

Who Feels at Home in School? Exploring Satisfaction with School Life across Gender and Class Lines

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Received: 26-04-2025

Revised: 14-05-2025

Accepted: 01-06-2025

Published: 16-06-2025

ABSTRACT

This study examined the differences in students' satisfaction with school life based on gender and socioeconomic status among government high schools in urban Faisalabad, Pakistan. A total of 800 students participated in the study through a convenience sampling approach. Satisfaction with school life was measured using an adapted version of the Satisfaction with Life Scale. This scale consists of five items rated on a five-point Likert scale. Independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA with Tukey post hoc analyses were conducted to assess group differences. Results showed that female students reported significantly higher satisfaction with school life than male students on most items, with moderate effect sizes. Significant differences were also found across socioeconomic groups, where high-SES students expressed greater satisfaction than medium- and low-SES students, supported by medium-to-large effect sizes. These findings highlight that gender and socioeconomic status are important correlates of students' satisfaction with school life.

Keywords: Student satisfaction, school life, gender differences, socioeconomic status, high school students

INTRODUCTION

School life represents a crucial developmental stage during which students form attitudes, values, and emotional attachments that influence their academic engagement and overall well-being (Bang & Heo,

2022). Students' satisfaction with their school life reflects their subjective evaluation of the quality of their school experiences and their emotional responses to the school environment (Brisson et al., 2024). High levels of satisfaction with school life are associated with positive academic outcomes, social adjustment, and emotional resilience (Cavioni et al., 2021). On the other hand, low satisfaction often results in disengagement, absenteeism, or even school dropout (Ayllón-Salas & Fernández-Martín, 2024). In Pakistan, particularly in government schools, understanding students' satisfaction with school life is essential for educational policymakers and practitioners. Despite ongoing reforms aimed at improving school infrastructure and teaching practices, disparities in student satisfaction with school life persist. These disparities are driven by factors such as gender and socioeconomic status (SES) (Liu et al., 2022).

Gender remains a particularly salient variable in the Pakistani educational context, where cultural expectations, parental attitudes, and classroom dynamics frequently differ for boys and girls (Shahzad, Akhtar, Batoon, et al., 2024). Female students may experience varying levels of teacher support, peer interaction, and feelings of safety in school, all of which shape their satisfaction with school life (Shahzad, Akhtar, & Sajid, 2024). Similarly, socioeconomic status profoundly influences students' access to learning resources, extracurricular opportunities, and family support for education. Students from higher SES backgrounds generally have better access to academic materials, parental guidance, and a conducive home learning environment. These factors enhance their satisfaction with school experiences compared to peers from lower SES groups. Thus, the aim of present study is to explore differences in satisfaction with school life based on gender and socioeconomic status among students enrolled in government high schools located in urban areas of Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Satisfaction with School Life

Satisfaction with school life refers to students' overall cognitive and affective evaluations of their experiences within the school environment (Gul, 2022). It encompasses the extent to which students feel content, fulfilled, and positive about their school experiences, including relationships with teachers and peers, school safety, academic engagement, and the learning environment (Moral-García et al., 2021; Wu & Becker, 2023). Bang and Heo (2022) conceptualized school satisfaction as a key component of students' broader life satisfaction and well-being. Research consistently shows that students who are more satisfied with their school life demonstrate higher levels of academic motivation, emotional adjustment, and social competence (Tian et al., 2023).

Gender and Satisfaction with School Life

Gender differences in satisfaction with school life have been widely reported, though findings vary across contexts. In some educational systems, girls tend to report higher satisfaction due to stronger teacher-student relationships and better peer support networks (Marquez, 2023; Nogueira et al., 2021). In contrast, boys may express greater satisfaction in environments that emphasize sports, autonomy, and outdoor activities (Kim et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2019). In Pakistan, gender norms and schooling practices may influence how boys and girls perceive their educational experiences. Studies in South Asian contexts have shown that female students value relational support and academic recognition more strongly, contributing to higher satisfaction levels. However, societal constraints, limited mobility, and safety concerns can undermine girls' sense of comfort and belonging in school settings (Piko & Hamvai, 2010; Reyes et al., 2025; Sağın, 2022).

Socioeconomic Status and Satisfaction with School Life

Socioeconomic status is another key determinant of students' perceptions of their school experiences. Higher SES students typically enjoy access to more educational resources, private tutoring, and enriched home environments, which positively shape their school satisfaction (Carvalho & Novo, 2017; Destin et al., 2019). Conversely, students from lower SES backgrounds often face challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of facilities, and limited parental involvement, all of which may reduce satisfaction (Fang et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2019). Evidence from both developed and developing countries indicates that SES strongly predicts differences in academic self-concept and subjective well-being (Liu et al., 2022; Mastrokoukou et al., 2024). In Pakistan's government schools, even within urban areas, students from diverse SES backgrounds may experience varying levels of satisfaction due to unequal access to educational support and material resources.

Summary and Research Focus

Significant gender differences in satisfaction with school life exist among high school students, but these differences are complex and context-dependent. Girls often report higher satisfaction with school as a domain, while boys may have higher overall life satisfaction. The size and direction of these differences can vary by country, school environment, and other factors. Drawing from the reviewed literature, the current study examines gender- and SES-based differences in satisfaction with school life among students in government high schools in urban Faisalabad.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine differences in students' satisfaction with school life based on gender and socioeconomic status. This design was considered appropriate because it allows for the statistical comparison of distinct groups within a population at a single point in time. The study focused on students enrolled in government high schools located in urban areas of Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

The target population consisted of male and female students studying in government high schools in urban Faisalabad. A total of 800 students participated in the study. Respondents were selected through convenience sampling. This technique was adopted due to accessibility constraints and the need to include a diverse set of schools within the city. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection. Efforts were made to include students from different socioeconomic backgrounds to ensure adequate representation of the study variables.

To assess students' satisfaction with school life, this study employed an adapted version of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985). The original SWLS contains five items designed to measure global life satisfaction. For the purposes of this study, each item was reworded to reflect the educational domain by substituting the term "life" with "school life" (e.g., "I am satisfied with my life" was adapted as "I am satisfied with my school life"). This approach is consistent with prior research that has domain-specific applications of the SWLS. Responses were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Table 1 presents full scale of satisfaction with school life scale.

Table 1

The Study Scale

Satisfaction with School Life Scale	Description
<p>Satisfaction with School Life Adapted from <i>Satisfaction with Life Scale</i> (Diener et al., 1985)</p>	<p>Measured students' overall satisfaction with various aspects of their school experience through five items:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In most ways, my school life is close to my ideal. 2. The conditions of my school life are excellent. 3. I am satisfied with my school life. 4. So far, I have gotten the important things I want in my school life. 5. If I could live my school life over, I would change almost nothing.

Socioeconomic status (SES) was measured through a single self-reported question designed to capture students' perceptions of their family's educational and income background. The item asked: Which of the following best describes your family's socioeconomic status? Response options were: (1) My parents have little or no formal education, and our family income is low (we struggle to meet basic needs), (2) My parents have some schooling (up to matric), and our family income is modest (we can meet basic needs but not much more), (3) My parents are educated (intermediate or bachelor's level), and our family income is average (we live comfortably and can afford some extras), and (4) My parents are highly educated (master's level or higher), and our family income is high (we can afford many extras such as a car, air conditioner, etc.). For analysis, the responses were categorized into low, medium, and high SES groups to facilitate statistical comparisons.

Data were collected during regular school hours with prior permission from school authorities. The purpose of the study was explained to the students, and confidentiality of responses was ensured. Questionnaires were distributed and collected on-site to minimize response bias and nonresponse errors. Out of 800 questionnaires distributed, only fully completed and valid responses ($n = 610$) were retained for analysis.

Collected data were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were applied. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed to summarize respondents' responses. To test the study hypotheses, independent samples t-test was used to examine differences in satisfaction with school life based on gender, while one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to assess differences across socioeconomic status groups. Where significant group differences were identified in ANOVA, post hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) were conducted to determine which specific groups differed significantly from one another. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was adopted for all statistical tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Study Sample (n = 610)

Gender	f	%
Male	290	47.5
Female	320	52.5
Socioeconomic Status (SES)		
Low SES	225	36.9
Medium SES	270	44.3
High SES	115	18.9
Family type		
Nuclear	157	25.7
Joint	293	48.0
Extended	160	26.2

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the study sample. The sample included 290 boys (47.5%) and 320 girls (52.5%), showing a nearly balanced gender representation, with a slightly higher proportion of female students. With respect to socioeconomic status (SES), the majority of participants belonged to the medium SES group (n = 270, 44.3%), followed by those in the low SES category (n = 225, 36.9%), and a smaller proportion from the high SES group (n = 115, 18.9%). This pattern reflects the socioeconomic composition typical of students enrolled in government schools in urban Faisalabad, where middle- and lower-income families are more prevalent.

Regarding family type, nearly half of the respondents reported living in joint families (n = 293, 48.0%), while 157 students (25.7%) belonged to nuclear families, and 160 students (26.2%) were part of extended family structures. The dominance of joint families aligns with cultural norms in Pakistan, where multi-generational living arrangements are common, even in urban settings. Overall, the demographic profile indicates that the study captured a diverse and representative sample of government school students. This comprehensive sample enabled meaningful analysis of gender and socioeconomic differences in satisfaction with school life.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in students' satisfaction with school life across the five adapted SWLS items. Means, standard deviations, t-values, significance levels, and effect sizes (Cohen's d) are reported in Table 3.

Item 1 (“In most ways, my school life is close to my ideal”) showed a statistically significant gender difference, $t(608) = 5.91, p < .001$, with females ($M = 4.44$) reporting higher satisfaction than males ($M = 3.997$). The effect size was moderate (Cohen’s $d = 0.48$), indicating a practically meaningful difference. Item 2 (“The conditions of my school life are excellent”) did not show a significant gender difference, $t(608) = -0.81, p = .421$, and the effect size was negligible (Cohen’s $d = -0.07$), suggesting that both male and female students rated the conditions of their school life similarly.

Item 3 (“I am satisfied with my school life”) also revealed a significant difference in favor of females, $t(608) = 5.47, p < .001$, with a moderate effect size (Cohen’s $d = 0.44$). Similarly, Item 4 (“So far, I have gotten the important things I want in my school life”) showed a significant gender difference, $t(608) = 6.07, p < .001$, with females ($M = 4.34$) scoring higher than males ($M = 3.90$), and a moderate effect size (Cohen’s $d = 0.49$). Item 5 (“If I could live my school life over, I would change almost nothing”) did not show a statistically significant difference between genders, $t(608) = 0.06, p = .951$, with a negligible effect size (Cohen’s $d = 0.005$).

Therefore, the results indicate that female students reported higher satisfaction than male students on three of the five items (Items 1, 3, and 4), with moderate effect sizes, whereas gender differences on Items 2 and 5 were not statistically significant.

Table 3

Gender Differences

Item	T	p	Mean Female	Mean Male	Cohen's d
Item1	5.905	0.000	4.441	3.997	0.478
Item2	-0.805	0.421	4.081	4.152	-0.065
Item3	5.470	0.000	4.522	4.086	0.444
Item4	6.068	0.000	4.344	3.903	0.490
Item5	0.062	0.951	3.644	3.638	0.005

Note: Independent-Samples t-test

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in students’ satisfaction with school life across three socioeconomic status (SES) groups: Low, Medium, and High. The results indicated that SES was significantly associated with satisfaction for some items but not others. Specifically, Item 2 (“The conditions of my school life are excellent”) showed a significant effect of SES, $F(2, 607) = 109.61, p < .001$, with a large effect size ($\eta^2 = .265$), as High SES students ($M = 5.11$) reported greater satisfaction than Medium ($M = 4.16$) and Low SES students ($M = 3.55$). Similarly, Item 3 (“I am satisfied with my school life”) differed significantly across SES groups, $F(2, 607) = 55.78, p < .001, \eta^2 = .155$, with High SES students scoring highest ($M = 5.06$), followed by Medium ($M = 4.31$) and Low SES ($M = 3.94$). Item 5 (“If I could live my school life over, I would change almost nothing”) also showed a significant SES effect, $F(2, 607) = 134.90, p < .001, \eta^2 = .308$, with a clear pattern of higher satisfaction among students with higher SES (High $M = 4.72$; Medium $M = 3.78$; Low $M = 2.92$).

In contrast, Items 1 (“In most ways, my school life is close to my ideal”) and 4 (“So far, I have gotten the important things I want in my school life”) did not differ significantly across SES groups (Item 1: $F(2, 607) = 1.57, p = .209, \eta^2 = .005$; Item 4: $F(2, 607) = 0.21, p = .808, \eta^2 = .001$), indicating that some aspects of school satisfaction were consistent regardless of socioeconomic background. Table 4 presents the results of One-Way ANOVA test. Overall, these results suggest that SES plays an important role in certain dimensions of school life satisfaction, with higher SES students generally reporting greater satisfaction.

Table 4

SES Differences

Item	F	p	Eta-squared	High SES Mean	Medium SES Mean	Low SES Mean
Item1	1.571	0.2087	0.005	4.365	4.178	4.222
Item2	109.612	0.000	0.265	5.113	4.163	3.547
Item3	55.780	0.000	0.155	5.061	4.307	3.942
Item4	0.213	0.8084	0.001	4.148	4.107	4.160
Item5	134.899	0.000	0.308	4.722	3.778	2.924

Note: One-Way ANOVA

Post-hoc analyses using Tukey’s HSD test were conducted to examine pairwise differences between SES groups for the items that showed significant ANOVA effects (see Table 5). For Item 2 (“The conditions of my school life are excellent”), all pairwise comparisons were significant: High SES students scored higher than Low SES students (mean difference = -1.566, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.816, -1.317]) and higher than Medium SES students (mean difference = -0.950, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.192, -0.708]), while Medium SES students scored higher than Low SES students (mean difference = 0.616, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.420, 0.813]). For Item 3 (“I am satisfied with my school life”), High SES students scored significantly higher than Low SES (mean difference = -1.119, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.367, -0.870]) and Medium SES (mean difference = -0.753, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.995, -0.512]), and Medium SES students scored higher than Low SES students (mean difference = 0.365, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.169, 0.561]). Similarly, for Item 5 (“If I could live my school life over, I would change almost nothing”), all SES pairwise comparisons were significant: High SES students scored higher than Low SES (mean difference = -1.797, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-2.059, -1.536]) and Medium SES (mean difference = -0.944, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.198, -0.690]), and Medium SES students scored higher than Low SES (mean difference = 0.853, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.647, 1.060]). These results indicate a clear pattern in which higher SES students consistently reported greater satisfaction with school life than Medium and Low SES students across these dimensions.

Table 5

SES Post-Hoc Comparisons

Item	Group1	Group2	Mean Difference	Adjusted P value	Lower CI	Upper CI	Difference
Item2	High	Low	-1.566	0.000	-1.816	-1.317	Significant
Item2	High	Medium	-0.950	0.000	-1.192	-0.708	Significant
Item2	Low	Medium	0.616	0.000	0.420	0.813	Significant
Item3	High	Low	-1.119	0.000	-1.367	-0.870	Significant
Item3	High	Medium	-0.753	0.000	-0.995	-0.512	Significant
Item3	Low	Medium	0.365	0.000	0.169	0.561	Significant
Item5	High	Low	-1.797	0.000	-2.059	-1.536	Significant
Item5	High	Medium	-0.944	0.000	-1.198	-0.690	Significant
Item5	Low	Medium	0.853	0.000	0.647	1.060	Significant

Note: Tukey HSD test, CI = confidence interval

DISCUSSION

The present study examined gender and socioeconomic differences in students' satisfaction with school life among government high school students in urban Faisalabad, Pakistan. The findings revealed that gender and socioeconomic status significantly influenced students' perceptions of their school experiences. Female students reported higher satisfaction levels than male students on most items, particularly regarding perceptions that school life was close to their ideal, that school conditions were excellent, and that they had achieved important goals in school life. These results align with earlier research suggesting that girls often express greater attachment and satisfaction with school environments (Brisson et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2021; Marquez, 2023; Tian et al., 2023). A plausible explanation may be higher compliance with academic expectations and stronger social connections within the classroom (Nogueira et al., 2021; Reyes et al., 2025). In contrast, boys may experience lower satisfaction as a result of disengagement, peer influences, or perceptions of school rules as restrictive (Tian et al., 2023).

Socioeconomic differences were also substantial and consistent across several satisfaction indicators. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds expressed significantly greater satisfaction with their school life compared to those from lower and medium SES groups. Post hoc analyses further clarified that the high-SES group consistently reported higher means across key satisfaction items. These findings are in line with prior studies showing that socioeconomic advantage enhances access to educational resources,

extracurricular opportunities, and supportive home environments, which collectively contribute to a more positive perception of school life (Carvalho & Novo, 2017; Fang et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2022). Conversely, students from low-SES families may face structural and psychological barriers. They may include limited parental education, economic stress, or resource scarcity. They potentially hinder their sense of fulfillment and belonging in school (Destin et al., 2019; Mastrokoukou et al., 2024).

Interestingly, no significant gender differences emerged for certain items, such as “If I could live my school life over, I would change almost nothing,” indicating that some aspects of school satisfaction are shared across genders. Similarly, SES did not influence all dimensions equally, suggesting that while economic resources enhance overall satisfaction, other non-material factors (peer relationships) may also play an important role in shaping students’ school experiences.

To summarize, these findings emphasize that both gender and socioeconomic factors are critical in understanding students’ satisfaction with school life within the Pakistani context. Improving satisfaction levels, particularly among male and low-SES students, may require inclusive classroom environments, motivational support, and equitable access to learning opportunities. The results highlight the importance of forming an environment where all students can feel valued and supported irrespective of gender or socioeconomic status.

CONCLUSION

The study explored gender and socioeconomic differences in students’ satisfaction with school life among government high schools in urban Faisalabad, Pakistan. The results revealed that both gender and socioeconomic status play significant roles in shaping students’ perceptions of their school experiences. Female students reported higher satisfaction levels than male students on most aspects of school life. Girls generally view their educational environment more positively. Likewise, students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrated greater satisfaction than those from medium or low SES groups. The study highlights the association of gender and SES with satisfaction with school life.

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