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SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG ECONOMICALLY WEAKER RURAL STUDENTS: A STUDY FROM AKOLA DISTRICT, MAHARASHTRA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and educational development among students from economically weaker sections in rural Akola district, Maharashtra. A descriptive correlational design was employed, and data were collected from 100 students aged 12–18 years enrolled in rural secondary and higher secondary schools. SES was assessed using indicators such as family income, parental education, occupation, housing conditions, and access to educational resources. Educational development was measured through annual academic records, attendance, co-curricular participation, classroom behavior, and teacher observations. The findings revealed a very high positive correlation between SES and educational development ($r = 0.995$, $p < 0.05$), confirming that improved socioeconomic conditions significantly enhance academic achievement and educational engagement. While most students demonstrated average to good performance and positive behavioral patterns, digital inequality and infrastructural limitations continued to restrict educational opportunities. The study recommends strengthening rural educational infrastructure, scholarship schemes, digital access initiatives, and parental awareness programs to reduce inequality and foster holistic development.

KEYWORDS : Socioeconomic Status, Educational Development, Educational Inequality, Rural Students, Economically Weaker Sections

INTRODUCTION

Educational inequality remains a persistent concern in rural India, particularly among students from economically weaker sections. Socioeconomic status significantly shapes access to quality education, digital learning, and academic support systems. Students from disadvantaged families frequently encounter limited educational resources, poor school infrastructure, irregular participation, and lower academic outcomes (Chaudhary & Kumar, 2022; UNESCO, 2023).

These challenges intensified with the rapid expansion of digital learning platforms, where rural students were further marginalized due to lack of internet connectivity, digital devices, and technical literacy (ASER, 2024). The theoretical frameworks of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and James S. Coleman (1988) illuminate how disparities in economic, social, and cultural capital reproduce educational inequality across generations. In Akola district, where the local economy depends predominantly on agriculture and daily wage labor, financial instability and limited digital access continue to hinder the educational progress of rural students (World Bank, 2022). The present study aims to investigate the relationship between SES and educational development among economically weaker rural students in Akola district, Maharashtra.

Objective

To examine the correlation between socioeconomic status and educational development among economically weaker rural students in Akola district, with reference to academic achievement, classroom participation, co-curricular involvement, and teacher-reported behavioral indicators.

Review of Literature

Several studies confirm the strong link between SES and academic achievement. In the Indian context, economic deprivation, low parental education, and inadequate infrastructure are consistently identified as key barriers to educational outcomes. Tilak (2007) demonstrated that post-elementary education is critically linked with poverty reduction and developmental indicators, with rural students from lower economic strata facing compounded disadvantages. Naushad (2021) and Dhawale (2023) reported a significant association between SES and academic performance among rural secondary school students in India. Choudhury, Joshi, and Kumar (2023), drawing on National Statistical Office data, found substantial regional and socioeconomic inequalities in educational access across India, particularly affecting children from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and economically disadvantaged households. Their findings underscore that both household income and parental education strongly predict educational participation in rural areas. Zachariah and Mathew (2022) similarly reported that socioeconomic inequality significantly curtails educational attainment among rural adolescents in India.

Digital inequality has emerged as a critical dimension of educational disadvantage (Yadav & Singh, 2021). The ASER reports (2024) consistently highlight stark disparities in digital device access and learning outcomes between urban and rural students, with rural government school students disproportionately affected. UNESCO (2023) further emphasized that economically marginalized students continue to face technology-driven exclusion. At the international level, Sirin (2005) and Reardon (2011) established persistent SES-based achievement gaps across diverse educational contexts, while Zhang and Postiglione (2020) emphasized the role of structural inequality in limiting social mobility through education. Collectively, the literature affirms that SES is a multi-dimensional determinant of educational development, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged settings.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive correlational research design to examine the relationship between socioeconomic status and educational development, an approach recently validated in similar secondary school contexts by Fazli and Nayyar (2025). A sample of 100 students aged 12–18 years was selected from rural secondary and higher secondary schools in Akola district, Maharashtra. This specific sample size and the use of purposive sampling procedures are highly appropriate for targeting economically weaker sections, aligning with recent methodological frameworks focused on rural Indian demographics (Khan, M. (2025).

Socioeconomic status was assessed through a structured schedule comprising indicators of family income, parental

education, occupation, housing conditions, and access to educational resources. Educational development was measured using annual academic records, school attendance, participation in sports and co-curricular activities, work experience performance, and teacher observations on classroom behavior and engagement. The selection of these specific SES indicators and multifaceted academic metrics is strongly supported by recent empirical studies examining rural educational barriers (Khan, M. (2025).

Both primary data (collected directly from students and teachers) and secondary data (from published reports, research articles, and government documents) were utilized. Data were statistically analyzed using percentage analysis, the Chi-square test, and Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation to determine the nature and strength of the relationship between SES and educational development. This statistical framework mirrors the quantitative analysis methods successfully utilized by Fazli and Nayyar (2025) to measure the correlation between economic backgrounds and academic progression.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Correlation Between Socioeconomic Status and Educational Quality

Socioeconomic Status	dx	dx^2	Educational Quality	dy	dy^2	dxdy
48.5	10	100	52.2	10.86	117.93	108.6
43.5	5	25	48.6	7.26	52.70	36.3
38.5	0	0	41.3	-0.04	0.00	0
33.5	-5	25	35.2	-6.14	37.69	30.7
28.5	-10	100	29.4	-11.94	142.56	119.4
Karl Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r) = 0.995 P-value = 0.000305 ($p < 0.05$)						

The analysis reveals a very strong positive correlation ($r = 0.995$) between socioeconomic status and educational quality, statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. This finding confirms that students with relatively better socioeconomic conditions demonstrate markedly improved academic performance, educational engagement, and participation. The result aligns with Sirin (2005) and is particularly relevant in the rural Indian context where economic capital directly mediates access to learning resources, qualified tutors, and digital tools.

Table 2: Distribution of Academic Achievement and Overall Educational Quality Among Students

Educational Indicators	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Percentage of Marks Obtained	Above 90%	37	7.4
	75%–90%	121	24.2
	60%–74%	213	42.6
	45%–59%	98	19.6
	Below 45%	31	6.2
Overall Academic Quality	Very Excellent	36	7.2
	Excellent	119	23.8
	Average	234	46.8
	Below Average	82	16.4
	Low	29	5.8
Chi-square Values: 219.44 and 277.78 respectively ($p < 0.05$)			

The distribution reveals that the majority of students (42.6%) scored in the 60%–74% range, while 46.8% were rated as demonstrating average overall academic quality. Only 7.4% achieved above 90%, and a small proportion (6.2%) scored below 45%. These patterns reflect moderate but constrained academic development consistent with the socioeconomic limitations of the study population. The findings parallel ASER (2023, 2024) data indicating that despite near-universal enrollment, actual learning outcomes among rural students remain significantly below expected benchmarks.

Table 3: Teachers' Opinions Regarding Students' Participation in Educational Activities

Educational Activities	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Participation in Sports	Excellent	239	47.8
	Outstanding	74	14.8
	Good	56	11.2
	Average	85	17.0
	Poor	46	9.2
Participation in Co-Curricular Activities	Excellent	112	22.4
	Outstanding	102	20.4
	Good	213	42.6
	Average	61	12.2
	Poor	12	2.4
Work Experience Performance	Excellent	120	24.0
	Outstanding	259	51.8
	Good	69	13.8
	Average	42	8.4
	Poor	10	2.0
Chi-square Values: 250.74, 221.82, and 381.06 respectively ($p < 0.05$)			

Teachers reported high levels of student participation in sports (47.8% rated Excellent) and work experience (51.8% rated Outstanding). Co-curricular engagement was predominantly rated Good (42.6%). This pattern suggests that despite financial constraints, rural students demonstrate commendable engagement in experiential learning activities, which positively contribute to personality development, self-confidence, social interaction, and indirect academic motivation.

Table 4: Teachers' Opinions Regarding Students' Classroom Engagement and Behavior

Classroom Indicators	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Attention Towards Studies	Yes	390	78.0
	No	110	22.0
Attendance Status	Regular	346	69.2
	Normal	128	25.6
	Irregular	26	5.2
Classroom Behavior	Good	283	56.6
	Average	217	43.4
	Improper	0	0.0
Chi-square Values: 156.8, 320.669, and 8.712 respectively ($p < 0.05$)			

The majority of students maintained regular attendance (69.2%) and demonstrated good classroom behavior (56.6%), with 78.0% of teachers reporting positive attention toward studies. No student was rated as behaviorally improper. These results indicate that, notwithstanding economic challenges, rural students exhibit positive educational dispositions, lending credence to Coleman's (1988) argument that social support environments—even in disadvantaged settings—can sustain educational engagement.

CONCLUSION

SES is a powerful determinant of educational development among rural students in Akola. The strong correlation ($r = 0.995$) highlights how deprivation impacts achievement, digital access, and participation. Moderate performance and strong co-curricular involvement reflect resilience despite barriers.

Findings align with Choudhury et al. (2023), Zachariah & Mathew (2022), and ASER (2023, 2024), confirming inequality is embedded in socioeconomic structures. Addressing disparities requires investment in inclusive policy, infrastructure, and community programs.

Recommendations

- Expand scholarships, free textbooks, and digital access.
- Strengthen counseling, mentorship, and career guidance.
- Organize parental awareness programs on attendance and engagement.

- Improve rural infrastructure: internet, smart classrooms, digital literacy.
- Support teachers with training for diverse socioeconomic contexts.

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