Poor Students' Strategies in Achieving Achievement in Favorite Schools: A Qualitative Study in Cilacap and Banyumas

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Abstract	Poor students are often considered students with difficulty achieving in school due to limited resources. Some try to study in their favorite schools, dominated by upper-class students. This study aims to describe the efforts made by poor students to achieve in their favorite schools. The qualitative research method involves interviewing poor students who excel with teachers at their favorite schools. The study results show that they are motivated to achieve and utilize the available learning facilities. They borrow books from the library and download books from the internet to learn. They also utilize free tutoring facilities that can be accessed online. Saving is their way of fulfilling learning facilities. They have a habit of practicing learning discipline at home by utilizing their free time as much as possible. The results of this study can change the negative stigma regarding poor students who are identified with laziness, helplessness, indiscipline, and failure. This study can provide insight into the efforts of poor students to develop resilience and achieve high academic achievement despite facing economic challenges.
Keywords	Achievement; Cultural Capital; Lower Class; Social Capital; Stigma

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1. INTRODUCTION

The lower class group often experiences social exclusion when accessing the state's public services. They experience marginalization so that their existence is often far from the attention of many parties (Halkos & Aslanidis, 2023; Wesselmann et al., 2016). In short, the lower class group, which is identical to the poor group, experiences a lot of discrimination (Peterman, 2018), including the opportunities they get in the education sector (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018).

Whether we realize it or not, opening up opportunities for all levels of society to obtain quality education is the duty and obligation of the state, in this case, the government (Affandi, 2017). This opportunity should be given to certain groups and all levels of society. The principle of meritocracy must also be applied in the education sector to realize a democratic education system (Elford, 2016; Napoletano, 2024). This means that anyone with the ability and capacity to advance must be given the same opportunity, one of which is to obtain educational facilities.

In recent decades, the cost of education has become increasingly expensive. The higher the level of education, the higher the costs that parents must pay to be able to send their children to school (Arsal & Hidayat, 2024; Banerjee, 2016; Hanushek, 2016). Thus, it is almost impossible for lower-class student to achieve their dreams of continuing their education to a higher level (Adam, 2021). The increasing cost of education also means that schools can only be accessed by certain groups, namely the upper-middle class. Meanwhile, it is difficult for poor people to access quality education (Musayyidi, 2020; Utama, 2024). Finally, some assume that "schools only belong to the rich". Expensive schools are always a very scary specter for poor people. This is also always a topic of discussion everywhere (Martono et al., 2018).

The government has also attempted to provide free elementary and high school education in response to this view. The hope is that by providing free education, the School Participation Rate (Angka Partisipasi Sekolah -APS) can be increased (Sanda P.H & Gistituati, 2023). This means that there is an increase in opportunities given to people experiencing poverty who have had difficulty accessing high school education. Public schools that were previously only enjoyed by the upper class because they were expensive (Freiman, 2017; Molnar, 2018), are now gradually being enjoyed by the lower class. Now, lower-class students can attend relatively expensive favorite schools with the help of BOS (School Operational Assistance) funds (Martono et al., 2020).

However, increasing access to education is not only a matter of quantitative improvement, nor is it merely providing the widest possible access for people experiencing poverty to receive quality education up to high school level (Gorski, 2017). Sociologically, the problem faced by people experiencing poverty is not simply "they cannot go to school," but rather that when they are given free education, all of these problems will be resolved.

The reason is, first, "going to school" does not only require school fees (for example, tuition fees that must be paid every month), but there are other costs that parents must still bear, for example: transportation costs, purchasing LKS (Student Worksheets), lunch, uniforms, shoes, and others. Second, two cultures will emerge when poor and rich students meet in one school. As we know, poor and rich students have different cultures: habits, ways of life, and ways of behaving. In Bourdieu's language (Tan & Liu, 2022; von Rosenberg, 2016)Both have different "habitus". This difference is because both have different "capital" (Shaw et al., 2015; Suhaini, M., Ahmad, A., & Harith, 2020; von Rosenberg, 2016).

In the case found in favorite schools, Martono et.al. (2018) produced a finding in their research in Cilacap and Purwokerto, Central Java. The study found that some lower-class students who attended their first-choice schools (often called favorite schools) felt inferior and embarrassed when interacting with their friends. This feeling arose because most of their friends came from the upper class, who had different habits from them. Poor students in favored schools are a minority group, while upper-class students are the majority group. On this basis, it is clear that a process of symbolic violence will occur. This process occurs when poor students, as a minority group, are unconsciously "forced" to accept and follow the habits of rich students. The results of Martono research, et al.'s (2019b), show that several upper-class habits are difficult for lower-class students to follow: taking lessons, watching movies at the cinema, and hanging out at cafes. When their friends asked them to do these activities, they refused the invitation because they did not have money.

Although they cannot follow rich students' habitus, some can show their abilities in academic and non-academic fields. With their limitations, they can make quite proud achievements to match the achievements of rich students. This study describes the efforts made by poor students to be able to survive in their favorite schools. Another interesting thing is what obstacles do they face to "match" the position of upper-class students with greater capital?

Not many studies explain poor students' efforts to achieve in school when they face many obstacles. Research on this topic is still focused on the social obstacles of poor students in school. A study conducted by Jury et al., (2017) Shows several obstacles faced by lower-class students. These obstacles are emotional, self-identity, self-perception, and low motivation. A study conducted by Banerjee (2016)

Explains several factors that cause poor students to fail in school. According to them, the social environment (family) of poor students contributes to creating stereotypes about poor students who are identified with deviant behavior. This stereotype impacts their socio-emotional condition when they are at school. This has an impact on the success of poor students in school. The lack of expectations from teachers also influences their failure; teachers see them as undisciplined students in many ways. Gomez et. al. (2023) stated that stereotypes directed at poor students also impact their achievement. Stereotypes shape poor students' views of their character at school. The results of Banerjee and Gomez's study align with the results of Durante & Fiske's study (2017), which also stated that the stigmas attached to poor students contribute to their failure to achieve. The same study's results were also shown in the study of Olszewski-Kubilius, P., & Corwith, S. (2018), which stated that poor students find it difficult to develop their talents at school. They get less recognition from teachers; it is difficult to meet the talent standards that are considered beyond their abilities. The next study was presented by de Moll et. al. (2024) regarding the interrelationship between student habitus and student performance at school. They said that students with academic abilities are related to their parents' socio-economic status; habitus formation is related to cultural capital and structural social capital, namely the type of family and the parents' employment status.

Several of the results of these studies have the same position, namely, explaining the various psycho-sociological obstacles faced by poor students that make it difficult for them to achieve. Meanwhile, this study starts from a different starting point. The purpose of this study is to describe the various efforts made by poor students to excel in their favorite schools, where most students come from the upper classes. For poor students, surviving in their favorite schools is difficult. They must be able to deal with many students from wealthy backgrounds with different cultures. Rich students also have "greater capital" compared to poor students. Therefore, this study is important to do.

In addition, this study also describes their efforts to achieve success at school and the obstacles they faced to "equal" the position of wealthy students with higher capital.

2. METHODS

This study uses an interpretive approach with a qualitative method. According to Neuman (2020), this method explains how an individual sees, explains, and interprets the social world. This study describes the efforts made by poor students to improve their academic achievement at school so that they will succeed in raising their social status. This research was conducted in two senior high schools (SMA) in Banyumas and Cilacap Regency. The two schools are SMA A and SMA B. Both are public schools where the majority of students come from upper-class families. The surrounding community also knows the two schools as "favorite schools" in Cilacap and Banyumas. The subjects of this study were students from underprivileged families who attended first-choice schools or "favorite schools" (SNU, AHS, AMR, DNS, DUH, GFH, and KIN). They are included in the category of poor students because they receive educational funding from the school, and some also receive assistance from the central government.

To collect data in this study using the following methods: interviews, observations, and secondary data collection (documentation). Interviews were conducted to obtain information on the informant's background, choosing the school, and what efforts were made to enter the school and achieve achievements with limited "capital". This study uses the constant comparison analysis method. This analysis model is used to compare events that occur when researchers analyze the events. Data validation is done by comparing data obtained from students and teachers. Student data is also validated with several documents that can strengthen information from students, for example: student family data obtained from schools, data on achievements that have been achieved.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Achievement and Passion as Capital

This study highlights the success story of poor students competing in schools with the majority of rich students. Although they had to work with various limitations, these students proved capable and could be like their friends from the upper class. The capital of rich and poor students is certainly different, but this difference is not a barrier for some students who cannot compete as well in their favorite schools. The results of a study conducted by Martono et al. (2019a) showed that to enter their favorite high school, they must at least have intelligence capital to compete at school. Intelligence is also capital to interact with rich students who are the dominant group at school.

Several students involved as informants in this study were students who "had cultural capital", namely "achievements", they had achieved in previous schools (elementary and junior high schools). With this capital, they managed to enter to interact and compete with other students at school. Take SNU, for example, one of the students who achieved while still in junior high school. He said:

> "… At that time, I managed to win the National Social Studies Olympiad. At that time, the prize-giving was done at SMA *** Purwokerto. … At that event, the principals of SMA *** and SMA *** were present at that time. Both of them offered me to go to their school…." (SNU)

SNU was offered to enter one of the favorite high schools in Purwokerto (Banyumas) because he won the national social studies olympiad. He decided to enter one of the high schools that offered him the opportunity for free. The series of SNU achievements illustrates that SNU has a high enough cultural capital in academics to continue its education at the favorite high school it entered. Its academic habits can be a bridge to adapt to the environment in its favorite high school.

Different from the story of AHS, who likes geography lessons. His great interest in studying geography has led him to become a champion in several competitions outside of representing his school, even though he is from the science department at his current school. He said:

> "…I like geography, and I realize that my ability in social studies is mainly geography. … I sometimes like to observe things around me because geography also studies the surrounding environment… " (AHS)

According to AHS, his interest in geography only emerged when he entered high school. This achievement then made AHS "comfortable" at school. AHS then managed to buy learning facilities that were previously difficult to obtain using the Olympiad prize. He bought a laptop and several books to complete his learning facilities. The way AHS manages finances so that he can buy various learning facilities can be seen from various sides, one of which is the lifestyle habitus of lower-middle-class people who are usually more effective and efficient in using money.

Meanwhile, AMR successfully demonstrated his abilities while in elementary school by winning the district and provincial science olympiads. This achievement then made him more confident to enter his favorite high school. AMR stated:

> " ….In elementary school, I won 3rd place in the district-level OSN (National Science Olympiad), the sub-district-level Mapsi competition, and 1st place in the outstanding student competition. In junior high school, I participated in the provincial-level OSN…" (AMR)

With his capital, he claims to be able to eliminate feelings of inferiority when interacting with his friends from a higher social class. Many of his friends also ask for AMR's help to do their schoolwork. Thanks to this capital, interacting with his friends at school becomes more dynamic, because he can be accepted to socialize with students from any class without feeling inferior.

In addition, DNS chose her favorite high school in her city. Although she came from a low-income

family and her parents were divorced, she was still confident enough to study in high school. She said:

> "…When I was in junior high school, I wanted to get into a favorite school, the competition was also tight, so I was more enthusiastic about studying. Another reason was that there were extracurricular activities, I liked dancing, even though I felt suited to chemistry…" (DNS)

DNS admitted that he dared to compete with his friends because that was what he wanted. Thanks to the capital he had, he was often asked to help his friends when doing homework that was considered difficult. His academic achievements in several subjects were not supported by the learning facilities he had at home. DNS considered that his friends' learning facilities were much more adequate than his. He only studied by utilizing the existing facilities obtained for free, such as textbooks in the library.

Economic capital differentiates him from most of his peers. However, according to him, this does not limit his social relationships. For DNS, to be able to go to school, all he needs is enthusiasm as a learning capital that he continues to maintain until now, so that this enthusiasm has led him to achieve various academic achievements at school.

Informants cannot live a relaxed life at home. Waking up early, studying early, and going to school early are the daily routines of the students interviewed in this study. They also briefly told about their daily activities:

> "… I wake up at three in the morning, then pray at night, then study, continue with the morning prayer, shower, and have breakfast. After that, I take my younger sibling at 06.15, then go to school at 06.30, continue studying until 15.30. I take lessons or practice every Tuesday and Thursday if there is an Olympiad. For spiritual activities too, and go home until Maghrib. When I get home, I shower, eat, clean up, continue with the Isha prayer, and tidy up my books for tomorrow. Then I study until 12, sometimes until one, because if the assignment is not finished, it is also uncomfortable to sleep, and after that I just go to sleep…" (SNU)

> "…. I went home at one in the afternoon, woke up at four until five to study, and then prayed Subuh. Leaving at 06.15 by bike for about 30 minutes to school. My pocket money then was only two thousand to three thousand rupiah. I used it to buy drinks and didn't bring any provisions to study that morning. After school, I went to bed at around two in the afternoon, after that I continued at three to four in the afternoon and studied regularly, at around four in the afternoon I played with my friends. After Isya, I studied the Olympiad…" (KIN)

> " ….I wake up before dawn, wash my face first, and study until dawn. After that, I study again until 05.30 and prepare for school. Before 07.45, I have to be at school, and after that, I go home at 15.30, continue to participate in PMR (Youth Red Cross) extracurricular activities until the sun sets. I use the evening to do my homework. I use the morning to study…" (GFH)

> "…. Wake up at 2-3 am to do homework, then pray Subuh. After that, memorize lessons, shower, and have breakfast. At 6 pm, I take my younger sibling to school. I go to school and come home at 3.30 pm. Sometimes I don't come home because of organizational activities or study." (AHS)

The persistence to realize their dreams causes them to be trapped in a routine that is quite tiring for some people. They seem to have no time to rest; more time is spent studying. Since waking up, what crosses their mind is studying and studying, and when they are about to sleep, their minds are fixated on school assignments that must be completed immediately. They also utilized various learning facilities that were cheap, easily accessible, and, of course, free. Some of their efforts were free book loans at the library, free tutoring, asking friends for study materials, and group study. At home, AHS only studies in the living room. The room is not big enough to put a study table. GFH has to study with his siblings because he does not have a special study table.

School Survival Strategies

As explained in the previous section, poor students must work harder to equalize their position with rich students who dominate schools. With different capital, they are required to achieve the same results. Limited economic capital makes it difficult for them to access various learning facilities that support their achievements (Al-Haj, 2020). If using Marx's thesis (Backer, 2016; Gan & Bai, 2023; Hill, 2018)This limited economic capital also has implications for the limitations of other capital. The cultural capital of poor and rich students will certainly be different; both will have different abilities to access cultural experiences, especially experiences that schools do not provide.

Some habits of rich students are difficult for poor students to follow. One of these habits is taking extra lessons or tutoring outside of school hours. Poor students will have difficulty taking extra lessons because they do not have the money, while rich students can easily choose a tutoring place that suits their financial condition. Meanwhile, it is not enough if poor students only rely on the learning materials given in class. Ultimately, they must find and utilize various learning resources outside of class according to their abilities. The following describes the interview results that show the informants' efforts to excel in school.

As a farmer's child, AHS could not expect to have complete learning facilities. He also did not expect to be able to follow lessons like his friends at school.

> " … usually we study together and we form study groups because not all of our friends take lessons … I once asked a friend for help. My group is more of a study group…" (AHS)

Limited economic capital did not prevent AHS from adopting strategies to overcome learning difficulties. He overcame it by utilizing existing resources for "free". Based on the interview results, AHS also said he utilized his city's regional library. He admitted that he often visited the regional library to search for and read books that could increase his knowledge, especially books that support the teaching and learning process at school.

Another informant, DUF, also could not attend lessons outside of school. As the child of a mother who sells kebabs at home, DUF could not possibly ask for money to pay for school fees. His father left DUF after they divorced. When interviewed, DUF stated that he often had difficulty understanding the lesson material at school. That is why he then asked his friends more often:

> " ….Alhamdulillah, they accept me as I am and also sometimes like to help with material matters, which confuses me because I don't take lessons outside of school, unlike my friends who take lessons…." (DUF)

Despite not attending lessons, DUF could follow the lessons well thanks to the help and attention of his friends. He used his break time to study to understand the lesson material that he had not yet understood.

Unlike GFH. When he could not attend lessons at a tutoring institution, he overcame it by utilizing free online tutoring facilities that can be accessed via smartphone. GFH said:

> "…. The most supportive thing is wifi; coincidentally, I'm taking online lessons. Regarding books, I didn't end up buying any. I wanted to buy them, but didn't have the money to buy the ones that cost 208 thousand. …. If it's still from improvisation, armed with SBMPTN (State University Entrance Selection) books, especially economics, yes, from online lessons that discuss SBMPTN and taking tryouts to measure my abilities…" (GFH)

In addition to taking free online classes, GFH also took advantage of the free SBMPTN tryout at his school. By taking this tryout, he hopes to realize his dream of continuing to a state university.

The efforts made by informants to overcome various problems at school are interesting. They do this to survive and be accepted by their friends at school. They have to do many things to match the

achievements of their friends, most of whom come from different backgrounds.

Discussion

Every child should be able to achieve their academic potential (Sandel, 2021). Unfortunately, a myth is circulating in society that underprivileged students will find it difficult to achieve high achievement (Weatherton & Schussler, 2021). Meanwhile, wealthy students have a greater chance of achieving better results. This myth is reinforced by many research results stating that there is a positive relationship between social class and student learning achievement. In other words, the research results state that the higher the social class, the higher the student's learning achievement. Research conducted by Huettl (2016) and Mauliya et al. stated that students from low socioeconomic families tend to experience a decline in academic achievement. The results of this kind of research are still believed by adherents of the macrosociological perspective (functional and conflict) as an absolute truth and a social law. Achievement is often identified as the habitus of the upper class (Durante & Fiske, 2017; Inglis et al., 2023).

The conflict perspective claims that education has legitimized and perpetuated social inequality. Schools are also claimed to be institutions that reproduce social class, so that lower-class students will ultimately remain in lower-class positions, and vice versa. This claim states that poor students cannot move to rich students. For adherents of this perspective, social mobility is just a utopia that is impossible for poor students to realize (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; McKnight, 2017; Major & Weiner, 2021).

The interviews with informants explained in the previous section show that the principle of meritocracy can still run and be carried out by each student on the condition that they have "capital". The capital owned by each individual depends on their social position, so the capital of poor students and rich students is certainly different. To achieve "like" rich students, poor students must carry out some of the upper-class habitus (Vassenden, 2025). Bourdieu explains that to succeed in their studies, poor students must go through a bourgeois process (becoming a "bourgeois class") (de Moll et al., 2024).

The bourgeoisie process that poor students do by utilizing the capital they have; the ability to achieve, the ability to work well together, and the ability to utilize limited resources are important mechanisms to equal the position of upper-class students. Their existence in school will be recognized when they have "capital". Achieving is part of this bourgeoisie process; the informant got the ease of entering a favorite school more because he had achievements, not because they was poor. The failure of the bourgeoisie causes them to fail to equalize their position with the upper class. This means that "achieving" requires a lot of capital that just any individual does not easily own, and rich students mostly own this capital.

There is an assumption that poor students do not have a high enthusiasm for learning because they live in limitations (Izah, et al., 2020; Wang & Degol, 2016). Physical (material) limitations that cause them not to have adequate capital resources are considered the culprit that breaks their motivation to learn. Students who live in poverty, especially ethnic minorities, have little opportunity to gain valuable social capital in the education system (Katz & Acquah, 2021). Furthermore, Gorski (2017) argues that poor people are not thought to have a weaker work ethic or lower motivation than rich people.

For them, limited economic capital must be balanced with a high spirit to continue learning without knowing the time. The habit of waking up early and studying between busy schedules becomes cultural capital for them. This capital also supports the success of their school. Their goal is only to realize their parents' hopes so that their social status increases. Schools still provide hope or space for them to carry out social mobility.

The success of some poor students in achieving success at school cannot be separated from the role of their teachers and friends (Flitcroft & Woods, 2018; Koca, 2016; Pedler et. al., 2020). One informant admitted that his teacher often encouraged him to continue learning. The teacher also always made time

when students had difficulty understanding the subject matter. A conducive academic atmosphere at school also encouraged friends were willing to be invited to study in groups. This can then provide social capital for poor students, namely, recognition from friends. Recognition is a form that their presence at school is recognized. This recognition is not limited to the presence of poor students at school; their friends also recognize the intelligence of poor students.

Underachieving students are a minority group in some schools (read: favorite schools). However, they have various social capitals that help them achieve success. Recognition from teachers and friends, ideals and hopes to achieve, and support from parents are some of the social capital they have, and are important capital for them (Hanushek, 2016). Social capital resources, such as family, friends, networks, and ties to the community, can influence student achievement (Abrar-ul-haq, M., Akram, F., & Farooq, 2015). Demir (2021), and Sinha, C., & Mishra (2015) Social capital is a resource obtained through social relationships that positively impact educational outcomes. Social capital influences children's growth. Trust from others, social networks, and shared norms in the family, school, peer group, and wider community have an impact on opportunities, choices, educational achievement, and also on student behavior and development (Mishra, 2020).

Socioeconomic disparities in schools can only be eliminated if the school community stops giving negative stigma to poor students (Inglis et al., 2023). These efforts include eliminating injustice through grouping students or class divisions based on academic ability, social status, and privatization of public schools. This is done to provide equal space for them (poor students) to enjoy quality education while also providing recognition for their efforts and abilities at school.

Thus, the success of some poor students in achieving success in school can break the myth that has been developing in society. The ownership of "different" cultural and social capital is the main capital for poor students. They do not need to "steal" the habitus of upper-class students, but they must be able to overcome the limitations of this capital with their hard work.

This study has limitations. First, this study only describes poor students who already have capital before they enter high school. This limitation prevents this study from being unable to explain poor students' efforts to survive in school when they do not have the capital for achievement. Can the absence of capital make them survive in school or not? Second, this limitation also causes this study not to explain the stigma from teachers and friends at school regarding poor students. Because they already have "capital", they find it easier to adjust to teachers and friends at school. This study was conducted in public schools with less extreme social environmental conditions. This means the social gap between students in public schools is relatively low. This differs from the conditions of favorite private schools, which are relatively more expensive. Thus, these limitations can be recommendations for further research.

4. CONCLUSION

Poor students do not have the economic capital to excel is a fact. However, the lack of economic capital can be covered by cultural capital, namely, the spirit of learning and never giving up. Economic limitations make them develop creativity in the learning process, such as utilizing free WI-FI, making optimal use of library books, and conducting group learning. They also try to manage their time so that most of their activities at home are spent studying rather than other less important activities. These methods have proven to be quite capable of balancing the academic achievements of rich students; even in some cases, poor students achieve much more than rich students. This achievement capital is one of the means for poor students to interact with other students. Friends and teachers also recognize their academic abilities; several times, they have been trusted to represent the school in various championships or subject olympiads. Their role as school representatives is not only a source of pride for them, but also a trigger for enthusiasm to continue to achieve at school.

The results of this study imply that teachers should not only focus on improving academic ability (achievement). Teachers must understand the important role of habitus (habits, enthusiasm, behavior, and so on) as an important aspect that supports student achievement. The problem of poor students in schools is not only economic limitations, but they also face problems related to social acceptance in schools, to negative stigmas directed at them. This must also be a concern for teachers as parties who are directly related to students in schools.

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