

Investigating the effect of family income on academic performance and student motivation in a South African private school

Genevieve Stanley, Omotosho Ademola Olumuyiwa*

Management College of South Africa, Durban 4001, South Africa

* Corresponding author: Omotosho Ademola Olumuyiwa, rufusademola1@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 1 September 2023

Accepted: 3 November 2023

Available online: 17 November 2023

doi: 10.59400/fes.v1i1.218

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ABSTRACT: In this study, a case study of a private school in the Benoni District of Gauteng Province, South Africa, was used to examine how family money affects learners' academic performance and motivation. Semi-structured interviews were utilised to acquire insightful data on parents' socioeconomic status. Nine participants—seven educators and two principals—made up the sample size for the interview, which served the goals and purposes of the research. The data were analysed using the qualitative content analysis method. The study's goals were to investigate and ascertain whether a parent's income level has any significant influence on a learner's academic performance and willingness to pursue their education. Four themes, including parent-child relationships, communication issues, parental lack of engagement and support, and socioeconomic position, were identified through a thorough analysis of the study. The results also showed a connection between parents' socioeconomic status and their capacity to assist and participate in their children's academic pursuits. In order to work with families and students to achieve excellent academic results, especially within lower socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, this study recommends that additional and future research be conducted. This research should concentrate on useful techniques and various approaches that institutions can employ.

KEYWORDS: family income; academic performance; socioeconomic status; education

1. Introduction

The relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and students' academic attainment has been an interesting subject of scholarly discourse over the years. The goal of this study was to assess how various families' incomes from both free and paid schools may affect students' academic achievement and motivation. One of the major issues that all schools face is a lack of funding. While the learners' motivation is a personal drive that is required to help them accomplish their academic goals, parental financial assistance is of the utmost significance for the academic journey of learners^[1]. Parents' financial support enables students to get educational tools and materials that will aid and direct them throughout their academic path. Less fortunate parents may be forced to send their children to government and public schools, whereas more financially successful parents may be able to send their children to the best private schools^[2]. All educational stakeholders promote and encourage family support since it is recognised that in order for students to achieve their full potential as learners, they will require such assistance^[3].

The unemployment rate has risen, according to earlier research, and it is now officially 34.5% nationwide^[4]. This indicates a sharp increase in the number of unemployed people, which has an impact on family finances and income. The academic success of a student is also greatly influenced by their drive and willingness to work hard. In order to overcome the obstacles to academic success, the learner's behaviour towards their studies must be conditioned via motivation^[5]. Financial assistance from parents has a big impact on how motivated students are to learn. Learners require their parents' financial assistance in order to effectively care for them as they study and prepare for the future^[6]. Many students aspire to achieve excellent academic success. A parent's approval and pride in their child's performance and accomplishments might motivate children to study more readily and successfully, which may result in a drop in motivation^[5].

The management and academic success of a school are influenced by its financial situation^[6]. Children of wealthy parents attend private schools, whereas those of less fortunate parents enrol their children in public institutions. As the researcher, an investigation was conducted for this specific research to see if a learner's academic performance at a private elementary and high school was impacted by their parent's money. A research topic, a goal and goals for the study, and an outline were also provided.

2. Research problem

The majority of parents want the best for their children and want them to succeed academically, but they also know that education is not free^[7]. Therefore, a learner's attitude, motivation, and general performance are determined by their parents' financial situation^[8]. For instance, the interest is in determining whether or not non-fee and fee-paying parents' influence their child's academic performance in a private primary school and if parental financial support could possibly be a demotivation and have a negative impact on a learner's motivation to the subject. It is also assumed that wealthy schools, along with financially successful parental support, help to motivate and influence a learner's ability to take an interest in their studies in private schools^[9]. Thus, this study analyses the differences between private schools in the Benoni area, especially in terms of how they offer parental financial assistance and if this support affects students' drive for academic success and interest in their studies.

In light of the fact that many people saw a sharp decline in the unemployment rate during the COVID-19 pandemic, which left many schools in dire financial straits and devoid of essential resources to support students' home study habits, previous studies and reports have shown that there is unquestionably cause to investigate this topic^[1,10]. The many repercussions of non-fee-paying parents in private schools were uncovered. This study sought to determine whether parental support and financial situation affected their children's academic achievement. The findings contributed to a better understanding of what influences a learner's performance and the strategies that may be developed to go around them or handle them more successfully.

3. Research method

In order to conduct the research for this study, the qualitative interview method was used. This method was specifically chosen because it allowed the researcher to gather useful data through personal insight, thoughts, observations, and opinions from people who regularly interact with the learners and are familiar with their family history and background. In order to acquire information about whether parental income affected student success and motivation in a private school, the researcher in this particular research study employed a qualitative research technique. As a result, information was

gathered from genuine principals who were familiar with parents' money and contributions, as well as from teachers who could observe students in action and provide insight into their motivation and performance. As a result, the researcher was better able to comprehend the hypothesis and assess the results. According to the expectations of the qualitative research technique, the researcher obtained the data and immediately provided it to the participants. Nine individuals were picked for the research: one principal and four educators from the high school division of the private school in the Benoni District, and one principal and three educators from both primary school divisions. The small sample size necessary for qualitative research led to a richer and more in-depth information-gathering process, which is why the size of the sample was chosen.

4. Findings

4.1. Sample characteristics/demographics

Six main themes, which are presented in this study, emerged from this particular study using the qualitative data technique of thematic analysis as illustrated in **Table 1**. These themes are parent-child relationships, home circumstances or backgrounds, communication issues, learning disabilities, parental lack of involvement and support, and socioeconomic status.

Table 1. Participants demographic details.

Demographic details	
Gender	No.
Male	1
Female	8
Level of study	
Second year	4
Third year	5
Race	
Indian	1
Black/African	2
Coloured	1
White	5
Age	
20–25	3
25–30	2
31–35	2
35–40	2

4.2. Demographic information

The participants in this research, who are all employees of the private school in the Benoni District of Gauteng, represented the four major racial groupings in South Africa. Most of the participants were in their early to late 20s, and their ages ranged from twenty to forty. The private school's tiny size, low personnel count, and predominance of female teachers and management are major contributing factors to the unbalanced racial and gender ratio. The results of this study were initialised, constructed, interpreted, corrected, and finalised through the use of the qualitative content analysis process. This

allowed the researcher to identify the categories and themes on which the results are built and presented into the six headings listed and discussed below based on the qualitative content analysis of the data.

4.3. Thematic analysis of qualitative data

The researcher was able to analyse the information gathered to comprehend the various experiences, ideas, or behaviours of the primary data collection source using this approach to data analysis used in the qualitative research method. Semi-structured interviews gave participants greater freedom in how they responded to the questions, and then they could add supporting remarks to their answers to offer additional context. The researcher had to become familiar with the data in order to prepare for the data analysis, which required attentive reading of the material several times without attempting to draw any conclusions. After defining and categorising all of this content, the six themes that are presented below emerged. By first narrating the themes, describing how they are related to one another, and then responding to the research questions, a report that included the study's conclusions and meanings was produced.

4.3.1. Parent-child relationship

If learners can openly and honestly share their successes and struggles with their parents, it is thought that having healthy and positive connections with their parents can improve and drive their academic performance. The majority of interviewees said that because students don't have good ties with their parents, they turn to their professors instead of their parents for parental relationships. It forces the educator to serve as a counsellor or middleman between the parent and child. According to the following quotation, this led to students feeling alone, uncared for, under pressure to succeed, and abandoned by their parents:

P1 stated, *"I believe that because parents have so much going on in their life, they occasionally forget to check in with the children. They look to us for that love and attention because they are so preoccupied with their own needs and desires that they fail to communicate with their kids and are unwilling to listen to them."* According to a study by Tsai et al.^[11], having good parent-child relationships can help teenagers feel less stressed and irritable, which is a protective factor for their daily study and life. This has a positive effect on students' academic performance when learning online.

P4 concurred, stating that *"um, as a teacher neh, you must have a feeling of tolerance, empathy, time, and understanding to a child's requirements in order to um, better aid them and find out what worries them and like what helps them to get through their day. You'll really discover that many of them only desire your time, attention, and overall acceptance."*

Participants agreed that parents who have bad relationships with their children end up making them rebel in school, in their personal and social lives, and even during the transition to adulthood because they don't have a good, unconditional relationship with their parents.

4.3.2. Parents' socioeconomic status

Positioning of persons and groups according to their wealth, education, income, occupation, level of experience, religion, and place of residence. This was discovered to play a role in learners' academic achievement. People grow more educated and disciplined via education, and as a result, parents should assist in socialising their children to create valuable citizens who contribute to the advancement of society. Education is the foundational step that is vital for creating society. However, there are other aspects of a family's financial situation that might hinder the growth of their children, particularly in their academic endeavours.

According to Henrietta^[12], “the education of a child begins at a very young stage in the family.” A child’s first teachers are his or her parents. This type of instruction is known as informal education. The participants of the study conveyed that “a parent’s socioeconomic status is one of the factors that hinder a parent’s involvement, support, and cooperation in the learners’ academic journey. Education plays the role of an instrument of social change that is initially imparted to the children in the home environment.”

Parents struggle to adequately counsel or advise their children in answering some questions or comprehending their subject matter since they lack the topic expertise necessary to assist with homework. This makes it challenging for teachers to deliver lessons effectively because most students require additional time to understand the material being covered, and even when we send homework home for completion and practise, the results are often incorrect because parents did not understand or had insufficient time, patience, knowledge, or experience to assist their children, likely as a result of their own limited education level. P2 provided an explanation for this.

According to P5, “parents can’t provide the basic necessities of their child’s education like um stationary for one, their income may be so low that even something as small as um stationary is not provided, and as a result many children do not have the basic tools needed to assist them in their school work. Many kids struggle and fight to finish their work in the absence of these kinds of support. As many of these students must pay for extra courses, extracurricular activities, and transportation, finances play a significant role in education. Due to their parents’ financial struggles, some of the youngsters don’t even have access to food. Additionally, some of the places where these children live may not have access to water or power, which further complicates matters.”

According to P8, “Some parents’ jobs pull them away from their kids,” that is, “certain jobs force them to work long hours, leaving their kids to care for themselves at home and for the house while their parents are at work. this leads to a lot of stress and, um, poor living conditions for the kids, which in turn affects their academic achievement.”

Because learners’ lives are influenced by the social, educational, financial, occupational, and residential elements of parents’ lives, the socioeconomic position of parents is one of the most significant factors in the academic performance and motivation of learners. Because their children’s fundamental needs aren’t satisfied, parents with lower socioeconomic levels have a more direct impact on their children’s academic performance. This has a detrimental impact on children’s attitude and motivation towards their studies.

The participants saw parental relationships with their children as a factor that, if they are not conducted in a positive way, negatively affects learners’ academic performance, while family dynamics and a lack of communication act as barriers to motivating learners’ academic performance. Although learning disabilities that surfaced played a part, the main factor hindering learners’ academic success was a lack of parental involvement and support. This corresponded with the most crucial key element being the socioeconomic status of parents, which affected all the themes and participants’ perceptions, indicating that it had the greatest impact on the participants’ academic performance.

5. Key findings

To investigate the impact of family money on students’ academic performance and motivation, the research examined the following questions: a case of a private school in the Benoni District. The data shown below represents the conclusions drawn from these particular research questions based on the perceptions and opinions of the research study’s participants.

The research by Zuma^[1], which mentioned the parent-child relationship, emerging adulthood,

emotional support, parental support and involvement, socioeconomic status, financial support, parents' and the community's value of education, parents' level of education, and parents' guidance, supported the findings in the primary study of this research. The results showed that although finances do have an impact on students' academic achievement, they are not the primary or most significant factor in how motivated and successful they are in school.

It was shown that, while not the only deciding element of this phenomenon, family money did, in fact, influence the students' academic performance and motivation. The main elements that affected how well students performed academically included several ideas, such as family history, parental relationships with their kids, communication with parents, teachers, principals, and students, learning impairments, and socioeconomic status. It was discovered that many students in this particular district with poor socioeconomic status were the students who were strongly impacted by these notions and were the determining factors of academic success or failure. This finding corroborates the work of Coleman^[9] who found that the scholastic achievements of students are frequently influenced by the economic resources available within their familial households.

The majority of participants agreed that a parent's financial situation did affect a child's academic performance in terms of their ability to pay for additional lessons or interventions for students who need them, as well as how they could afford extra mural activities, rewards for good grades, and other things. However, this was not the only reason why students performed poorly.

In fact, the research study's participants thought that parents' lack of support, encouragement, engagement, and supervision had a significant negative impact on students' academic performance and motivation. Because the majority of the students' parents have similar occupations and professions, educators concluded that wealth did not directly impact the students at the school and that, as a result, economics did not constitute a serious danger to their academic achievement. The participants highlighted that communication between educators, parents, and learners helped the learners achieve academically. They also stated that these learners tend to perform well and thrive with the support, engagement, direction, and encouragement of their parents.

In this regard, all of the participants felt that students' academic performance would significantly increase if parents were more actively involved and helped their children together with the teachers. If parents supported their children, learners would be more emotionally, mentally, and physically motivated to succeed. Parents could support their children by communicating with them, encouraging them, inspiring them, rewarding them, and being actively involved in attending meetings, sporting events, and other school events on their children's behalf. This finding aligns with the perspective articulated by Morris and Perry^[7], asserting that the direct correlation between parental engagement in their children's education and academic success is evident.

In order to inspire and encourage their children to excel academically and become productive members of society, several of the participants mentioned that parents should educate their children on the significance of education and explore various career choices with them.

Participants noted that parents who support their children by having a routine, enforcing good discipline, talking to them, setting reasonable goals, and being more involved with the children will see significant improvements in their academic performance and motivation. Because they feel under pressure to do better and better even when students believe they are doing their best despite their efforts, parents who are perceived as being overly stringent and demanding might lead to more harmful attitudes and behaviours towards students' academic performance. For this reason, a majority of the

participants concurred that parental assistance may unquestionably be beneficial in raising a learner's academic achievement and drive.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

According to the study's findings, the most fundamental desire for fulfilment is physical survival, which also serves as the primary driver of behaviour. In essence, children expect their parents to provide for their physical, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs before they can do it for themselves. The results point to a relationship between learners' requirements for academic performance and motivation and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The main driver of academic motivation for children is parental support and participation. The socioeconomic position of parents, which includes their earnings, occupations, backgrounds, levels of education, and religion, has an impact on their children's academic achievement. Higher socioeconomic level parents foster a more encouraging atmosphere and are able to give resources to help students with their academic success, which supports strong academic accomplishment. Because parents respect education and their child's personal development, their education level has an impact on the learner's academic success as well. A significant amount of emotional support and parental involvement is required to help learners perform academically and decrease the number of dropouts and failures, since parental lack of involvement and support was found to demotivate learners and cause feelings of loneliness and isolation among them. Finally, it is crucial to note that this research has its limitations. All data provided about parents' engagement in their children's education and student academic achievement were based on self-reports. Consequently, there is a possibility that parental bias may have influenced the accuracy of the data provided. Future research is encouraged by the findings of this study to reconsider strategies that can be employed to create better supportive systems and structures that will enable families to collaborate with principals, teachers, students, and the school as a whole in order to inspire and motivate learners to achieve excellent academic results. In order to better support and assist learners with support and access to resources for their academic performance, schools must also provide useful literature that may bridge the gap for those from uneven socioeconomic backgrounds.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, GS; methodology, GS; software, GS; validation, OAO; formal analysis, GS; investigation, GS; resources, GS; data curation, OAO; writing—original draft preparation, GS; writing—review and editing, GS; visualization, OAO; supervision, OAO; project administration, OAO; funding acquisition, GS. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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