

Influence of Poverty on Academic Performance: A Systematic Study of Secondary School Students in Enugu East LGA

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Abstract

Academic performance is at the core of manpower training in Nigeria's federating units. The research sought to examine how poverty has impacted on the academic performance of students in Enugu East public secondary schools. Survey research design was adopted. Structured questionnaire was constructed on a 4point Likert scale and textbooks, journals and unpublished works were consulted and referenced as secondary sources. The study revealed inter alia that, poverty influences the academic performance of students in Enugu East LGA in terms of classroom teaching and learning. Conclusively, the impact of poverty is enormous and the present state of poor academic performance here and beyond categorically shows that there is an assignment to be completed vis-à-vis the quantum of development plans and poverty alleviation programs. Thus, government should roll out sustainable scholarship schemes that would ensure the achievement of the educational aspirations of poor students living in Enugu East LGA and beyond.

Key words: Academic Performance, Poverty, Education, Secondary School, Nigeria

Introduction

Academic performance is at the core of manpower training in Nigeria federating units, especially Enugu state. Unfortunately, different indicators in Nigeria and Enugu East LGA, Enugu State show that majority of the citizens are wallowing in abject penury. Confucius was right to have said that, "In a country well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed

of...” Suffice it to say that, Nigeria is far from being well governed. Thus, paving the way for poor academic performance of students at all levels with special reference to those in public secondary schools in Nigeria. To Ajaikaye & Adayeye (2000, p.5) poverty is “a function of education, health, child mortality and other demographic variables.” Therefore, poor performance is part of the end products of poverty and poor education can lead to poverty.

Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits (Lamichhane, 2018, p.24). Education is the transmission of knowledge and varied matters from the educator(s) to the learner(s) in a manner best suited for the lesson to be learnt. This process has some apparent militating factors (poverty and so on) that inhibit the successful transmission of such knowledge, values, beliefs and skills. Amzat (2010, p.55) insisted that, “the impact of poverty on education is of great significance and it is tormenting to see students struggling and battling the hardship to study without any support from the government or their parents.” According to Gweshengwe et al. (2020, p.1), “poverty is one of the defining challenges of the 21st Century facing the world.” Indeed, “The reduction of poverty is one of the most difficult challenges facing any country in the developing world where, the majority of the population is considered poor (Ogwumike, 2001, p.1).” To this end, “the 2030 Global Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals has called for the elimination of all forms of poverty everywhere in the world (Koehler, 2017).” The desideratum is that sovereign states of the world and Nigeria in particular should pay unadulterated attention to students from poor families and also positively responds to the poor socio-economic life of the masses.

Statement of the Problem

According to National Center for Education Statistics (2001), “Academic success is important because it is strongly linked to positive outcomes. Not surprising, research shows that adults with high level of education are more likely to be employed and to earn higher salaries.” In the location of the study, many students in government owned secondary schools performed badly in classroom teaching and learning; internal examinations; external

examinations; and take home assignments. The variables associated with students' performance which guided the study are: late registration, late payment of school fees, non-attendance to classes as a result of lack of writing materials and text books and so on. Significantly, the effect of poverty on education is grave, as it has affected the society's core values, productivity, industry and other areas. These impacts have demythologized the story regarding the euphoria evident in quality and the quantity of educational training and the resultant performance of students in the classroom and beyond classroom experience.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

- I. How does poverty influence the academic performance of students in Enugu East LGA in terms of classroom teaching and learning?
- II. How would you rate the influence of poverty on students' academic performance in their internal examinations?
- III. How does poverty affect performance of secondary schools students in external examinations?
- IV. What is the extent to which poverty disturbs students' performance in the area of take home assignments?

Academic Performance: A Brief Definition

Academic performance defies single line definition. We thus view it from different angles. Anthony (2018) operationalized academic performance as "the results obtained by a student at end of a specific term in all subject." Scott (2012) defined academic performance as how well a student is accomplishing his task in school. Be that as it may; *ceteris paribus*, academic performance is basically the extent to which students have achieved the set educational objectives over a specific period of time – per term or session.

In educational institutions success is measured by academic performance or how well a student meets standards set out by the institution (Bell, 2011). Ayodele (2015, p.1) posited that, "Academic performance is commonly measured by examination and continuous assessments, usually

given at specific periods in an academic session.” Also, we bear in mind that:

In relation to educational research, academic performance of a student can be regarded as the observable and measurable behaviour of a student in a particular situation. We can equate academic performance with the observed behaviour or expectation of achieving a specific statement of or statement of educational intention in a research. Academic performance of students consists of scores obtained from teacher-made test, first term examination, mid-semester test and so on (Yusuf, 2002, p.87).

Additionally, “quite a number of factors determine the level and quality of students’ academic performance. They include grades, attendants, extracurricular activities and behavior (Scott, 2012).” The factors influencing student performance are classified into two: “(1) Academic factors and (2) Non-academic factors. Academic factors include teaching methods, self-learning efforts, and student previous results, whilst non-academic factors are those like health factors, personal factors, financial factors, and even the environment and its composition like people and culture (Laurel, Wrong, Chan and Safiyyah, 2008, p.207).” Poverty when microscopically examined is among the non-academic factors capable of influencing student academic performance.

Poverty: A Conceptual Clarification

Poverty is commonly defined as a situation of low income or low consumption. It can also be viewed as a situation in which individuals are unable to meet the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, education, security and health (Mustapha, 2011, p.189). In this lens, while low income is a cause, low consumption and poor performance become the effects thereof. Poverty is “...a situation in which an individual is unable because of economic, social, political and psychological incapacitation, to provide himself and his family the barest basic necessities of life (Mustapha, 2011, p.189).” Interestingly, Ajaikeye and Adeyeye (2000) conceptualized poverty as “a function of education, health, child morality and other demographic variables.”

What else do we say about poverty? “A culture of poverty is not just a matter of deprivation or disorganization – a term signifying the absence of something. It is a culture in traditional anthropological sense in that it provides human beings with a design for living, or ready-made set of solutions for human problems, and so serves significant adaptive functions (Jeremy, 2014).” Operationally, poverty is a state of acute deprivation of essential needs, which could be in form of money, water, shelter, food, security, land, education, and other basic essentialities to good and considerable standard of living. Also, it is a condition of lack of money useful for the provision of study materials needed for the training of a child or ward in school. Based on this, it is the students that suffer the poverty of the parents, because this condition in one way or the other affects the performance of students. These issues intermingle to make poverty a complex problem bedeviling Nigerians in Enugu East LGA.

Review of Empirical Literature

Kainuwa and Yusuf (2013) in their paper titled, “Influence of Socio-Economic and Educational Background of Parents on their Children’s Education in Nigeria,” sought to examine how socio-economic status and educational background of the parents affects the education of their children; examine the role of parents’ socio-economic and educational background on the educational process of their children; and to provide some suggestions for parents on how to overcome personal and economic challenges. Their paper stated that, one of the most important influencers in education is worldview. They noted that every curriculum, text book, and teacher has a worldview that influences the students. Also, children’s education was affected with the level of education of their parents.

Another strand of scholarly research conducted by The Institute for Public Policy & Economic Development (2016) was titled, “The impact of poverty on a child’s academic performance.” They examined data from each public school district in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties to see how the data from Northeastern Pennsylvania corresponds to existing scholarly research and to find relationships between school performance measures and socioeconomic measures that may shed light on how socioeconomic status impact education in Northeastern Pennsylvania. It

found that, in Lackawanna County, the lowest median family income was found to be in Carbondale Area, with a median income of \$44,075.

Gap in literature

The above studies did not consider the influence of poverty on the academic performance of secondary schools students in Enugu East Local Government Area in terms of: classroom teaching and learning; internal examinations; external examinations; and take home assignments. These are vacuums in scholarly literatures that this present study sought to fill and to the best of my knowledge, these areas have not been studied.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted survey research design as it proved to be suitable design for the study.

Data Generation Method

The primary data in this study were collected through the use of structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was carefully designed in dichotomous and multiple choice approach using: Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree and Disagree. The research was validated by the researcher's supervisor and two research experts (one from Enugu State College of Education Technical and another from Crown Theological Seminary Enugu). To determine the reliability of the research, Cronbach Alpha was used. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was 0.997, which indicates a high level of internal consistency for the scale.

Selection of Participants

The population of teachers in the scope of the study is one thousand two hundred and fifty five (1255) (PPSMB, 2017). Using Taro Yamani, the researcher arrived at 303 as the sample size of this study. However, a total of two hundred and fifty five (255) questionnaires were retrieved from the respondents by the researcher. Out of 255 returned questionnaire, 80 questionnaires were mutilated and were not part of the analysis. The study was based on 175 from whence the data for the study was produced.

Method of data Analysis and Ethics

The researcher adopted descriptive and inferential analyses. On ethical issues, the researcher wrote to the research unit of Enugu State PPSMB and approval was gotten. The populations of the tutorial staff of Enugu East secondary schools were consequently divulged. The researcher convinced the teachers in the schools surveyed that the survey was solely for academic purpose and that their identities and information supplied will on no account be divulged to any third party.

Data Analysis

Question A: How does poverty influence the academic performance of students in Enugu East LGA in terms of classroom teaching and learning?

Table 1

Mean ratings of the Responses of Principal and Teachers on the Influence of Poverty on the Academic Performance of Students in Enugu East LGA in terms of Classroom Teaching and Learning.

S/ N	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	SD (2)	D (1)	\bar{X}	Variance	Std	Decision
1	There are very high cases of poor parents sending their children/wards to hawk instead of sending them to secondary schools to learn.	100	45	11	19	3.2914	0.9836	0.99 18	Accepted
2	Students' non attendance to classes as a result of lack of writing materials and text books.	95	45	20	15	3.2571	0.9339	0.96 64	Accepted
3	Poverty makes students to be carried away during learning hours.	9	95	60	11	2.5829	0.4717	0.68 68	Accepted
4	Cases of male preference in education of students are predominant due to poverty.	7	97	61	10	2.5771	0.4383	0.66 20	Accepted

5	Incidences of teenagers serving as sales boys or girls are common in Enugu East Local Government Area.	32	82	35	26	2.6857	0.8784	0.9372	Accepted
6	Poor students are not allowed to take part in the learning activities due to nonpayment of school fees and lack of learning materials.	55	49	1	70	2.5087	1.6785	1.2956	Accepted
7	Poverty directly account for increase in the rate of school drop outs.	101	33	14	27	3.1886	1.2372	1.1123	Accepted
Grand Total						2.8702	0.9459	0.9503	

Source: *Filed work 2018*

Question B: How would you rate the influence of poverty on students' academic performance in their internal examinations?

Table 2

Mean ratings of the Responses of Principal and Teachers on the Influence of Poverty on Students' Academic Performance in their Internal Examinations

S/N	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	SD (2)	D (1)	\bar{X}	Variance	Std	Decision
8	Poverty accounts for poor performance in oral tests and exams.	90	7	3	75	2.64	2.1161	1.4547	Accepted
9	Poor students who marry early perform poorly in internal examinations.	2	167	4	2	2.9657	0.0784	0.28	Accepted
10	Students' late payment of school fees	100	46	20	9	3.3543	0.7659	0.8752	Accepted

	contribute to poor performance in internal examinations.								
11	Poor students who live in shanty areas perform badly in written exams.	17	99	51	8	2.7143	0.4898	0.6998	Accepted
Grand Total						2.9186	0.8626	0.8274	

Source: *Field work*

Question C: How does poverty affect performance of secondary schools students in external examinations?

Table 3

Mean ratings of the Responses of Principal and Teachers on how Poverty affects Performance of Secondary Schools Students in External Examinations.

S/N	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	SD (2)	D (1)	\bar{X}	Variance	Std	Decision
12	Majority of poor students lack the appropriate diction to relay their views on questions in written exams conducted by external exam bodies.	89	70	10	6	3.3829	0.5563	0.7459	Accepted
13	Poverty accounts for late registration of students for their external exams.	66	35	4	70	2.5543	1.8013	1.3421	Accepted
14	There is no adequate guidance of students in subjects like: Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry by private teachers prior to the exams	155	0	1	19	3.6629	0.8863	0.9414	Accepted

due to parents'
poverty.

Grand Total	3.2000	0.7480	1.0098
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Source: *Field work (2018)*

Question D: What is the extent to which poverty disturbs students' performance in the area of take home assignments?

Table 4

Mean ratings of the Responses of Principal and Teachers on the extent to which Poverty disturbs Students' Performance in the area of Take Home Assignments.

S/N	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	SD (2)	D (1)	\bar{X}	Variance	Std	Decision
15	There is limited number of materials needed for the assignment due to parents' poverty.	23	144	3	5	3.0571	0.2596	0.5095	Accepted
16	Lack of fund needed for surfing the internet for vital information regarding the take home assignment.	99	58	14	4	3.44	0.5435	0.7372	Accepted
17	Farming operations prevent students from carrying out their take home assignments.	72	72	4	27	3.08	1.0919	1.0449	Accepted
18	Poverty has given rise to incidence of plagiarism.	80	29	50	16	2.9886	1.1084	1.0528	Accepted
19	Poverty has given rise to lack of motivation or interest for take home assignments.	33	122	2	18	2.9657	0.6107	0.7815	Accepted

20	Incidence of haphazard take assignments	73	100	2	0	3.4057	0.2640	0.5138	Accepted
Grand Total						3.1562	0.6464	0.7733	

Source: *Field work (2018).*

Discussions

Cluster one revealed that poverty influences the academic performance of students in Enugu East LGA in terms of classroom teaching and learning. The study discovered that, there are very high cases of poor parents sending their children and wards to hawk instead of sending them to schools. Hence, Amzat (2010, p.55) was apt in noting that, “The impact of poverty on education is of great significance and it is tormenting to see students struggling and battling the hardship to study without any support from the government or their parents.” Consequently, children are being abandoned by their parents, while some who are not abandoned are not being sent to school. Ahmed Miriam in an article written by Ezea (2018, p.40) was quoted to have said, “A lot of parents abandon their children, many children are not sent to schools, children are being abused on a daily basis and the child right is being infringed upon.” Thus, the aftermath of not sending children to school is abuse and infringement of the child’s right. Also, the study shows that students’ non-attendance to classes is as a result of lack of writing materials and text books. Another salient discovery unveiled via this study is that, poverty makes students to be carried away during learning hours. This is consistent with Kainuwa and Yusuf (2013, p.6) finding on parental income as follows, “this can seriously affects the psychological balance or homeostatic balance in the classroom, which causes low concentration, low perception, frustration, sickness and emotional disability in academic performance of the students and can also lead to dropping out or withdrawal.” The study found that there are instances of male preference in education of students. Fikree and Pasha (2004, p.328) observed that, “Male gender preference is deeply embedded in the culture of some countries.” Farah, Marad, Girmay & Martin (2011, p.1) found that “In Pakistan, preference for boys over girls is deeply culturally embedded.” What are the reasons for this? Sen (1999,

p.8) seem to have answered this by stating that, “Boys carry the family name, can continue the family trade, and are expected to provide for their parents in old age. Married women typically live with their in-laws and are expected to provide care and support to their husband’s parents in their old age.” This practice was notoriously common some decades ago in Igbo land. There is a serious paradigm shift in this regard as parents and guardians in Enugu East have seen the need not to do otherwise. However, traces of male preference still remain. One respondent corroboratively said, “Although there are still traces of male preference in the educational training of children or wards in Nike land, this practice is gradually going into extinction.” Again, incidences of teenagers serving as sales boys or girls are common in Enugu East local government area. Teenagers are often seen serving in different shops, restaurants and hotels as sales boys or girls, thereby abandoning their educational pursuit in a bid to making money that would help in their families’ up keep. Also, the research discovered that, poor students are not allowed to take part in learning some activities due to lack of learning materials. This makes learning a boring enterprise. This was corroborated by Mosha (2014) who found that, students’ performance was affected by shortage of ...and absence of teaching and learning materials.” Finally, poverty directly accounts for increase in the rate of school drop outs. The high rate of school drop outs is therefore associated with poverty as some families live below the poverty line.

Cluster two reveals that poverty impacts on student’s performance with regard to internal examination. Poverty accounts for poor performance in oral tests and exams. What could possibly be responsible for poor performance in oral tests and exams as shown in this study? For one reason or the other, poor people do experience inferiority complex. The implication of this is that, students in this category find it difficult to communicate with their fellow students from rich homes. Secondly, poor students who live in rural areas, semi urban and urban areas are grossly disadvantaged as they seldom have private teachers who help them surmount the challenge of oral communication. Some have the problem of pronouncing letter R and L. Indeed, the relevance of oral tests cannot be

over emphasized, as these influence academic performance of poor students. Again, the study showed that poor students who marry early perform poorly in internal examinations. In fact, "...the timing and the resultant impact of early marriage is a source of concern for many who cherish the equitable participation of female in modern education (www.iproject.com.ng)." Jenifer *et al*, (2015, p.14) wrote, "When girls are married early, their educational trajectory is altered." Thus, a good number of poor students who marry early generally perform badly in internal examination. Some respondents were unanimous in their positions as they said, "Married students come to class late and some do not show up at all." In fact, the pride that goes with marriage obscures their views about learning and the resultant internal examinations. The study discovered that, students' late payment of school fees contribute to poor performance in internal examinations. Students' late payment of school fees contribute to poor performance in internal examinations. Slums or shanty areas make attainment of educational goals practically inconvenient, difficult, tasking and seemingly impracticable. The reason why students in slums perform badly in written exams is the excessive lack of necessary amenities in shanty areas and lack of proper ventilation which makes concentration difficult.

Regarding cluster three, it is evident that poverty affects the performance of secondary schools students in external examinations. First, majority of poor students lack the appropriate diction to relay their views on questions in written exams conducted by external exam bodies. This is in tandem with the researcher's view that the choice of words has reduced the quality of academic performance of the poor students in our communities as some know the appropriate answer but lack the requisite diction. Be that as it may, the study discovered that, poverty accounts for late registration of students for their external exams. The research revealed that, there is no adequate guidance for students in subjects like: Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry by private teachers prior to the exams due to parents' inability to foot the bill. "Research has shown that children of poorer parents display substantially worse math and reading skills... Elizabeth (2015, p.1)."

Finally, the fourth cluster reveals that poverty impacts on secondary school students' performance in the area of take home assignments. The study found that there is limited number of materials needed for assignment. Similarly, a study conducted in Tanzania by Maganga (2016, p.40) found that, "the schools were experiencing shortage of science textbooks which hindered the chance for the students to learn effectively." Hence, when assignments are given them by their educators they have no option than to borrow from their classmate. Also, lack of fund needed for surfing the internet for vital information regarding the take home assignment is yet another prominent negative impact of poverty on take home assignment. The worst is a lot of them do not have Android phones in their home let alone buying data. Apart from this, the study revealed that farming operations prevent students from carrying out their take home assignments. Most students go to farm immediately they return from school and retire home by 6pm or beyond resulting to fatigue. From this, we can actually see the reason for the high rate of failures recorded in the delimitation of this study in the last concluded WAEC/NECO exams. Additionally, the study found that, poverty has given rise to incidence of plagiarism. Other home chores prevent students from carrying out their take home assignments and further leads to plagiarism as they become ardent copycats and plagiarists. The study also showed that, poverty has given rise to lack of motivation or interest for take home assignments. This is true as poor parents do not motivate their children to do their assignment on daily basis. In short, some are not even interested in such matters. Lastly, we have the incidences of haphazard take assignments. Why? Poor students are not properly guided by their illiterate and naïve parents. In some cases, students who borrowed textbooks and associated materials for take home assignments get interrupted in the course of doing the assignments by the owners of the borrowed materials. These issues contribute to making performance of students in public schools to be low. However, Maganga (2016, p.3) said, "Performance in public schools is something which everyone expects to be of higher quality because of the roles the sector plays to provide service to the community..."

Conclusion

Poverty impacts on the academic performance of secondary school students in Enugu East LGA. This relationship has hindered manpower development. To surmount poverty, education sector must be urgently and adequately attended to. Conclusively, the impact of poverty are enormous and the present state of poor academic performance here and beyond categorically shows that there is an assignment to be completed vis-à-vis the quantum of development plans and poverty alleviation programs.

The implication of the findings is that, many students in public schools merely complete their learning without acquiring the basic lessons they ought to have acquired. It further implies that secondary school leavers from the area under study would find it difficult to cope with the ever changing standards of tertiary institutions in Enugu State and beyond. All stakeholders are therefore requested to contribute useful inputs in order to resuscitate the ailing educational system and dwindling academic performance of secondary school students here and there.

Recommendations

The following remedial measures are proposed:

- To correct the problems revealed in cluster one; government should roll out sustainable scholarship schemes that would ensure the achievement of the educational aspirations of poor students living in Enugu East LGA and beyond.
- Since poverty impacts negatively on the academic performance of secondary school students in terms of internal examinations; Non-Governmental Organizations and other well-meaning Nigerians should encourage poor students in public schools by providing teaching and learning materials that are fit for contemporary studies.
- There should be downward review of the registration fees paid by students in the registration of external exams like WAEC and NECO.
- Public libraries should be better equipped to suit twenty first (21st) century educational needs. This would provide succor to poor

students in the area of solving or writing their take home assignments.

Declaration of Interest

There is no financial interest or any other interest to declare herein which may have arisen from this research.

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