
NEWSLETTER

The Disparities in Students' Access to College Admission Information: Narrowing the "Information Divide"

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THIS study investigates the effects of student socio-economic status (SES) on their access to college admission information with a sample of 2056 12th-graders from a county-level city in western China.

Research Findings:

- The effect of the student' SES on their access to college admission information is contingent on their utilization of information from their connections and the internet. Students with high SES have the access to more open information networks through superior family social capital (e.g., connections with professional expertise and experience), as opposed to those with low SES, who can only enjoy comparatively narrow information networks based on the limited knowledge on college choice of their own and their connections in the village and rural school. This gap in social support is a direct consequence of the SES differences between the two groups. The low-SES group is more likely to experience the stagnation of information flow in this regard.
- Students' internet use in accessing college admission information is associated with their personal preferences and information search tactics. High-SES students are skillful in using internet-based official platforms provided by the government's college admission management departments and universities' admission offices to obtain richer and more authoritative information. On the other hand, low-SES students may resort to social media, such as WeChat, Micro-blog, and TikTok, and as a result, the information gathered is unreliable and incomplete. Students' use of internet-based channels is determined by their internet use habits developed under different social and cultural backgrounds as well as being influenced by the social support they have received. Internet-based information channels used by low-SES students are less effective or sometimes, even misleading.
- The high school and classroom teacher play vital roles in providing valuable information on the transition to postsecondary education for students. The school's guidance in this regard can sig-

nificantly narrow the SES gap in the access to college admission information between students; the classroom teacher plays an important compensatory role in supplying low-SES students with relevant information, which should have been partially fulfilled by their parents.

Based on its research findings, the study highlights the following implications: (i) For lower-SES students, the improvement in the individual's information literacy can make up for the inadequacy in college admission information due to the lack of social support. (ii) Public institutions, particularly the high school, have the obligation to transmit comprehensive information on university admission to students and provide relevant education to enhance their information acquisition competence. (iii) School progression counseling institutions should be encouraged to open up advisory services of reasonable charges to meet low-SES students' needs for both public and on-demand information about university admission. In addition, the study proposes to establish an information support mechanism based on joint efforts of homes, public agencies, and private institutions to promote the equity in the access to Gaokao-related information among all students.

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