Research Article

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The Correlation of Academic Performance and Socio-Economic Background of University Students in Bangladesh

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Abstract: This study focuses on the relationship between students' socioeconomic backgrounds and their academic success at the university level. The goals were to identify factors influencing students' academic success and analyze the connection between socio-economic status and academic achievement. A sample of 132 participants from the University of Rajshahi was chosen through simple random sampling. Structured questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. CGPAs are used to measure academic performance. In this study, factors such as parental income, education level, occupation, students' access to resources, and learning environments are considered to evaluate overall academic success. The results reveal a significant correlation between socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievement, with students from higher SES backgrounds often performing better due to greater access to educational resources, mentorship, and stable living conditions.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Socio-economic Background, University Student.

Introduction

The relationship between the socio-economic background of university students and their academic performance has been a focal point of educational research for decades. Education is widely acknowledged as a fundamental determinant of individual success, shaping both economic and social outcomes. It provides access to new opportunities, enhanced life quality, and serves as a key factor in determining long-term success. While academic achievement is a primary measure of educational success, the extent to which socio-economic factors influence it remains a critical area of investigation. This research focuses on understanding how students' socio-economic backgrounds impact their academic success, specifically within the context of university education in Bangladesh.

Socio-economic status (SES) refers to an individual's or family's position within society, typically determined by income, education level, occupation, and access to resources. SES encompasses both material advantages (such as income and wealth) and social advantages (such as family education and occupation). Research indicates that SES has a profound influence on various aspects of student life, including their academic performance. Studies consistently show that students from higher SES backgrounds tend to perform better academically due to better access to educational resources, mentorship, and stable living conditions. Conversely, those from lower SES backgrounds often face greater challenges, such as limited access to academic resources, financial instability, and a lack of parental educational support, all of which may negatively impact their academic performance (Sirin, 2005; Walpole, 2003).

In the modern world, obtaining a university degree has become essential for securing a stable career and achieving upward social mobility. However, the financial burden of higher education, along with other socio-cultural factors, can exacerbate the challenges faced by students from low socio-economic backgrounds. These challenges include difficulty affording tuition fees, inadequate study materials, and insufficient academic support. Research has shown that these

students often face significant obstacles in both their academic and personal lives, impacting their educational attainment (Barua et al., 2023; Perveen et al., 2023).

The academic performance of university students is often assessed through metrics such as grade point averages (GPAs), test scores, and educational attainment. Many studies have explored the role of family background, parental education, and household income in shaping students' academic outcomes (Munir et al., 2023; Duncan & Magnuson, 2012). Higher SES students benefit from a range of advantages, including access to better schools, more educational opportunities, and supportive home environments. Conversely, students from lower SES backgrounds face financial constraints, limited access to educational support, and psychological stress, all of which can hinder their academic success (Sirin, 2005). The effect of SES on academic achievement is often compounded by other factors such as peer influence, mental health, and institutional support (Barua et al., 2023; Walpole, 2003).

While the relationship between SES and academic performance has been widely studied, the complexity of this relationship is not always fully understood. Factors such as the student's personal resilience, the quality of institutional support, and the presence of peer networks may mitigate the impact of socio-economic challenges. Moreover, the influence of SES on academic performance may vary depending on the specific context of the educational institution and the societal environment in which the student lives. In some cases, students from lower SES backgrounds may overcome these disadvantages through sheer determination, access to institutional support programs, or the presence of strong peer and family networks (Thomas, 2002; Tinto, 1993).

The existing literature on this topic suggests that while SES plays a significant role in shaping academic outcomes, it is not the sole determinant. Other variables, such as the student's intrinsic motivation, cognitive abilities, and mental health, also contribute to academic success. Additionally, the educational institution's role in providing supportive environments and resources for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, is crucial in reducing the academic achievement gap. For example, programs designed to provide mentorship, tutoring, and financial assistance can significantly improve the academic performance of students from lower SES backgrounds (Rodríguez-Hernández et al., 2020; Bourdieu, 1986).

This study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on the impact of socio-economic background on academic achievement by focusing on students in Bangladesh. Specifically, it seeks to investigate the relationship between SES and academic performance among university students at the University of Rajshahi. A survey was conducted with 132 students from various disciplines and academic years to assess the role of factors such as parental income, education, occupation, and access to resources in shaping students' academic outcomes. The results of this study will provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by students from different socio-economic backgrounds and contribute to the development of targeted interventions to improve their academic success.

While many studies have established a clear link between SES and academic performance, the existing research often overlooks the specific socio-cultural and institutional context in which these students operate. In the case of Bangladesh, where a significant portion of the population comes from rural areas and has limited access to higher education, the impact of SES on academic achievement may differ from that observed in more developed countries. Furthermore, while some research highlights the negative impact of low SES on academic performance, others suggest that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds can overcome these challenges

through hard work, resilience, and institutional support (Macaulay et al., 2023; Perveen et al., 2023).

The literature also points to the importance of cultural capital in academic success. According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital refers to the non-financial social assets that individuals possess, such as educational credentials, cultural knowledge, and social networks. Students from higher SES backgrounds are often exposed to more cultural capital, which enhances their academic performance. In contrast, students from lower SES backgrounds may lack access to these resources, making it more difficult for them to succeed in the academic environment. However, some studies argue that cultural capital can be cultivated within educational institutions, allowing students from disadvantaged backgrounds to overcome their socio-economic limitations (Bourdieu, 1986; Tinto, 1993).

This article aims to bridge the gap in research by examining the relationship between socio-economic factors and academic performance within the context of Bangladesh's higher education system. By analyzing how students from different socio-economic backgrounds face various academic challenges and navigate their university education, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the socio-economic factors that influence academic success. The findings of this study will not only contribute to academic discourse but also inform policies aimed at reducing the educational achievement gap and promoting social equity in higher education.

The socio-economic background of university students plays a significant role in shaping their academic performance. Students from higher SES backgrounds typically have better access to educational resources, stable home environments, and greater social and cultural capital, which contribute to their academic success. On the other hand, students from lower SES backgrounds often face significant challenges, including financial strain, limited access to resources, and inadequate academic support. However, these challenges can be mitigated through institutional interventions, personal resilience, and the cultivation of social capital. This study will provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between socio-economic status and academic performance, with a specific focus on the context of higher education in Bangladesh.

Method

The research employed a quantitative approach to assess the correlation and impacts between the academic performance and socio-economic background of university students. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, where data were collected at a single point in time from a sample of students enrolled in various programs at the University of Rajshahi. Simple random sampling ensures representation from different academic disciplines, year groups, and socio-economic backgrounds, with a target sample size of 132 students to ensure statistical significance. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires, which included sections on demographic information, socioeconomic status, academic performance indicators, socioeconomic impacts, and coping and support mechanisms. The data was analyzed to determine the strength and nature of the relationships between socio-economic factors and academic performance. This methodology facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how socio-economic status affects academic achievement and the distinct challenges faced by students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring confidentiality, were strictly adhered to throughout the study.

Results and Discussion

As previously mentioned, the key individuals involved in this research are students from the University of Rajshahi. About 36% of the survey participants are female, while the remaining 64% are male.

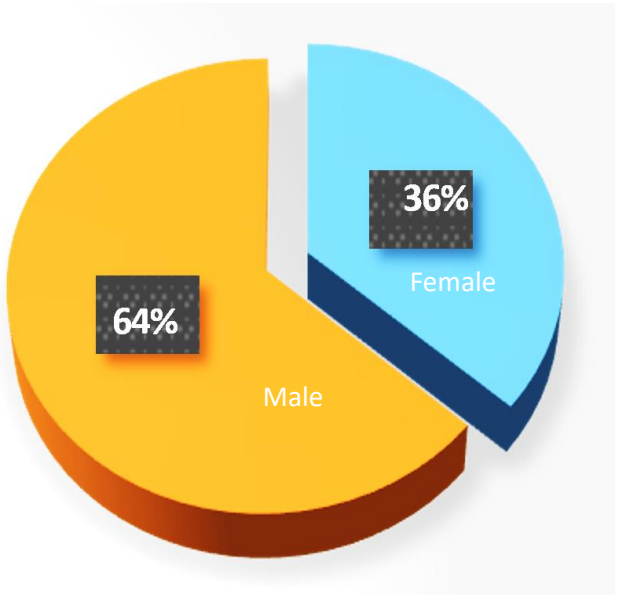

Figure 1. Types of Gender
Source: Field Data 2024

Table 1. Study Year of the Respondents

	Frequency		Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1st year	1	.8	.8	.8
	2nd year	7	5.3	5.3	6.1
	3rd year	14	10.6	10.6	16.7
	4th year	99	75.0	75.0	91.7
	masters	11	8.3	8.3	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data 2024

The data shows the distribution of families' monthly incomes across different categories. Only 9.1% of families earn more than 40,000 Tk per month, placing them in the high-income group. Meanwhile, 16.7% of families have a monthly income between 25,000 and 40,000 Tk, which is considered upper-middle class. The largest segment comprises 43.9% of families, who earn between 10,000 and 25,000 Tk per month. Additionally, 30.3% of families live on less than 10,000 Tk monthly. Altogether, a significant majority, 74.2% of families have a monthly income of 25,000 Tk or less, highlighting an intense concentration in the low-to-middle-income range.

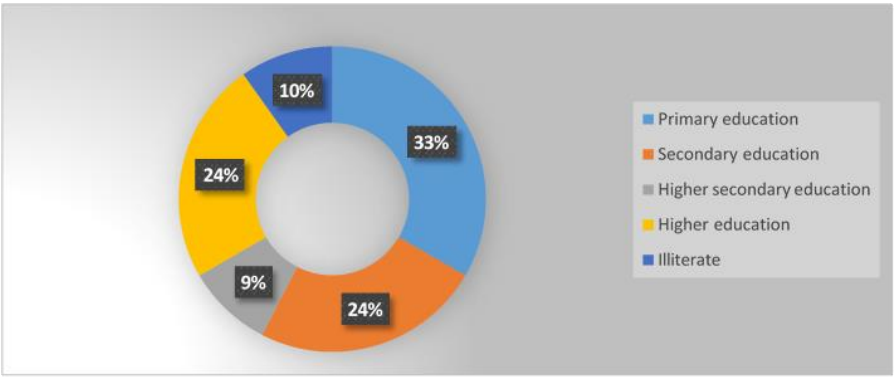

Figure 2. Parents' Education of the Respondents
Source: Field Data 2024

The educational levels of respondents' parents are as follows: the largest group, 33% of parents, has only primary-level education, and a significant portion, 10%, has no formal education. 24% of parents hold a higher education, 24% have a secondary-level education, and 9% have a higher secondary education, indicating a low level of advanced educational attainment among parents.

Table 2. Respondents' Source of Financial Support

Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Family	113	85.6	85.6	85.6
	Scholarships/grants	8	6.1	6.1	91.7
	Part time job	11	8.3	8.3	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data 2024

The table reveals that a substantial majority of students (86%) rely primarily on financial support from their families, underscoring the critical role of household income in sustaining their education. In contrast, only 6% of students benefit from scholarships or grants, indicating limited access to institutional or external financial aid. Meanwhile, 8% of students supplement their expenses through part-time employment, suggesting a relatively small proportion actively engages in income-generating activities to support their studies. Overall, this distribution highlights a heavy dependence on family resources, with comparatively low reliance on scholarships or self-earned income, which may have implications for students' financial security and their ability to manage educational costs independently.

Table 3. Source of Respondents' Family Income

Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agriculture	63	47.7	47.7	47.7
	Business	27	20.5	20.5	68.2
	Job	30	22.7	22.7	90.9
	Others	12	9.1	9.1	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data 2024

The data indicate that agriculture serves as the primary source of income for the largest share of families, accounting for 47.7%. This highlights the significant role of the agricultural sector in supporting household livelihoods. Additionally, employment in various jobs contributes to the income of 22.7% of families, while business activities support 20.5%, both representing significant portions of economic engagement beyond farming. A smaller segment, 9.1% of families, depends on other miscellaneous sources of income.

Table 4. Academic Performance (Grade)

Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 2.0	1	.8	.8	.8
	2.0-3.0	7	5.3	5.3	6.1
	3.0-3.5	69	52.3	52.3	Participants'
	Above 3.5	55	41.7	41.7	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data 2024

The academic performance of the surveyed students shows a broad spectrum of achievements. At the lower end, only 1% of students had a CGPA below 2.00, indicating impoverished academic standing. Another 5% fell within the 2.00 to 3.00 range, suggesting there is considerable room for improvement for this group. The most significant proportion of students, 52%, achieved CGPAs between 3.00 and 3.50, reflecting solid and consistent academic performance. Notably, a substantial 41% of students earned CGPAs between 3.50 and 4.00, demonstrating a high level of academic excellence. Overall, the data reveal that while a small fraction of students struggle academically, the majority maintain good to outstanding academic records, underscoring a generally strong performance across the surveyed group.

Table 5. SES Impacts Academic Performance

Frequency			**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	Strongly agree	36	27.3	27.3	27.3
	Agree	65	49.2	49.2	76.5
	Neutral	23	17.4	17.4	93.9
	Disagree	6	4.5	4.5	98.5
	Strongly disagree	2	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data 2024

This table represents respondents' opinions on the impact of socio-economic status (SES) on academic performance. 27.3% of respondents strongly agree that SES impacts academic performance. 49.2% of respondents agree with this statement, making it the largest group. 17.4% of respondents are neutral, indicating no strong opinion. 4.5% of respondents disagree with the statement.1.6% strongly disagree. A combined 76.5% of respondents (Strongly Agree + Agree) believe SSE positively impacts academic performance, while only 6.1% (Disagree + Strongly Disagree) think otherwise.

Table 6. How SES Impacts Academic Performance

Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Affirmative impact	39	29.5	29.5	29.5
	Negative impact	42	31.8	31.8	61.4
	No impact	38	28.8	28.8	90.2
	Not sure	13	9.8	9.8	100.0
	Total	132	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data 2024

The table shows how SES impacts Academic Performance. 29.5% of respondents believe SES has a positive impact on academic performance. 31.8% of respondents perceive a negative impact, the largest group in this analysis. Moreover, 28.8% think SSE has no significant effect on academic performance. Then, 9.8% are uncertain about the impact. Responses are divided, with a slight tilt towards negative perceptions at 31.8%, though 29.5% see it positively, and 28.8% believe it has no effect.

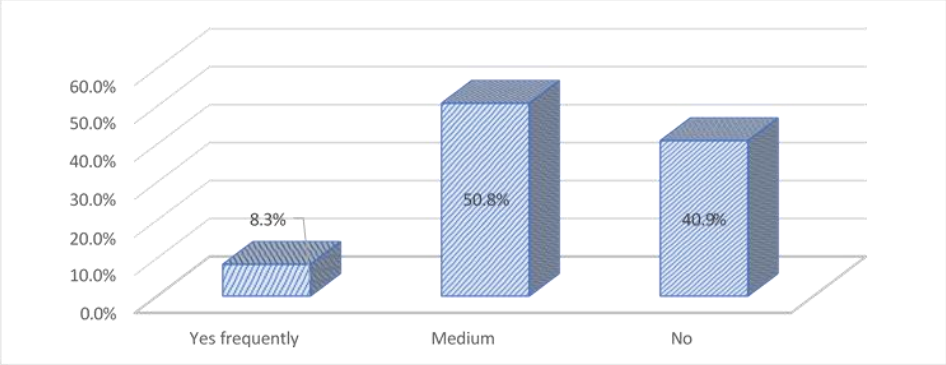

Figure 3. Status Family Affects Academic Performance
Source: Field Data 2024

The survey shows the percentage of students who experience different levels of family pressure on their academic performance, among 8.8% of students reported “yes, frequently”, indicating a high level of family pressure. 50.8% of students reported that the pressure was "medium", and 40.9% stated that there was “no” pressure.

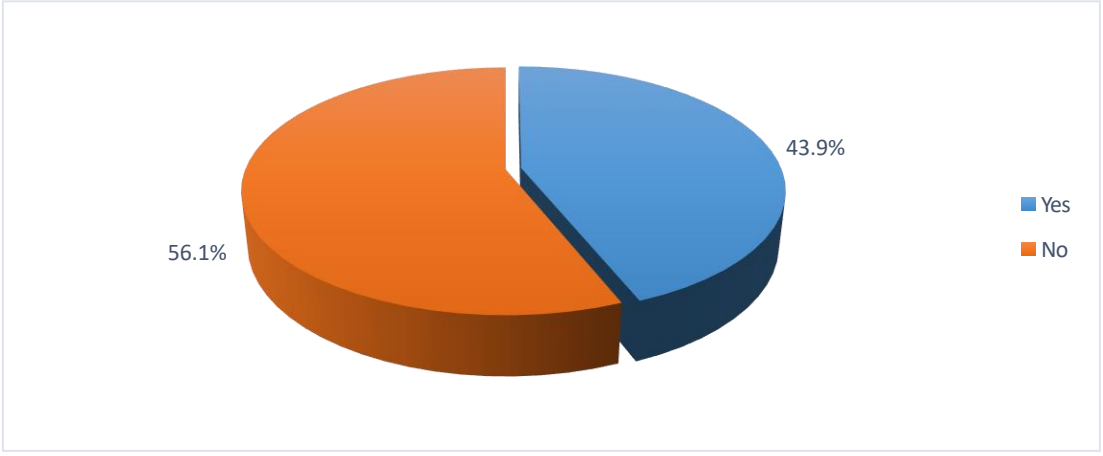

Figure 4. Faced challenges in Paying Tuition Fees
Source: Field Data 2024

The graph shows the percentage of respondents who faced challenges in paying tuition fees. 43.9% of respondents said "yes" they faced difficulties in paying tuition fees, while 56.1% said "no".

Correlation Analysis

The analysis of the correlation between the Average CGPA of respondents and their parents' highest education, family income, and family income source is given below.

Pearson Correlation: Measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables. Values range from -1 (perfect negative correlation) to +1 (perfect positive correlation), with 0 indicating no correlation at all.

Table 7. Correlation

	Average CGPA	Parents education	family income	family income source
Average CGPA	1			
Parents education	.043	1		
Family income	.093	.318**	1	
Family income source	.193*	.254**	.382**	1

Correlation with Average CGPA and Other Variables

Average CGPA and Parents' Education: The correlation coefficient is 0.043, which is very close to zero, indicating a weak or negligible relationship between Average CGPA and Parents' Education. This suggests that the level of parents' education has little to no effect on the student's CGPA.

***Average CGPA and Family Income*:** The correlation coefficient is 0.093, which is also very low, indicating a weak positive correlation. This suggests that family income has a slight positive effect on Average CGPA, but the relationship is not strong.

***Average CGPA and Family Income Source*:** The correlation coefficient is 0.193, indicating a weak positive correlation. This suggests that the source of family income may have a small but positive influence on the student's CGPA. The relationships between Average CGPA and the other variables (Parents' Education, Family Income, and Family Income Source) are weak, with only a slight positive correlation.

The work primarily aimed to explore the correlation and impact of academic performance and socio-economic background on university students in Bangladesh. The results obtained from the field data represent a mixed outcome.

The findings indicate that the parents of the interviewees have relatively low educational levels, with only 24% holding university degrees. A total of 65% of parents had only finished high school (24%), primary school (33%), or had no formal education at all (10%). This pattern of parents is similar to what is happening in many South Asian nations, where historical social and economic constraints have made it difficult for people to access higher education (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2013). However, the CGPA scores of the interviewees indicate that most of the pupils are performing well in university education. There were only 1% of people with a CGPA below 2.00 and 5% of those with a CGPA between 2.00 and 3.00. The other 52% had CGPAs between 3.00 and 3.50, while an incredible 41% had CGPAs between 3.50 and 4.00. This pattern shows that most students are doing well, even though their families are poor and don't have much education (Macaulay et al., 2023). Previous

research has shown that parental education is a significant factor in determining educational outcomes, but individual effort, institutional support, and peer influences may mitigate its effect (Sirin, 2005; White, 1982). Tinto's (1993) theory of student integration suggests that integrating academically and socially into university life can help students address problems they may face at home, leading to greater success and perseverance.

The respondents' views on the link between academic achievement and socioeconomic status (SES) indicate that they have a profound understanding of how social and economic backgrounds influence educational success. One interesting finding is that 76.5% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the socioeconomic background of children affects their academic performance. This finding aligns with numerous studies that demonstrate the significant and complex impact of socioeconomic class on students' academic performance (Abdu-Raheem, 2015; Adegoke & Osokoya, 2015). Students' understanding of how socioeconomic status (SES) affects individuals aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital. Children from wealthier families are more likely to live in households that value education and provide them with the necessary support to excel in school. Studies from South Asia, such as the one by Asadullah and Chaudhury (2013), demonstrate a link between the wealth and education of parents and the educational success of their children in Bangladesh.

However, when the question concerning how socioeconomic position affects academic performance was asked more specifically, the statistics revealed a significant difference. Most of the respondents (31.8%) who were concerned about social and economic problems that hindered their school attendance stated that their socioeconomic status exacerbated this issue. This aligns with research indicating that thinking about money can make people feel uneasy, less mentally resilient, and less attentive in class (Mani et al., 2013). On the other hand, 29.5% said that socioeconomic status (SES) had a favourable effect. This could mean that those with higher SES are aware that they have better access to opportunities, more robust educational resources, and more stable school environments (Rodríguez-Hernández et al., 2020). Many people (28.8%) who responded to the survey believed that SES did not affect academic success. Students know that both individual and institutional variables can help lessen the negative consequences of SES. Some of these factors include peer pressure, intrinsic motivation, and academic surroundings that are beneficial (Thomas, 2002; Tinto, 1993). These diverse views illustrate how students perceive SES in various ways. Sirin's (2005) global meta-analysis reveals that SES remains a moderate predictor of academic performance. However, its explanatory power varies depending on the context and is influenced by factors such as school quality, community expectations, and individual resilience.

In the findings, the correlation between parents' education and average CGPA was determined to be $r = 0.043$, which is very close to zero. This suggests that there is almost no direct correlation, indicating that the education level of parents in this sample has a minimal impact on students' college performance (Tadese et al., 2022). This result appears to contradict much of the international research, which typically indicates a moderate relationship between parents' educational attainment and their children's academic performance (Azhar et al., 2014; Ghaemi & Yazdanpanah, 2014; White, 1982). One reason could be that students in the public university may have already overcome the disadvantages associated with having parents who did not attend college (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2013; Núñez et al., 2024). The average CGPA and family income had a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.093$, indicating a very modest positive relationship. This suggests that higher family

wealth may be associated with better school achievement, although the relationship is not particularly strong. This aligns with research that suggests family income often facilitates rather than determines academic achievement by providing students with access to resources such as private tutoring, improved study environments, and reduced financial stress.

The average CGPA and the source of family wealth had the strongest relationship, with a r-value of 0.193, which is still a weak positive association. This means that students whose families have more steady or varied sources of income may do better in school. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) concept of economic capital, which posits that the type and consistency of income create an environment that indirectly supports students' academic performance by enhancing their living conditions, nutrition, and reducing their stress levels at home and in educational settings.

The weak links between CGPA and these socioeconomic indicators highlight the complexity and interplay of factors that influence academic performance. Tinto (1993) states that academic success is influenced not only by external factors but also by how well students integrate into the intellectual and social life of their schools. Thomas (2002) also discusses how "institutional habitus," which refers to the set of habits and expectations that universities have, may help students from less privileged backgrounds succeed. Additionally, psychological and cognitive studies indicate that daily financial worries can impact mental bandwidth, potentially affecting academic focus (Mani et al., 2013). The weak associations here may mean that these students, even if they come from different SES backgrounds, benefit from compensatory institutional supports, personal resilience, or strong peer networks that help them overcome the usual problems that come with low SES.

Conclusion

This study shows that although many students in Bangladesh from lower socioeconomic backgrounds come from households with limited education and income, they still perform well at the university level. There are weak connections between CGPA and socioeconomic variables, suggesting that individual resilience, supportive peer networks, and institutional factors can greatly reduce the disadvantages usually linked to SES. These findings imply that higher education policy must go beyond just financial support. It should focus on creating more inclusive academic cultures, implementing mentoring programs, and providing psychological support to help all students succeed, regardless of their backgrounds.

This work provides an initial understanding of the relationship between SES and academic success. For a clearer picture, future research should explore this topic further, possibly involving a larger sample size to improve the reliability and applicability of the results across more situations. Increasing the sample size would make the findings more statistically robust and trustworthy, offering a deeper insight into the complex links between socioeconomic conditions and academic achievement.

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