

Socio-economic Factors Influencing Grade 12 Accounting Learners' Performance in the Eswatini General Certificate Secondary Examination

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Received: September 29, 2024

Accepted: December 1, 2024

Online Published: December 10, 2024

doi:10.5430/ijhe.v13n6p35

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v13n6p35>

Abstract

This study examined the influence of socio-economic factors on Grade 12 Accounting learners' performance in the Eswatini Accounting General Certificate Secondary Examination (GCSE). An explanatory sequential, mixed-methods design was used. For the quantitative component of the study stratified random sampling was used to obtain a sample of 400 Accounting learners and 80 Accounting teachers. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data, which was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Purposive sampling was used to select 12 Accounting learners and 8 Accounting teachers for the qualitative component. Interviews were used to generate qualitative data which was analysed thematically. The study found that socio-economic factors that negatively influenced learners' performance in Grade 12 Accounting GCSE in Eswatini included parents' lack of interest and involvement in their children's learning, as well as the family's socio-economic status (income and background), with poverty and overcrowded living conditions playing a role. The study raises awareness of the socio-economic factors that are likely to influence learners' academic performance in Grade 12 Accounting in emerging economies. To mitigate these factors, the researchers recommend that parents or guardians allocate a regular time and dedicated space at home for their child to do their homework and discuss their child's progress regularly with their child's teacher as strategies to support their child's learning.

Keywords: socio-economic factors, Grade 12 accounting learners, accounting learners' performance, Eswatini General Certificate Secondary Examination

1. Introduction

The Kingdom of Eswatini has experienced a high incidence of poverty for many years, with 58.9 percent of the population living below the poverty line in 2016 despite the reported slow improvement in the situation (Kingdom of Eswatini, 2022). Rural families, female-headed households, single-headed households, orphans, large families, the less educated, and the unemployed are the most prone to being poor, with the rate of poverty in rural areas at almost 70% (World Bank, 2020).

A household's socioeconomic position is associated with the household earnings, education level of adults, and the family's position in society (Okioga, 2013). A child's academic performance can be influenced by their parents' socio-economic status (Fuligni & Witkow, 2004). Ahmad and Khan (2012) reported a substantial correlation between parents' socio-economic standing and learners' success at school. They found that learners whose parents had a medium socio-economic status typically obtained higher marks than those whose parents had a low socio-economic status. Ahmar and Anwar (2013) and Barry (2005) argue that when the socioeconomic position of

parents is low, it adversely impacts on their children's academic accomplishment as it impedes access to essential resources. A study by Nguna (2021) in Kenya found that families with low economic status tended to live in overcrowded homes with poorly lit rooms and lacking essential furniture, making it difficult for learners in these families to find a quiet place to study. In addition, it was beyond the means of these families to purchase additional learning resources that were not provided by the school, such as textbooks, devices and internet connection for accessing information on the internet, or private tutoring.

The purpose of this study was to explore the socio-economic factors affecting learners' academic achievement in SGCSE Accounting in 40 selected secondary schools in the Manzini and Lubombo regions. The study addressed the research questions 'What socio-economic factors contribute to learners' poor performance in Grade 12 Accounting GCSE in Eswatini?' and 'How do socio-economic factors relate to demographic variables such as age, gender, school location?'

2. Literature Review

Several key socio-economic factors that affect the performance of learners, and their implications for emerging economies are noted in the literature.

2.1 Parents' Level of Education

Parents who are educated are better equipped to engage and assist their children with work being taught at school (Fantuzzo & Tighe, 2000). Egalite (2016) asserts that parents with higher literacy rate are affording to send their children to a higher quintile school, better to assess the quality of a school and can afford to pay transport for their child to go to a school other than the closest school geographically, if there is a better option. Barnard (2004) states that parents who are educated themselves are more likely to furnish an enabling atmosphere befitting whiz kid. Farooq, Chaudhry and Berhanu (2011) demonstrate that the social and economic position of parents, have a notable impact on the general schooling capability of their children, as level of educational achievement matters more than career when it comes to the schooling of their children. Similarly, Kabinga (2014) and Pinantoan (2013) found that parents who obtained a subject-specific degree of literacy are more able to help their children when they are doing their homework and are aware of the importance of purchasing schooling supplies for their children. Desarrollo (2007) established that the extent to which parents or other family members actively engaged in learners' education had a positive influence on their academic achievement.

2.2 Home Environments

Living in overcrowding households has been found to have a negative impact on learners' ability to study and do homework (Hall & Pasel, 2012). Learners from conducive home environment possesses a majority of learning materials, consume a minimum of three meals daily, own numerous properties, with well-educated parents are likely to display an excellent academic performance (Haralambos & Holborn, 2010). Hall and Posel (2012) note that as overcrowding can prevent a child from being able to engage with learning tasks, it can potentially undermine a child's needs and rights.

2.3 Family Income Level

A family's income level can influence its ability to be able to pay school fees regularly and source materials that support learning (Mosibudi, 2012). Udida, Ukwayi and Ogodo (2012) reported that learners whose parents have completed their education and professional occupations have greater access to supplementary educational resources at home therefore accomplish more excellent marks than their class mates. Rich (2000) stated that children in families headed by a single female are more like to achieve low academic results as the parent's earnings and educational attainment tend to be low. Kabinga (2014) disclosed that poverty yield inspirational and scholarly result due to the fact that learners from poor families endure learning infirmity compared to learners from wealthy environment. In contrast, Grolnick, Friendly and Bellas (2009) argued that parents who lack resources may still be fully capable of supporting their children's academic advancement.

2.4 Participation of Parents in their Children's Schooling

The duty of parents is encouraging children to do their homework, attend school meetings and participate in parent groups at school (Just, 2005). A study conducted in Latin America found that learners who are accepted, supported and encouraged by their families stand a greater chance of performing better in their academic pursuits, spend more time studying and thus perform better (Desarrollo, 2007). A 2010 survey conducted in New York discovered that a percentage of learners with mostly As and Bs on their transcripts reported that they had been inspired by their parents to succeed in school. Conversely, part of those with C grades reported that their parents' seldomly supported them (Grolnick, Friendly & Bellas, 2009). In Ghana, Nyarko (2011) found that the participation of learners' mothers in their education, monitoring their writing of assignments, and volunteering to accompany their child's class on field trips was associated positively with learners' academic performance. However, Hong, Yoo, You & Wu (2010) found an imperceptible link between parents' involvement and learners' math achievement in a study comparing the longitudinal associations between two types of parental involvement (values and reinforcement) and high school learners' math achievement.

According to Nwosu, Bechuke and Moorosi (2018), emerging economies, are mostly affected by socio-economic factors, adopt a model of instructional leadership that would see Accounting Heads of Departments (HoDs) leading the process of improving learner achievement by creating an environment in which both teachers and learners share a transparent purpose. This model seeks to ascertain that both teachers and learners take collective responsibility for learning, and are both able to participate cooperatively in activities that pursue the achievement of school objectives, while mitigating the effects of these socio-economic factors in the process. The model also serves as a way of seeing HoDs as instructional leaders who have a responsibility to lead in implementing their school curriculum and improving it despite the prevalence of socio-economic impediments to academic achievement.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design, Paradigm and Sampling

The study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design. Quantitative data was gathered first to explore the relationships between variables, then qualitative data was gathered to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study outcomes. The target population included 136 schools in the Manzini region and 67 Schools in the Lubombo region. A sample of 400 learners and 80 teachers was selected through stratified sampling for quantitative data collection. Of these, 378 learners and 66 teachers responded. Learners (12) and teachers (8) were selected through purposive sampling for qualitative data collection.

3.2 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Quantitative data was collected using two parallel versions of the questionnaire, one designed for learners and the other for teachers. The questionnaires were comprised of open-ended, closed-ended and Likert scale questions. The researcher used face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with learners and teachers to elaborate on the quantitative data and generate rich qualitative data. The interview guide and questionnaires were piloted with eight Grade 12 Accounting learners and four accounting teachers who were not part of the study.

3.3 Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27 software. The outcomes of this analysis were then used to construct qualitative questions of the interview guide. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. The researcher listened to the recorded interviews several times to become familiar with the data, then transcribed the audio recordings. The researcher read each transcription several times to understand the data. Open coding was used. Finally, the results were synthesised. Research results were confirmed through member checks by the supervisors, professors during the post-graduate research seminar.

3.4 Integrity of the Study

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Higher Education Ethics Committee of the Higher Education Institution and authorisation was also secured from the Eswatini Ministry of Education and Training. Informed consent was obtained from all teachers, and informed assent from learners, before the interviews were conducted. This included permission to make an audio recording of the interview. Pseudonyms Fictitious names were used for participants in the reporting of data.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Findings: Correlation between Socio-economic Variables and Learners' Academic Achievement in SGCSE Accounting

4.1.1 Education Background of Parents or Guardians

Table 1 indicates that half of the parents or guardians of learners (f= 205, 54.2%) had had no formal education; the parents of 5.6% of learners (f= 21) had completed their high school education; the parents of 21.4% of the learners (f= 81) had completed a college education; and the parents of 18.8% of the learners (f= 71) had attained a university qualification.

Table 1. Education background of learners' parents or guardians

Features and descriptions	Count (n)	%
Education background		
High school	21	5.6
University education	71	18.8
College education	81	21.4
No education	205	54.2
	378	100

4.1.2 Source of Income for Parents or Guardians

Table 2 shows that some common source of income for the parents of the learners was salary (f= 162, 43%), followed by business (f= 110, 29%), temporary or casual labour (f= 56, 15%) and subsistence farming (f= 50, 13%).

Table 2. Sources of income for learners' parents or guardians

Features and descriptions	Count (n)	%
Sources of income		
Farming	50	13
Salary	71	18.8
Business	110	53.2
Temporal or Casual labour	56	15
	287	100

4.1.3 Relationships between Socio-economic Determinants and Selected Demographic Characteristics

Correlations were used to describe the relationship between the variables. The correlations were presented in terms of correlation coefficients. Table 3 presents the relationships between socio-economic variables and selected demographic characteristics. The relationship between teacher variables and their selected demographic characteristics was generally low. The strength of the correlation between the coefficients was generally weak.

Table 3. Relationships between socio-economic variables and demographic characteristics

	Socio-economic variables	
	Learners	Teachers
Gender	-.02	-.25
Age	.14	.17
Location	.13	.42
Type of school	-.01	-.01
Region	-.01	-.10
Previous grade	.15	–
Academic qualification	–	.42

Table 4. Socio-economic variables giving rise to low levels of academic achievement in SGCSE Accounting by learners

	SD		D		U		A		SA											
	Learners		Teachers		Learners		Teachers		Learners		Teachers									
	F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%	F	%	f	%								
Poverty	52	13.8	17	25.8	35	9.3	6	9.1	30	7.9	6	9.1	121	32.0	5	7.6	140	37.0	32	48.5
Parents' involvement & interest in their children's education	30	7.9	0	0	56	14.8	0	0	27	7.1	0	0	145	38.4	42	63.6	120	31.7	24	36.4
Quality of school attended	42	11.1	1	1.5	63	16.7	15	22.7	38	10.1	14	21.2	136	36.0	31	47.0	99	26.2	5	7.6
Family income	58	15.3	14	21.2	82	21.7	18	27.3	39	10.3	21	31.8	128	33.9	11	16.7	71	18.8	2	3.0
Overcrowded living conditions	52	13.8	2	3.0	86	22.8	17	25.8	57	15.1	16	24.2	110	29.1	17	25.8	73	19.3	14	21.2
Beliefs in accounting versus other subjects	53	14.0	1	1.5	58	15.3	6	9.1	93	24.6	18	27.3	109	28.8	25	37.9	65	17.2	16	24.2

SD = Strongly Disagree D = Disagree U = Undecided A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree

4.2 Qualitative Results

4.2.1 Socio-economic Variables Giving Rise to Low Academic Achievement in Accounting among Grade 12 Learners

Learners cited poverty, lack of parental involvement and interest in their education, socio-economic status and living conditions (overcrowding) as socio-economic variables impacting their academic achievement in Grade 12 Accounting. Similarly, teachers pointed to the lack of parental involvement and interest in their children's education, poverty, socio-economic status (income and education of parents) as socio-economic variables contributing to learners' low academic achievement in Grade 12 Accounting.

(1) Poverty

Ten learners indicated that poverty negatively affected their performance. The learners stated that their parents could not afford to pay their school fees or pay in the middle of the year; as a result, they were sometimes sent home by the school until they could present proof of payment. The learners also mentioned that they came to school having not eaten anything; as it is difficult to concentrate when one is hungry, this affected their learning, though they appreciated that there is a feeding scheme at school.

"I think poverty is the worst factor affecting our performance. We are many OVC's in class and we don't have textbooks. How can we learn without a textbook? I like Accounting, but I fail it because I'm chased most of the time for school fees arrears. This affects my performance in accounting." (Learner 1)

"Coming from a poor home contributes to the poor academic performance. Sometimes, I can't even come to school because of bus fare so I am left behind and this affects my performance. I also owe schools fees and the Head-teacher sometimes sends me home to remind my parents and not to come back until they have paid." (Learner 8)

Similarly, six (6) teachers indicated that poverty hindered learners' performance. The teachers said many learners were Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) who tended to be emotionally and socially challenged. Some teachers commented that learners with difficulties at home struggle to concentrate on their lessons. =

"I think poverty affects the performance as many of the learners are now OVCs. Learners who come from a poverty-stricken background have emotional and social challenges. They disturb the classes and are always noisy, they seek attention in many ways which makes them end up not performing well." (Teacher 2)

(2) Parent's Lack of Involvement and Interest in their Children's Education

Nine learners agreed that their parent's lack of involvement and interest in their education affected their academic performance. The learners explained that if a parent comes to check their child's progress regularly, it helps the child to be motivated to keep up with their work and make sure they do well. However, the majority of the learners complained that their parents don't check their school work, help them with their studies or homework or otherwise involve themselves in their child's education. Some of the learners said that when they tell their parents about a parents' meeting or that a report needs to be collected, their parents send a relative rather than coming themselves.

"My parents' lack of involvement and interest in my studies negatively affects my performance. My mother doesn't bother herself with how I do at school. She does not check my exercise books and always sends someone if parents are needed; she doesn't even come to fetch my report." (Learner 11)

"My father's lack of interest in my studies is a cause of my poor performance. He does not care even if I can be chased for not paying school fees – he will not pay or come to the school to beg the principal. I will stay at home for days until I decide to come back and sneak into the class." (Learner 9)

Six teachers attested to parents lacking interest in their children's education and failing to involve themselves. They mentioned that parents don't come to them to check their children's school progress; even when the school calls for parents' meetings or requests parents to fetch reports some parents don't come, or they send relatives on their behalf.

"Parents are not interested in their child's education as they don't even bother to come and check their child progress or why the child performs badly. They don't come even to fetch the reports or during parents meeting or open days. The only time they try to avail themselves is when they have been called for the child's misconduct." (Teacher 4)

(3) Overcrowded Living Conditions at Home

Eight learners cited living conditions or home environment as a factor affecting their performance. The learners mentioned that living under conditions of overcrowding impeded their performance as they did not have a space for studying or doing homework or lack of sleep. On the other hand, learners from less overcrowded homes reported to be performing better because they were able to focus when studying doing assignments. They mentioned that when there were many people in their home it was noisy, which made it difficult for them to study. They felt that effective studying needs a quite environment so that they could master what they were reading.

"My performance is affected by the fact that I can't study well at home because we are too many and there is always too much noise. I cannot study effective in a noisy environment; I need to be in a quite environment in order to master what I am studying." (Learner 3)

"... A person who has privacy for studying will perform better than a person who lives under conditions of overcrowding with no privacy for studying or doing homework. I think living in overcrowded homes contributes to the poor performance." (Learner 1)

More than half of teachers also cited living conditions as a factor affecting learners' performance. The teachers made the same arguments as the learners. They added that most of the learners whose performance was poor or who didn't complete their homework complained that they could not study well at home because it was noisy and there was no privacy for studying or doing homework.

"Learners' home living conditions affect their performance. Some learners, when they haven't done homework or have not performed well, make excuses that they do not have a space for doing their home and privacy for studying." (Teacher 5)

(4) Family's Socio-economic Status

Five learners cited aspects of their family's socio-economic status, like income and the education background of their parents, as variables affecting their performance. They elaborated that if their family income was enough to cater for their educational needs their performance could be better; however, if their income was low and could only cater for their households needs, the performance would be in most cases will be poor. Majority of the learners mentioned that as their parents' income was low and parents could not afford to pay their school fees, which resulted in the learners being prohibited from attending school. The learners further explained that their parents sometimes could not afford bus fare or money for lunch which also negatively affected their performance. Majority of the learners also said that their parents' educational background was poor; some were illiterate and others did not have a background in accounting and thus could not assist them with their school work.

"I am raised by a single parent and she struggles with paying our school fees, and I'm left behind at school because I am chased for not paying. In addition, she can't afford my bus fare and sometimes I don't go to school which negatively affects my performance." (Learner 4)

"My parent's socio-economic status is very low. She is earning a little amount and struggles to pay school fees; as a result, I am chased and miss out. She is uneducated and cannot help me with my studies or homework." (Learner 3)

Seventy-five percent of the teachers mentioned aspects of families' socio-economic status, such as income and education, as factors affecting the performance of learners. The teachers explained that some parents could not afford extra learning material for learners; learners sometimes did not come to school because their parents lacked finances for bus fare; parents paid school fees very late, which made learners miss classes; and most parents could not help their children with Accounting because of poor or no education background with Accounting. The teachers mentioned that all these led to poor performance by learners.

"Most parents earn little income to cater for their children's education. They cannot even afford to pay the school fees on time or the top-up fee – and even their children's bus fare. As a result, the learners miss out – which negatively affects their performance." (Teacher 8)

5. Discussion

The study highlights several socio-economic variables that affect learners' performance in Grade 12 Accounting GCSE in Eswatini.

5.1 Poverty

The findings of the study reveal that poverty contributes to the poor academic achievement of learners. The study found that there were many learners who were orphaned and vulnerable and their parents or guardians could not afford school fees or paying on time due to poverty. As a result, they did not get learning material on time and sometimes missed classes because they were often sent back home. In addition, the learners mentioned that they could not concentrate in class due to hunger. These results are supported by MacMillan & Schumacher (2001), who reported that poverty is a severe barrier to education because when a learner comes to school hungry, he or she cannot concentrate, thus resulting in poor performance.

5.1.1 Parent's Involvement and Interest in their Children's Education

The study demonstrated that parents' involvement and interest in their children education affects the academic performance of their children. The study found that majority of the parents lacked involvement and interest in their children's education as they did not check their children's work nor did they help them with assignments. The study also found that majority of the parents did not attend open days at the school or fetch their children's report; some parents were reported to send a relative to collect them. This caused learners to lose interest and focus with regard to their learning, and perform poorly as a result. The findings of this study concur with those of MacMillan and Schumacher (2001), who found that some parents could not help their children as some did not have formal and Desarrollo (2007) found that the extent to which parents or other family members actively engaged in learners' education had a positive influence on the learners' achievement.

5.1.2 Socio-economic Status-family Income and Educational Background

The study found that characteristics associated with low socio-economic status, such as low family income and low level of education, contributed negatively to the performance of learners. Some parents with low-income experienced difficulty paying school fees on time, afford extra study materials and children could not always get to school. Some parents with a low level of education were less able to help their children with homework, which also contributed negatively to learners' achievement in accounting. This study supports the findings of Barry (2005), who found that low socio-economic status negatively affected academic achievement because few learners' have access to vital resources that support learning.

5.1.3 Overcrowded Living Conditions at Home

This study found corroborated previous research demonstrating the impact of living conditions on learners' academic performance. Learners living in crowded conditions did not have a space where they could study or do homework without distraction, which corroborates Hall and Pasel's (2012) findings that crowded living conditions had a negative impact on learners' learning.

5.2 Socio-economic Variables and Demographic Variables

The relationships between socio-economic variables and demographic variables revealed that there was a moderate positive relationship between socio-economic variables and the variables of the teacher's location ($r=.42$) and academic qualification ($r=.42$). There was a weak association or no association between the socio-economic variables and the other demographic variables.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study found that socio-economic variables affected learners' performance in Grade 12 Accounting GCSE in Swaziland such as poverty, socio-economic status like parents' income and education background, and living in congested household. To improve learners' performance the researchers, make several recommendations to parents and guardians. Parents could involve themselves in the learning of their children by checking if accounting assignments are completed, and meeting with teachers regularly to check on their child's progress. Parents who can't pay school fees on time due to economic reasons must inform the school and make necessary arrangements so that learners can get all the accounting learning material on time. Parents need to show that they are responsible for his or her child education. Parents to provide dedicated space at home for their children to do their homework. If space not available at home to study, write homework, assignments and study, then schools, libraries, education centres and churches are encouraged to play a part by providing learners a space to write homework, assignments and study. Space must be made available after school or during weekends.

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