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Development of Socio-Economic Background Scale

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A B S T R A C T

Education plays a major role in developing skills set for acquiring jobs, as well as for cultivating specific qualities that stratify people with higher and lower social-economic background. Parents belonging to the middle economic class play an active role in their children's education and foster a sense of entitlement in them. Families with lower income do not show much concern in the academic development of their children and as a result develop a sense of constraint in their children. A division in educational attainment is thus born out of these two differences in child rearing. The children of lower income families do not succeed to the extent as that of the children of middle income families, as the latter have a greater entitlement, and are better prepared for a balanced adult life. The purpose of this article is to discuss the impact of socio-economic background on the academic achievement of students and to develop a tool to assess the socio-economic background, one which suits the present Indian conditions.

Introduction

As increasing attention has been paid to the quality of public education in India, parental socio-economic characteristics are found to influence to a great extent the performance of students in schools and their adjustment in life. Socio-economic background is a concept that is understood and utilized well beyond the scope of Indian education.

Socio-economic background has a unique and distinct relationship with the progress and level of education among Indians. It is also found to be one of the important variables in educational researches. A measure of socio-economic background of students relies heavily and oftentimes exclusively on the socio-economic

background of their parents. Students and their families are generally classified into high, middle and low socio-economic background based on a standardized composite index score of parent's education, occupation, income, family structure and availability of other related facilities.

The poor performance of students in examinations, in recent times, has been largely attributed to the changing life pattern and socio-economic background of these families concerned. According to Ogunshola and Adewale (2012), parents of different occupation classes often have different styles of child rearing, different ways of disciplining their children and different ways of reacting to their children. These differences do not express themselves consistently as expected in the case of every family; rather they influence the average tendencies of families for different occupational classes (Rothstein, 2004). In line with the above assertion, Hill et al. (2004) had also argued that the socio-economic status of parents not only affects the academic performance of children, but also makes it possible for children from low background to compete well with their counterparts from high socio-economic background under the same academic environment. Moreover, Smith, Fagan and Ulvund (2002) had asserted that the significant predictor of intellectual performance at the age of 8, included parental socio-economic status. In the same vein, other researchers had posited that parental socio-economic status could affect school children as to bring about flexibility to adjustment to the different school schedules (Guerin et al., 2001). Further, a significant difference between the rates of deviant behaviour is observed among students from high and low socio-economic statuses (Oni, 2007; Omoegun, 2007).

The size of the family in which a child grows affects his/her intellectual development, as in the case of a large-sized family, where a child may not be given adequate attention in the area of academics. The payment of school fees, attending Parent Teachers Association meetings in schools and many other activities, may not be convenient for parents living in large families, while children in small families are well taken care of with much focus by their parents and hence are also found to perform better.

Financial resource is another important aspect determining the economic background of a child. Family financial resources, which are mostly associated with parents' occupation and educational attainment, often influence learning opportunities both at home and in school. Better educated parents contribute better to the learning of their children through their day-to-day interactions and also by involving themselves in their children's school work.

The foregoing discussion has established that socio-economic status and a host of other factors relating to the home environment of students, such as educational background of parents, health status of students, parental occupation and family size could have a profound effect on the academic achievement of children. In India, many families are still very poor and cannot afford three square meals, not to talk of meeting the educational needs of their children. This indeed has serious implications on the learning and performance of the less privileged students in schools. Thus, family background is the foundation for children's development, and as such family background in terms of family type, size, socio-economic status and educational background play an important

role in children's educational attainment and social integration (Ushie et al., 2012).

Need for the study

There is a long history of socio-economic status being reported to correlate with educational achievement (Holley, 1916; Lynd and Lynd, 1929; Cuff, 1934). The Equality of Educational Opportunity Commission Report (Coleman et al., 1966) played a major role in bringing this finding to prominence in policy circles. Since then, measures of socio-economic status have been routinely included in educational research studies as a background variable. Student factors, school factors and home environment are found to contribute remarkably to the academic achievement of students (Fan, 2012). Researchers have found the family economic status of students to be the most significant determinant of student learning (Zhao et al, 2011; Shah et al., 2012). According to Akhtar and Niazi (2011), students belonging to families with higher socio-economic status have better opportunities and a conducive learning environment which lead to enhanced achievement as opposed to students who are from lower socio-economic status with fewer opportunities and fewer resources that make them lag behind academically. The importance of this variable has been realized by researchers in the fields of Psychology, Education, Sociology, Social work and other allied disciplines. Further those who are interested in socio-economic status as a contextual variable to study educational equity and fairness issues, as a covariate with achievement to examine the effects of other variables such as class size or school governance policies, and as a matching variable to ensure the equivalence of treatment and control groups in educational intervention studies have also focused on the same. The Socio-economic Status Scale by

Kuppuswami (1962) that most researchers use to assess the socio-economic status, seems to be outdated. Since the other available scales are also found to be outdated, a need is felt to redefine some relevant items for indicating the socio-economic status accurately and thus the initiation for the development of a scale to assess the socio-economic background of students.

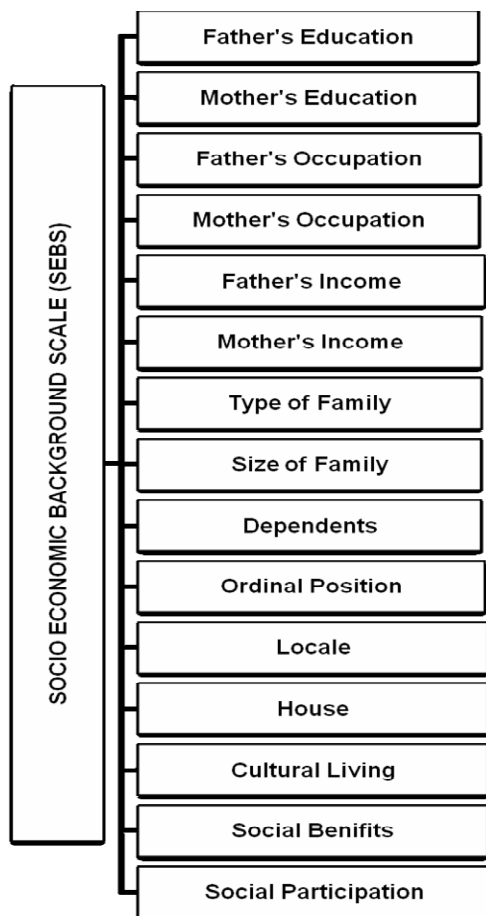
Theoretical framework

Socio-economic background is an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position relative to others, based on income, education, and occupation. Social Constructivist Theory (Vygotsky, 1896-1934) emphasizes the need for socially meaningful activity as an important influence on human consciousness (Schunk, 2004). Vygotsky asserted that unlike animals that react to the environment, humans are capable of altering the environment for their own purposes. The consequence of learning from other cultural backgrounds, heritages, and traditions by acknowledging and understanding one's own culture and values while respecting those of others (The IRIS Center for Training Enhancements, 2009) resulted in the Theory of Culturally Responsive Teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Irvine, 2003; Moll and González, 2004; Nieto, 2010; Gay, 2010).

Development and standardization of the scale

Based on the above mentioned theories, Vygotsky's Social Constructivist/Constructivism Theory and Cultural Responsive Teaching and other earlier research studies (Schunk, 2004; Cushner and

others, 2009; Hairsston and Strickland, 2011), the components of the scale were generated. The scale seeks information about the following components:



The items generated in the construction of the scale were subjected to expert judgment where every item was required to be passed on in its relevance to the content and criterion of environmental behaviour. Experts were requested to content validate the scale items. This was done with a view to establishing content validity of the scale items. On the basis of the opinion and comments of the experts, 8 items had to be reframed and 6 items were deleted for overall ambiguity. The final Socio-economic Background Scale constructed by the investigators is made up of items pertaining to 15 components, such as (i) Father's Education, (ii) Mother's Education, (iii)

Father's Occupation, (iv) Mother's Occupation, (v) Father's Annual Income, (vi) Mother's Annual Income, (vii) Type of Family, (viii) Size of Family, (ix) Dependents (x) Ordinal position of the child, (xi) Type of locality the family is residing, (xii) Type of house living in (xiii) Monthly Pocket Money, (xiv) Social benefits enjoyed by the family, (xv) Participation in Social Activities. Further the tool was subjected to Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the purpose of standardization and is found to be 0.81, and thus the tool was standardized. The scores range from a minimum of 15 to a maximum of 64, meaning higher the value, better is the socio-economic background.

A pilot study was conducted with a sample of 30 students selected randomly at the secondary level in different systems of education. The tool was administered to them and since the tool was self-explanatory and simple, the students did not face any difficulty in completing the tool. The tool was subjected to validity check using Bentler-Bonette (1980) Coefficient of Validity. The BBN Normd Fit Index for the constructed tools was found to be 0.94. Cronbach's Alpha method is a more robust test of reliability compared to the simple test-retest method or parallel form reliability. The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach's Alpha method (Cronbach, 1951). and it was found to be 0.84.

In conclusion, research studies indicate that the academic performance of students is influenced by the socio-economic background of their parents; as parents who earn a high income can take absolute responsibilities for their children's education compared to parents who earn meager salaries (McMillan and Western, 2000; Jeynes, 2002; Hansen and Mastekaasa, 2003; Eamon 2005). The financial and

moral support a child receives from his/her parents' affects his psychology, which is reflected in his performance in school. Also, students whose parents have better jobs and higher levels of educational attainment and who are exposed to more educational and cultural resources at home tend to perform better than their counterparts without such opportunities. According to Delaney and others (2010), students with a low socio-economic status underestimate themselves because of the socio-economic status they inherit from their parents and the same is reflected in their performance at school. Since a suitable tool is very much essential to assess the socio-economic background of students to investigate the influence of the variable independently and in combination with other variables on the academic performance of students, a need is felt to develop the Socio-economic Background Scale. The scale was developed and standardized for the purpose of present and future researches.

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