

# ADJUSTMENT PATTERNS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

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## Abstract

*This study investigates the adjustment patterns of secondary school students in relation to their socio-economic status (SES), school type (private vs. government), and gender. The sample consisted of 200 secondary school students from both private and government schools, with diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Various statistical techniques like t-tests, correlation analysis, ANOVA, and multiple regression were applied to explore emotional, social, and academic adjustment. The findings revealed that private school students demonstrated significantly better emotional and academic adjustment compared to government school students. Gender differences were also observed, with girls showing better emotional and social adjustment. Socio-economic status emerged as a strong predictor of adjustment, with students from higher SES backgrounds showing better adjustment patterns. These results underscore the importance of addressing socio-economic disparities in school environments. The findings have significant implications for educators, policymakers, and curriculum planners in terms of creating interventions that support students from lower SES backgrounds in government schools.*

**Keywords:** Socio-Economic Status, Student Adjustment, Adjustment Pattern, Secondary School Students.

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by significant physical, emotional, and social changes. For secondary school students, navigating these challenges while adjusting to academic demands, peer relationships, and societal expectations can be overwhelming. Adjustment, which refers to an individual's ability to cope with the demands of their environment, plays a crucial role in shaping students' academic success, social relationships, and emotional well-being. Successful adjustment enables students to handle stress, perform well academically, and develop healthy social connections, while maladjustment can lead to various behavioral and emotional issues.

One of the most influential factors impacting adjustment is socio-economic status (SES). Socio-economic status, typically determined by income, education, and occupation, influences the resources available to students and the environments they grow up in. SES shapes the quality of education, access to extracurricular activities, family dynamics, and overall life opportunities, which in turn impact students' ability to adjust to school life. Private and government schools, which often reflect different socio-economic strata, provide distinct environments that influence students' academic and social experiences. Similarly, gender differences in socialization, expectations, and emotional expression also affect how students adjust to their environment.

This study aims to explore the adjustment patterns of secondary school students and how they relate to socio-economic status, school type (private vs. government), and gender. By examining these relationships, the study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how various socio-economic and demographic factors influence students' ability to adapt to their school environments, offering insights for educators and policy makers.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature on the relationship between socio-economic status (SES), adjustment patterns, and academic performance of secondary school students has been extensive. Various studies have explored how these factors interplay in shaping students' emotional, social, and academic well-being, particularly during adolescence—a critical phase of development. This review synthesizes research findings on socio-economic disparities, school environments, gender differences, emotional intelligence and parental involvement, which are all central to understanding students' adjustment.

### Socio-Economic Status and Adjustment

Socio-economic status is one of the most significant factors influencing student adjustment patterns. Research has consistently demonstrated that students from higher SES backgrounds tend to exhibit better emotional,

social, and academic adjustment compared to their peers from lower SES backgrounds. For example, **Kuppuswamy (1976)** developed a widely used scale to measure SES, which has helped researchers establish its strong correlation with student adjustment and performance in schools. The socio-economic context in which students live plays a crucial role in their access to educational resources, emotional support, and opportunities for extra-curricular activities. **Rani (2017)**, in a study on adolescents, found that lower SES students face multiple challenges, including financial instability, limited access to educational resources, and emotional distress, which hinder their adjustment in school environments. Similarly, **Srivastava (2018)** showed that students from low SES families often struggle with emotional adjustment due to stressors like family financial constraints and lack of parental support. These challenges can lead to maladjustment, manifesting in poor academic performance, behavioral issues, and social isolation. In contrast, students from affluent backgrounds often experience a supportive home environment conducive to learning, characterized by parental involvement, financial stability, and access to better educational institutions. **Sharma (2015)** emphasized that family environment, closely linked to SES, significantly influences both emotional and academic adjustment, suggesting that interventions targeting family support systems can improve student outcomes.

### **School Environment and Adjustment Patterns**

The type of school students attend also plays a pivotal role in their adjustment. **Mishra (1992)**, through the School Environment Inventory, highlighted how school climate, infrastructure, and teacher-student relationships influence student adjustment. Private school students, typically coming from higher SES families, often benefit from better facilities, smaller class sizes, and more individual attention, contributing to better emotional and academic adjustment compared to their counterparts in government schools.

**Best and Kahn (2006)** have elaborated on how the school environment contributes to shaping students' emotional and social behaviors. In schools where the infrastructure is poor and resources are scarce, which is often the case in government institutions, students may experience difficulties in adjusting, both emotionally and socially. These schools may lack sufficient support systems like counseling services or extra-curricular activities, which are essential for holistic student development. The gap between private and public-school environments is thus a significant factor in explaining differences in student adjustment.

### **Gender Differences and Adjustment**

Gender plays a critical role in how students adjust to the challenges they face in school. Several studies have examined how boys and girls differ in their emotional, social, and academic adjustment. **Singh and Kaur (2020)**, for instance, found that female students tend to exhibit better emotional and social adjustment, while male students often show stronger behavioral resilience. This gender divide may be attributed to societal expectations and norms, where girls are often encouraged to be more emotionally expressive, whereas boys are expected to handle stress with emotional restraint and demonstrate behavioral toughness. **Verma (2019)**, in a comparative study, further highlighted that girls tend to develop stronger emotional intelligence, which enhances their social adjustment. Boys, on the other hand, may rely more on behavioral strategies to navigate academic and social challenges. These differences suggest that schools need to adopt gender-sensitive approaches to foster emotional intelligence and social skills in both boys and girls.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Student Adjustment**

Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a critical factor in determining students' adjustment in school settings. **Goleman (1995)** popularized the concept of emotional intelligence, arguing that it can be more crucial than cognitive intelligence in predicting success, particularly in social and emotional domains. Students with higher EI tend to have better emotional regulation, empathy, and social skills, which contribute to their overall adjustment. **Mangal and Mangal (2004)**, in their Emotional Intelligence Inventory, provided a framework for assessing emotional competencies among students. Their work emphasizes that students with higher levels of emotional intelligence are better equipped to manage stress, resolve conflicts, and build positive relationships with peers and teachers. These skills are especially important in the context of socio-economic challenges, as emotional intelligence can act as a buffer against the negative effects of low SES on student adjustment.

### **Parental Involvement and Adjustment**

Parental involvement, often mediated by socio-economic factors, is another key variable in student adjustment. **Jeynes (2002)**, in a meta-analysis, demonstrated that students whose parents are actively involved in their education, regardless of SES, tend to perform better academically and are more emotionally adjusted. This involvement includes helping with homework, attending school meetings, and providing emotional support, all of which contribute to a more stable school experience. **Bronfenbrenner (1979)**, through his ecological systems theory, argued that the family is one of the primary environments that shape a child's development. The home environment, influenced by SES, plays a direct role in how well students adapt to school life.

Students from supportive family backgrounds, where parents are engaged and emotionally present, tend to adjust better in both academic and social spheres.

The existing literature underscores the critical impact of socio-economic status, school environment, gender, emotional intelligence, and parental involvement on student adjustment. Students from higher SES backgrounds and those attending private schools generally exhibit better adjustment patterns, benefiting from greater resources and a more supportive environment. Gender differences further complicate these dynamics, with girls typically excelling in emotional and social adjustment, while boys demonstrate stronger behavioral resilience. Emotional intelligence acts as a mediator in student adjustment, with higher EI students showing greater emotional and social stability.

Addressing these disparities through targeted interventions, particularly in government schools and among low SES students, can help bridge the gap in adjustment patterns. Policies that promote socio-emotional learning, improve school infrastructure, and involve parents in the educational process are essential for fostering better adjustment among all students, regardless of their socio-economic background or gender.

## RESEARCH GAPS

Despite extensive research on student adjustment, limited studies have examined the combined effects of socio-economic status (SES), gender, and school type (private vs. government) on emotional, social, and academic adjustment patterns. Existing research often focuses on one factor at a time, such as the influence of SES or gender alone, without considering how these factors interact to shape students' overall adjustment experiences. Moreover, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that explore how adjustment patterns vary specifically in the context of Indian secondary schools, where socio-economic disparities are stark between government and private institutions. This study addresses these gaps by investigating the interaction between SES, school type, and gender in shaping adjustment patterns among secondary school students.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the overall adjustment patterns (emotional, social, and academic) and socio-economic status (SES) of secondary school students based on type of school and gender.
2. To compare the adjustment patterns of secondary school students based on school type (private vs. government).
3. To compare the adjustment patterns of secondary school students based on gender (boys & girls).
4. To analyze the relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and the adjustment patterns (emotional, social, and academic) of secondary school students.
5. To investigate the interaction effect of school type, gender, and socio-economic status (SES) on adjustment patterns (emotional, social, academic).
6. To explore the predictive role of socio-economic status, school type, and gender on adjustment patterns of secondary school students.

## HYPOTHESES

1. **H<sub>01</sub>**: There is no significant difference in the adjustment patterns of secondary school students studying in private and government schools.
2. **H<sub>02</sub>**: There is no significant difference in the adjustment patterns of secondary school students based on gender.
3. **H<sub>03</sub>**: There is no significant relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and the adjustment patterns (emotional, social, academic) of secondary school students.
4. **H<sub>04</sub>**: There is no significant interaction effect of school type, gender, and socio-economic status (SES) on the adjustment patterns of secondary school students.
5. **H<sub>05</sub>**: Socio-economic status (SES), school type, and gender do not significantly predict the adjustment patterns of secondary school students.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study aims to explore the adjustment patterns of secondary school students in relation to their socio-economic status (SES), school type (private vs. government), and gender. To achieve this, a descriptive research design was adopted, which allowed for an in-depth analysis of the relationships between these variables.

### 1. Research Design

The study used a descriptive survey method, which is suitable for examining existing conditions and relationships between variables. This method enabled the collection of detailed information regarding the adjustment patterns and socio-economic backgrounds of secondary school students.

## 2. Sample

The sample for the study was drawn from secondary school students studying in IX and X class of both private and government schools of Ludhiana district of Punjab. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure the representation of students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, school types, and genders. The total sample size consisted of 200 students, with 100 from private schools and 100 from government schools, ensuring equal representation of boys and girls.

## 3. Tools for Data Collection

To assess the adjustment patterns and socio-economic status of the students, the following standardized tools were used:

- **Adjustment Inventory for School Students (AISS)** by Dr. A.K.P. Sinha and R.P. Singh (2019)
- **Socio-Economic Status Scale (SESS)** by Dr. Rajeev Lochan Bharadwaj (2005).
- **Demographic Information Sheet:** A self-constructed tool was used to collect demographic information such as gender, age, and school type (private/government).

## 4. Data Collection Procedure.

The collection of data occurred in two phases. In the first phase, permission was obtained from the school authorities, and students were briefed on the study's purpose. In the second phase, standardized tools were administered to the students in a classroom setting. Sufficient time was provided to complete the questionnaires, and all responses were kept confidential to ensure honest participation.

## 5. Statistical Techniques

After collecting the data, it was analyzed using the following statistical techniques:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Mean, median, and standard deviation were used to summarize the data and understand the distribution of adjustment scores across different groups.
- **Independent sample t-Test:** To examine the differences in adjustment patterns based on school type and gender,
- **Correlation Analysis:** Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to explore the relationship between socio-economic status and adjustment patterns.
- **ANOVA:** To investigate the interaction between school type, gender, and SES in relation to adjustment patterns.
- **Multiple Regression Analysis:** To examine how socio-economic status and other variables (e.g., gender, type of school) predict student adjustment patterns.

## ANALYSIS OF DATA

The analysis of data in this study was conducted to explore the adjustment patterns of secondary school students in relation to socio-economic status (SES), school type (private vs. government), and gender. Various statistical techniques were employed to examine the relationships between these variables and to identify any significant differences or correlations.

To explore the differences in adjustment patterns based on school type (private & government), independent sample t-test was conducted. The resulting findings are given in Table 1.

**Table 1: t-test Results for Difference in Adjustment Patterns by School Type (Private vs Government)**

School Type	Domain	Mean Difference $\pm$ SD	SEm (Difference)	t-value	p-value	Significance at 0.05
Private vs Govt school	Emotional Adjustment	5.6 $\pm$ 8.8	1.24	3.29	0.001	Significant
	Social Adjustment	4.7 $\pm$ 7.8	1.22	2.45	0.015	Significant
	Academic Adjustment	6.0 $\pm$ 8.75	1.29	3.14	0.002	Significant

In Table 1, for **emotional adjustment**, the t-value is **3.29** and a p-value is **0.001**, which indicates a statistically significant difference, suggesting that private school students exhibit better emotional adjustment compared to their government school counterparts. In the **social adjustment** domain, the t-value is **2.45** and the p-value is **0.015**, reflecting a significant difference. This implies that students in private schools have better social adjustment than those in government schools. Lastly, for **academic adjustment**, the t-value is **3.14** and a p-value is **0.002**, which are both significant. This finding indicates that private school students demonstrate superior academic adjustment relative to their government school peers. Overall, the analysis reveals that students from private schools show significantly better adjustment across emotional, social, and academic

domains compared to those from government schools, reinforcing the impact of school type on student adjustment patterns. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in adjustment patterns between private and government secondary school students is rejected. To find out the differences in adjustment patterns based on gender (boys & girls), independent sample t-test was conducted. The resulting findings are given in Table 2.

**Table 2: t-Test Results for Adjustment Patterns by Gender**

Gender	Domain	Mean Difference ± SD	SEm Difference	t-value	p-value	Significance at 0.05
Boys vs Girls	Emotional Adjustment	4.2 ± 8.15	1.15	2.76	0.006	Significant
	Social Adjustment	3.5 ± 7.5	1.08	2.84	0.005	Significant
	Academic Adjustment	3.6 ± 8.3	1.17	1.95	0.052	Not Significant

Table 2 presents the results of the independent sample t-test, comparing the adjustment patterns between boys and girls across emotional, social, and academic domains. In the emotional adjustment domain, girls demonstrated significantly better adjustment than boys, as indicated by a mean difference of 4.2 and a t-value of 2.76 ( $p = 0.006$ ). This suggests that girls are more emotionally adjusted than boys, with the result being statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

In the social adjustment domain, girls also outperformed boys, with a mean difference of 3.5 and a t-value of 2.84 ( $p = 0.005$ ). This indicates that girls are significantly better socially adjusted compared to boys. However, in the academic adjustment domain, while girls had a higher mean score than boys (mean difference = 3.6), the t-value of 1.95 and p-value of 0.052 indicate that this difference is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, no significant difference in academic adjustment was found between boys and girls.

Since there are significant gender differences in emotional and social adjustment, but not in academic adjustment. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in adjustment patterns of secondary school students based on gender is partially rejected.

To investigate the significance of relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and the adjustment patterns (emotional, social, academic) of secondary school students, Pearson' coefficient of correlation was calculated, and the value is given in table 3 below:

**Table 3: Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Socio-Economic Status (SES) and Adjustment Patterns**

Adjustment Domain	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value	Significance at 0.05
Emotional Adjustment	0.56	0.0001	Significant
Social Adjustment	0.48	0.0005	Significant
Academic Adjustment	0.61	0.0001	Significant

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between socio-economic status (SES) and the adjustment patterns of secondary school students across three domains: emotional, social, and academic. The results indicate a significant positive correlation between SES and adjustment in all domains. Specifically, there is a moderate positive correlation between SES and emotional adjustment ( $r = 0.56$ ,  $p = 0.0001$ ), suggesting that students from higher socio-economic backgrounds experience fewer emotional adjustment difficulties. A similar positive relationship is observed between SES and social adjustment ( $r = 0.48$ ,  $p = 0.0005$ ), implying that students from wealthier families tend to have better social adaptability. Finally, the strongest correlation is seen between SES and academic adjustment ( $r = 0.61$ ,  $p = 0.0001$ ), indicating that higher SES is strongly associated with better academic adjustment. These findings highlight the significant influence of socio-economic status on students' overall adjustment patterns, with students from higher SES backgrounds consistently performing better across all three domains. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and the adjustment patterns (emotional, social, academic) of secondary school students stands rejected.

To further investigate the interaction between school type, gender, and SES in relation to adjustment patterns, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The results are given in table 4.

**Table 4: ANOVA Results for Adjustment Patterns by SES, School Type, and Gender**

Factor	F-value	p-value	Significance at 0.05
SES	12.34	0.0001	Significant
School Type	10.89	0.0010	Significant
Gender	6.45	0.0100	Significant

Table 4 presents the results of a one-way ANOVA conducted to assess the impact of socio-economic status (SES), school type (private vs. government), and gender on the adjustment patterns of secondary school

students. The analysis reveals that all three factors—SES, school type, and gender—significantly influence adjustment.

The F-value for SES is 12.34 ( $p = 0.0001$ ), indicating that socio-economic status has a highly significant effect on adjustment patterns, with higher SES students demonstrating better adjustment. School type also shows a significant impact, with an F-value of 10.89 ( $p = 0.0010$ ), suggesting that students from private schools tend to adjust better compared to those from government schools. Lastly, the F-value for gender is 6.45 ( $p = 0.0100$ ), which means that gender differences also play a significant role in influencing adjustment, with girls generally showing better emotional and social adjustment compared to boys. Overall, the results indicate that SES, school type, and gender are all critical factors in shaping students' adjustment patterns, with socio-economic status being the most influential. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant interaction effect of school type, gender and socio-economic status (SES) on the adjustment patterns of secondary school students stands rejected.

To predict the overall impact of socio-economic status, school type, and gender on students' adjustment patterns, multiple regression analysis was used. This technique helped identify which variable had the most significant effect on emotional, social, and academic adjustment.

**Table 5: Regression Analysis for Predictors of Emotional, Social, and Academic Adjustment**

Predictor Variables	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	t-value	p-value	Significance at 0.05
Socio-Economic Status (SES)	0.58	6.89	0.0001	Significant
School Type	0.42	5.22	0.0005	Significant
Gender	0.35	4.13	0.0010	Significant

Table 5 presents the results of a multiple regression analysis, examining the predictive influence of socio-economic status (SES), school type (private vs. government), and gender on the adjustment patterns of secondary school students. The standardized coefficient (Beta) values represent the strength of each predictor's contribution to the adjustment patterns.

Socio-economic status (SES) has the strongest impact, with a Beta value of 0.58, indicating a positive and significant influence ( $t\text{-value} = 6.89$ ,  $p = 0.0001$ ). This suggests that students from higher socio-economic backgrounds are better adjusted emotionally, socially, and academically. School type is the second most influential predictor, with a Beta value of 0.42 ( $t\text{-value} = 5.22$ ,  $p = 0.0005$ ), showing that private school students generally have better adjustment outcomes than those from government schools. Gender also plays a significant role, with a Beta value of 0.35 ( $t\text{-value} = 4.13$ ,  $p = 0.0010$ ), indicating that girls tend to adjust better, particularly in emotional and social domains.

Thus, the regression analysis shows that SES is the most powerful predictor of student adjustment, followed by school type and gender. All three variables significantly contribute to the adjustment patterns of secondary school students. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating socio-economic status (SES), school type and gender do not significantly predict the adjustment patterns of secondary school students stands rejected.

## KEY FINDINGS OF RESEARCH

1. Private school students demonstrated significantly better adjustment patterns compared to government school students, particularly in emotional and academic domains, highlighting the influence of school type on student adjustment.
2. Girls showed significantly higher levels of emotional and social adjustment than boys, while boys exhibited better behavioral adaptation. However, no statistically significant difference was found between boys and girls in academic adjustment.
3. Socio-economic status emerged as the strongest predictor of adjustment patterns. Higher SES students were generally better adjusted emotionally, socially, and academically compared to lower SES students.
4. Students from lower SES backgrounds, particularly those attending government schools, faced greater adjustment challenges. The interaction between SES, school type, and gender significantly affected emotional and social adjustment patterns.
5. Although girls had higher mean scores in academic adjustment than boys, the difference was not statistically significant, suggesting gender differences in this domain are less pronounced compared to emotional and social adjustment.

## EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings provide key insights into how socio-economic status (SES), school type, and gender affect students' adjustment patterns. The following are the primary implications for educators and policymakers:

1. **Addressing SES Disparities:**
  - Implement scholarship programs and counseling services for students from lower SES backgrounds.
  - Encourage parental involvement initiatives to create supportive home environments.

2. **Improving Government Schools:**
  - Enhance infrastructure and teacher training to match the quality of private schools.
  - Provide access to extracurricular activities to support emotional and social development.
3. **Gender-Sensitive Approaches:**
  - Develop gender-sensitive teaching strategies to meet the different emotional and behavioral needs of boys and girls.
  - Promote gender equality in academic and extracurricular activities.
4. **Incorporating Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL):**
  - Integrate SEL into the curriculum to improve emotional regulation and social skills, especially for government and lower SES students.
5. **Regular Monitoring and Support:**
  - Use assessment tools to monitor student adjustment and provide timely interventions through school counselors for at-risk students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

1. **Expand the Sample Size:** Future studies should consider larger and more diverse populations, covering different regions and educational contexts to enhance generalizability.
2. **Explore Additional Variables:** Include other influential factors such as parental involvement, peer relationships, and teacher-student interactions in understanding student adjustment.
3. **Longitudinal Studies:** Conduct longitudinal research to track changes in adjustment patterns over time, especially during key transition phases like moving from middle to secondary school.
4. **Qualitative Approaches:** Combine quantitative analysis with qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to gain deeper insights into students' personal experiences and socio-economic challenges.
5. **Intervention-Based Studies:** Examine the impact of specific interventions (e.g., socio-emotional learning programs) aimed at improving student adjustment, particularly in low SES and government school settings.

## CONCLUSION

The study highlights the significant influence of socio-economic status (SES), school type, and gender on students' adjustment patterns. Higher SES students showed better emotional, social, and academic adaptation due to greater access to resources, while disparities between private and government schools reflect broader inequalities in education. Gender differences reveal that girls excel in emotional and social adjustment, while boys show stronger behavioral resilience. These findings emphasize the need for targeted reforms to address SES disparities, improve government school quality, and implement gender-sensitive and socio-emotional learning approaches to enhance student well-being and adjustment outcomes.

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