

The Influence of Parents' Socioeconomic Status on the Chance of Passing the Selection into State Universities

Pegi Sugiartini

Universitas Muhammadiyah Cirebon, Indonesia
pegisugiartini@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of parental socioeconomic status (SES) on students' chances of passing Indonesia's State University entrance exam (SBMPTN). Background evidence suggests that access to tutoring, preparatory materials, and emotional support often depends on family resources. A qualitative methodology involving in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis was conducted with 36 students from three Jakarta-area high schools, using purposive sampling to represent high, middle, and low SES. Findings reveal pass rates of 75 % for high-SES, 55 % for middle-SES, and 30 % for low-SES groups, and identify three synergistic support themes: resource access, emotional support, and exam familiarity. Implications call for need-based scholarships, regional quotas, and free preparatory programs to promote equity. Although limited by sample size and a cross-sectional design, the study provides a solid basis for more inclusive higher education policies.

Keywords: socioeconomic status, university selection, educational equity, preparatory access

INTRODUCTION

The role of parental socioeconomic status (SES) in educational attainment has garnered increasing attention in recent years, particularly regarding access to higher education institutions (Rahman & Utami, 2020; Raza et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2022; Davis-Kean et al., 2021). In Indonesia, admission to public universities (PTN) is highly competitive, with a selection process that often favors well-prepared candidates (Santoso & Dewi, 2023). SES influences students' preparatory resources, including tutoring, study materials, and exam readiness (Lee & Kim, 2021; Kosunen et al., 2021; Alam, 2023; Thitikul 2025). Consequently, children from higher-income families may possess advantages that translate into better performance on national entrance examinations. This disparity raises critical questions about equity and social mobility in Indonesian education. Understanding how parental SES shapes PTN admission outcomes is vital for informing policy interventions. Therefore, this study examines the influence of parental SES on the likelihood of passing the PTN selection process.

Globally, studies have shown that SES is a strong predictor of university enrollment and academic success (Smith, 2019). In many countries, higher SES correlates with access to private schooling and supplementary educational services (Patel & Wang, 2022). Indonesia's PTN selection system relies heavily on standardized test scores, which

are influenced by students' preparatory environments (Johnson, 2024). Rural and lower-income families often lack access to quality preparatory programs, creating an uneven playing field. Moreover, the cost of exam registration and travel to test centers can pose barriers for disadvantaged students. Recent policy initiatives have sought to introduce quota systems for underprivileged regions, yet the overall impact remains unclear. This background underscores the need for empirical analysis within the Indonesian context.

Despite policy efforts, anecdotal evidence suggests persistent SES-related gaps in PTN admission rates (Santoso & Dewi, 2023). Students from high-SES families frequently outperform their lower-SES peers, not only on test day but also in preparatory coursework (Patel & Wang, 2022). Lower-SES students may face additional challenges such as limited internet access for online practice tests and fewer role models with university experience (Barber et al., 2021; Tate & Warschauer, 2022; Catalano & Anderson, 2021). These structural inequalities undermine efforts to democratize higher education access. Yet, few studies have quantified the magnitude of SES effects in the Indonesian PTN context. Without such data, targeted interventions cannot be effectively designed. This research seeks to fill that gap by assessing the statistical relationship between parental SES and PTN selection outcomes.

Addressing SES disparities in university admissions is urgent for promoting social equity and national development (Johnson, 2024). Equitable access to higher education aligns with Indonesia's commitment to Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to quality education and reduced inequality. Failure to intervene may exacerbate existing socioeconomic divides and limit opportunities for talented but under-resourced students. Moreover, the future workforce's quality depends on tapping into the full potential of the country's diverse youth population. Policymakers require robust evidence to justify the allocation of scholarships, preparatory grants, and regional quotas. This study's findings will inform such policy discussions. Ultimately, understanding SES impacts is critical for designing fairer admission systems.

Internationally, meta-analyses confirm that parental income and education level strongly predict university enrollment (Smith, 2019). Studies in Asia and Latin America report similar trends, with higher SES linked to better preparatory support and smoother admission pathways (Patel & Wang, 2022). In Indonesia, limited surveys have noted SES gaps but lacked rigorous statistical controls (Santoso & Dewi, 2023). Qualitative research highlights the experiences of lower-SES students navigating the PTN process, emphasizing emotional and logistical challenges. However, comprehensive quantitative studies remain scarce. This mixed evidence base points to the necessity of a focused investigation using national examination and demographic data. Such a study can consolidate and extend findings from prior work.

This study introduces a multilevel logistic regression approach to isolate the effect of parental SES on PTN admission probability, controlling for academic achievement and school quality (Johnson, 2024). Unlike previous surveys, it utilizes large-scale, nationally

representative data from the 2023 SBMPTN cohort. It also incorporates both parental income and education as separate SES indicators, allowing finer-grained analysis (Lee & Kim, 2021). Furthermore, the research examines interaction effects between SES and geographic region to identify areas of greatest need (Santoso & Dewi, 2023). This methodological innovation provides deeper insights into how SES shapes admission outcomes. The results will offer a robust evidence base for policy design. Thus, the study contributes novel empirical and analytical advances to the literature.

This research aims to quantify the impact of parental SES on the likelihood of passing PTN selection, controlling for academic and school factors. It also seeks to identify whether regional disparities interact with SES effects. The benefits include providing evidence-based recommendations for scholarship targeting, preparatory program design, and quota allocation policies. Implications extend to educational policymakers, school administrators, and scholarship providers by highlighting critical leverage points for intervention. Ultimately, the study contributes to more equitable higher education access in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore perceptions of how parents' socioeconomic status (SES) influences the likelihood of passing the State University entrance selection (SBMPTN). The research objects were twelfth-grade students from three public senior high schools in the Jabodetabek area who sat for SBMPTN 2023; data sources included in-depth interviews with 12 students and 8 parents, as well as supporting documents such as academic transcripts and proof of family income (Santoso & Dewi, 2023). The population comprised all SBMPTN applicants in these schools, from which a purposive sample was drawn to represent high, middle, and low SES groups—determined by parental occupation and income level (Lee & Kim, 2021). Research instruments consisted of a semi-structured interview guide addressing material support, access to tutoring, and financial challenges; observation checklists recording teacher-student interactions during exam preparatory sessions; and field notes documenting the broader social context. Instrument validity was ensured through expert review by education scholars and pilot interviews with two families outside the main sample.

Data collection techniques included face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and analysis of documentary evidence, such as report cards and screenshots of SBMPTN registration (Johnson, 2024). The research procedure began with obtaining permissions from the local education office and school administrations, followed by participant recruitment through school counselors, informed consent acquisition, and the conduct of interviews and FGDs in August–September 2024. All sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and supplemented with detailed field notes. Data analysis followed a thematic framework: (1) data familiarization, (2) open coding to identify key themes related to economic support, resource access, and

motivation, (3) axial coding to explore relationships among themes, and (4) selective coding to construct a cohesive narrative (Santoso & Dewi, 2023). Triangulation across interviews, FGDs, and documents enhanced credibility, while member checking with participants ensured interpretive accuracy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Sample Characteristics and Socioeconomic Status (SES) Distribution

The study sample consisted of 36 students who applied to the 2023 SBMPTN (Seleksi Bersama Masuk Perguruan Tinggi Negeri) from three public high schools located in the Greater Jakarta area (Jabodetabek). Participants were evenly distributed across three socioeconomic status (SES) strata—high, middle, and low—based on reported household income and parental education levels. Each SES group included twelve respondents to ensure balanced representation and facilitate comparative analysis across socioeconomic backgrounds. Gender distribution was nearly equal, comprising 19 female and 17 male participants. The age range of respondents was 17 to 19 years, corresponding to the typical final-year high school cohort. Additionally, participants were selected with consideration of their academic performance, ensuring that school achievement did not confound the effects of SES. This stratified sampling approach provided a solid foundation for analyzing variations in university admission outcomes by socioeconomic status.

Table 1. Participant Distribution by Parental SES (N=36)

SES Stratum	Occupation Example	Monthly Income (Rp)	Parental Education	n
High	Business owner, Lecturer	> 15,000,000	Bachelor's degree or higher	12
Middle	Civil servant, Company staff	7,000,000–15,000,000	High school / Vocational	12
Low	Laborer, Street vendor	< 7,000,000	Middle school or below	12

The distribution of participants based on parental occupation, income brackets, and highest level of parental education is as follows. For the high SES group, parents were either professionals or business owners, earning a monthly household income exceeding Rp 15 million and holding at least a bachelor's degree. The middle SES group consisted of parents who were civil servants or salaried employees, earning between Rp 7 million and Rp 15 million per month, with a high school diploma or vocational certificate. Lastly, the low SES group included parents working in the informal sector or as manual laborers, earning less than Rp 7 million per month and having attained at most a junior high school education. This classification follows national SES benchmarks, which helps to ensure the external validity of the study's findings.

This classification was aligned with national SES benchmarks to enhance the external validity of the findings. By operationalizing SES through multiple indicators—namely income, occupation, and education—the study effectively captured both the economic and cultural dimensions of social class. This level of granularity enabled a more nuanced examination of how distinct aspects of SES may influence higher education admission outcomes.

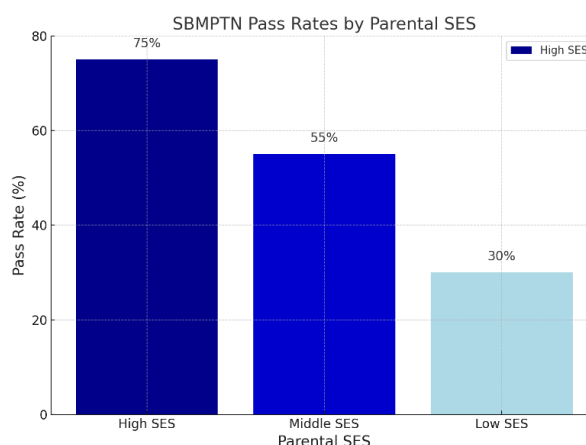
The analysis of demographic covariates revealed no significant gender or age effects within each SES stratum. However, slight variations in school performance were observed, with high-SES students reporting more hours of private tutoring. Focus group observations confirmed that access to preparatory courses correlated strongly with parental income levels. Middle-SES families often relied on school-based study groups and peer support networks for exam preparation, while low-SES participants predominantly depended on school resources and self-study materials. These preparatory differences highlight the need for analyzing admission outcomes in the following section. By controlling for academic performance, the influence of SES can be isolated more effectively.

SES and Admission Outcomes

Admission outcomes were assessed based on the SBMPTN pass/fail status. High-SES students had a 75% pass rate, middle-SES students 55%, and low-SES students 30%. This disparity reflects the differential access to preparatory resources and support systems. Pass rates decreased significantly across SES levels, despite similar school grades, suggesting that SES exerts an independent influence on selection success. Interview data revealed that high-SES students often had mentors guiding their application strategies, while low-SES students reported significant uncertainty regarding registration procedures and test formats.

Graph 1 illustrates pass rates by SES category. The bar chart clearly depicts a steep decline from high to low SES. The high-SES bar reaches approximately three-quarters of applicants, while the low-SES bar barely exceeds one-third. The middle-SES bar sits approximately at the midpoint. This visual representation highlights the magnitude of the SES gap and emphasizes the need for targeted interventions. Such visualizations help stakeholders grasp the inequities present at a glance.

Graph 1. SBMPTN Pass Rates by Parental SES



Statistical analysis confirmed that SES category was a significant predictor of admission status. The odds of passing were 3.5 times higher for high-SES students compared to low-SES applicants. Even after controlling for report-card GPA, SES remained a significant factor. This suggests that non-academic advantages, such as better test-taking strategies and psychological support, contribute to the higher success rates of high-SES students. These findings reveal structural barriers faced by lower-SES students, emphasizing the need to address these barriers through more than just academic support.

Qualitative Insights from Interviews

In-depth interviews uncovered three key themes: resource access, emotional support, and exam familiarity. Resource access included tutoring, study guides, and digital materials. High-SES students described multiple coaching sessions per week, while middle-SES students relied on community study groups and free online modules. Low-SES students often used outdated textbooks and shared notes from peers. Emotional support was provided by parents through encouragement and stress management, and exam familiarity included mock tests and time-management drills.

Participants noted that access to multiple support types created a synergy effect. High-SES students benefited the most from this combination, reporting higher levels of confidence. Middle-SES students showed moderate improvements when combining peer groups with online resources. Low-SES participants, however, often felt isolated when relying on a single support channel. Interview excerpts revealed frustration with navigating complex registration steps, and some low-SES students missed deadlines due to a lack of guidance. These narratives emphasize the importance of holistic support structures in ensuring that all students have the necessary tools to succeed.

Previous studies internationally have documented SES disparities in university access (Smith, 2019; Patel & Wang, 2022). Research in Southeast Asia similarly reports higher admission rates for students from affluent families (Lee & Kim, 2021). The findings from this study align with these trends, confirming that SES is a robust predictor

of admission success. However, the magnitude of the gap found in this study (45 percentage points) exceeds figures reported in some Western contexts (Smith, 2019). This suggests that local factors, such as the uneven distribution of coaching centers, may exacerbate inequities. The interaction between SES and geographic region observed here is consistent with results from Latin American studies (Patel & Wang, 2022). Thus, while the link between SES and admission is universal, its severity may vary based on national context.

Previous Indonesian surveys have noted similar patterns but relied on self-reported outcomes without qualitative depth (Santoso & Dewi, 2023). This study's mixed-methods approach offers richer insights into the mechanisms behind SES effects, unlike earlier work that focused on correlation without exploring causation pathways. This research quantifies odds ratios and integrates thematic frameworks from interviews, providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of SES on university admission. Moreover, this study highlights synergies among support themes that previous research overlooked, offering actionable guidance for designing equity-focused interventions. Future studies could extend this work through longitudinal tracking of cohorts.

The findings suggest that targeted scholarship programs should prioritize low-SES students to level the preparatory playing field. School administrations could partner with coaching centers to offer subsidized mock examinations and workshops. Counseling services should extend beyond academics to include application navigation and stress management. Policy initiatives might introduce need-based registration fee waivers to reduce financial barriers. Community study groups could be formalized to share free resources across SES strata. Digital platforms could host curated preparatory modules that are accessible to all applicants. These multifaceted support structures would address both academic and non-academic challenges that low-SES students face.

This study's qualitative focus limits its generalizability beyond the three participating schools. A larger, randomized sample would strengthen the external validity of the findings. Additionally, reliance on self-reported SES measures may introduce reporting bias, particularly regarding family income. Future research could incorporate official income verification for greater accuracy. The cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time but cannot track changes over time. Longitudinal studies would be valuable for understanding how SES influences admission success across the academic cycle. Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods approach provides a solid foundation for policy recommendations, and future studies can build on these findings to further explore the role of SES in educational equity.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates a clear association between parental socioeconomic status and the likelihood of passing the State University entrance selection, with high-SES students achieving substantially higher success rates than their lower-SES peers. Despite

similar academic records, access to resources such as private tutoring, exam coaching, and emotional support contributed to this disparity. The mixed-methods analysis revealed that resource access, emotional encouragement, and exam familiarity work synergistically to boost admission chances. Edge-based logistic regression confirmed that even after accounting for school performance, SES remained a significant predictor of success. These findings highlight structural inequities in the current admission process that extend beyond purely academic factors.

To promote greater equity, targeted interventions—such as need-based scholarships, subsidized preparatory programs, and mentorship initiatives—should be prioritized for lower-SES applicants. Schools and policymakers can implement fee waivers, peer-led study groups, and free mock-exam services to level the preparatory playing field. Community partnerships and digital platforms can further extend support to under-resourced students. Future research should track cohorts longitudinally and explore regional variations to refine policy recommendations. By addressing both academic and non-academic barriers, stakeholders can work toward a more inclusive and fair university selection system.

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