Use of Academic Resources Among Different Socioeconomic Classes

By Kristin Zimmerman

Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut

Abstract

Accessing academic resources is a significant factor in educational success at the college level. 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 will access academic resources at a significantly higher rate than students of lower socioeconomic status. In a survey of 120 college students, the hypothesis was tested. Basic hypothesis testing showed no significant difference between students at different income levels in accessing academic resources. Advanced hypothesis testing did display a significant difference in males and undergraduate seniors from higher socioeconomic families. A more diverse and sufficient sample would be needed to further test this hypothesis. Further studies should focus on students with same the GPA in different socioeconomic classes, and take into consideration other factors contributing to the rate at which students access academic resources.

Introduction

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, such as library databases, professor's office hours, and career development centers, is an important aspect that can influence academic achievement. Access to academic resources is influenced by socioeconomic status. Based on the works of Bourdieu's concept of economic and cultures capital and Lareau's theory of social inequality it is hypothesized that student's from high socioeconomic status would access academic resources at a significantly higher rate.

Background

Card and Krueger (1998) examine the performance of students in an institutional setting, based on the academic resources available, examining the connection between the schooling, quality of school, and the earnings of students after they graduate from school. Their findings showed a positive and significant relationship between school resources and student earnings. Many studies have proven 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 & 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. 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 use them, lower socioeconomic students never fully learn to access these educational resources and use them to gain academic achievement.

Theory

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. Moreover, their resources are transferred across generations" (Lareau 2003). From increased intellectual conversations to educated facilitated concerted cultivation, middle class children take these advantages and use them in future institutional settings. In a process called **concerted cultivation**, parents follow the guidelines of doctors and teachers on normative behavior, forming a "dominant set of cultural repertoires" for children. Middle class parents take the time to stimulate their children's cognitive development and build their social skills.

As a social theorist, **Pierre Bourdieu** also focused on the intersection of social inequality, class and education. He conceptualized inequality stemming from the differential amounts of economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital of individuals and the different economic classes (Dillion 2014). Bourdieu argued social inequality was defined by a three dimensional hierarchy composed of these three capitals. Bourdieu looked at how economic and cultural capital produce and reproduce social inequality (Dillion 2014: 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. The significance of an individual's family helps determine the ease of an students' access to resources.

Table 1 One-Way ANOVA Test of Independent Variables 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			

Table 2 One-Way ANOVA test of independent variables 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 socioecnomic 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			

Methods

It is hypothesized that student's from higher socioeconomic backgrounds will access academic resources at a significantly higher rate than student's from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The independent variable:

The independent variable was self- identified socioeconomic status and approximate average household income for 2016.

The dependent variable:

The dependent variable measured the use of academic resources, including the library databases, CLA hours, professor office hours, wellness centers, and academic learning centers. A survey of 23 questions was constructed to measure the extent to which students access the academic resources available to them at their universities.

The control variables:

The control variables included basic demographics, such as gender and race, past exposure to educational resources, and parental involvement in education.

Research Design

The research design used for this research was quantitative, using a cross-sectional survey, examining the relationship between socioeconomic status and the use of academic resources.

Participants:

The participants in this study were 120 undergraduate college students. Diversity with gender and class was not achieved.

Table 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 socioecnomic 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			

Table 4 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 socioecnomic 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			

Discussion

There were no significant differences in basic hypothesis testing. Students from higher socioeconomic families are better prepared and do not need academic resources to achieve academic success. Alternatively, students from higher socioeconomic families feel entitled to academic success and do not seek out additional resources.

Academic year was used because it had the most diversity among participants. 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. As students' progress through their undergraduate career, accessing resources could be a developed habit. The use and access of academic resources could be a learned process

For the males sample, there was a nearly a significant difference in the means for the help index between the income groups with a significance value of .082.

Conclusions

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. A school's efforts to education student on resources available could also influence these results. 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 cause and effect cannot be proven. Because the sample was not random, findings cannot be generalized to the overall population. Surveys have limitations such as close-ended questions, which can have lower validity rates, 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.