

The Academic Performance Gap between Social Classes and Parenting Practices in Korea*

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This study attempts, using qualitative research methods, to identify a series of complex processes and mechanisms that turn the differences in parents' education level and occupational status into the gaps between their children's academic achievements. Highly educated parents with high occupational status are obsessed with top universities while less educated parents with low occupational status tend to be less interested in educational capital. Highly educated upper-middle-class parents themselves have strong educational aspirations. They also try to inspire educational aspirations and academic enthusiasm in their children through their early and deep involvement in a long-term educational strategy. They repeatedly teach their children to have aspirations toward higher professional status as well as a competitive attitude in academic performance. In contrast, the less educated working-class parents do not emphasize the importance of having a high level of education and 'a good educational background' to their children.

The differences in the educational aspirations and parenting practices between the two social classes primarily derive from their varying life experiences in the social structure. The upper-middle-class interviewees said that their obsession with 'a good educational background' was closely related to their fear that their children could fall from the middle class. In contrast to the middle class interviewees, the working-class parents had no memories of painful experiences related to their lack of higher education. They claimed that they rarely ever felt inferior and that they rarely regretted their low level of education. In addition, they did not believe that their lives were more difficult due to their 'low education'.

Keywords: Parents' Socioeconomic Status (SES), Academic Performance, Educational Aspirations, Parenting Practices, Paradox of Perceived Value of Education, Korea

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I. INTRODUCTION

The proposition that children from affluent families tend to do better in their studies has become a fact that nobody can deny. Meanwhile, the fact that “the higher the parents’ social status, the better the children’s grades, and the lower the social status, the poorer the grades” has been confirmed time and again by all sorts of investigation and research (Ju, D. 1998; Kim, H. and Lee, B. 2005; Park, C. and Do, J. 2005; Byun, S. and Kim, K. 2008). Their results are in agreement with numerous foreign antecedent studies (Coleman 1990; De Graaf et al. 2000; Jencks and Tach 2006).

As for the reason that children’s grades change according to their parents’ socioeconomic status, public sentiment commonly points to the difference in their capacity to spend on private education. However, the fact is that there is a static correlation between parents’ income and the scale of their private education expenditures (Choi, Y. 1999; Nam, K. 2008), but studies analyzing the effect of private education on grade improvement run contrary to one another, concluding that that there is an effect (Park C. and Do, J. 2005; Choi, H. 2007), or conversely that there is either no effect or that the effect is insignificant (Han, D. et al. 2001; Ban, S. et al. 2005). Regardless, when we look closely at the well-known fact that the effect of education can be swayed significantly by a student’s attitude and enthusiasm, even if we say that private education has an influence rather than a direct effect on grades, we can surmise that it exhibits the power to influence bit by bit the variables that influence a child’s attitude toward their studies.¹

If we combine the results of the precedent domestic and foreign research handling the relationship between family background and academic achievement, generally speaking, the variable that has the most distinct relationship with academic achievement is the father’s education level, followed by the parents’ employment and income levels (De Graaf and

¹ Related to this, Kim, K. (2005), through multiple regression analysis, discovered the moment of insertion of variables that reflected a child’s interest in education, and the disappearance of the statistical significance of private education. He also is among those who take the stance that the power of private education expenses brings out a child’s interest in education.

Ganzeboom, 1993; Phang, H. and Kim, K. 2002; Park C. and Do, J. 2005; Chang, S. and Sohn, B. 2005). But in certain studies, there are cases in which the influence of income appears inconsistent or unclear (Yeo, E. et al. 2007; Kim, D. 2008), so normally it is presumed that income level does not have as strong an effect on academic achievement as parental education level.² The meaning of all of this is that as a background factor influencing the level of academic achievement, economic capacity is not the number one variable, and cultural capital and other influential variables are more important than economic capacity in explaining the relationship between education level and background (Erikson and Jonsson, 1996: 21; Sewell et al., 2004: 28).

Regarding this point, parents' "socioeconomic status" has been postulated as a concept that includes income, education level, professional status, etc., but there has been nothing to clearly illuminate the reason that such cultural resources as education level and professional status appear to be the major primary influences. These days, quantitative research showing parents' socioeconomic status to be an independent variable and children's total years of education, highest level of education, academic achievement, probability of entering higher education, etc., as dependent variables stress the importance of illuminating the influential power and relevance of all variables. Antecedent research successfully scrutinizes specific aspects of quantitative research methodologies, such as cause and effect relationships, and relevance and change, but there is nothing that illuminates the black box existing between that cause and effect, namely the specific processes and mechanisms that exert influence and by which relevant factors interplay (Lamont and Lareau, 1988: 154). Hence the objective of this research is to use qualitative research methods to find the series of complex mechanisms and processes that appear with changes in parents' education level and professional status. If existing quantitative research illuminates the duality of the causal relationship among factors in educational achievement, this research, which has adopted

² As an example that shows this, Beblo and Lauer (2004) found through an analysis of the relationship between 1990s Poland's economic change and educational achievement, that parents' financial resources, such as wealth and income, and unemployment, had very little to do with a child's educational achievement; on the other hand, they came to the conclusion that parents' educational level was a much more important factor in swaying a child's academic achievement.

qualitative methods, emphasizes the apprehension of answers to the question of why and how these conditions come about.

And so, the primary issue this paper deals with is how parents' educational aspirations and child-rearing methods, as they pertain to education, differ between the lower and upper social strata, and moreover, by what causes and mechanisms those differences appear and persist. And the second research question is, when do the differing child-rearing traditions and strategies among different social strata produce predictable results? Outside of the decisive factors appearing in previous research, are there any other factors that influence academic scores?

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Research on Factors that Hinder Academic Achievement

Research regarding factors that influence academic achievement can be divided into that which deals with factors that hinder academic achievement versus that which deals with factors that promote academic achievement. First, low income and poverty, the absence of one parent, and low parental education level and status stand out as hindrance factors.

Compared to children who have never or have only temporarily experienced poverty, children who continuously experience poverty score lower on intelligence tests. Also, it has been inferred that the reason for the deficient cognitive abilities of children of impoverished families is that they are subjected to stress during pregnancy or receive insufficient developmental stimulus from their families (McLoyd 1998: 198); accordingly it is not only the case that poverty hinders cognitive development in childhood, but also that it casts a negative influence over adolescent academic achievement as well (Conger et al. 1997: 308).

As for factors that influence impoverished children's intellectual growth, it is known that a lack of appropriate educational resources (books, magazines, travel and field trip opportunities, etc.) to stimulate children's cognitive development, in addition to family environment, parenting style, the child's health, etc., have an effect (Guo and Harris 2000). At the same time, a

lack of economic resources also brings with it a lack of education-relevant cultural resources, skews a non-material resource—parental treatment of the children—and impedes the development of the child’s intelligence by negatively affecting that child’s health.

Even the absence of one parent because of divorce or death appears to have a negative influence on a child’s degree of educational achievement (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994: 45; Ku, I. 2003: 17). Compared to children of married parents, children of divorced parents experience more strife and have harsher experiences, and because of this the problem of adaptation arises (Grych and Fincham 1990).

As an alternate explanation of the influence of family structure, there is one interpretation that states that the absence of one parent brings about the loss of a role model, and carelessness in direction, teaching, and control (Thomson et al. 1992). As for research purporting that socialization within the family is carried out completely by the parents, according to Thomson and others (Thomson et al. 1992), when compared with two parents, single parents’ demands on children are lower, their degree of control is weaker, and the amount of time they spend with their children on homework, principles, reading, etc., is smaller.

As for this relationship, there is a connection between single-parent nurturing manners and insufficient income or poverty. Single parents, who cannot help but lack economic resources when compared to dual-parent families, experience psychological stress. This encourages a *laissez-faire* style of parenting, which eventually leads to the detriment of a child’s degree of academic achievement (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Conger et al. 1997).³

Parents of low educational and professional status cannot effectively support children’s schooling or intervene positively in their educational activities (Lareau 2003). In addition, there is a series of opinions stating that when compared with the middle class, the poor have relatively low aspirations

³ According to Cummings and others (Cummings et al. 1994), when parents fret or experience discord because of financial problems, their children, and in particular sons, are susceptible to that discord, and so become extremely angry with or engulfed in feelings of hostility towards them. However, in the case of single-parent families, compared with dual-parent families, because the probability of falling into hardship is higher, it is easier to fail at academic achievement by means of the same cause.

for their children's education because they are not as worried about their children's downward social mobility (Boudon 1974; Erikson and Jonsson 1996). Between these two groupings of social status exists a difference in the system of values and deeds regarding a child's education. In other words, as a result, the difference in the distribution of the class origins of students who go on to high levels of education is due to the difference in the degree, according to class distinction, that relative importance is placed on high-level education and the degree to which the possibility of attaining the resources for higher education is recognized (Edwards and Roberts 1980; Archer 2003: 9).

Not only parents lacking the experience of higher education are unable to give specific advice to their children regarding how to study or how to progress academically; they do not even have a helpful social network. Relatively uneducated working-class or impoverished parents, even when the occasion calls for them to be involved in their children's education, tend to lack the capacity or ability to do so, and as such "think educational issues are solely the teacher's responsibility" (Lareau 2003: 239-43).

2. Research on Factors which Facilitate School Grades

It can be inferred that there are two possible reasons that the children of parents of high socioeconomic standing take the lead in academic achievement: they are the recipients of genes for academic excellence, or they receive advantageous support that produces learned behaviors. Taking into account the results of related research in the field of sociology, one can imagine three cases illustrating the latter: "First, the inheritance of economic resources; second, the impartation of cultural resources; and third, the indoctrination of expectations and aspirations through role modeling" (Kalmijn 1994: 260).

1) *Cultural Capital*

Cultural capital theory started taking the spotlight as "the proposition of a new point of view asking how a family's social and cultural resources explicitly and implicitly raise academic achievement levels" (Lamont and Lareau 1988: 154). Since the 1980s, much research corroborating cultural capital theory has entered the picture. DiMaggio and Mohr (DiMaggio and

Mohr 1985) surveyed the attitudes and knowledge regarding culture and showed that cultural capital exerts influence even on high school grades. Also, on the point of whether there is research stating that “even if we know that a family’s educational resources (newspapers, dictionaries, etc.) regulate family background, they also exert a constant influence on a child’s academic achievement, as upper-middle-class parents use their educational resources to create a domestic atmosphere that promotes academic capability, study activities, and attitudes” (Teachman 1987: 549-53). There is also the standpoint that “cultural capital such as the quality of language parents use and the educational atmosphere of the family have the greatest effect on a child’s academic achievement” (Bernstein 1973; Kim, S. 2009: 349).

On the one hand, Lareau (Lareau 1987; 2003), who has almost exclusively adopted qualitative methodologies in her research on educational stratification, takes the stance that middle-class parents have child-rearing practices distinct from those of working-class and poor parents. According to her research, upper-middle-class parents take great efforts to ensure that their children lead a structured life, and using systematic planning, they make their children participate in all sorts of private education (gymnastics, soccer, music, art, etc.), thus developing their children’s talents and regulating their behavior. They teach their children to express themselves and maintain specific goals, and they monitor their children’s school life on an equal footing with teachers by cooperating positively but sometimes offering their criticisms.

Even in South Korea, there has recently been research and applied analysis of the concept of cultural capital. Chang, M. (2002) divided parents’ cultural capital into that of artistic tastes and that of cognitive abilities (study habits, computer literacy, English communication ability), analyzed the influence these factors have on children’s scholastic achievement, and as a result uncovered the fact that even taking into account parents’ education level, there is a static correlation between the volume of cultural capital and children’s grades. In addition, when compared with the cultural capital of the ‘artistic taste’ variety, the effect of the ‘cognitive ability’ variety on grades is somewhat larger.

Kim, K. and Byun, S. (2007), after measuring cultural capital as the frequency of attending movies, cultural performances, musical performances, and art museums, as well as reading preferences, analyzed its effect as a

decisive factor in academic achievement. However, the effect of cultural capital on academic achievement either did not appear, or depending on the kind of measure used, the results were contrary or a clear conclusion was not possible.

Kim, H. and Lee, B. (2007) treated annual household expenditures for cultural activities and the degree to which families appreciated culture and arts together as cultural capital. However, time spent conversing with family along with the degree to which the family took an interest in the student, was treated as social capital. They then compared the influence of these variables of socioeconomic background. As a result, they showed through an independent model that after considering the variables of parents' socioeconomic standing, cultural capital variables displayed either no correlation or negative correlation.

2) Social Capital and Parental Concern

Because of the influence of Coleman and his concept of social capital, from the 1990s much corroborative research concerning the effects of diverse variables on academic achievement has appeared. Until the 21st century, research that usually measures a family's social capital as the amount of conversation children have with their parents, the degree to which parents expect their children to complete university (or not), the level to which a child's life is directed by parents (inspecting homework, TV viewing, amount of time spent alone), the degree to which parents participate in school, etc., had continuously appeared. This research links these variables with a child's grades and home life in a causal relationship (Valenzuela and Dornbusch 1994; Wright et al. 2001; Dika and Singh 2002).

Finally, as for social capital related to educational achievement, after excluding elements like family structure, number of siblings, and ethnicity, the concept of 'parental involvement' has become categorized. The idea that "parents' concern for their children's studies is the parents' injecting of resources into the domain of their children's school life" (Grolnick and Slowiaczek 1994: 238) has something in common with Coleman's concept that "the social capital of the family is the parent-child relationship" (Coleman 1988: 110).

But these existing studies have different conclusions: some say that

parental involvement improves academic achievement (Sui-Chu and Willms 1996), others conclude that it lowers academic achievement (Milne et al. 1986; McNeal 1999: 118), and still others take the stance that it has no particular influence (Domina 2005).

As far as Korean research is concerned, Ju, D. (1998) measured and analyzed ‘involvement acts’ as nine variables, including face-to-face time with homeroom teachers, conversations about school grades and career paths, participation in PTA meetings, etc., and found that while there were variables that exerted a positive influence on academic achievement, variables for regulation and supervision did not have an effect. Byun S. et al. (2008) performed a factorial analysis on the results of measuring parental involvement variables as sixteen items, including parents’ membership and participation in PTA groups, homework supervision and discussions about school grades, reciprocal interaction with other students’ parents, and household rules. They weighed the effects, but found that the influence of the parental involvement variable was insignificant. Regarding results like these, which are at odds with expectations, Chang, S. and Sohn, B. (2005) show that even if you introduce variables such as parental involvement or familial emotional bonds, the effect of parents’ socioeconomic status (SES) on academic achievement does not change greatly. They take the stance that, rather than parental involvement, adopting an employment aspirations parameter is much more convincing.

If we combine preceding research and associated theories and schematize them, it looks like [Figure 1]. Preceding research contends that as for cultural capital theory, cultural capital can on the one hand be classified, like a fine artistic aroma, as a variable that acts as a go-between for parents’ socioeconomic status and their child’s academic achievement. On the other hand, social capital theory (though the relevance to parents’ class position is not clear), from parent-child relationships to parents’ involvement in education, is a parameter of family background.⁴ If social capital theory

⁴ In this thesis, the concepts of family background and parental socioeconomic status are considered one in the same, but when referencing Coleman’s social capital theory, there can be a difference between the two. Coleman saw that, although it doesn’t pique all that much interest, with regard to parents’ socioeconomic standing, or in other words, their class level, social capital has a very intimate connection with individual

ignores parents' class status, solely mentioning the influence of parents' educational aspirations and nurturing methods on children's academic achievement, then cultural capital theory sees class culture, which is indistinguishable from parents' class status, as passing down cultural resources and skills for success from within the educational system. Consequently, existing social capital theory does not illuminate the relationship between educational aspirations and parents' socioeconomic standing. While on the one hand it argues that the methods parents use and the extent to which they are involved in education have sway over a child's academic achievement, cultural capital theory simply maintains that parents' class culture itself already involves variables that are advantageous or disadvantageous to a child's academic competitiveness, but does not take interest in the specific mechanisms. Hence, this research attempts to take a look at the items prior theories have treated carelessly, as well as elucidate the process of give and take of influence among all factors.

Domestic research that has applied these theories to Korean society has not come to consistent conclusions, but if the more valid theories are summarized approximately, they can be categorized as follows: in the case of cultural capital theory, cultural capital in the form of cognitive ability (study, hobbies, English speaking proficiency, etc.), to a certain degree, affects academic achievement more than cultural capital in the form of artistic tastes; in the case of social capital theory, anticipated level of education (educational aspirations), conversations about academic achievement, amount of support for studies, etc., of course have a positive influence. Findings like these in existing research suggest that via educational aspirations and nurturing customs, parental social status can have an influence on academic achievement. However, the reason that this research has not adopted the terminology of 'cultural capital' or 'social capital' is that these terms have been included so widely in concepts of such diverse form and character that now they have become far too abstract. If a concept's breadth is extensive,

family communities' cultural traditions and religion, etc. For example, he saw that the academic fervor Asian families possess or Catholic school parents' religious traditions positively influenced children's academic achievement. As such, for Coleman, social capital has an unclear connection with socioeconomic status, but its connection with family cultural background is distinct.

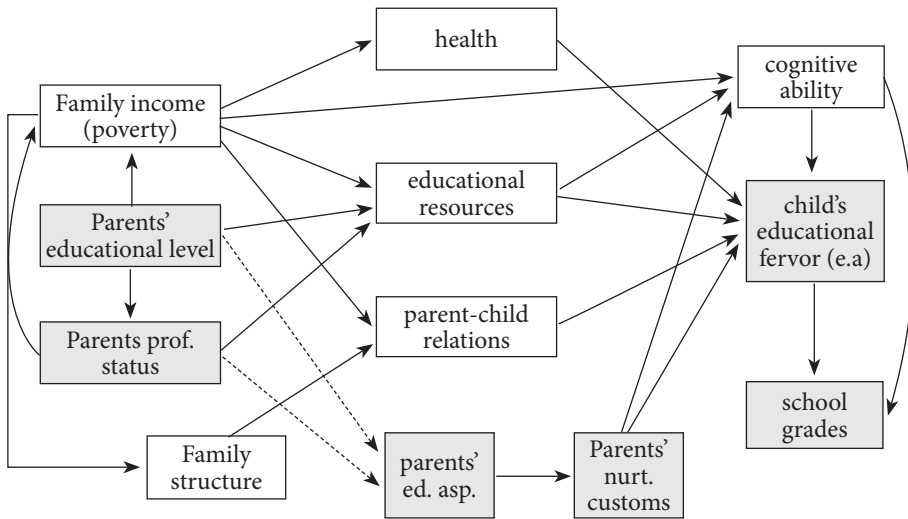


Figure 1. synthesis of prior research on decisive factors in school grades.

it goes without saying that confusion and misunderstanding in scientific communication will follow, and this research focuses on specific techniques rooted in fact rather than abstract concepts.

As shown in [Figure 1], factors that influence adolescent school grades are numerous, and factors like innate intellectual capacity, which this paper is not concerned with, are excluded from the figure. This paper attempts to examine the forms in which “educational aspirations, reputed to be the core factor in the process of educational achievement”⁵ (Sewell et al. 1980; Teachman and

⁵ The term ‘educational aspiration’ used in this paper was decided upon due to its fulfillment of the following two requirements. First, not only is it one quantitative aspect of academic achievement, but also it means the qualitative objective reflecting discerning valuations. The more some people do not settle for high school graduation and aim to attend vocational schools or 4-year universities, the standard of educational aspirations increases. In other words, it can be defined as ‘the degree to which effort and resources are invested within the ranking system of value derived from educational capital, with the goal of relatively high educational institutions.’ Secondly, educational aspiration means, under the conditions (parental professional status and education level, income, child’s academic scores and academic fervor, etc.), the goal of academic achievement by which students determine they can succeed somehow, and means, far from being something they anticipate obscurely, a specific

Paasch 1998) from 1960s educational stratification research until today, and parental participation in education appear and operate in Korean society, and what relation there is between parents' educational level and professional class status.

III. RESEARCH METHODS AND OBJECTIVES

Within the category of qualitative research, this research, through detailed and thorough collection of materials, uses a "bounded system," or case study⁶ methodology (Creswell 2005: 87) of deeply exploring a case. In this research, the cases are Korean students who graduated from high school and their parents. There were times when a student and one parent (father or mother) were investigated together as one case, but this was for the purpose of determining differences in interpretation and experiential testimony relating to entering college. Because they were not separated in the investigation, they can be considered as a single case.

In this study, "in order to show all points of variation, the 'maximum variation'⁷ strategy" (Creswell 2005: 151-2) has been employed. To accomplish this, diverse cases were collected and recorded to establish common patterns. Toward this purpose, not just students with good grades from highly educated upper-middle-class families and students with poor grades from uneducated working-class families, but also students with poor grades from upper-middle-class families and high achievers from working-class families were included.

goal into which they invest capital, effort, and time in order to succeed.

⁶ This research is an instrumental case study that utilizes cases simply as tools to illustrate the issue that is the main focus of the study, and is a collective case study with more than two cases. Accordingly, the important thing in this study is not the personality or characteristics of the cases, but rather the use of the cases as material to analyze the problem of differing levels of academic achievement among children of different social classes.

⁷ Regarding qualitative research's strategy for intentional sampling, Miles and Huberman proposed 16 strategies. Refer to Miles and Huberman (1994) regarding these strategies.

This study's purpose is to establish the mechanisms of the relationship between parents' social standing and children's academic achievement. Therefore, I have divided the subjects according to factors of family background: first, upper-middle-class families with parents of high educational and professional levels, and conversely, working-class families and relatively poor families. Then, according to academic ability, I divided them into those who went on to prestigious universities and non-prestigious university attendees or non-university attendees. In this study, with the father's education level used as the standard, those who had graduated from university were considered highly educated and those who had graduated from high school or lower were considered uneducated. Also, as for the father's professional status, usually those in high management positions or those engaged in specialized jobs received a high professional status score, which in existing research (Yoo, H. and Kim, W. 2002) is calculated using one's educational level and income; meanwhile, those engaged in unskilled labor, those with technical jobs, those employed in the service sector, and small business owners engaged in sales were classified at the lower level.

To be able to differentiate among children's levels of academic achievement more clearly, I have divided high school students into a group of extremely high level achievers and another group of middle and low-level achievers. In the case of the former, subjects were selected among students who had entered Seoul National University, Yonsei University, and Korea University. The latter group is composed of those who scored in the middle or lower range on the college entrance examination and attended non-prestigious universities, or those who forewent university altogether. As for the university graduates, the choice to limit those in the former category to the three universities mentioned above reflects the Korean tendency to emphasize academic competition. In this study, the academic achievement of a family with an acceptance into a prestigious university is considered excellent, while that of a family with an acceptance into a non-prestigious university or lack of acceptance into university is seen as poor. The instances in which a child and the mother (or father) were interviewed together are considered a single case, so even though the total number of interviewees is 34, including 25 teenagers and 9 parents, because five of the parents' children had already been interviewed, they were excluded and so this study utilizes only 29 cases.

The results of the study of parental socioeconomic standing and children's academic achievement among these 29 cases are as follows.

Parent's SES	Superb Students	Low-Achieving Students	Total
Upper-middle-class	11 cases	2 cases	13
Working-class	5	11	16
Total	16	13	29

A list of the interviewed parents and students appears in appendices 1-4.

The subjects were interviewed in such a way that they could speak their minds about their parents' thoughts and values regarding education, study habits and environment, amount and methods of parental involvement, and work. The subjects as a rule were interviewed once, and if there was an occasion for additional questions or confirmations, email and telephone were used. The interviews took approximately one hour each, but among a total of 34 interviews the shortest was 26 minutes and the longest 1 hour and 34 minutes, resulting in an average interview time of 58 minutes.

This study, rather than using "statistical normalization," utilized the "analytical normalization" case study methodology attempted by Robert Yin. According to this methodology, statistical normalization is impossible in case studies, but analytical normalization that compares an already developed theory with evidential results from case studies is possible. Case study research lacks representativeness of its case studies, and so it fails at normalization because it attempts to normalize the investigated cases to different case studies. Thus, if one attempts to normalize research results with "theory" rather than different cases, analytical normalization becomes possible (Yin 2008: 73). This research groups cases into $2 \times 2 = 4$ categories according to parental socioeconomic status and children's academic achievement and compares each of them using "actual reproducible research" so that we can see whether every case will show the same results; and under different conditions, this research uses "theoretically reproducible research" to predict contrary results.⁸

⁸ Yin, with the idea that multiple cases studies are like doing plural experiments, takes

IV. COMPONENTS OF DECISIVE FACTORS IN DEGREE OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

1. Process of Consciousness-Raising of Educational Aspirations

In the results of this study, differences appear between the highly educated middle class and uneducated working class in values and aspirations regarding the child's education, methods for encouraging studying, and nurturing customs.

Educated upper-middle-class parents had a strong obsession regarding highly-ranked universities with high-value academic capital, and as such had strong competitive educational aspirations. These parents routinely expressed how highly they evaluated "good universities" and how passionately they wanted their children to go there whenever the chance arose.

In an interview with student Jung, Ji Yong regarding his choice of university, his father said in passing, "It would be great if you went to Seoul," and the mother said on a similar occasion, "You at least need to get into XX University." According to the mother's criteria, she believes that her daughter must go to one of these six universities: Seoul, Yonsei, Korea, XX, YY, or ZZ. If [he] can't get into any of those, [he'll] just have to study one more year." Jiyong mentioned that he had to study one more year due to his mother's view.

Another way that the students became aware of and benefited from their middle class parents' aspirations for studying was their parents' reaction to academic scores. Upper-middle-class parents thoroughly checked their

the stance that one must follow the logic of replicated research. "If every case used gives the expected result, then you can support the proposed research hypothesis very strongly from the start. If you draw contradictory conclusions from each and every case, you must either modify the research hypothesis or re-examine with different cases. The important stages in this kind of replicated research procedure develop into a concrete theoretical framework. In the theoretical framework, conditions (effective replication study) under which particular phenomena are likely to be discovered, and conditions under which those phenomena will not likely be discovered (theoretical replicated research), must be included (Yin 2008: 87).

children's grades and abilities and worked hard to make their children improve upon their weak points. Whenever they received test scores, because the mothers would either compliment and encourage, or unleash reprimand and scold, the showing of grades was always an event that was a source of tension and emotional interaction between the parents and children. Experiencing this kind of event regularly, children would, depending on the amount of study effort, repeatedly experience their parents' gladness and hope or disappointment and frustration, and thus became trained in the importance of studying.

It was because of an uncertain dread. If I couldn't [study] well, even at home, it was not good, and I also don't like falling behind others. I didn't have a roadmap for how to study for doing something in the future.... Since my parents took a thorough interest in my grades when they came out, if they said "It looks like you didn't put your best effort into this," I thought of my older brother being scolded a long time ago, and worried that I'd end up like him.... And I also have a bit of a high-strung personality, so if it was like that [if my grades were bad], I worried about what would happen, so I [studied] harder. (Interview with Jaehong An, after he studied hard)

The "reasons you have to study hard" emphasized by upper-middle-class parents are very simplistic and similar. One student relayed his parent's words: "Since we have no inheritance to pass down to you, if you want to have a comfortable life later, you must focus on studying so that you won't have any regrets" (Jang In Böm). Accordingly, the admonition that "striving to study is a matter of course" suggests itself as the reason one has to study hard at all times.

My parents said that if I didn't study hard I wouldn't be treated well, and they said that since they don't have a lot of money I have to study hard so I can live well later. They think there is no other way. It seems like they always talk that way. If you want to eat, you have to study. (Interview with Lee Kõn Wu)

Mother sometimes used to say, when she watched a drama (Korean soap opera), if a homeless or poor person appeared she would call me. Call me and say "If you don't study this is what will happen." (laughs) She wouldn't let me watch dramas; only when that kind of scene appeared she would call me and

tell me I'd become like that if I didn't study hard. (Interview with Ko Ŭn T'ae)

In this way, and also through grade checking, encouragement, and other repeated events, if the values of parents who emphasized the importance of and concentrated on study activities are injected into their children, the children's thoughts gradually begin to resemble their parents' high educational aspirations.

As part of the awareness-raising process, upper-middle-class parents also express their aspirations for their children to enter high-level professions. From when they are young, children are made aware of their parents' hopes for them to go into specialized white-collar professions such as law, diplomacy, or medicine, or to become high-level civil servants or professors.

In elementary school they have you write about your aspirations for the future. I wrote "train conductor." Mom had a meeting with my teacher, came home, and asked me why, of all the professions containing the Chinese character "士" (sa), I chose *kikwan-sa* (train conductor). *Köm-sa* (prosecutor), *p'an-sa* (judge), *kyo-sa* (teacher), *üi-sa* (doctor)—there are so many. Of all of them, why *kikwan-sa*? In elementary school, I didn't know anything so I didn't have a concept of this. At that time I thought freely riding around on a train sounded great so that's what I wrote, but as I grew up my thinking changed and became more realistic. (Interview with Jang In Böm)

The awareness-raising strategy of upper-middle-class parents to implant the will and motivation to study in their child is not just a matter of taming the mind and spirit, but also of acting to train the body so that from an early age, study practices are secondnature. They regulate behavior so that the child automatically sits at his desk to study, and selectively restrict distracting elements such as computer use, television watching, exercise activities, and friends. They make it so that, to the extent possible, children do not take interest in things outside of what is helpful for study activities. However, because these kinds of fixed rules are not always followed according to the parents' wishes, sometimes friction and discord arises regarding these lifestyle regulations. As a child grows up, if his desires to have diverse experiences and the expectations of his upper-middle-class parents who want him to focus only on studying come into conflict, all kinds of discord arise. However,

upper-middle-class parents have a tendency to be deeply involved in their children's lives and schooling, so even when discord arises, rather than avoiding it, in order to see their decisions and plans through to the end, they embrace this 'labor of love'.

...Anyway, if something gets in the way of studying, the parent-child relationship becomes tense. Even if there is no conflict, it gets rough. There's absolutely no way parents will just sit idly by and say, "What are you going to do? It's your business..." So the parents intervene and if they can send their kid to a better university, then 10 or 20 years later life will be different... I [the mother] manage my kid's scores but he just resists. He just thinks, "Whatever, it's enough if I just keep studying like I am now." But if I just thrust the numbers at him and show him how his grades have changed, and say, "Look at this and say something," in that case, he has nothing to say. That's because he knows he has to get into university through the regional quota system. If I do that, then there's nothing he can say, is there? ...I'm just saying he needs to study enough to achieve our goals, but he thinks I'm nagging him to study until he dies from exhaustion. (Interview with Yun Jöng Lan)

On the other hand, in this study's cases of working-class and low-income families, there were parents who were completely negligent and uninterested in their child's studies, and parents who, while communicating with their child only slightly, occasionally scolded them and told them to study. Parents of the former type think that "one's study is one's own business" and that "which school [for their child] to attend and what job [for their child] to choose" are not their concern but rather think "that's [their] child's problem to decide." Also, these parents' perspective is that "if [their] child studies hard on his own and is able to enter university, then as a parent [they] will support him, but if he is not interested in studying, [they] will not force him to do so." The reason they do not take a special interest in or support their child's studies is because of their attitude toward education, and also because they do not have adequate intellectual experiences themselves. Hanna Jang's parents did not even know how to interpret their daughter's college entrance exam practice test scores. They never once expressed, even in a roundabout way, their hopes for which university she should go to.

On the contrary, since I'm so obsessed with studying, at home my dad would say, "Why don't you stop studying?" That was the source of a lot of fights at home. I'm the kind of person who studies well at home, so I wanted it to be a bit of a quiet place. But Dad didn't understand, and he would watch TV (with the volume turned up loud), and if I asked, "Dad, could you turn the TV down?" he would ignore me a few times and finally say, "Are you always going to be like this?" He's even said, "Why don't you go outside and play instead?" (Interview with Jang Han Na)

Conversations about studying? We never had them. They never pushed me to study or anything like that.... A long time ago, maybe in my second year of junior high, the [television news] showed a story of a student who had committed suicide after the college entrance exam. I wasn't there at that time, but my dad said to my sister, while watching the TV, "Aren't you glad I don't make you all study?" (Interview with Kim Ji Ae)

In this type of family, there is no friction or tension regarding studies. Owing to the fact that, from the start, there is no anticipation of studying, the child who is lazy about studying is not especially vexed by or regretful about it. Even when Jǒng Kyǒngmo's and Oh Jǒnghŭi's siblings consistently failed to study and their grades were low, their parents did not give it much thought.

The second type of parent, the communicative type, desires that their child attend an appropriate four-year university by way of a humanities high school, as opposed to a vocational high school. Unlike upper-middle-class parents, these parents do not have the mindset that going to a "good university" or "high-level university" is absolutely necessary. There are some parents who dropped out of middle school, like those of Yang T'aegyun, who believe that a high school diploma is the minimum level of education needed to function in society, and accordingly try to make their child study through high school no matter what; but generally parents know that these days a college diploma is necessary. Among parents of this type, there are some who optimistically supervise their child's education with great interest, and those who occasionally scold and reprimand. As an example of the former, Mrs. Hyǒnsuk Lee, whose only son graduated from a vocational high school and is studying for the college entrance exam, restrained herself from scolding her son and waited for her son to become aware of the importance of studying by himself. Mrs. Choi, S. also never pushed her eldest son, who is in middle

school, to study.

Researcher: Most parents nag and continuously scold their children into studying...

Lee Hyönsuk: I didn't do that.

Researcher: Why not?

Lee Hyönsuk: Kids get stressed out. It's not just because of that, though, that I didn't nag him. People like me...whose parents worked really hard in the countryside, seeing that I felt sorry for them, so even if I didn't study, I would at least pretend to study when they were around. Because of that we continue to work really hard, thinking our son will learn by watching, just as he wants... but we never pushed him to study. But if I look back now I kind of think I should have nagged him just a little bit.

Because lowly educated working-classparents, unlike the middle class, do not alternate between the extremes of joy and sorrow or constantly react strongly and sensitively, their reactions do not make their children nervous or feel pressure to study. Nagging or scolding to study is an event that very rarely or at most occasionally happens, and so there is not much opportunity for the child's educational fervor or study time to increase. Unlike in the upper-middle-class, the consciousness to internalize the motivation to study does not really arise in the working-class.

2. Reasons Educational Aspiration Differs Among the Social Hierarchy

If this is the case, then why do differences arise in educational aspirations between the highly educated middle class and the lowly educated working class? Why are upper-middle-class parents so obsessed with high-level universities, and conversely, why do lowly educated working-class parents have no consciousness of academic cliques? To state the conclusion first, the former type of parent has a greater sense of the crisis of downward social mobility, and knows well the reality of the power that educational capital has with regard to maintaining or elevating social status. On the other hand, the latter type of parent has a weakened fear of social status degradation, and has a tendency to see the possibility of realizing upward social mobility by getting a diploma from a so-called "good university" as unclear. In fact, upper-

middle-class interviewees expressed the fact that their obsession with “good academic cliques” came from their sense of crisis regarding downward social mobility.

You’re living as number 5 of 10—think you can move up to number 4? No? A person should work hard to “level up”; it’s terrible to move downward. I would talk to him like that. “If you want to live like your father, study hard.” (Interview with Mun Kyuhyōn’s mother)

...Studying is the shortest way to reach a success. Poor people these days, well, aren’t they dancing in the streets? What are they called? Anyway celebrities... Those poor people have nothing to lose. The parents and children. But we’re not like that. So we want to take the safe and comfortable way. I lived like that and so did my parents, because we had the same education, so if you look at it a certain way there is no development. We just keep going down the same old path. (Interview with Ch’a Kyōngshin)

Compared to this, lowly educated working-class parents do not have a sense of crisis of downward social mobility with regard to their children having a harder or similarly not affluent life if they do not study hard. The five working-class and lower-class parents interviewed for this study all responded the same way in that they had never had any feelings of crisis of downward social mobility.

Researcher: If your children don’t study, they’ll have to continue being poor. Have you ever had any feelings of crisis regarding this?

Lee Hyōnsuk: No, I’ve never thought about that. If he just does his best, what could be difficult? He works hard. So what could he not do? Do your best and work hard.

Researcher: Mr. Lee, you didn’t graduate from university, but you’re doing fine.

Lee Hyōnsuk: Yes, but I haven’t really felt that. If your family is peaceful and comfortable...and your mind and heart are rich, I think it’s fine.

Interviewees from the lowly educated working-class did not have an intense and poignant experience with regard to higher education. They said that they hardly felt any regret, nor had complexes about not having gone to university.

In addition, they do not even consider the reason they have such hard lives to be their “low education level.” The following statement from Yang Söyön’s father, who was a middle-school dropout, clarifies this point.

As far as formal education, I didn’t even make it through high school and I don’t have any regrets or anything like that. I’ve been working hard living in my own way, and I’m still living my own life, thanks to our social structure. So if you think you want to live, even if you don’t make a lot of money, you can make a living, no matter what. (Interview with Yang Söyön)

...I had no idea what kind of merit there was in going to college. Because I hadn’t had any experience. Well, I said I graduated from a vocational high school. I have a friend who graduated from XX University in Seoul. She makes her kids study extremely hard. She made them study so hard, to the extent you could say it was an obsession.... There was something she used to say. Something she used to hammer into her kids. While I was listening right next to her, she would say, “If you come out of university, you can choose from an array of hundreds of jobs, but if you come out of high school, you can choose from an array of one or two. Which kind of life do you want to live?” ...That was something I didn’t know. “If you graduate from university there are that many jobs you can choose from—whatever job you want!” I realized it then.... People like us, we’re fine if we just have our family, don’t starve, and lived contentedly with our neighbors, ...outside of that we don’t really have any particular dreams. (Choi Sünghüi)

It appears that these types of responses contradict our common sense notion that “people who were not able to receive much education must have deep resentment towards education because of the sorrow of not learning.” However, this kind of common sense notion can be different from reality. The inferiority complex that lowly educated people normally have could potentially exist to some extent, but the problem is determining how frequently and seriously it brings disadvantage in everyday life, and in particular the labor market. If the labor market for lowly educated workers required a high level of mental labor and were a place where competition is based on capacity for mental labor, then of course, the lowly educated would constantly endure discrimination and the pressures of getting fired. However, the labor market in which highly educated people compete and the

labor market in which lowly educated people compete exist separately. The labor market sectors for physical laborers and for only white-collar workers have formed separately. For the most part, the type of labor required by the labor market in which lowly educated people participate has no relation to education level. It is not important whether someone who is employed at a construction site as a casual worker, a bus driver, or a housekeeper graduated from middle school, high school, or a vocational college, so the instances in which they might lament their low education level and perceive disadvantages because of it could be unexpectedly few. Therefore, while on the one hand, lowly educated people actually experience less discrimination and feel less of the necessity of education in everyday life, on the other hand, we can say that the highly educated middle class urgently experiences and perceives both discrimination and the importance of education. Of course, the universality of this proposition has not been confirmed empirically. It is a hypothesis that was formed during the process of analyzing the results of this study's interviews. This study refers to this as "the paradox of perceived educational value" and suggests it as one hypothesis.

3. Other Factors that Influence Educational Achievement

Several of the interviewees were divided into three types of student according to their educational fervor and attitude. The first type of student studies on their own without any supervision. These students' personalities are inherently competitive, so they hate losing to others and they have a tendency to have a strong will for victory. These students have a strong internal sense of educational direction, so even though their parents do not pressure them, they strive for education of their own accord because of their own ambition. The second type is those who study to meet their parents' requirements and expectations. More than because of a sense of satisfaction from achievement or interest in studying, they are the cases who study because of external influences and because their parents wish and require it. They are those who may not have had much enthusiasm for studying, but owing to their parents' force and pressure, steadily increased their will to study. The final type is those whose parents' pressure never changes their volition or attitude, and on the contrary, induces stress and antagonism. The personalities of this type

of student include those who have a low capacity for studying, those who, opposite to the first type, have a weak sense of competition, and those who have an especially strong revulsion to being compared with others. If we add one more to this type, it would be those who grew up in a family environment distant from or barren of studying, and so lost interest in studying early on. They include students such as Shim Misŏn, Shin Hyosun, Jŏn Bongjun, and Kim Jiae, whose mothers abandoned the family or whose parents divorced, so they did not receive proper attention from their parents.

Among the 29 cases with which this research deals, students of the first and second type belonged together among those who had highly educated upper-middle-class parents and who successfully entered prestigious universities. Students such as Han Ch'angsŏk, Kim Namju, and Jo Dongjun are close to the first type, while Mun Kyuhyŏn, Jang Inbŏm, Jŏng Jiyong, An Jaehong, and Yun Jŏngran can be said to be of the second type. In other words, among academic achievers of upper-middle-class families, sometimes children are discovered who already have an especially education-oriented personality, even before the influence of the strong awareness of the importance of educational background from their parents. In these cases, rather than the role of promoting motivation or desire to study, parents concentrate on providing educational resources and support.

Compared to this, among the lowly educated working-class and low-income cases, those who had achieved high levels of academic achievement and gone to prestigious universities (Kang Taehyŏn, Park Sangkyun, Jŏng Kyŏngmo, Oh Jŏnghŭi, Jang Hanna) were all examples of the first type. Their parents had a tendency to have an attitude of not showing deep interest in their education or leaving all decisions regarding education up to their children. With regard to these students' educational attitudes and educational aspirations being directly related to their academic grades, I could not discover any influence from their parents or their family environment. Compared with siblings from the same parents and family environment, it was not as if there was some particular external stimulus or benefit exerting itself only on these students. When compared with siblings from the same family, one of the main reasons these students succeeded is clearly connected to their individual characteristics. There was not a single case, at least among the above five cases, in which other siblings of the same family did well

in school or went to prestigious universities. Also, among other siblings, personality characteristics like those found in the academic achievers were not discovered. (However, it may only be that they were not found among the cases dealt with in this study; there is always a probabilistic possibility that there could be two or more children with inherently education-oriented personalities under one set of parents.) In relation to the factors that led to successful entrance into prestigious universities, the above five unanimously pointed to their ambition, and said, "It seems like it's something that was inherited."

If this is the case, then the reason the highly educated upper-middle-class's nurturing customs and strategies raise their children's academic achievement is that they can mass-produce the second type of student successfully. We can assume that students who have inherent academic aptitude and education-oriented personalities exist in every social class, and it can be said that the third type of personality, which is unsuitable for competitive and controlling cramming-style education, is an inherited condition unrelated to social class. However, the type-two success cases do not just succeed because of an inherently compliant personality; on top of that type of characteristic, parents' goal-oriented nurturing customs exert an influence and so educational enthusiasm comes half from the child's and half from the parents' will. Highly educated upper-middle-class parents' customs and strategies are not only ways to accelerate and exert pressure for their children's academic motivation, but also include choice strategies for the future, which based on intelligence, information, and economic ability, map out their children's educational background and deduce the best decision at every turning point.

On the one hand, previous academic scores exert influence on future academic scores and also on the student's educational aspirations. A student with a previously poor academic record has wholly low educational aspirations, and because this does not bring about a heightened level of educational enthusiasm or attitude, the possibility becomes higher that the process will repeat in the future at a lower level. But since students' educational aspirations are also influenced by parents' educational aspirations, the low educational aspirations and nurturing customs of parents of low education and low professional status maintain their child's educational achievement at a low level from the start, and as a result, influence their

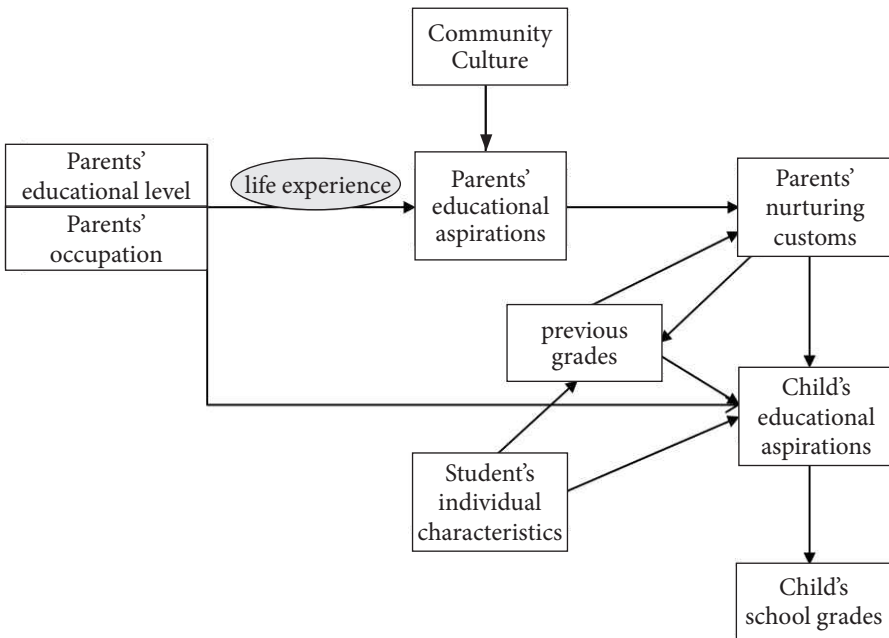


Figure 2. The Relationship between Parental Status and Children’s Academic Scores.

child’s educational aspirations and enthusiasm through previous academic achievement.

V. CONCLUSION

This study takes note of the conclusions of antecedent research that say amidst socioeconomic status, parents’ educational level and professional status have an especially strong influence on a child’s academic achievement, and attempts to elucidate the causes and mechanisms by which this phenomenon occurs. Among related theories, social capital theory does not clarify whether parental participation activities in education differ according to class and stratum, or whether they are unrelated to class status (Kim, D. 2008: 29). The investigation of the connection between the two is one important research question. That is because if parental interest and intervention is an important decisive factor in a child’s level of academic achievement, then depending

on the relationship between parental class status and nurturing attitudes, the solution to educational inequality could be different.

The results of case study analyses show that highly educated upper-middle-class parents have high educational aspirations that competitively prioritize entrance into a highly-ranked university with high academic capital value. These parents raise their child's awareness and control their life through diverse methods in everyday life, and imbue aspirations for a high-level white-collar job so that the child's academic enthusiasm transforms to conform to these values of educational prestige. Compared with them, working-class parents of low professional status and without the experience of high-level education show no indication of practical behavior with the objective of sending their children to so-called "good universities." One upper-middle-class parent who graduated from Seoul University and Kyunggi High School said, "[I] didn't study very hard during high school and university, but I have the K-S mark and have made ends meet my whole life." And, while on the one hand, emphasizing the importance of studying to his son, one self-employed middle-school dropout said, "Even if you don't learn, you'll find a way somehow," and, "The smallest amount of education needed for life in society is high school graduation; if my child doesn't work hard on his own, I'm not going to force him to go to college."

As with the above, differences in educational aspirations and nurturing customs between the highly educated upper-middle-class and lowly educated working-class appear because their life experiences are different. The former have experienced firsthand the power of educational capital, and they know well from experience that prioritizing educational capital is the most powerful strategy for ensuring that their children's generation can maintain their current class status. Compared to them, the latter have never endeavored fiercely toward acquiring a high level of education or educational background, and have not experienced discrimination or disadvantages in the labor market as a result of their low education level. They sometimes by chance advise their children, "If you don't want to have a rough life like me, study hard," but they are unable to show what a life of accomplishment through studying hard is like, and also have never experienced it.

Hereby this study identifies the existence of an intimate relationship between parents' degree of interest and participation in their child's education

and parental social class tendencies. The differences in parental educational level and professional status determine the differences in the degree and method of support and intervention in a child's education, and the outcome of those differences is, in the end, an expression of "class instinct" that strives to maintain one's current socioeconomic status. In other words, it can be said that parental nurturing methods, which influence a child's educational aspirations and enthusiasm and their class status, are different aspects of each other, but cannot be separated and are essentially the same.

In the process of analysis, the discovery of an "inherently education-oriented personality" as a factor that influences academic achievement, because of qualitative research, was a possible outcome. Because case studies target numerous related variables and deal with all phenomena and circumstances (Yin 2008: 89), they are an appropriate approach for teasing out new factors that do not show up using quantitative methods.

However, this research has limitations, which are as follows.

First, it deals with only one of many decisive factors related to academic scores. Explanatory factors such as educational aspiration and nurturing methods are one aspect of a mechanism that is auxiliary to parental social status, and we cannot declare that this explains the whole mechanism by which the social class education gap is born.

Secondly, on the point of being a qualitative study based on a limited number of cases, it has the limitation of not being able to attain statistical normalization.

In addition, in the process of analyzing the interview materials, the difference among social classes in the degree to which the value of educational capital is physically perceived, along with our societal assumptions and the contradictory "paradox of perceived educational value," as hypotheses formed by the author, are incomplete propositions that will need to be validated through further research.

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