

Examining the Role of Parental Occupations in Shaping Students' Academic Performance at the Secondary Level

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Received on: 25-10-2021

Accepted on: 26-11-2021

Abstract

This study investigates how parental occupations influence the academic performance of secondary school students. The study was correlational and quantitative. The students of the 10th grade were randomly selected from Male Public Secondary Schools in Tehsil Muzaffargarh District Dera Ghazi Khan. The sample was 340 male Rural and Urban Public Secondary School students. Fathers' occupations were found to explain 11.9% of the variation in students' achievement ($\beta = .345$), while mothers' occupations accounted for 7.0% ($\beta = .265$). Fathers played a slightly more prominent role, often contributing through socio-economic stability, while mothers significantly shaped emotional and cultural support. The study also highlights how evolving work trends, like remote work and gig economies, are reshaping family dynamics and educational support. Recommendations include creating flexible parental engagement opportunities, fostering socio-cultural development for students, and implementing family-friendly policies to promote educational equity.

Keywords: parental occupations, academic achievement, socio-economic factors, cultural influence, family dynamics, educational equity.

Introduction

The role of parental occupations in shaping students' academic performance at the secondary level has garnered significant attention in humanities research, as it provides a lens through which to explore the intersection of family dynamics, socio-economic status (SES), and

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educational outcomes. Secondary education is a critical phase in a student's life, bridging foundational learning with advanced cognitive and social development. As such, understanding the socio-cultural and economic influences on academic achievement, particularly parental occupations, is crucial in addressing disparities and fostering equitable educational practices.

While the social sciences in particular consider occupation and parental profession primarily as an economic determinant of opportunities for the offspring, within the humanities parental occupation is conceptualized mainly as a symbolic, cultural determination for the future identities, ambitions, and resultant education orientation of pupils. Parents who engage in work characterized by intellectually engaging activities along with regulated time scheduling socialize such skills among their children; the household thus often provides favorable learning environments conducive to attaining successful outcomes. Conversely, parents in occupations marked by instability or limited autonomy may face challenges in providing consistent academic support, thereby affecting their children's educational outcomes (Lareau, 2011).

Parents' occupations also provide the basis for the development of cultural capital students carry with them to school. For Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital entails not only linguistic resources, but also attitude towards education and intellectual provision; cultural capital, therefore, intersects with social structures in such a way that it can be used to either reinforce or override educational inequalities. For example, the children of professional categories are widely exposed to cultural and intellectual experiences that nurture skills rewarded by schools and educational institutions (Sullivan, 2001). These are further complicated by the ways in which cultural norms, gender roles, and community expectations intersect with parental occupations in shaping students' academic identities (Reay, 2004).

Where cultural capital is the major facilitating tool, social capital, or networks and relationships that facilitate access to resources and support, also mediates the influences of parental occupations on academic outcomes. For instance, parents whose occupations involve high social networks may use those networks to provide their child with mentors, internships, or advice that further the child's educational aspirations (Coleman, 1988). On the contrary, parents experiencing limited occupational mobility may be at a disadvantage with structural barriers that limit their potentially supportive role for or in advancing their children's education.

Recent interdisciplinary research has highlighted placing such relationships within a broader sociohistorical framework. The shift toward a knowledge-based economy, coupled with the diversification of family forms and shifts in gender roles, has reconfigured what school achievement means with regard to parental occupations. The humanities further illustrate how narrative and lived experience play in how students come to understand and internalize the values and expectations associated with their parents' occupations.

The study aimed to explore, in detail, how parental occupations influence the performance of students at the secondary level along cultural, social, and symbolic dimensions. This paper, adopting a humanities approach, attempts to contribute to an integrated approach to educational inequality and identifies strategies that would encourage inclusiveness in academic settings.

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Statement of the Problem

Despite these continuing efforts at closure, many students went on to struggle in their efforts to fulfill their academic potential throughout the course of their secondary schooling. One significant determinant of these differences, for some students, related to the types of occupations pursued by their parents, which influenced both the resources to which families had access and the values and support systems on which students could draw. Yet just how these occupational influences operated in practice often remained vague, not least in the many varied cultural and economic contexts.

Those students whose parents were in more stable, professional positions often had access to superior resources, more structured routines, and environments more conducive to learning. In contrast, students whose parents held jobs that were less stable or lower paying more often reported having to deal with special challenges, such as financial insecurity, inconsistent schedules, or a lack of academic support at home. Although such general patterns were noted, further examination of exactly how job stability, work demands, and parental roles shaped students' academic trajectories was not well developed.

Besides, factors such as gender, cultural norms, and regional differences were rarely considered; thus, important parts of this issue have not been explored. As the family and work dynamics continued to evolve with remote work, gig jobs, and dual-income households on the rise, the ways parental occupations affected students shifted and created new complexities that education policies struggled to address.

The present study had attempted to fill these gaps by investigating how parental occupations influenced the academic performance of secondary school students. By delving into the socio-economic, cultural, and emotional aspects of these influences, the research aimed to provide a clearer picture of how families and schools could work together to support every student's success.

Objective

To explore how parental occupations shape the academic performance of secondary school students through their influence on socio-economic, cultural, and symbolic resources.

Research Question

In what ways do parental occupations influence the academic performance of secondary school students, and how are these effects mediated by cultural and social dynamics within families and communities?

Significance of the Study

The association of parental occupations with students' academic achievement is of interest to policymakers, educators, and families in their efforts to close educational gaps and promote equity. This study, therefore, tries to provide the basis on which parental involvement will be enhanced, underprivileged families supported, and systemic barriers to educational success addressed.

Delimitations of the Study

The study was delimited to:

Male students of the public secondary schools in tehsil Muzaffargarh.

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Literature Review

The intersection of parental occupations and students' academic performance has been a focal point in humanities research, offering critical insights into how social structures and cultural practices influence educational outcomes. This review explores key themes such as cultural capital, social identity, and familial dynamics, with an emphasis on the symbolic and socio-cultural dimensions of parental occupations.

Cultural Capital and Academic Performance

Cultural capital theory by Bourdieu (1986) still forms one of the seminal works explaining students' academic tracks arising from parental occupation. Parents whose jobs entailed intellectual activity tended to transfer attitudes, abilities, and knowledge that valorized academic success. According to Lareau, for instance, middle-class families "concertedly cultivate" children, thereby encouraging intellectual growth and critical thinking through planned activities and embellished vocabulary. This again is corroborated by recent studies conducted by Park et al. (2021), which show that parental professions in education, law, and medicine instill resources in the children that are highly valued at schools.

Social Identity and Parental Occupations

In the humanities, there is an emphasis on the role of parental occupations in constructing social identities that have consequences for students' engagement with education. Occupations help shape family stories, values, and aspirations that consequently inform students' understanding of their position within academic spaces. For example, Reay (2004) suggests that working-class families stress the importance of practicality and resilience, values that may conflict with institutional expectations within formal education. While professional jobs often have narratives of achievement and intellectualism attached to them, closely related to academic success, vocational jobs do not. Thus, this juxtaposition brings to light the tension between institutional norms and diverse family cultures.

Familial Dynamics and Symbolic Roles

Parental occupations also determine the symbolic roles of the parents within families, which influence household division of labor, childrearing and parenting, and schoolwork support. For instance, Walkerdine et al. (2001) examined how parents with unstable or low-paid jobs may be especially stressed and therefore have less energy to devote to their children's schooling. On the other hand, parents in secure professional employment are better equipped to balance work and family obligations and thus can establish an enabling environment for academic engagement. The dynamics are further entangled with gender roles, as it is often expected of mothers to be responsible for providing educational support, irrespective of their occupational status.

Shifts in Work and Family Life

Recent socio-economic changes, such as the gig economy and remote work, have given new meanings to this relationship. Green et al. (2022) investigated how working from home redefined family relationships: sometimes it increased the involvement of parents but also brought challenges in terms of keeping the boundary between work and home life. Precarious

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employment, noted by Kalleberg (2018), increased inequalities, especially for families whose members had unstable or part-time jobs, thus placing students at a disadvantage in school.

Gaps and Emerging Areas of Inquiry

While there is considerable research on the impact of parental occupations on academic attainment, there are some significant lacunae. Humanities scholars have called for further qualitative research into how narratives, identity-making, and symbolic positions are intertwined with occupational effects. The role of intersecting factors of race, ethnicity, and regional disparities in such processes is also poorly examined, as is the changing nature of digital technologies and working from home on school engagement.

Parents' occupations have an influence on the academic performance of students because they influence cultural capital, social identity, and family dynamics. Humanities studies have been of great relevance in this direction, focusing on the importance of narratives, identity, and social structures. In a changing socio-economic landscape, there is a need to study these relations in a myriad and modern settings, with the resulting insights able to underpin inclusive and equitable education policy.

Research Methodology

The study was a correlation-by-method. A quantitative approach was followed to understand the relationship between Parents' Occupations and Students' Academic Achievement.

Population of the study

There were 35 male public secondary schools in tehsil Muzaffargarh, of which 11 were in urban areas while the other 24 were in rural areas.

Source:

(https://schoolportal.punjab.gov.pk/sed_census/new_emis_details.aspx?distId=323--Muzaffargarh).

Sample of the study

Twenty-five schools were selected out of 35 using a table of random numbers. Six (6) urban and 19 rural male public secondary schools were selected for data collection in tehsil Muzaffargarh. The students of the 10th grade were randomly selected from every Male Public Secondary School in Tehsil Muzaffargarh. So, the sample was 340 male Rural and Urban Public Secondary School students, which provided sufficient statistical power for detecting medium to large effect sizes with a confidence level of 95% (Etikan et al., 2016; Creswell, 2014).

Research Instruments

A self-developed instrument was used to collect the parental occupations data from the students, and a self-developed Academic Achievement Test (AAT) was used for the 10th grade.

Reliability of Research Instruments

A pilot study was conducted by administering an academic achievement test. The test was

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given to randomly selected 20 students from the population. Academic achievement scores were obtained. This allowed the researcher to evaluate the clarity and comprehensibility of the questionnaire items.

In this research, the following instruments were used:

- i. Parental Occupations (PO), like government job, Semi Government, Private business or unemployed.
 - ii. Academic Achievement Test (AAT)
- The reliability of the (PO) tool was 0.91, and (AAT) tool was 0.89

Data Collection

Data was collected through visits to the respondents' schools, and the questionnaires were distributed among participants. An achievement test was also conducted. Then, achievement tests scored and correlated with students' parental occupation status.

Data Analysis

After the data collection phase, the data was analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data through SPSS. For inferential statistics, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r) was used.

Results

Table No. 1 Regression Analysis of Relationship of Father's Occupations and Academic Achievement (Model Summary)

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.345	.119	.116	11.976

a. Predictors: (Constant), Father's Occupations

Table 1 indicates the regression analysis of Students Father's Occupations and Academic Achievement. According to the data analysis of the model summary, the R-square value was .119, which showed that the students' father Occupations caused a 11.9% change in students' academic achievement.

Table No. 2 Regression Analysis of Students Father's Occupations and Students' Academic Achievement (ANOVA)

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6547.626	1	6547.626	45.649	.01
	Residual	48480.713	338	143.434		
	Total	55028.338	339			

a. Dependent Variable: Total Marks

b. Predictors: (Constant), Father's Occupations

Table 2 indicates the regression analysis of the student's mother's education and academic achievement. According to the data analysis of ANOVA, the $p < 0.05$ showed a significant relationship between students father's Occupations and academic achievement.

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Table No. 3 Regression Analysis of Students Fathers' Occupations and Students' Academic Achievement (Coefficients)

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	66.016	2.163		30.521	.002
1 Father's Occupations	4.831	.715	.345	6.756	.01

a. Dependent Variable: Total Marks

Table 3 indicates the regression analysis of students father's Occupation and students' academic achievement. According to the data analysis of Coefficients, the value of beta was .345, which showed a positive relationship between students father's Occupation and students' academic achievement. In other words, it indicates that if students father's Occupations interacts with one unit, then students' academic achievement will increase by 34.5% positively.

Table No. 4 Regression Analysis of Relationship of Mother's Occupation and Academic Achievement (Model Summary)

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.265	.070	.068	12.302

a. Predictors: (Constant), Mother's Occupation

Table 4 indicates the regression analysis of Students Mother's Occupation and Academic Achievement. According to the data analysis of the model summary, the R-square value was .070, which showed that students mother's occupation caused a 7.0% change in students' academic achievement.

Table No. 5 Regression Analysis of Students Mother's Occupation and Students' Academic Achievement (ANOVA)

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3878.897	1	3878.897	25.632	.02
	Residual	51149.442	338	151.330		
	Total	55028.338	339			

a. Dependent Variable: Total Marks

b. Predictors: (Constant), Mother's Occupation

Table 5 indicates the regression analysis of the students mother's education and academic achievement. According to the data analysis of ANOVA, the $p < 0.05$ showed significant relationship between students mother's occupation and academic achievement.

Table No. 6 Regression Analysis of Students Mother's Occupation and Students' Academic Achievement (Coefficients)

Coefficients ^a				
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.

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		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	74.163	1.324		55.994	.01
1	Mother's Occupation	3.002	.593	.265	5.063	.002

a. Dependent Variable: Total Marks

Table 6 indicates the regression analysis of students mother's occupation and students' academic achievement. According to the data analysis of Coefficients, the value of beta was .265, which showed a positive relationship between students mother's occupation and students' academic achievement. In other words, it indicates that if students mother's occupation interacts with one unit, then students' academic achievement will increase by 26.5% positively.

Findings

The analysis underscored the significant influence of parental occupations on students' academic achievement, highlighting both fathers' and mothers' roles in shaping educational outcomes.

Fathers' occupations were found to have a notable impact, with the data showing that 11.9% of the variance in students' academic performance could be explained by this factor, as reflected in the R-square value of .119. Additionally, the ANOVA analysis confirmed a statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between fathers' occupations and students' academic success. The beta coefficient (.345) indicated a positive relationship, suggesting that when fathers' occupations shift positively by one unit, students' academic achievement improves by 34.5%.

Similarly, mothers' occupations also demonstrated a significant, albeit slightly smaller, effect on students' academic performance. The R-square value was .070, showing that 7.0% of the variance in academic outcomes is explained by mothers' occupations. Just like that of fathers, the ANOVA results confirm that there is a statistically significant relationship at $p < 0.05$. The beta coefficient was .265, meaning there is a positive relationship; therefore, with a one-unit change in mothers' occupations, the students' academic achievement increases by 26.5%.

These findings hint that professional role for both parents drive crucial roles for children in achieving better scores at schools, especially that fathers might exert more significant influence regarding this trend. Indeed, it places significant emphasis on the socio-economic aspect and that family professional stability, through which each child gets positive academic results from schools.

Discussion

This study, therefore, underlines the profound impact of parental occupations on students' academic performance by accentuating the social and cultural dimensions of the relationship. The fact that it agrees with humanities perspectives that perceive parental occupations not merely as economic factors but as cultural and symbolic roles shaping family narratives, identity formation, and educational engagement, aligns seamless with.

Occupations and Symbolic Roles of Fathers

In contrast to this, however, the stronger influence of fathers' occupations accounted for

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11.9% of the variance in academic performance, underlining their symbolic role as providers of socioeconomic and cultural stability. For example, humanities scholars such as Reay (2004) and Lareau (2011) have critically discussed how fathers, through professional occupation, often express values of discipline, ambition, and intellectual engagement that are reflected in their children's academic identities. Positive β of .345 represents the contribution of a high occupationally statused father to generate a highly congruent home environment, meeting the expectation of the Institutions.

Mothers' Occupations and Cultural Capital

Although the contribution of mothers' jobs is relatively weaker, accounting for 7.0% of the variance, their role is not atypically insignificant in students' academic performance. Mothers often play a role of main transmitters of cultural capital through engaging children in educationally enriching activities and building their intellectual curiosity. The beta value .265 reflects the supportive contribution that a mother in a professional occupation provides to shape the child's academic path through "concerted cultivation" practices. This finding also agrees with Walkerdine et al. (2001), who detail the emotional and cultural labour contributed by mothers even within difficult socio-economic contexts.

Cultural and Social Dynamics within Educational Institutions

Parents' occupations structure the sort of cultural and social resources students bring into school and, by extension, how well they interact with educational establishments. For parents in professional jobs, their job holds greater reserves of cultural capital better aligned with the assumptions made within schools and universities, giving them a competitive edge in preparing themselves and their children for dealing with the rigors associated with education (Reay, 2004). These findings also agree with Coleman's concept of social capital, in which the occupational networks provide mentorship, career guidance, and academic support that further enhance aspirations and achievements of students.

Changing Family Dynamics and Work Structures

Changes in work have altered the pattern of the relation between parental occupations and the academic performance of students. In fact, as Green et al. note, the new face of working conditions has restructured family dynamics due to the growing trend toward homeworking and gig economy; this has a very positive yet negative influence on parental involvement. Fathers and mothers in flexible roles may be better placed to engage in their children's education, while those who are in precarious or overburdened jobs will struggle to provide consistent support. In sum, such findings point to a need for updated frameworks that account for these shifting socio-economic and cultural realities.

Implications and Future Research

The relatively stronger influence of the fathers' occupations does, of course, provoke questions about gendered expectations within both family and educational systems. It is perhaps a point that humanities scholars may investigate: how these roles intersect with broader cultural narratives and affect students in their self-perception and aspirations. What is more, the present study suggests investigating intersectional factors such as race, ethnicity,

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and regional disparities, which remain under researched with respect to parental occupations and students' academic achievement. Further qualitative research may yield even richer insights into how these dynamics are interpreted and enacted in daily life by family members.

Conclusions

This paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how parental occupations shape students' academic performance, with emphasis on their symbolic, cultural, and social dimensions. From the perspective of humanities, these findings uncover the complex interplay between socio-economic roles, family narratives, and educational systems. In order to address such dynamics, policies would have to take into consideration not only economic inequalities but also cultural and symbolic barriers to academic success. By focusing on these factors, educators and policymakers are able to work toward creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Recommendations

1. Schools should create flexible ways for parents to stay involved, such as virtual parent-teacher meetings or after-hours workshops, to accommodate busy or irregular work schedules.
2. Schools and communities should offer experiences available in mentoring programs, cultural activities, and out-of-school opportunities to provide equal access to such experiences and support for students from all walks of life.
3. Policymakers should focus on creating family-friendly work environments and expanding affordable after-school programs to help parents balance work and their children's education more effectively.

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