**MEASURING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT**

Here we start the exploration of differential educational achievement. To fully grasp this area of sociological study, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of how educational achievement is measured. As such, we will investigate the various methods of measuring educational achievement, briefly scrutinize the trends in gender, ethnicity, and class, and identify some of the internal and external factors that can impact educational achievement.

When referring to educational achievement, we are alluding to the qualifications, grades, GNVQ, BTEC, or any other qualification obtained at the conclusion of a specific stage of education. In the United Kingdom, this would entail the conclusion of Key Stage two, Key Stage Four, and Key Stage five. It is worth noting that university level is excluded due to the lack of consistency in the courses that are taught, the way they are assessed, and classified. As universities are private institutions and not governed by governmental policies like schools, we are referring to the achievement of students at the conclusion of each formal stage of education, i.e., Key Stage two, Key Stage Four, and Key Stage Five. When referring to differential educational achievement, we are alluding to the examination of how different groups within society perform in their educational endeavours.

There is a plethora of approaches used to measure educational achievement; however, we will concentrate on a few of the primary methods employed by the media, government, schools, and sociologists. It is worth noting that other methods exist, but the following are widely recognized and utilized.

**RAW GRADES**

In the field of education, the most commonly used system for measuring academic achievement is raw grades. Raw grades are typically determined by looking at the levels achieved on standardized tests such as the SATs, as well as the number of GCSE or A-Level grades that fall within the range of four to five to nine. These grades are usually expressed as a percentage, with the percentage of students who achieve a certain level being used to determine their overall academic performance. For example, at Key Stage Two, the percentage of students who achieve a level six in a specific subject, such as English, Maths, or Science, is often used as an indicator of academic success.

There are several reasons why the range of four to five to nine is commonly used to determine academic achievement. In the case of GCSE grades, for example, a grade of one still indicates that the student has passed the subject, even if their performance was not particularly strong. Similarly, an E grade at A-Level still represents a pass, although it may not be considered a particularly high level of achievement. Schools are often measured based on grades of four or five, which are roughly equivalent to a C grade or a C plus, respectively. Some schools may measure academic achievement based on a range of four to nine, while others may use a range of five to nine. In government evaluations, a range of A's to C's is often used to determine academic performance.

In many cases, schools will promote their percentage of four to five to nine grades in their literature, as these grades are often used to determine their position on league tables. The raw percentage of grades is one of the measures used to determine a school's ranking. For example, a school with a higher percentage of four to five to nine grades will be ranked higher than a school with a lower percentage.

Trends in academic achievement show that, in general, girls tend to outperform boys. While this is not true in all subjects, it is a consistent trend across most academic areas. Ethnicity is another factor that can affect academic performance, with Chinese and Indian students tending to perform above average, while black, Romani, and traveller students tend to perform below average. However, it should be noted that this gap is narrowing rapidly.

Working-class white boys are currently the lowest-achieving group when it comes to raw GCSE and A-Level grades. This can be attributed, in part, to the fact that the education system is designed to cater more to the needs of middle-class students. As such, middle-class students tend to outperform their working-class counterparts.

Now, this is where we start getting into the more complicated systems and these are relatively new, they were introduced by Michael Gove when he was education secretary. And this is looking at what has been referred to as the EBacc or progress and attainment eight.

**ATTAINMENT EIGHT**

The education system has become increasingly complex, with new systems such as the EBacc and progress and attainment eight being introduced by Michael Gove during his tenure as education secretary. The attainment eight system has become increasingly complicated and plays a significant role in league tables and marketization policies. It is crucial for sociology students to understand these systems and how they can disadvantage certain groups of students.

Attainment eight is a measure that only applies to GCSEs. It involves taking the eight subjects that students take at GCSE and breaking them down into three groups.

1. Group one includes English and math, which are double weighted, meaning they count twice.
2. Group two consists of Ebacc subjects, such as sciences, computer sciences, geography, history, and languages.
3. The remaining spots go to other GCSE subjects, vocational qualifications, and the arts.

Each student is given an attainment eight score, calculated by adding up their points for each subject and dividing by 10. However, this measurement can disadvantage students who do not take eight GCSEs, as their remaining gaps would have a zero score, which would still be divided by 10. To determine a school's attainment eight score, all students' scores are added up and divided by the number of students in that cohort.

The trends in attainment eight scores show that girls outperform boys, and there is still a gap between middle-class and working-class students. In terms of ethnicity, Chinese, black African, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi students perform above average, while black Caribbean and Romanian traveller students perform below average. However, this gap is narrowing.

**PROGRESS EIGHT**

The progress 8 score is an indicator of the progress that students make from Key Stage Two to Key Stage Four, providing insight into how well a school is performing. While the progress eight score is challenging to compute, it is useful to understand its calculation process to grasp the underlying trends.

A Progress 8 score is calculated for each pupil by comparing their Attainment 8 score with the average Attainment 8 scores of all pupils nationally who had a similar starting point, using assessment results from the end of primary school. For example, am average attainment 8 school will be determined from all the students who achieved an average level 6 in the Key Stage 2 SATs. This will determine the 0 point. Any student who is above that zero point will receive a positive score and those who did not reach it will get a negative score.

Although it may seem ridiculous to suggest that what a student achieves at 10 impacts what they obtain at 16, this approach is standard practice. The difference between the expected and actual scores is represented by a plus or minus value. A plus score suggests that a student has made more progress than expected, whereas a negative score indicates that the student has not made as much progress as anticipated. This calculation process is used to calculate a school's progress eight score, which is the mean average of all progress eight scores calculated in the same way as the attainment eight score. The score generally ranges from minus one to plus one, with zero indicating expected progress.

The concept of value added is relevant to A-Level students, with a value-added score indicating whether they have added value to their education by achieving more than expected progress. It is challenging to add value to students with high-grade target rates, such as those targeted an A or A\*. If a student achieves an A\*, and the teacher cannot add value beyond that grade, the teacher will receive a value-added score of zero for that student.

Despite the complexity of progress eight, understanding its calculation process is useful to evaluate trends and identify methodological issues. In terms of gender, girls tend to make more progress than boys, and the amount of progress made by girls almost equals the lack of progress made by boys. In contrast, Asian and Black students tend to make more progress than other ethnic groups, despite not achieving higher grades. White and mixed-race students tend to have negative progress eight scores, indicating that they are not making expected progress. Similarly, free school meal students tend to have negative scores, whereas advantage students tend to have positive progress eight scores. By examining progress eight trends within each group, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence educational progress.

**UNIVERSITY ENROLMENT**

The final system uses data related to university enrolment, which is typically used to assess which demographic groups are attending universities in the UK. This data is often used at the governmental level to gain insights into the composition of the student population and to inform policies related to education. This data typically becomes available after enrolment has closed, around December or January. Analysis of this data reveals that Chinese and Asian students tend to have higher levels of university acceptance compared to the lowest group, which tends to be white ethnicity. While data on gender and social class is not currently available, ethnicity tends to be the primary focus. The percentage of students offered a place compared to those who actually enrol is the key metric used, although it is not widely used for school league tables. Instead, this UCAS data is utilized at the governmental level to track the type of students attending universities in the UK. It is important to note that universities are private institutions and not subject to government policies in terms of education. There is no standardized examination or course across universities, so a history course at UEA will differ from one at Oxford, Aberystwyth, or Plymouth. Thus, the UCAS data primarily serves to inform us of which demographic groups are attending university.

**INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS**

When examining the factors influencing educational achievement, it is crucial to consider both internal and external factors. The internal factors relate to what is happening within the school itself, including the quality of teaching, the hidden curriculum, and the formal curriculum. The hidden curriculum refers to the unwritten rules and values that are implicitly taught within schools. The formal curriculum includes the content and structure of what is taught in the classroom, including the ethnocentric and feminized curricula, setting, and streaming.

In addition to the internal factors, external factors also play a significant role in educational achievement. These factors include home life, culture, and education policies. For instance, parental attitudes, spoken languages, and living conditions can impact a student's educational performance. Moreover, gender socialization, peer pressure, and the location of the school, whether it is in a deprived or affluent area, can also have an effect on students' academic outcomes.

To fully comprehend the complexity of the factors influencing educational achievement, sociologists employ a range of specialist terms and concepts. For example, anti-school and pro-school subcultures can arise within pupil subcultures, where students either reject or embrace the values and norms of the school. Furthermore, sociologists use a variety of analytical tools to assess the impact of both internal and external factors on educational achievement. Through careful analysis and comparison of these factors, we can gain a better understanding of the ways in which education shapes and is shaped by society.