



The Impact of Socioeconomic Status on the Adaptability and Development of Personality Skill of Undergraduate Students

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Abstract: This research focuses on finding the relationship between social backgrounds of university students and their adaptability to university environment. Students were asked to tell about improvement of academic and social performance of their batch mates since first semester. In the process, interviews of 120 engineering students from third and fourth years were conducted. Interviews of female students were 15. The results indicate that academic and social adaptability of students from rural or humble backgrounds is higher than upper or middle class students. Findings suggest that students from low socioeconomic status and backward areas were more adaptable to change, they generally showed more work improvement and personality grooming than other students though they were more reluctant to go out from their comfort zone. The study also shows that low SES students were hesitant to go to co-gatherings and communicating with students of opposite sex. Together these findings provide important understanding of how SES affects students' adaptability and performance.

Key words: Socio economic status, Academic skills, Low performance, High performance, Adaptability, Social background

1. Introduction

Socioeconomic status (SES) describes an individual's or family's social and economic position in society based on income, education and occupation. Although research on socioeconomic status and its relationship with income, education and occupation is well documented, most of the researchers have focused on income aspect of SES. Moreover, Education aspect of SES has mostly been ignored but current researches indicate that students who belong from higher socioeconomic status generally perform better in education as compared to those who are from families of lower socioeconomic status.

Adaptability is defined as the ability to change or to alter oneself to the changed circumstances or environment (Kaushal, 2011). Although many factors can impact the adaptability of students to a new environment, this study will focus only on socioeconomic factor. Are students from humble or low socioeconomic background more adaptable to changes? Generally, students from low socioeconomic background are considered to be more adaptable to changes.

1.1 Objectives

- To examine adaptability of students by testing improvement in social skills.
- To investigate impact of social background on adaptability of students.
- To assess the effect of social background on academic performance.

1.2 Research Questions

- Is there any association between social background and adaptability of students?
- What might be the possible causes of this association?
- How does academic performance influenced by social background?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Relation between SES and Marital Problems and their Effect on Child Development

Families with high SES status had less marital problems and they focused more on child's development while those families with low SES status faced more marital problems as a result child's development was hindered. Family Stress Model predicted that economic hardship leads to deterioration in marital relationship which had a bad effect on child's development because of two reasons 1) effect of behavioral and emotional functioning of parents. 2) Investment in development in child's abilities. While families with greater economic resources are able to make significant investments in the development of their children. (Conger & Martin, 2010).

2.2 Relation between SES and Character of Individuals and their Effect on Child Development

While financial status has an impact on relations with relatives and growth of kids, personality traits also influence socioeconomic advancement and the standard of interpersonal relationships. Parenting attributes that enterprises respect and are willing to pay for, such as abilities, diligence, integrity, sound health, and dependability, benefit children's life possibilities regardless of how they affect parents' earnings. Kids of parents with these characteristics perform well regardless of whether their parents do not have a high income. Thus, "parents" relationships with others are likely to influence both their family structure and their parenting skills (Conger & Martin, 2010).

2.3 Socioeconomic Status and Peer Relations

Most social contacts can be regarded as trading activities since they pervade every aspect of social phenomena, including group processes and inter-group relations, which are conceptualized as joint consequences of voluntary individual actions motivated by incentives (Blau, 1964). Sharing hobbies across students, such as sports and other activities, can foster friendships since they provide a mutual desire for exchanging. The type and quantity of sports and activities in which learners can participate, nevertheless, may be influenced by the socioeconomic circumstances of their families. As a result, kids of low SES may have had a harder time developing and maintaining the reciprocity that is required to form friendships and affiliations with peers with a greater SES. Their "marketplace" in school may be reduced in contrast to pupils from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, potentially leading to lower SI. As previously stated, SES may also be linked to social competency, which is vital for developing relationships.

Hägglund (2003) proposed that inadequate social abilities could raise the likelihood that one will be ostracized from a social circle and bullied. Her investigation, involving conversations with children around 11 to 13, predicted that excluded peer group children had not obtained social approval among other peers. In addition, a Swedish study (Larsson & Frisk, 1999) found that learners with a low socioeconomic status had more behavioral difficulties than those with higher SES, increasing the likelihood of separation from the social circle and being abused This is consistent with the overwhelming proof that assertive kids are more probably to be turned down by other students (Coie, Dodge, & Kupersmidt, 1990).

2.4 SES and the School Environment

This might result in stronger ties between schools and parents, or in families questioning teachers. One might

suggest that this parental engagement motivates teachers to improve their interactions with middle-class kids. (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). However Muijs et al. (2009) pointed out that schools in low SES communities face challenges such as higher joblessness, a shortage of qualified educators, and lower educational outcomes. Moreover, Gimbert and Wallace (2007) suggested that a teacher's years of experience and training quality correspond with their students' achievement in school. Low-income schools do not have highly qualified teachers. In fact, 27 percent of secondary school math instructors in low-income districts of schools had a college mathematics degree, compared to 43 percent of teachers in more affluent school districts (Ingersoll, 1999). A number of factors have been found to increase the quality of schools in low-SES neighborhood: increasing learning and instruction, creating a full of data atmosphere, fostering a community of learners, and providing continual professional development (Muijs et al, 2009).

2.5 Measuring Socioeconomic Status

While SES has generally been considered central to the area of research, there appears to be a continuous debate concerning its theoretical significance and empirical assessment in studies involving kids and teens (Bradley, 2003). SES is calculated using a variety of variable arrangements, creating difficulty when evaluating research findings. The same argument can be made now. Many researchers use SES and social class interchangeably, without explanation or justification, to refer to students' social and economic attributes (Ensminger & Fothergill, 2003). In general, however, SES represents an individual's or a family's placement on a hierarchy based on access to or control over a number of valued goods such as wealth, power,

A number of empirical investigations investigating the relationships among these parts found moderate correlations, but more importantly, these studies demonstrated that the components of SES are distinct, with each measuring a significantly distinct element of SES that should be thought about as independent of the others (Huang, 1998). Parental income, as an indication of SES, shows the student's access to social and economic resources. Another conventional SES element, the education of parents, is regarded as one of the more stable parts of SES because it typically begins at a young age and tends to remain constant over time. Furthermore, educational attainment of parents is a predictor of income for parents because educational attainment and income are significantly associated in the US. The third conventional SES component, occupation, is graded according to the level of education and earnings required to have a specific occupation (Hauser & Warren, 1997).

2.6 Effect of SES on EFL and Communication Development

Ghani (2003) explored the impact of SES on language acquisition in Pakistan. He assessed learners' language proficiency in three ways: by managing a previous Cambridge First Certificate exam (1995) and a cloze test (Lapkin and Swain, 1977), as well as by analyzing the results they received on the latest between yearly test in English. These tests covered structure, sentence structure, translation, and set texts.

3. Methodology

The research is carried out under the paradigm of pragmatic worldview as it highlights problem centered and real world practice oriented situation. Moreover, mixed method approach is used to imply convergent design. The survey was conducted as non-experimental which leads to the instrument of observation to determine the generalization. This is done to refine and draw interrelationship of categories of information. Data was collected from 3rd and 4th year students of undergraduate level of NUST. Respondents were interviewed with open ended questions and their responses were recorded in written transcription. There were five structured questions. Each question was compiled statistically and analyzed separately.

4. Analysis

A random sample of 120 engineering students in 3rd and 4th years was selected and interviewed. According to 62.3% interviewees, their batch mates from rural background improved (both socially and academically) more than those from urban backgrounds. 71.23 % of respondents believed that students from rural background improved their academics and 78.2% of them had opinion that they also improved their social skills. When asked about whether students from rural areas work harder than others, 34% of respondents believed that they are more hard working

only in academics whereas 15% said that rural students only work harder in social activities. While 40% of respondents had opinion that students from humble backgrounds are more hardworking both socially and academically. According to 49% of respondents, students from humble backgrounds were more willing to take risks and go out of their comfort zone while 51% of them answered in negative. 71.3% of interviewees replied that their batch mates from mediocre backgrounds tend to avoid going into gatherings or circles, which include both boys and girls.

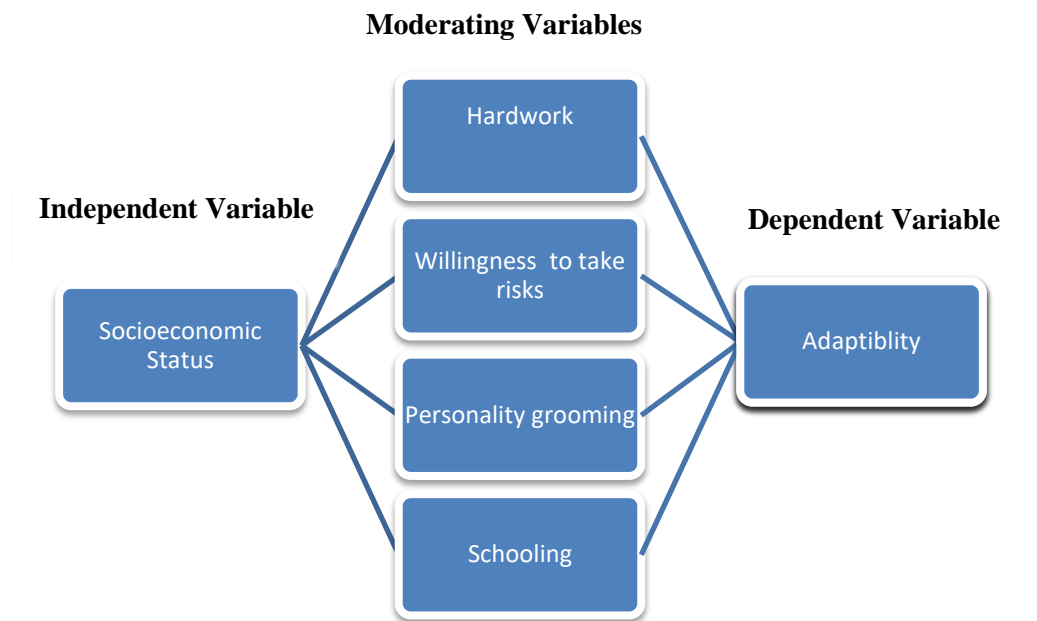


Figure 1

4.1 Relationship of Personality Grooming with SES and Adaptability of Undergraduate Students

Socioeconomic status influences personality grooming of students. In our research 78.2% of students had opinion that undergraduate university students belonging to lower SES do groom their personality with time (figure 1). Many respondents attributed this behavior to the urge these students feel to get inside peer groups. There is another Swedish report (Larsson & Frisk, 1999) predicted that pupil with low SES have generally more mental and behavioral issues in comparison to the students with higher SES, and this factor increased the possibility of exclusion from the peer group. Therefore, in order to avoid being excluded from social groups low SES students have higher motivation to groom their personality.

Some interviewees also said that in university lower SES students are provided with more opportunities to be part of social activities such as society work, interaction with diverse student body, interaction with teachers etc. They are also provided with opportunity to engage in higher level intellectual activities. When they involve themselves in such activities they learn essential behavior and skills needed for acceptance in the professional society. Interviewees also had opinion that students also learn communications skills and become self-aware of their weaknesses and talents when they get into diverse and competitive academic environment of university. Therefore, they then look forward to polish their skills and overcome weaknesses by grooming themselves. At good universities teachers expect high from students, such as engagement with intellectual problems, completing assignments on time, and the ability to manage time efficiently. An individual's personality develops when he goes through this treatment for 4 to 5 years of university.

Some researchers find out that most schools enforce culture and values of high SES individuals (Epstein, 2001). Therefore, students from low SES feel difficulty to adapt to these values. Teachers tend to reward students who confirm to the values and culture of school (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Therefore, lower SES students find ways to adapt themselves to the new environment and get acceptance by their teachers.

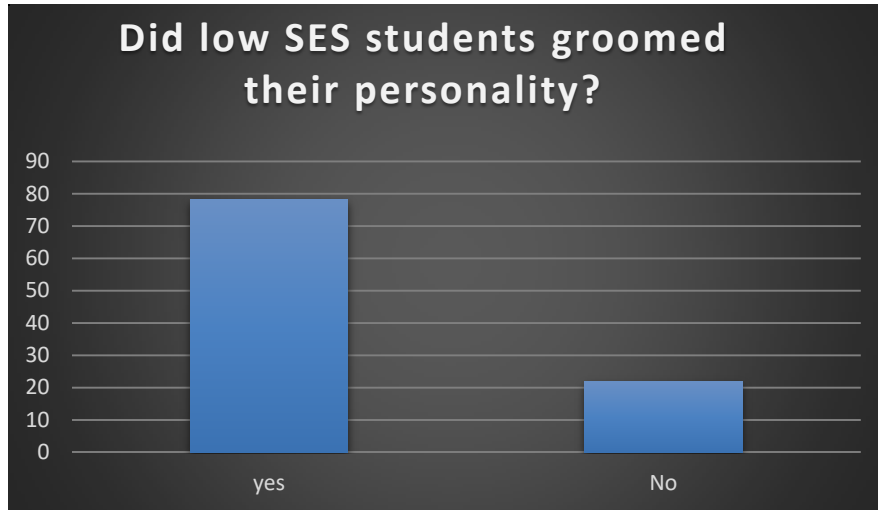


Figure 2

4.2 Relationship of Hard Work With low SES and Adaptability of Undergraduate Students

Socioeconomic status affects the hardworking ability of a student. Low SES was found to have negative impact of mental health of children and adults. Moreover, studies has predicted that the intergenerational transmission of mental health conflicts were strongest among families of low SES (Reiss, 2013). Mental health problem in students from low SES may cause them to work less hard work as hard work requires a healthy mind. Another research shows that students with high socioeconomic status had more achievements in studies as compared to the students from low socioeconomic status (Ekber, Tomu, Kazim Celik, 2009). Children with high socio economic status have educated parents who know the importance of studies. These parents take personal interest in studies of their children and assist their children in homework and studies (Orestes et. al, 2014). Therefore, higher SES parents are more vocal in urging their students to work harder. However, the statistical results of this study predicts in figure 3 that 89% low socio economic status more hardworking and the students with low SES are more willing to face challenges. These children have responsibility to support their families and want to upgrade their life styles and class due to which they work more hard as compared to other students. The students from humble background have a will to achieve high goal to support their families and to cope up with the fast urban life. Since, these students have experienced hardships early in their lives, they welcome new challenges and can adapt to new environment more easily. Some interviewees also admitted to knowing some bright students with good Grade point average (GPA) who do part time jobs along with their studies to support their families.. Hence low SES students are more sensitive to the needs of families and so they are more hard working as compared to other students.

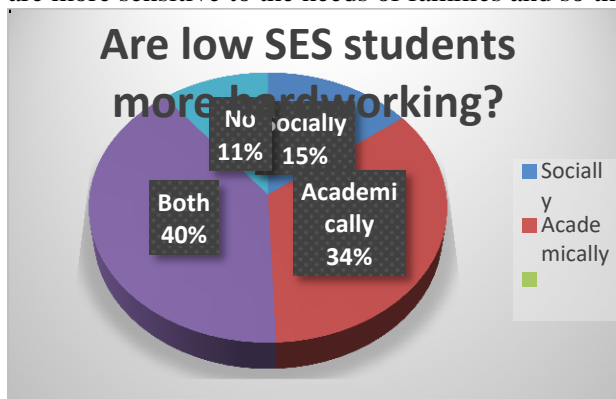


Figure 3

4.3 Relationship of Schooling with Low SES and Adaptability of Undergraduate Students

Research shows that students from low SES background perform lower in their academics in comparison to the

students who belong from high SES group (Morgan et.al, 2009).It is generally observed that schools of low SES communities are often under resourced which could one of the reason of negatively affecting students’ academic progress (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008).Similarly, families with low economic resources made less investment in the development of their children. (Conger & Martin, 2010). Mostly low SES students study in government school while high SES students study in private schools. A teacher’s experience and quality training are also considered as contributing factor in children’s academic achievement (Gimbert, Bol, & Wallace, 2007). Yet, children in low income schools are less likely to have well-qualified teachers. So schooling had a major impact on their performance and behavior as they entered university.

From our interviews, we found out that initially there are skill gaps between students from low SES and high SES. But with the passage of time, students from low SES background started adapting themselves to the environment and started developing social and academic skills that are required of any student in a university (figure 2 & 4). This pattern observed because of a bigger room for improvement for low SES students than for high SES students. So, low SES students were more adaptable to change as compared to high SES students. Their work performance improved, their personality groomed more rapidly than high SES students (figure 4).

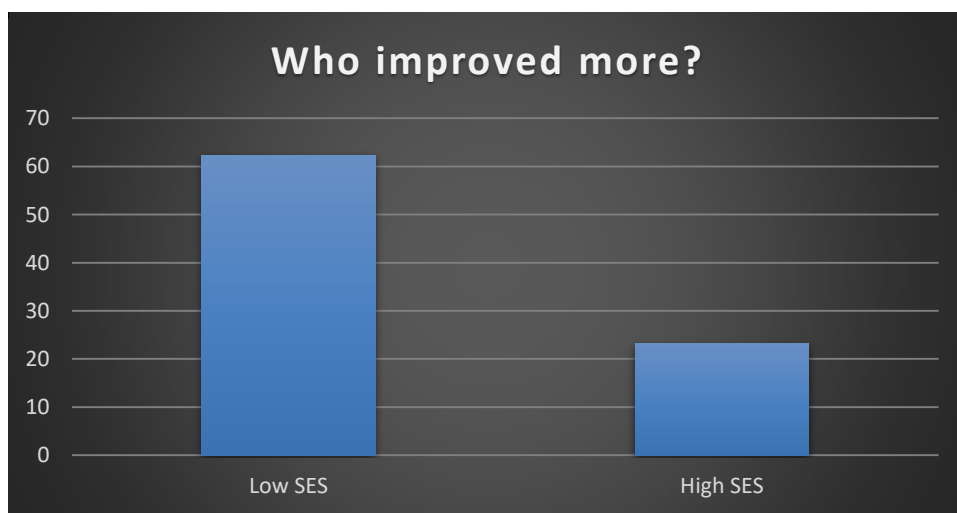


Figure 4

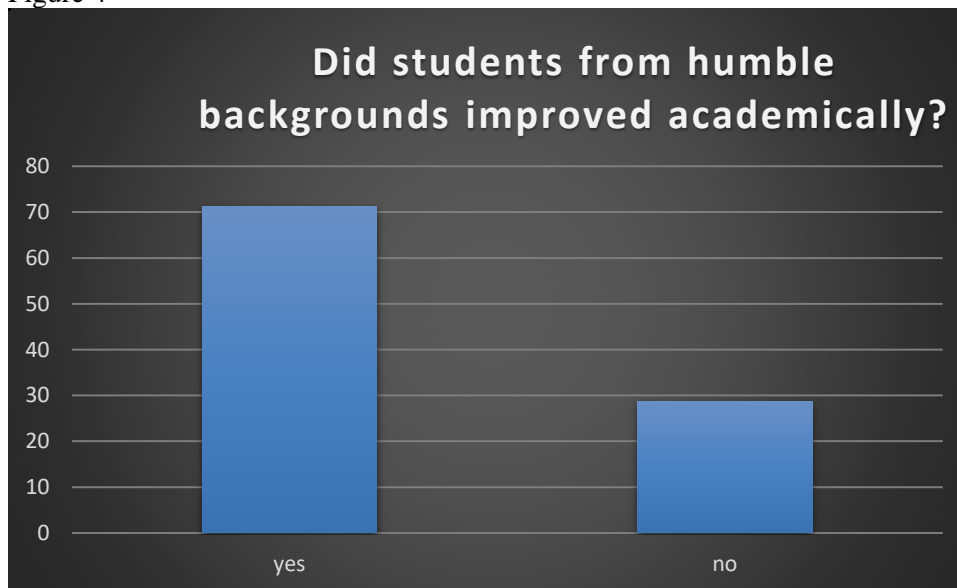


Figure 5

4.4 Relationship of Risk Taking Ability with SES and Adaptability of Undergraduate Students

Student's belief towards risk taking could influence on their academic achievement. They are needed to get awareness of the significance of risk taking. The risk factor can appear in different scenarios like in medical and forecast predictions, environmental or financial risks from media research based reports to public officials (Schlottmann & Wilkening, 2011). Therefore, risk taking and risk-aversion has been under consideration of educators and researchers for certain reasons (Till, 2014). It includes the significance of pointing difference to leading consensus, along with developing critical thinking and decision making. Risks are significant for growth and development, but some people are reluctant to take risks due to emotionally unstable circumstances. It is generally believed that motivation for risks and take on risks differ between students, ranging from cautiousness and restraint to risk-seeking and even pleasure in risk-taking (Rohrmann, 2005). However, there it is not clear evident from the previous researches that this is a general practicing trait. There are different risk attitudes with variant risk orientations which are not found to be consistent across domains. Moreover the motivation for taking risks are also dependent on the context. Until now, very few researchers have examined the effect of socioeconomic status on choices and decision-making and these few showed a confusing outcome: the poor seem even more rationale than the rich (Meuris & Leana, 2015). However, no study relates decision-making under risk (and uncertainty). So the students from low SES backgrounds cannot be considered as more risk taking since they are more considerate they will rarely indulge in any such activity. It refutes one of the hypotheses of our research, that students from low SES are more risk taking. Also when the question was posed to our sample of 100, third year and fourth year students, the outcome was a split; 51% replying in favor and the rest 49% rejecting it (Figure 6). So on the basis of it we would not rule out a verdict. But when the same question was posed to the faculty of university, one observation came out as a common denominator, the students with low SES are associated with lower expectations from their peers and university environment which makes them perform without any pressure. The opposite stands true for high SES students, who for the sake of pressure of expectations are held back from delivering. Under such circumstances students with low SES have a definite edge.

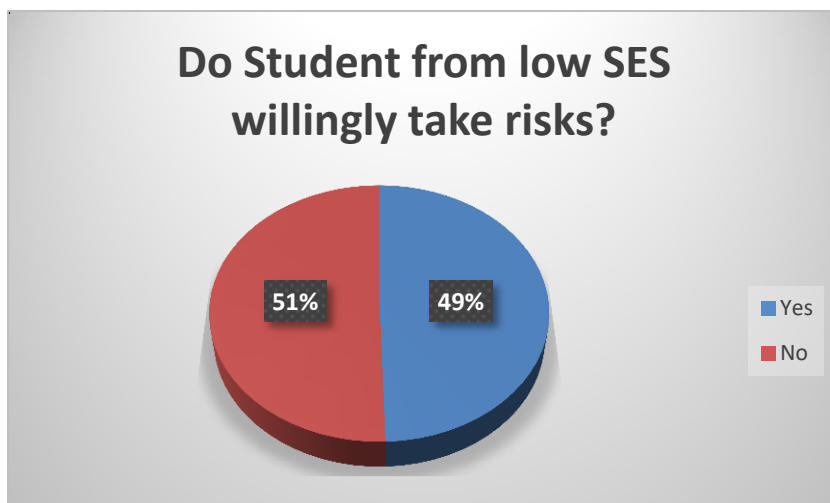


Figure 6

4.5 Findings

Our present study indicates that students from low SES are slightly more adaptable to change than high SES students. It shows that low SES students have improved themselves over the years both academically and socially. These students were found to be more hard working, resulting in improvement of their work performance and personality grooming. Personality grooming is also dependent upon students' previous schooling, students from private schools and colleges were found more groomed than students from government schools and colleges. But as students from mediocre schools (Low SES students) entered university, they showed more improvement as

compared to high SES students. This study has also some limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small. Increasing the sample size would give us a better understanding of students' adaptability. Secondly, if we would know about students background (like previous education and their hometown) beforehand it could provide us with a more accurate analysis and result.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

- Are there students in your knowledge that have improved with passage of time both socially and academically? And can you tell from which social background they belong?
- Do students from lower social background have improved their performance quality?
- Do you think students from humble background have groomed their personality well since first semester?
- Are these students more hard working than the rest of the students?
- Do you think these students are more willing to face challenges in a multidimensional student body and competitive environment of a university?
- Do students from humble background like going to Co-gatherings?