

# How Socio-economic Status Affects Academic Performance

## A Study of Education Inequality in Junior High School Students in China Based on a Structural Equation Model

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### ABSTRACT

As social stratification has deepened in contemporary Chinese society, educational capital and academic performance in secondary education have differentiated according to students' socio-economic status. Most of the existing studies on the relationship between family background and children's academic achievement focus on the impact of a student's family background on the final level of education achieved, but education acquisition is a continuous process. Without an analysis of the educational process, it is difficult to understand the process mechanism by which family background affects children's educational opportunity. By using data from the China Education Panel Survey (CEPS), this paper studies the paths and effects of students' socio-economic status on their academic performance. Through modelling latent variables (socio-economic status, academic performance) with fourteen observed variables in a sample size of approximately 7,000 junior high school students around China, this study found that: first, families use their socio-economic resources to provide children with different educational resources and thus influence their academic performance; second, through parents' educational participation and behavioural support, families develop children's learning attitudes and habits, thus influencing their academic achievements. The findings of this paper provide a possible basis for reducing class differences in children's academic achievements and promoting educational equity.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic status, academic performance, structural equation model, China

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is fundamental for the development of national quality, and education in childhood is the basis for the cultivation of a country's labour force. The acquisition of education in childhood not only affects individual's own sense of achievement and happiness, but also affects the quality and innovation of a country's labour force at the national level. Education thus affects nation's development ability [1]. In China, as compulsory education has become more widespread and schools have expanded in size, the average education level of residents has been significantly improved. Nevertheless, due to the scarcity of educational resources and their uneven allocation, there is still a great deal of room to improve educational inequality[2]. For this reason, the state council approved the "Outline of the National Medium- and Long-Term Programme for Education Reform and Development" in 2010 and set

"promoting fairness in education and ensure equitable education for the benefit of all" as one of the key strategic goals of national education development.

On the one hand, the fairness of education is rooted in the institutional arrangement, which in turn cushions or even restrains the influence of families' socio-economic status. On the other hand, fair access to education relies on the opportunity and ability to participate in education. Either way, the ultimate outcome is the academic performance of the child within the peer group. In this way, the relationship between family background and access to education has become one of the most important indicators to measure the fairness of education. Research shows that since China's reform and opening up, the role of families' socio-economic status in individual education acquisition has been on the rise and, moreover, its influence has not weakened as school enrolment has expanded[3][4][5][6]. Most of the existing studies on the relationship between family background and children's

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