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Use of Academic Resources Among Different Socioeconomic Classes

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Abstract. Access to academic resources is influenced by socioeconomic status. Based on Bourdieu's concept of economic and cultural capital and Lareau's theory of social inequality, it is hypothesized that students from high socioeconomic status would access academic resources at a significantly higher rate. This hypothesis was evaluated in a survey of 120 college students. Basic hypothesis testing showed no significant differences. Advanced hypothesis testing, however, found a significant difference for males and undergraduate seniors. The results suggest a trend that students from lower socioeconomic families access academic resources at a higher rate than students from higher socioeconomic families. A more diverse and sufficient sample would be needed to further test the hypothesis. Further studies should focus on students with the same GPA in different socioeconomic classes and take into consideration other factors contributing to the rate at which students access academic resources.

Socioeconomic status affects individuals in many ways. Countless studies have shown a positive relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement. However, other factors can contribute to this correlation. Socioeconomic status can influence the rate at which a student accesses academic resources. The frequency at which students use the academic resources available to them is an important aspect that can influence academic achievement. The following study examines the connection between socioeconomic status and the rate at which students access resources. These resources include library databases, professor's office hours, and career development centers.

Background

The first publication to look at school resources and student achievement was by Coleman in 1966. The study found that higher levels of availability of school resources have no effect on student performance. However, in the last decade, new studies have proven otherwise. Card and Krueger (1998) examined the performance of students in an institutional setting, based on the academic resources available. They examined the connection between the schooling, quality of school, and the earnings of students after they graduate from school. Much of their findings showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between school resources and student earnings.

Study after study shows the positive correlation socioeconomic status and academic success. Ethnically diverse students are placed in the low-resourced, under-staffed schools, adding to the already inferior education. Right from the start, students of color and disadvantage ethnicities have a higher probability of receiving a lower quality education. Tracking based on race and ethnicity appears as early as first grade, placing kids into "advanced" or "special" classes, increasing the inequalities of education and resource allotment. As early as kindergarten, students of a different race or ethnicity have significantly lower test scores than white children. Ethnically diverse students demonstrate an average math score 21 percent lower than white students (Fisher, 2012).

Many studies have shown that school success and quality of education is associated with social backgrounds, influencing the resources available to students. Researchers have examined the different aspirations for higher education of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Wilks and Wilson, 2012). They looked especially at the pathways and barriers that low income student's face and the effects these barriers have on a student's educational aspirations. The results showed students from low socioeconomic families are more likely to be alienated from the cultures and resources universities offer to help students achieve academic success. Due to this isolation of resources and lack of instruction on how to properly use them, lower socioeconomic students never fully learn how to access these educational resources and use them to gain academic achievement. But what happens when these students continue on to colleges or universities? Will their past experiences with the education system effect how they access academic resources in college?

Moreover, a student's zip code plays a huge role in determining the quality of education he or she will receive. Schools located in poor or less-populated areas are faced with less funding and less qualified teachers. Lower funding leads to fewer academic resources available to students. Educational levels across the United States are becoming increasingly dissimilar. Cities such as Boston, San Francisco, and Washington have a growing population of educated individuals. These school systems have more resources and more qualified teachers than other cities, such as Las Vegas, Memphis, and Dayton, all of which are falling behind in education levels (Fisher, 2012). After funds are distributed among school districts, these funds are used to support the offering of honors and advanced placement courses, college credit courses, and other curricular enhancements.

Studies have focused on the determinants of school funding, including the demand for education, the ability to pay for education, and models of funding that emphasize property taxes. The local initiatives to increase resource allotment were related to local schools. It has been found that local districts hold much of the power to decide how the flow of state resources will be used. Most schools try to maximize their budgets in ways that will increase the number of teachers on staff, the number of aids, and the level of experience of the teachers. Yet schools in lower socioeconomic areas almost always begin with a lower budget per pupil (Monk, 1981).

Surprisingly, existing research has also suggested that schools perform just as well with lower spending. Steele, Vignoles, and Jenkins (2007) suggest that the decrease in student academic attainment is due to a lack of competitive pressures requiring schools to use their resources efficiently. These findings demonstrate that how schools use the resources given to them and how accessible they make the resources to students can affect the academic outcomes of the students. This study looks at the rate at which students access the resources available to them in relation to their socioeconomic status.

Theoretical Framework

In her work, *Unequal Childhoods*, Annette Lareau explains the differences in parenting styles as related to class distinctions and inequalities. She observed how socioeconomic status influences a child's academic performance and interactions with adults in positions of authority. "Highly valued resources such as the possession of wealth; having an interesting, well-paying, and complex job; having a good education; and owning a home are not evenly distributed throughout society," she writes. "Moreover, their resources are transferred across generations" (2003, pp. 7-8). While urban schools face serious limitations, such as limited supplies and teacher shortages, suburban schools have ample teachers and classroom supplies. "Across the country, communities where the average social class position of parents is higher have vastly more favorable public school systems," Lareau notes (2003, p. 24). Additionally, the differences in educational resources at home significantly impacts a child's academic development. From increased intellectual conversations to educated facilitated concerted cultivation, middle-class children take these advantages and use them in institutional settings.

Economic constraints make it difficult for lower-class families to provide a safe place to live, let alone the academic resources required to stimulate a child's learning. There are different ways in which parents can help enrich the cognitive development of their children. Parents can follow the guidelines of doctors and teachers on normative behavior, which forms a "dominant set of cultural repertoires" for children, or what is called "concerted cultivation." This set of standards includes "the importance of talking with children, developing their educational interests, and playing an active role in their schooling" (Lareau, 2003, pp. 2-4). These middle-class parents take the time to stimulate their children's cognitive development and build their social skills. During this process of concerted cultivation, the children grow a sense of entitlement that follows them into institutional settings. Children from middle-class families grow up questioning adults and addressing them as equals instead of figures of authority. These children are comfortable in academic situations, open to sharing information and asking for attention. On the other hand, working-class children have a sense of constraint in institutional settings, accepting the teachings of authority figures and do not seek additional attention (Lareau, 2003, p. 6). Based upon the socioeconomic status of the family, a child can be raised either to have a sense of entitlement or a sense of constraint.

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Lareau defines cultural capital as, "skills individuals inherit that can then be translated into different forms of value as they move through various institutions" (2003, p. 7). Middle-class children gain favorable "cultural capital" and learn how to make the institutional system work in their favor, while lower-class children fail to achieve these advantages. The openness to access academic resources can be seen as a form of cultural capital because student's use the resources to benefit their academic success. Bourdieu and Lareau's work would suggest that students from higher socioeconomic families will access academic resources at a higher rate than students from lower socioeconomic families.

As a social theorist, Pierre Bourdieu also focused on the intersection of social inequality, class and capital. He conceptualized inequality stemming from the differential amounts of economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital of individuals among the different economic classes (Dillion, 2014, p. 428). Bourdieu argued social inequality was defined by a three-dimensional hierarchy composed of these three capitals. Economic capital is not only measured by money, but also by property ownership or investments. Cultural capital is formulated based off the cultural competence, education, and ease of everyday life (the ability to fit in with peers). Cultural competence is the set of norms that are formed by a particular social group. Bourdieu examined how both formal and informal education and cultural habits influence individuals' actions in society. Social capital refers to an individual's social networks and social connections. Economic, social, and cultural capitals are expressed differently in different social classes. While each capital is distinct, each influences the others and are interrelated. Bourdieu was especially interested in looking at how economic and cultural capital produce and reproduce social inequality (Dillion, 2014, p. 432). Students from higher socioeconomic families are better prepared entering higher level education and may not need to access additional academic resources, which can be seen as an interconnection between both economic and cultural capital. Although economic and social capital are interrelated, they are also analytically independent. An individual may have an influential amount of economic capital but little social capital, or vice versa. However, a wealthy individual can use his or her economic capital to gain social capital and enhance their social reputation or symbolic capital (Dillion 2014, p. 433). The significance of an individual's family helps determine the ease of an individuals' access to capital.

While education can independently enhance economic capital, there is also a strong positive relationship between ascribed socioeconomic status and future educational attainment. Children raised in high socioeconomic families are more likely to succeed in college, ultimately achieving occupational-economic success (Dillion, 2014, p. 433). Similar to Lareau's theory of concerted cultivation, children who grow up in more affluent households are more likely to have knowledge of resources available at schools because they are immersed in them early in life. These resources can be in the form of educational toys, books, or private tutors, all of which high socioeconomic families can afford. Parents with strong academic backgrounds generally come from higher socioeconomic families. Therefore, these parents proceed to teach their children

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how to properly use the academic resources available to them most efficiently. The higher income families can afford the best schools, learning materials, and extra academic programs, all of which are resources lower socioeconomic families probably cannot afford. Bourdieu states, "The educational capital held at a given moment expresses, among other things, the economic capital and social level of the family of origin" (1984, p. 105). Children grow and learn through family-social experiences. Different family learning environments are determined by social-class differences, such as the resources available for intellectual experiences. Culture, educational, and social capital all work together to allow children from high socioeconomic families to be immersed in resources and give them the knowledge of how to use them.

This study explored how a student's economic background affects how he or she accesses academic resources, such as library databases, professor's office hours, and career development centers. Based upon the social theories of Bourdieu and Lareau, one would expect students from different socioeconomic backgrounds would access academic resources at varying rates. I hypothesize that students from higher socioeconomic status would access academic resources at a significantly higher rate.

Existing Studies

A multitude of studies have examined the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic behavior and attitudes. For example, Ming-Hsueh and Fu-Yu (2013) looked to understand the relationship between family socioeconomic status and academic attainment through Structure Equation Models (SEM). They examined the impact of socioeconomic status on academic performance. The authors used a study by Coleman (1966) that was originally designed to weigh a student's academic performance based on the educational resources available at a school. Coleman found that resources, such as equipment, books, teacher's educational level, and parent's educational level, were more significant (Coleman 1966). Ming-Hsueh and Fu-Yu (2013) proposed that socioeconomic status is positively correlated with academic achievement and parent child interaction. Maximum likelihood estimation was used to confirm the reliability and convergent validity, confirming both hypotheses. This study looks at how the socioeconomic status of a family will affect the rate at which a student accesses academic resources.

Wilks and Wilson (2012) look specifically at the educational aspirations, pathways, and barriers that low-income students face. The study found that low-income students are more likely to be alienated from the cultures of universities and, subsequently, the resources that will help them to achieve academic success. These results follow Lareau's theory of sense of constraint, in which students from lower-classes do not question the social norms of an institutional setting. The primary and secondary students were interviewed, with questions focusing on socioeconomic status, cultural and social capitals, and barriers and enablers they face accessing higher education and academic resources. By using both qualitative and quantitative

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methods, the study was able to gather more opinions from the students about the availability of resources and access to higher education. The results showed that as students grow older they lose aspirations for high academic success, such as bachelor or master degrees. Students with family who have higher education also have stronger ambitions to continue their education and access academic resources. These findings demonstrate how important a family's display of academic resources and educational attainment affect students' aspirations. My study looked to for a connection between family income and the initiative to use available academic resources.

Taffs and Holt (2013) examined the expanding use of online information and communication technologies (ICTs) in educational settings. ICT is an innovative way to enhance learning and provide effective methods to give students multiple curriculums. However, ICTs rely on the student's ability to access them and the appropriate use of them. Past studies have found that even though the resources are available, the use of online resources has been limited. Researchers conducted a survey and found that both on campus and online students had high percentages of using online resources; however, online students accessed the resources at an increased rate. The results also showed that online resources were deemed useful. My study looked at overall use at academic resources, and if the use of these resources is impacted by the socioeconomic status of students.

Purpose of Research

The gap between educational outcomes among students of different socioeconomic status is widening. We know there is a strong relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement. Now, we must examine the factors that influence this relationship. This study focuses on the rate at which students use the academic resources available to them at a college level. It is hypothesized that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds will access academic resources at a significantly higher rate than students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. If the hypothesized difference exists in the access of academic resources, efforts can then be made to increase the accessibility of resources for students of lower socioeconomic status.

Methods

Participants. The participants in this study were 120 undergraduate college students. Diversity with gender and class was not achieved. Eighty percent of the participants were female, 92.5 percent were white, 63.3 percent had GPAs ranging from 3.6-4, and approximately 50 percent of participants had parental incomes ranging from $75,000-$124,999.

Research Design. The research design used for this study was quantitative, using a cross-sectional survey. The survey was designed to examine the relationship between socioeconomic status and the use of academic resources among college students. The following academic

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resources were observed: accessing library databases, consulting with professors, using teacher assistant hours or learning center hours, and use of the wellness center.

Measures. In this study, the independent variable was self-identified socioeconomic status and approximate average household income for 2016. Self-identified socioeconomic status was measured by the economic class the student most identified with: lower, lower-middle, middle, upper-middle, or upper-class. The income variable was measured by the average income of the student's household per year. Given that there were many categorical values, the incomes groups were divided into four broader income ranges: $0-$74,999, $75,000-$124,999, $125,000-$174,999, $175,000-300,000+.

The dependent variable measured the use of academic resources. A survey of twenty-three questions was constructed to measure the extent to which students access the academic resources available to them at their universities. The resources included the library databases, CLA hours, professor office hours, wellness centers, academic learning centers, *etc*. Two indexes were created to measure the dependent variable, help index and access index. For each metric, the scoring range was 1-5, with 1 being never and 5 being always accessing resources or looking for help.

The control variables included basic demographics, such as gender and race, past exposure to educational resources, and parental involvement in education. Past exposure to educational resources could be in the form of educational toys or intellectual activities students used throughout their childhood. Past exposure to these resources, either through parents or lower level institutions, can influence the rate at which student's access academic resources in higher education. Parental involvement in student's education growing up included help with class work and engagement in educational activities. Other demographics included were undergraduate class, race and ethnic identity, and GPA.

Procedures. A nonprobability, purposive sampling was conducted. The selection criteria for the sample pool maintained that respondents had to be undergraduate college students. Survey Monkey was used to construct the survey. The link was sent out to as many participants as possible through e-mail and Facebook, aiming for the diversity in student backgrounds and gender. Follow-up reminders were also sent out for those slow to respond.

Results

Two independent variables were used in this study: students' approximate average household income for 2016 and the socioeconomic group they most identified with. Based upon a frequency analysis of reported household incomes, an index was created for students' approximate household income: $0-$74,999, $75,000-$124,999, $125,000-$174,999, and $175,000-300,000. For each index, the scoring range was 1-5, with 1 being never and 5 being always accessing resources or looking for help.

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A One-Way ANOVA statistical test was used for the basic hypothesis testing. Both independent variables, average household income and self-identified socioeconomic group, were analyzed against the dependent variable, help index. No significant results were found. Students from higher socioeconomic status families do not necessarily access academic resources at a higher rate (Figure 1).

One-Way ANOVA Against Help Index

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
IncomeRecode	Between Groups	8.879	10	.888	.925	.514
	Within Groups	92.168	96	.960		
	Total	101.047	106			
Which socioeconomic group do you most identify with:	Between Groups	3.404	10	.340	.784	.644
	Within Groups	42.969	99	.434		
	Total	46.373	109			

Figure 1. One Way ANOVA test of independent variables against Help index.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run on the independent variables, income recode and self-identified socioeconomic group, against the dependent variable, access index. No significant results were found. Students from higher socioeconomic status families do not necessarily access academic resources at a higher rate than students from lower socioeconomic status families (Figure 2.) An opposite trend was seen.

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One-Way ANOVA Against Access Index

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
IncomeRecode	Between Groups	14.207	22	.646	.620	.898
	Within Groups	86.444	83	1.041		
	Total	100.651	105			
Which socioeconomic group do you most identify with:	Between Groups	10.672	22	.485	1.171	.295
	Within Groups	35.640	86	.414		
	Total	46.312	108			

Figure 2. One way ANOVA test with independent variables against the Access Index.

A One-Way ANOVA test was also used for the advanced hypothesis testing in differences between gender and academic year. Both independent variables, income recode and self-identified socioeconomic group, were analyzed against the dependent variable, help index and access index. There was a significant difference between gender when the independent variable, income recode, against the dependent variable, help index, with a significant value of .082 (Figure 3).

One-Way ANOVA Against Help Index Selecting for Males

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
IncomeRecode	Between Groups	11.578	8	1.447	2.676	.082
	Within Groups	4.867	9	.541		
	Total	16.444	17			
Which socioeconomic group do you most identify with:	Between Groups	4.244	8	.531	1.418	.306
	Within Groups	3.367	9	.374		
	Total	7.611	17			

Figure 3. Advanced hypothesis one-way ANOVA with independent variables against the Help Index, selecting for males only.

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One-Way ANOVA Against Access Index Selecting for Seniors

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
IncomeRecode	Between Groups	17.425	15	1.162	1.493	.218
	Within Groups	12.450	16	.778		
	Total	29.875	31			
Which socioeconomic group do you most identify with:	Between Groups	11.269	15	.751	2.635	.024
	Within Groups	5.417	19	.285		
	Total	16.686	34			

Figure 4. Advanced hypothesis one-way ANOVA with independent variables against Access Index, selecting for seniors only.

The academic years (freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) were analyzed using one-way ANOVA. Seniors were seen to have a significant difference when the independent variable, self-identified socioeconomic status, was analyzed against the dependent variable, access index, with a significant value of .024 (Figure 4).

Discussion

A one-way ANOVA was used for basic hypothesis testing and advanced hypothesis testing for differences between gender and academic year, both with a p-value significance of < .1. Academic year was used because it had the most diversity among participants.

This study suggests that students from lower socioeconomic families access academic resources at a higher rate than students from higher socioeconomic families. According to Annette Lareau's theory of "concerted cultivation," students from higher socioeconomic families develop a sense of entitlement in institutional settings (Lareau, 2003, p. 2-4). On this basis, I hypothesized that students from higher socioeconomic families would access academic resources at a higher rate than students from lower socioeconomic families. However, the results do not support this hypothesis. Perhaps students from higher socioeconomic families are better prepared and do not need additional help or academic resources to achieve academic success. Alternatively, students from higher socioeconomic families might feel as though they are entitled to academic success and do not seek out additional resources. It could also be that middle-class children learn to question adults, addressing them as equals instead of figure of authority, therefore do not follow the advice to use and access academic resources, whereas students from

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lower socioeconomic families are less likely to question authority and more likely to use academic resources as recommended.

Pierre Bourdieu focused on the connection between social inequality, economic and cultural capital (the ability to fit in with peers with ease and competence). Students from different socioeconomic families learn how to use resources differently. Both cultural capital and economic class are likely to affect how a student will use academic resources. As this study suggests, lower socioeconomic students seem to use resources more, which does not follow Bourdieu's predictions on class and social inequality. Students from higher socioeconomic status families are likely better prepared entering a higher level of education and do not need to access additional resources, which could be seen as an increased "cultural capital."

This study also proposes further investigation on the differences among academic years. Seniors were seen to have a significant difference when the independent variable, self-identified socioeconomic status, was analyzed against the dependent variable, access index, with a significant value of .024 (Figure 4). As students progress through their undergraduate career, accessing resources could be seen as a developed habit. The use and access of academic resources could be a learned process as students' progress through higher level and more difficult coursework. Higher socioeconomic status students may learn at a faster rate, thereby using the resources more frequently to achieve higher academic success. Additionally, there was a significant difference between genders when the independent variable, income recode, was correlated against the dependent variable, help index. With a significance of .082, male students from higher socioeconomic status families accessed academic resources (help index) at higher rate than females (Figure 3). However, these results were not representative of the general population because the sample was 80 percent female. The academic level of a student could influence the rate at which they access academic resources. Students with the same GPA in different socioeconomic classes should also be examined to further test the predictions based on Bourdieu's theories of class and social inequality. A school's efforts to educate students on resources available could also influence these results.

Study Limitations

Another survey with a larger, more diverse sample size would be needed to further test the hypothesis. An important limitation to note is internal validity; therefore, causation is not supported. Because the sample was not random, findings cannot be generalized to the overall population. Another limitation is the breadth and diversity of the sample. Class, academic level, and gender were all skewed. For example, respondent's socioeconomic backgrounds may not differ that much due to the majority of respondents were from a private institution. Additional methodologies, such as focus groups and interviews, could be used instead of a survey, to further test the hypothesis. Surveys have limitations such as close-ended questions, which can have lower validity rates—in that participants may not feel comfortable providing accurate, honest

answers; data errors may occur due to participants not answering questions; and participants recall about childhood academic activities may be imperfect. Further studies should focus on students with same GPA in different socioeconomic classes, and take into consideration other factors contributing to the rate at which students access academic resources.

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