

BBC Learning English  
6 Minute English  
*Poverty and education*



NB: This is not a word for word transcript

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**Dan:** Hello, I'm Dan.

**Alice:** And I'm Alice.

**Dan:** And this is 6 Minute English! Today we're talking about a new report that examines how poverty can affect education.

**Alice:** The report, from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – or OECD – studies whether there is an inevitable link between wealth and academic performance.

**Dan:** You'd think that children from poorer backgrounds perform less well at school than children from richer backgrounds, right Alice?

**Alice:** Well, that makes sense – if you're from a disadvantaged background then **'the odds are stacked against you'** – you're less likely to succeed because the situation is unfavourable.

**Dan:** But the OECD report says that in certain countries children from poorer backgrounds are more likely to achieve good grades and do well academically *despite* having the odds stacked against them.

**Alice:** So it's easier for poorer school students – or **pupils** – to achieve high grades in some countries rather than others then, Dan?

**Dan:** Exactly. They achieve against the odds. For example, poorer children in Canada and Japan are more likely to achieve good grades than poor children in the UK. There's a more level playing field in those countries than in Britain.

**Alice:** That's a good phrase – **a level playing field** – it comes from sport; if you're playing on a level playing field, it's a fair situation for everybody. So where are poorer pupils most likely to do well then, Dan?

**Dan:** Ah, well that's this week's question actually, Alice. Which country do you think came top in the OECD list for pupils doing well, even when the odds are stacked against them? Was it:

- a) Finland
- b) Canada
- c) South Korea

**Alice:** And I'll guess...Finland?

**Dan:** Well, we'll see if you're right at the end of the programme. Now let's hear from Professor Yvonne Kelly from the University of Essex. She specialises in how economic factors can influence childhood development. Here she is talking about her research in the UK. What factors does she say could be affected by different levels of family income?

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**Professor Yvonne Kelly, University of Essex**

**We compared levels of family income with the likelihood of children having social and emotional difficulties, and also their cognitive ability skills.**

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**Dan:** So the research compared levels of family **income** – that's how much money a family earns – with the likelihood of children having social and emotional difficulties.

**Alice:** **Social** here refers to how people live and work together; and **emotional** refers to how the children react to their feelings. So the income of a family could affect whether the children have social and emotional difficulties.

**Dan:** And the research also looked at children's **cognitive** ability skills – that's the way children learn. Cognitive is a scientific term that refers to how we process information.

**Alice:** And what were the findings of this research then, Dan?

**Dan:** Well Professor Kelly says that children from low-income families were more likely to show symptoms of social and emotional difficulties. She says they

can be more **fidgety**, **restless** and **clingy**. Could you explain some of these terms for us, Alice?

**Alice:** Sure. Well, to fidget means to make small, quick movements in a nervous way, so fidgety means moving nervously. Being restless means you're unable to relax, and clingy, well here it means that the child doesn't want to be separated from their parents.

**Dan:** OK, let's listen to Professor Kelly again. How many times more likely were children from poorer backgrounds to suffer from social and emotional difficulties?

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**Professor Yvonne Kelly, University of Essex**

**Children from the poorest households were between seven and eight times more likely to have social and emotional difficulties – things like being excessively fidgety, restless, clingy – compared to their better-off counterparts.**

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**Dan:** So children from poorer backgrounds were seven or eight times more likely to be fidgety, restless and clingy than their better-off counterparts.

**Alice:** **Better-off** here means richer; and a **counterpart** is a person who's at the same level, or who does the same job. So the better-off counterparts here are children of the same age who are from richer backgrounds.

But Dan, did you say that some countries have less of a divide between the grades of richer pupils and poorer pupils than other countries?

**Dan:** That's right, although there's a strong link between family income and how well pupils perform at school, the report says that the education systems in some countries are more likely to help students from poorer backgrounds develop self-confidence and motivation to succeed.

**Alice:** OK, so don't keep me waiting, Dan – which countries are they?

**Dan:** Well, I can tell you that South Korea, Finland, Japan, Turkey and Canada are the most successful countries in terms of poorer pupils achieving high results. But today's question was which country came *top* in the OECD list for poorer students getting higher grades? Was it:

- a) Finland
- b) Canada
- c) South Korea

**Alice:** And I said Finland.

**Dan:** Well, in fact it was South Korea. In fact, the top five places by regional and national school systems are all in Asia: South Korea leads the countries, and Shanghai, Hong Kong, Macao and Singapore are also in the top five. France, Australia and the US are around average for pupils succeeding against the odds, and the UK is - unfortunately - well below average. Well Alice, before we go, let's hear some of the words and phrases we've used in today's programme:

**Alice:** OK.

**the odds are stacked against you**

**pupils**

**a level playing field**

**income**

**social and emotional**

**cognitive**

**fidgety**

**restless**

**clingy**

**better-off**

**counterpart**

**Dan:** Thanks, Alice. I hope you've enjoyed today's programme and you'll join us again for more *6 Minute English* next time.

**Both:** Bye.

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>the odds are stacked against you</b>	it is very unlikely you will succeed because in your current situation many things will work against you
<b>pupils</b>	learners who are taught in a class
<b>a level playing field</b>	a situation allowing an equal chance for all participants to be successful at something
<b>income</b>	money earned from working
<b>social and emotional</b>	people living and interacting with each other (social); people responding outwardly to their feelings (emotional)
<b>cognitive</b>	the process of our brains learning, knowing and thinking about information
<b>fidgety</b>	making small, quick movements in a nervous way
<b>restless</b>	moving about aimlessly, unable to relax or focus on tasks
<b>clingy</b>	not wanting to be separated from other people, often physically holding on to them or seeking their attention
<b>better-off</b>	here, richer or from a more privileged background
<b>counterpart</b>	person who is at the same level (e.g. at school) or does the same job as someone else

### More on this story:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-13794591>

### Read and listen to the story and the vocabulary online:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/general/sixminute/2011/06/110630\\_6min\\_english\\_poverty\\_page.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/general/sixminute/2011/06/110630_6min_english_poverty_page.shtml)