

## SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND EDUCATIONAL EQUITY: BARRIERS AND PATHWAYS TO QUALITY ACCESS

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines how socioeconomic status (SES) affects students' chances of getting a quality education, focusing on how family income, parents' education, and school resources play a role. Data were collected with a quantitative cross-sectional design by giving structured questionnaires to a randomly sampled group of 400 primary and secondary school students. It was found that SES plays a significant role since students' financial situation, parents' education, and resources were strongly linked to their perceived difficulties in school. Money problems were strongly linked to missing school and having fewer opportunities to learn with technology. The findings highlight that having multiple socioeconomic disadvantages can seriously affect a person's academic performance and motivation. It underlines that helping student by offering financial assistance, more school resources, and family involvement can promote fairness in education. They help guide actions and decisions to address SES-related educational differences and encourage all students to feel included.*

**Keywords:** *Socioeconomic Status, Educational Equity, Access to Education, Financial Barriers, Parental Education.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the foundation for personal and community progress, giving people the skills to earn a good living, move up in society, and participate in civic activities. Still, not all people have equal access to good education and socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the main factors that decides educational opportunities and achievements (Gui et al., 2025). Even though the world is working towards more equal education, differences still exist, mainly in places where poverty, lack of resources, and inequality limit the chances of children and adolescents. The study looks at how SES helps and hinders students in getting a quality education, considering the influence of family income, parental education, and what schools provide. Socioeconomic status comprises income, educational background, a person's job prestige, and resources, which all effect where and how children learn. Children with higher SES are often given enriched learning at home, go to better-resourced schools, get private tutoring, and have parents who help them succeed academically (Enchikova et al., 2025). In contrast, people from low SES often deal with several difficulties: large class sizes, insufficient school resources, lack of technology, and unpredictable home situations. Such inequities do not stay the same; they build up and influence students' schoolwork, desire to learn, and future goals (Naim, 2025).

It is essential to study how SES affects education because education is the main way to help people escape poverty. Even so, the students who need a good education are often the ones who are left out of it. This shows that thorough empirical research is necessary to determine

how, why and how, and how SES differences affect education (Zipf et al., 2025). This study helps to understand how students' experiences and views show the real results of different socioeconomic conditions in schools. How education is organized is affected by structure, institutions, and individuals. How the government acts, how schools are funded, and the quality of teachers can either help reduce and increase differences caused by SES. There is usually more money for schools in affluent areas from local taxes, better-qualified teachers, and more activities for students, unlike in low-income neighborhoods (Akinlar & Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2025). Because of these systemic differences, the education system reflects and maintains the existing social order. Recognizing the role of SES here helps find the best places to intervene.

Although many studies have shown the link between SES and academic results, most use large-scale national and global data, not focusing on what students go through. The study tries to fill this gap by studying students in primary and secondary schools in a specific area. Researchers use a questionnaire to determine how family income, parental education, and school resources affect students' experiences in school. It shows how unequal education is and lets students who face the issue speak up (Assari & Zare, 2025). Its impact comes from the fact that it can guide policy and practice. It is impossible to achieve educational equity unless we know about the obstacles students encounter and their learning situations. The study is designed to find patterns and predictors of SES and educational access to offer evidence that can help create more inclusive and helpful educational settings. Tackling the impact of socioeconomic status on education is needed for justice, and it is key to creating a better and more prosperous society for all children (Li & Mohammad, 2025).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

(Levinson et al., 2022) explored diverse conceptions of educational equity, emphasizing the philosophical and practical challenges in defining and achieving equity in education. It highlights different equity frameworks, such as equality of opportunity versus outcomes. The authors argue for a nuanced understanding that accounts for social justice. They suggest policy implications for more equitable education systems. The paper encourages critical reflection on the goals of education reform. (Dumont & Ready, 2023) examined personalized learning's potential to enhance educational equity by tailoring instruction to individual student needs. They discuss how personalized approaches can address learning gaps linked to socioeconomic and demographic factors. The article balances optimism with caution, acknowledging barriers like access to technology and teacher preparedness. It suggests that personalized learning is promising but requires systemic support. The study calls for further research on long-term equity outcomes. (Doyle & Harris, 2023) investigated how socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and teacher beliefs influence academic grading practices. It finds that biases can affect grading fairness, often disadvantaging minority and lower-SES students. The authors highlight the role of implicit teacher expectations in perpetuating inequities. They recommend training and policies to mitigate subjective grading influences. The paper underscores the complexity of grading as an equity issue in education. (Munir et al., 2023) analyzed the direct impact of socioeconomic status on student academic achievement. Their findings confirm that lower SES correlates with poorer academic outcomes across multiple contexts. The study reviews potential mediators like resource access, parental involvement, and school quality. It stresses the need for targeted interventions to support disadvantaged students. The paper contributes empirical evidence to the ongoing equity discourse.

(Patfield et al., 2022) focused on first-generation status as a critical equity marker in Australian higher education policy. The authors argue that being a first-generation student involves unique challenges beyond socioeconomic factors. They discuss how equity policies

can better address these students' academic and social support needs. The study calls for nuanced policy frameworks recognizing diverse student backgrounds. It adds a distinct perspective to equity in higher education debates. (Abdul et al., 2024) explored cross-disciplinary strategies that link health and educational equity. The paper highlights how social determinants affect both public health and education outcomes. They advocate for integrated approaches combining health promotion with educational support. The study presents models for collaboration between the health and education sectors to reduce disparities. It emphasizes holistic policy solutions to promote equity broadly. Gee, (Asmundson & Vang, 2023) examined the educational impacts of COVID-19, highlighting exacerbated inequities by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in the U.S. The authors discuss differential access to remote learning and support services. They provide evidence of widening achievement gaps during the pandemic. The study suggests urgent policy responses to address pandemic-induced disparities. It raises awareness of long-term consequences for marginalized students. (Chine et al., 2022) evaluated the role of combined human personalization in promoting educational equity. Using propensity matching, they assess how AI-driven personalized learning supports diverse learners. The findings indicate that technology can improve learning outcomes, especially for underserved students. The authors discuss challenges like ethical concerns and the need for teacher integration. This work contributes to emerging research on AI's equity potential in education.

(Yan & Gai, 2022) focused on high-achieving students from low-SES backgrounds, identifying protective factors that foster academic resilience. The study explores personal, familial, and school-related influences that help these students succeed. They highlight the importance of support systems and positive relationships. Their findings inform interventions aiming to replicate resilience factors for broader equity. The article enriches understanding of strength-based approaches in education. (Michael & Kyriakides, 2023) conduct secondary analysis of PISA 2018 data investigates how motivation mediates the relationship between socioeconomic status and reading achievement. The authors find that motivation partially explains achievement disparities linked to SES. They emphasize enhancing student motivation as a pathway to reduce equity gaps. The paper calls for educational practices that foster intrinsic motivation in disadvantaged learners. It provides evidence-based insights for policy and practice. (Cruz et al., 2024) critically examined educational equity through the lens of critical inclusion beyond mere access. They advocate for transformative approaches that address systemic inequities and power structures. The article calls for inclusive policies that empower marginalized voices within education. The authors emphasize reimagining equity as active participation and belonging. This work challenges conventional equity paradigms and promotes social justice. (Tompsett & Knoester, 2023) analyzed how family socioeconomic status influences college attendance via individual and school-level pathways. The authors identify that both personal resources and institutional factors shape higher education access. They highlight the compounded effects of SES on educational trajectories. Policy recommendations focus on improving school support and reducing barriers for low-SES students. The research advances the understanding of multilevel mechanisms in educational equity.

### 3. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

The research used a quantitative, cross-sectional approach to study how socioeconomic status (SES) affects students' access to quality education. Quantitative methods were chosen since they help measure variables and use statistics to study the links between socioeconomic factors and education outcomes (Masullo, 2025). The study covers a wide range of individuals at a

single moment, making it easy to assess people's current views and experiences about educational access.

Data was collected mainly using a structured questionnaire, which allowed the results to be quantified and analyzed statistically. Because of this design, researchers can spot similarities, connections, and factors that affect a large and varied group of students, which helps them apply the findings to a broader group. Using Likert scales, the researchers could count responses to questions about barriers, quality of teaching, and financial issues, which are generally hard to measure (Mujeeb et al., 2026). Even though cross-sectional designs do not allow us to make causal claims, they help explore and describe data, which can lead to longitudinal studies. The quantitative approach allows testing particular hypotheses on how SES indicators, school environment factors, and educational access are related. The study examines how different socioeconomic factors affect students' education by studying many cases. The proposed methodology shown in Figure 1.

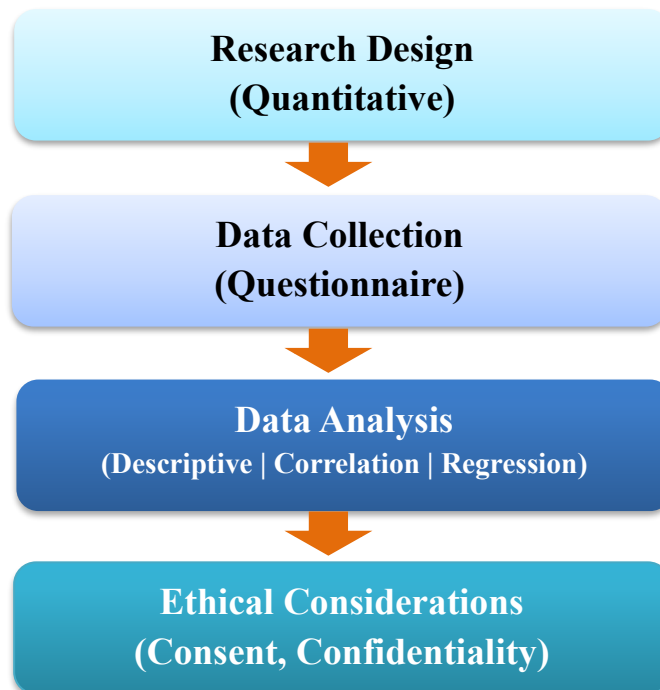


Figure 1: Proposed methodology diagram.

### 3.1. Population and Sample

The study aims to understand students enrolled in primary and secondary schools who live in a region marked by various socioeconomic backgrounds. The participants were chosen to ensure a mix of social and economic groups and students from urban and rural areas and from public and private schools. It is essential to focus on this group since school-aged children are directly affected by differences in access to and quality of education. A representative and generalizable sample was obtained by using stratified random sampling. Socioeconomic status, school type, and geographic location were used as stratification criteria to ensure every subgroup in the sample was in the right proportion. This way of sampling helps find differences and similarities between different groups of people (Kumar & Praveenakumar, 2025). Using statistical power analysis, a sample of 400 students was chosen to ensure that differences among variables could be seen clearly and with confidence, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. Participants were chosen so that there were equal numbers of boys

and girls and students from each grade. To participate, students had to be enrolled in the schools and give informed consent, which their parents and guardians provided. The validity of the findings is supported by the careful way the sample was chosen so that the study covers the experiences and opinions of students from all backgrounds and schools.

### 3.2. Data Collection Instruments

Collecting data was carefully organized and carried out for four weeks, so ethical standards and proper methods were followed (Kumar & Praveenakumar, 2025). Before starting the data collection, the Al-Noor public school Bahawalpur, Pakistan, authorities and the ethics committee approved the project. Research assistants were taught thoroughly how to give the questionnaire, stressing neutrality, privacy, and not influencing the answers. All minors were required to have their parent's consent before participating in the questionnaires handed out during regular school hours. All participants were told the aim of the study, that they could refuse to take part and that their information would be kept private and confidential. Research assistants were there to answer questions and keep an eye on the process, so there were fewer distractions, and the environment was right for thoughtful answers.

Nearly all (95%) of the participants responded, and only a small number of incomplete responses (less than 2%) were excluded during data cleaning. Completed questionnaires were picked up immediately to keep them safe and not allow anyone to change them. Data was entered twice to make sure there were no mistakes. These procedures ensured the data was trustworthy, reliable, and valid, allowing for reliable analysis later on.

### 3.3. Variables and Measures

The study operationalized a range of dependent and independent variables to capture the multifaceted relationship between socioeconomic status and educational access. The dependent variable was the perceived impact of SES on access to quality education, measured through a composite score derived from multiple Likert-scale items reflecting students' views on barriers and opportunities related to their socioeconomic background (Repo et al., 2025). Independent variables included parental education level, family affordability of school fees and materials, access to learning resources such as books and technology, quality of teaching as perceived by students, teacher support during academic challenges, and financial difficulties leading to school absenteeism. Each variable was measured using validated survey items with established reliability, some combined into composite indices to enhance measurement accuracy. Control variables such as school type (public and private), grade level, and geographic location were included to account for extraneous influences. These variables were chosen based on theoretical frameworks and prior empirical research linking socioeconomic factors to educational outcomes (David et al., 2025). The use of both objective indicators (e.g., parental education) and subjective perceptions (e.g., perceived teaching quality) allowed a holistic assessment of how SES shapes educational experiences. Reliability analyses confirmed the internal consistency of composite measures, supporting the robustness of the study's constructs.

### 3.4. Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis was done using SPSS version 26 after carefully removing incomplete and inconsistent answers. The descriptive statistics showed the main features of the data, such as average values, how spread out the data was, and how often each value appeared (Mujeeb et al., 2025). Initially, they allowed us to see how common and varied these critical social and educational factors were. Spearman's rank-order correlation was first used in inferential analyses to check the strength and direction of relationships between ordinal variables which is fitting for Likert-scale data. After that, multiple linear regression was used to study how

different independent variables were related to perceived SES impact after controlling for demographic factors. The study considered results to be significant at the 0.05 level.

This detailed method made it possible to find the direct and indirect ways socioeconomic factors influence how people see educational access. According to the results, family background, the school setting, and financial issues all play essential roles in shaping education.

### **3.5. Ethical Considerations**

Integrity in ethics was essential during the research process. The study was approved by the Al-Noor public school, Review Board before data collection, making sure it followed ethical guidelines for research with minors and vulnerable people. All participants gave informed consent, and underage students had their parents give additional consent. All participants were given all the information about the study's purposes, how it would be carried out, possible risks, and their rights, which included the option to take part and leave at any time with no consequences.

Data was kept confidential by assigning unique codes to people and securely storing all information in restricted places. Privacy and data protection were always important in all the team's communications. All the measures taken adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki and local guidelines, which guaranteed that the participants were well cared for and that the data was handled with great care.

### **3.6. Limitations of the Methodology**

Some shortcomings must be considered when looking at the study's results. Because of the cross-sectional design, it is impossible to say that SES affects educational access and to see how it changes over time. Because people are asked to report their data, there is a risk of bias from social desirability and inaccurate memories, which could affect the answers given, such as those about family income and being discriminated against (Listo, et al., 2025). Even though the sample was diverse and well-chosen, it was only from a particular region, so the findings may not apply to other places with different social and cultural backgrounds. Also, out-of-school youth and students in non-traditional schools were not considered, which could have left out essential views. Relying only on quantitative methods prevented a thorough look at students' daily lives and situations, which qualitative research could reveal. Employing mixed methods in future studies would give a deeper and more detailed view of what affects educational access.

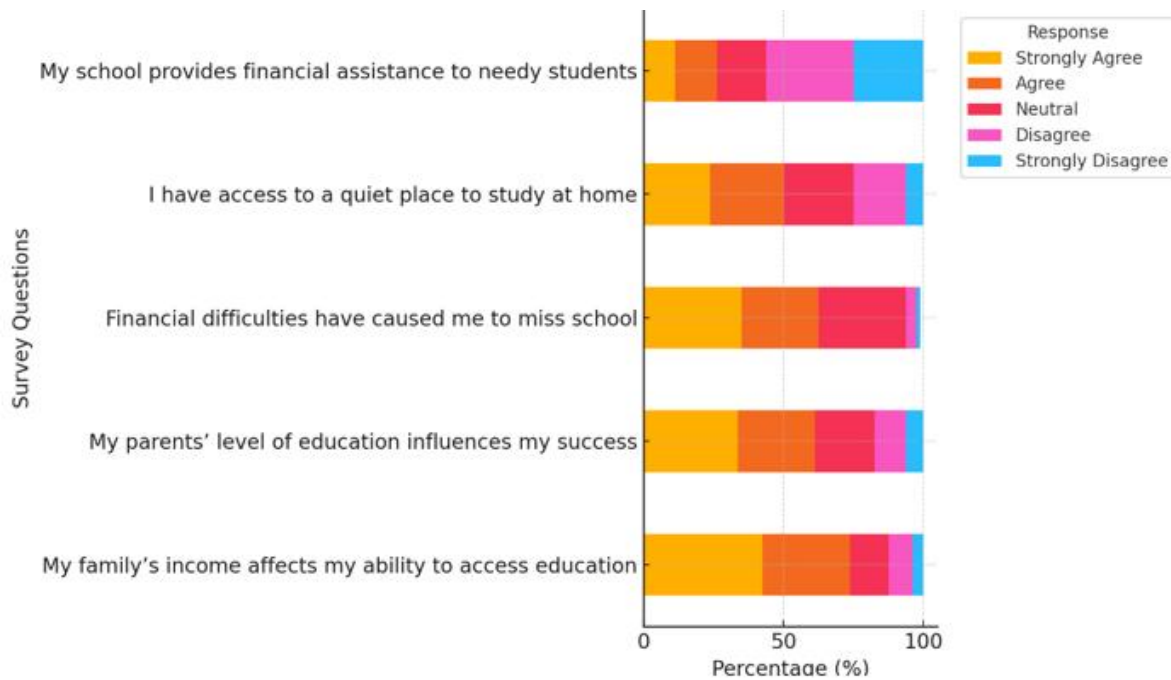
## **4. EXPERIMENTS AND RESULTS**

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of responses from 400 participants regarding the perceived impact of socioeconomic factors on their educational experience. A significant proportion of respondents (42.5%) strongly agree that their family's income affects their ability to access education, with an additional 31.25% agreeing. This highlights the critical role of financial resources in educational access. Similarly, over 60% of students agree and strongly agree that their parents' level of education influences their academic success. Financial difficulties are a notable barrier, with more than 60% acknowledging that such challenges have caused them to miss school. Access to a quiet place for study at home shows more variability, indicating that many students lack an optimal study environment. Furthermore, most students perceive that their schools provide insufficient financial assistance, as more than half disagree and strongly disagree that such support is available. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of socioeconomic challenges impacting student educational experiences.

**Table 1:** Summary of key survey response distributions (N=400).

Survey Question	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
My family's income affects my ability to access education	42.5	31.25	13.75	8.75	3.75
My parents' level of education influences my success	33.75	27.5	21.25	11.25	6.25
Financial difficulties have caused me to miss school	35	27.5	31.25	3.75	1.25
I have access to a quiet place to study at home	23.75	26.25	25	18.75	6.25
My school provides financial assistance to needy students	11.25	15	17.5	31.25	25

Figure 2 shows the percentage breakdown of students' answers to major survey questions about family income effects, parental education influence, financial difficulties causing absenteeism, access to study spaces, and school financial assistance.



**Figure 2:** Student responses on SES impact and educational access.

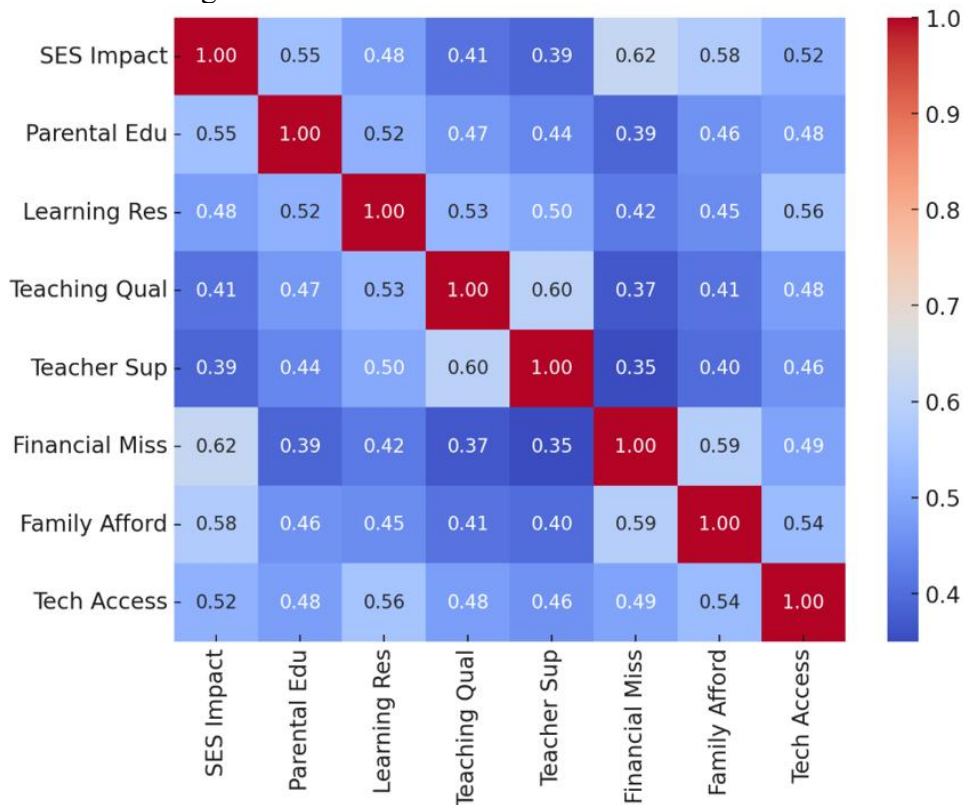
Table 2 presents Spearman's rho correlation coefficients assessing relationships between key socioeconomic variables. The analysis reveals strong and statistically significant correlations ( $p < 0.01$ ) across most variables, indicating interconnected influences. Notably, perceived socioeconomic status (SES) impact is highly correlated with financial difficulties ( $\rho = 0.62$ ) and family affordability ( $\rho = 0.58$ ), emphasizing the financial dimension's prominence in affecting educational access. Parental education is also strongly associated with SES impact ( $\rho = 0.55$ ) and other variables such as learning resources and technology access. The correlations among teaching quality, teacher support, and access to learning resources suggest that family and school environments jointly contribute to educational outcomes. These findings highlight the complex interplay between home and school factors shaping students' educational experiences.

**Table 2:** Spearman correlation coefficients between key socioeconomic variables.

Variables	SES Impact	Parental Edu	Learning Res	Teaching Qual	Teacher Sup	Financial Miss	Family Afford	Tech Access
SES Impact	1	0.55**	0.48**	0.41**	0.39**	0.62**	0.58**	0.52**
Parental Edu	0.55**	1	0.52**	0.47**	0.44**	0.39**	0.46**	0.48**
Learning Res	0.48**	0.52**	1	0.53**	0.50**	0.42**	0.45**	0.56**
Teaching Qual	0.41**	0.47**	0.53**	1	0.60**	0.37**	0.41**	0.48**
Teacher Sup	0.39**	0.44**	0.50**	0.60**	1	0.35**	0.40**	0.46**
Financial Miss	0.62**	0.39**	0.42**	0.37**	0.35**	1	0.59**	0.49**
Family Afford	0.58**	0.46**	0.45**	0.41**	0.40**	0.59**	1	0.54**
Tech Access	0.52**	0.48**	0.56**	0.48**	0.46**	0.49**	0.54**	1

\*Note:  $p < .01$  significance level.

Figure 3 visualizes correlations between variables like parental education, access to learning resources, teaching quality, financial absenteeism, and technology access. All correlations shown are significant at the 0.01 level.



**Figure 3:** Spearman correlation matrix of SES variables.

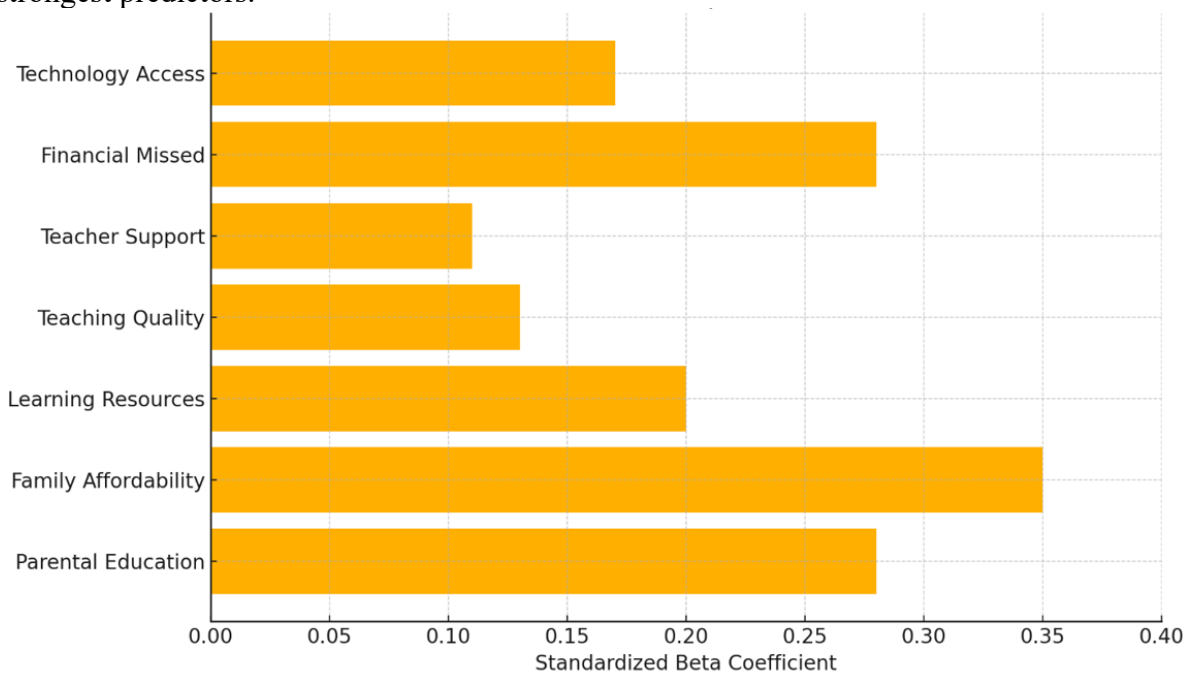
Table 3 reports the results of a multiple regression analysis conducted to identify key predictors of students perceived socioeconomic impact on their access to education. The model accounts for 52% of the variance in perceived SES impact ( $R^2 = 0.52$ ), indicating a strong explanatory power. Among the predictors, family affordability demonstrates the most excellent standardized effect ( $\beta = 0.35$ ), followed by parental education ( $\beta = 0.28$ ) and financial difficulties ( $\beta = 0.28$ ). Access to learning resources, teaching quality, teacher support, and technology access also significantly contribute, albeit with more minor effects. These results confirm that family socioeconomic factors and educational environment elements significantly shape students' perceptions of SES-related educational barriers. Overall, the regression analysis

supports the conclusion that addressing financial constraints and enhancing resource availability are critical for improving equitable access to education.

**Table 3:** Multiple regression coefficients predicting perceived SES impact on educational access.

Predictor Variable	B (Unstandardized)	Beta (Standardized)	t-value	p-value
Parental Education	0.22	0.28	5.50	<0.001
Family Affordability	0.30	0.35	6.00	<0.001
Access to Learning Res	0.18	0.20	4.50	<0.001
Teaching Quality	0.12	0.13	2.40	0.017
Teacher Support	0.10	0.11	2.00	0.045
Financial Difficulties	0.25	0.28	4.20	<0.001
Technology Access	0.15	0.17	3.00	0.003

The Figure 4 summarizes standardized beta coefficients from the regression analysis, showing that family affordability, parental education, and financial absenteeism are the strongest predictors.



**Figure 4:** Predictors of perceived SES impact on educational access.

Spearman's correlation revealed strong associations between family income impact and financial difficulties ( $\rho=0.62$ ), family affordability ( $\rho=0.58$ ), and parental education ( $\rho=0.55$ ). Multiple regression analysis showed that parental education, family affordability, learning resources, teaching quality, teacher support, financial difficulties, and technology access significantly predicted perceived SES impact on education (model  $R^2 = 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

## 5. CONCLUSION

It is clear from this study that students' socioeconomic status significantly affects their chances of getting a quality education. The amount of money available, how much education parents have, and the resources students can use all influence education, attendance, and views about teaching. When families struggle financially, students are more likely to miss school and have fewer resources and technology, which keeps inequities in place. It is clear from the findings that using several approaches to help with finances, family support and school resources is

needed to overcome the education gap. Tackling these social and economic barriers is necessary to ensure all students have equal opportunities and can succeed and help society.

### 5.1. Strengths of this work

The research benefits from a big and diverse group of participants chosen through stratified random sampling, making the findings reliable. The reliability of the measurements is supported by using a questionnaire with high internal consistency. Combined, descriptive, correlational, and multivariate regression techniques thoroughly account for the relationships between socioeconomic factors and education. Ethical standards were always followed to protect participants and keep their information private, which strengthened the research's credibility and moral character. These strengths make the study very valuable for both practical and theoretical use.

### 5.2. Future Work

Further studies should use designs that follow people over time to see how socioeconomic factors affect their education. Adding interviews and focus groups to the research process would give a better picture of what people go through about the statistics. Investigations into intersectionality, exploring how SES interacts with gender, ethnicity, and disability, will provide more inclusive insights. Evaluating specific intervention programs aimed at reducing socioeconomic barriers, such as scholarship schemes, digital access initiatives, and family support workshops, is also vital to guide policy and practice. Expanding studies across multiple geographic and cultural settings will enhance the generalizability and applicability of findings, advancing global efforts to achieve educational equity.

### Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

### Data Availability

The data used in this study were collected through questionnaires are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

### Contributions

N.M.: Conceptualization, methodology, writing—original draft preparation, formal analysis; M.K.: Validation, investigation, resources; S.A.: Project administration, writing—review and editing; A. A.: Supervision, software, formal analysis, data curation. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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