughter. His daughter is studying in class seven. However, his two sons left the school after completing class ten. His elder son left the school due to two times failure in the SLC exam but the younger one was an excellent student in school passed with first division but did not join further education. Budharam's narrative:

My elder son is working as a mason for the last five years after leaving his school. My younger son also joined work with his elder brother after SEE exam and discontinued his study. Both sons got married and have children. I tried for continuity of their education but they never got convinced because they are earning around Rupees 1000 per day.

Researchers have claimed that the economic status of parents influences the academic achievement of the students. French educationist Bourdieu (1986) and Colman report (1996) argued that parental economic status and education play a vital role in the learning achievement of their children. Parents of a medium socio-economic class found to be more conscious about the future carrier of their children (Thomson, 2018). A similar response was found from a female parent, Gita, who said: "I admitted my children in community school after grade eight from boarding school because of the provision of the government scholarship in higher education only to those who have passed SEE from Community School". This narrative justifies that parents of the middle economic class are more conscious of the education of children compared to low economic class. Due to widespread poverty, students have less priority in higher education. Most of them have been eager to earn money and change their lifestyle. So it is concluded that parental economic status is a favorably influencing factor for the children's academic achievement. In the rural community, most of the students belonging to the low economic class are affected by their parental economic status.

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### **Parental education and academic performance of children**

Another concern of the research was to identify the influences of parental education on children. The researcher mainly focused on how does parental education influence the educational achievement of children? Researcher conducted in-depth interviews with participants. Participants argued on a common understanding that parental education is the most influential component of academic achievement. It was found that educated parents more actively participate in educational activities of children. Student participants having educated parents reported that their parents support them to do homework, regularly interact with teachers, support to collect educational materials, provide the necessary advice. However, their counterparts are at a disadvantage from opportunity. One of the respondents Sudhir affirmed, "My parents are illiterate they are unable to understand my educational needs . . . I am facing difficulties . . . they never participate in the school's interaction program". This was the common consensus among the respondents.

According to Bourdieu (1986), the education of parents is the social capital of the family. Children of educated families have more opportunities to learn at home from their parents. Educated parents frequently interact with school teacher and children on their educational concern. A similar result was found in this study. One of the respondents was Mrs. Rita. She is an educated woman and works as a school teacher. Her husband has his own business. She said, "We (husband and wife) both are busy and unable to pay the sufficient time to their children's education at home but we managed home tuition and frequently meet to the school teacher and get feedback". Head teacher Gopal also argued that literate parents comparatively participate more in school activities. They do not hesitate to ask for the progress of their children and complain to the school. They are more conscious about the academic achievement of children.

### **Influence of the home environment on academic achievement of student**

The learning environment is also equally important to academic achievement. It was found that many students have done better in the study although their parents were illiterate. The social environment is also embedded in children's education, what

Bourdieu (1986) calls the habitus. Children can learn the behavior of their social setting. A retired teacher (Ramesh) shares similar experience. He argued that the economic factor is a means of fulfilling to basic needs of people. It helps to create a suitable environment for learning. He shared his experiences that his several students with poor economic backgrounds had better performance in school. He also shows several examples of successful students of medium and low economic backgrounds. He emphasized to the learning environment of children rather than the economic status of parents. He also argued that students of low socio-economic status comparatively struggle more than the students of high socio-economic status. He further argued: "Education is a lifelong learning process and people learn in different ways. Some parents have no formal education but they have more knowledge than literate people. Level of consciousness is the capital of persons."

This statement is supported by Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. Parent's expectation, interaction, and encouraging feedback support the development of an environment of self-efficacy to children. This study also focused on exploring the experiences of a socio-economically disadvantaged group. They were asked to tell their experience about learning environment at homes. Bina (Kamlari girls) aged 20 said:

"My parents send me for the job of child-caring in the city. I was interested in learning, so my master's family allowed me to go to school in the day time. School also supported and encouraged me . . . I passed grade 12 from the master's home and I have a plan for further higher education but my parents are not interesting".

The narrative indicates that a suitable environment is also essential for academic achievement. Occupation and economic activity of family create an environment of learning.

It was observed that students of the middle-class family have some burden of household activities. Sometimes they have to support the domestic work, agricultural work to their parent. One of the girls of grade 10 from the middle class said: "We are involved in agricultural activities during the period of cultivating and harvesting the paddy . . . parents also forced us to leave school for a few days to finish our agricultural work in time." It indicates academic achievement of children is affected

by their home environment. Parents have an important role to create favorable environment. It was observed that parents of high socio economic status create a favorable home environment of learning than parents from low socio-economic status.

### **Conclusion and recommendation**

The socio-economic status of parents is an essential factor that influences the academic performance of the children. The majority of students learning in community school are from medium and low economic backgrounds. This study concludes that academic achievement of children is determined by socio-economic status of the parents. The main reason for decreasing the attraction of parents to higher education is widespread poverty and unemployment problems among youth. The involvement of the student in semi-skilled and unskilled labour is significantly observed among poor families. Parental involvement in educational activities is also found low. Parental education is also a crucial factor affecting better performance. Educated parents pay more time and attention to the education of children. Illiterate and poorly educated parents are unable to support their children in the educational activity. The following strategies are recommended to concerned stakeholders, authorities to address the identified issues in this study:

- ) Schools and concerns authorities should focus on technical and vocational education. Such technical and vocational education should be made accessible to students of poor and disadvantaged people.
- ) Parental involvement is crucial for the academic achievement of children. Schools should focus on increasing parental involvement in school and outside school educational activities. Regular teacher-parent interaction, school and parents communication, parental participation in school activities, parental awareness and education, door visit program should be effectively implemented.
- ) Due to the lack of education, awareness parents hesitate to interact with teachers so the class teacher should be more responsible to create parents friendly environment.
- ) Supporting remedial classes should be conducted to the student having illiterate and low educated parents.

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