

Less privileged kids shine at university, according to study

December 19 2014, by David Stacey



Australia's higher education system appeared to level the playing field in terms of academic achievement for students, regardless of their socio-economic status (SES) background, according to a new study.

The study, "Socio-economic Status of Schools and University Academic Performance: Implications for Australia's Higher Education Expansion", by Assistant Professor Ian Li from the School of Population Health at The University of Western Australia and Associate Professor Michael Dockery from the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education at Curtin University focused on the role of schools' SES in determining academic performance at university.

They study authors found that increased participation by [students](#) from lower SES backgrounds was possible without compromising academic standards and suggested that as students from low SES backgrounds were under-represented in higher education, their participation should be encouraged.

While prior [academic achievement](#) was found to be a strong determinant of university [academic performance](#), a student's personal SES background did not influence their university performance. Another key finding was that neither the [school](#) sector, nor resources, impact on students' academic scores.

"These findings imply that larger amounts of funding per student are not being translated into better outcomes at university, though there are probably variations in resources, such as teacher quality, that were not observable in the study," Assistant Professor Li said. "The study also found that female students strongly outperformed male students in their first year of university, that older students tended to achieve higher marks, and that students from co-ed schools performed better than students who went to all-boy or all-girl high schools."

The study's sample population consisted of 8,417 first-year undergraduate students at an Australian university, from 183 schools. Latest figures from the Australian Government Department of Education indicate that the proportion of low SES students enrolled in [higher education](#) in 2013 was approximately 17 per cent.

More information: Li, I. W. and Dockery, A. M. (2014). Socio-economic Status of Schools and University Academic Performance: Implications for Australia's Higher Education Expansion. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Perth: Curtin University. [www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications ... cademic-performance/](http://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications...cademic-performance/)

Provided by University of Western Australia

Citation: Less privileged kids shine at university, according to study (2014, December 19)
retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-12-privileged-kids-university.html>

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