
Socio-Economic Dilemma of Educational Achievement in Nigeria

By

L. K. YARO

*Department of Social Studies
Federal College of Education,
Pankshin.*

Abstract

The paper investigated the relationship between socio-economic status and educational achievement in Nigeria. It proceeds to the examination of the relationship between SES and Achievement, asked the question of whether it is the problem of poor student or poor schools. It also examines issues of poor funding and a theoretical base to explain the phenomenon. Considering the problems affecting education in Nigeria, the paper identified lack of political will, incessant strikes in public schools and poor funding as major impediments in the educational sector. The paper advocates an equitable social change in the social and economic structure of society in order to ensure that Nigeria's meets the fundamental rights of her citizenry to quality education.

Life from its start to end is learning. Learning continues from the start to the end of life. The concept of learning is as old as development. The aim of education is the development of six aspects of the personality. These six aspects of personality development are physical, mental, social, spiritual, esthetic and emotional. Development is associated with achievement so the ultimate goal of learning is achievement. The home environment has continued to play an important role in the learning capacities of many school age children in Nigeria and hence understanding the effects of socioeconomic status on educational achievement is important in determining effective policy issue to overcome this dilemma.

Socio-economic Status (SES) is the term used to distinguish between people's relative position in the society in terms of family income, political power, educational background and occupational prestige. Socio-economic status is an important variable which may affect learning achievement. Studies have indicated that the high socio-

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economic status families provide more resources for learning experience to their children. The reverse seems to be the case in low socio-economic families. For example, Mirza (2001) studied the “relationship of socio-economic status with achievement” and found that socio-economic status of students has fairly significant effect on their achievement. Several other studies have shown this correlation. Therefore, conclusions on the bases of the findings of different research studies shows that there is positive correlation between low SES and lower self-esteem, ability or readiness and school oriented resources; and negative correlations between low SES and learned helplessness, achievement test scores, the dropout rate and discipline problems (Rice, 1993; Dodge, Pettit & Bates, 1994). It was also observed that many students who are academically able to continue their studies fail to do so because of the low income status of their families (Jordan & Plank, 1998). It is only through checkmating the socio-economic dilemma through proper funding of education and possibly making available to all sundry that educational achievement can be fully attained.

From the foregoing therefore, this paper explores issues relating to the effects of socio-economic factors of educational achievement in Nigeria and the way forward. More specifically, the paper addresses the following issues:

- i) Socio-economic status, learning styles and Achievement.
- ii) Poor Students or Poor Schools
- iii) Funding of Schools
- iv) Marx Theory of Class
- v) Suggestions for the way forward.

Secondary sources of literature have been utilized to put this discussion into proper perspective. This source of literature included published and unpublished works, records, documents and discussions. Some of the sources included the author’s involvements in educational promotional workshops and interaction with professionals during various training programs and workshops. These literatures together, provided an insight into the problems, issues and dilemmas that the Nigerian educational faces in the 21st century.

Socio-economic Status (SES) and Achievement

Empirical findings from different studies have shown that students from different SES groups have different facilities at home and schools. Furthermore, it is universally true that a class has three types of students the high achievers, average and low achievers. Although they learn in same class, but the learning outcomes are different according to their personal experiences. In my observation as a teacher for many years now, I have discovered that innate ability and genetic factors do not cause the achievement gap, but differences in family income and parent education explain a

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part of the gap. For instance, Graetz (1995) carried out a study on social economic status in education research and policy found that social economic background remains one of the major sources of educational inequality and adds that one's educational success depends very strongly on the social economic status of one's parents. Furthermore, Combs (1985) argued that in virtually all nations, children of parents high on the educational, occupation and social scale have far better chance of getting into good secondary schools and from there into the best colleges and universities than equally bright children of ordinary workers or farmers. Combs (1985) adds that the findings of many empirical studies suggest that children whose parents are at the bottom of the social economic hierarchy are not as inclined to seek or gain access to available educational facilities as the children with families are located at the middle or top of the hierarchy.

In Nigeria, it can be seen that family income has a profound influence on the educational opportunities available to adolescents and on their chances of educational success. Observation in Jos metropolis in Plateau State and other states in Nigeria shows that due to residential stratification and segregation, low-income students usually attend schools with lower funding levels, have reduced achievement motivation and much higher risk of educational failure. When compared with their more affluent counterparts, low-income adolescents receive lower grades, earn lower scores on standardized test and are much more likely to drop out of school. This is so in that many children from poor families are forced to attend public schools because of the low or total absence of income of the part of the parents. These public schools are constantly on strikes due to non-payment of salaries by the government. On the other hand, well-to-do families send their children to private schools that are fully functional and hence have the tendencies for better performance. In Jos for example, Graceveille (a private nursery and primary school) schools fees per term is ₦80,000.00 and there are three terms in a years based on the approved curriculum. It therefore means that parents are expected to pay ₦240,000.00 per year for their wards to ensure they attain nursery or primary education. The big question is how many families in Nigeria can afford this amount of money in a year?

Poor Students or Poor Schools

Two fundamental questions remain valid when comparing achievement and SES. And this questions are (1) Is low achievement due to the student's family income level? (2) Or is low achievement due to the child being at a low achieving or poor quality school? The previous section has addressed the first question. Hence, we shall attempt to answer the second question.

Starting in preschool, poor and low-income children were more likely to attend early childhood programs of lower overall quality. Klein & Knitzer (2007) found that

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classrooms with 60% of the children from low-income homes possessed significantly lower quality indicators of teaching, teacher-child interaction, and materials for learning than classrooms with fewer low-income children. An in-depth analysis reviewed 103 effectiveness studies (Opdenakker, Van Damme, De Fraine, Van Landeghem, & Onghena, 2002). According to this analysis, 18% of variance in achievement resulted from differences among schools, and after holding constant student ability and SES, an eight percent variance still existed (Opdenakker et al.). Still, the poor quality of schooling is an important factor in student achievement. Regardless of SES, students attending a poor area school scored lower on all areas of criterion-referenced reading and mathematics exams. Hoff (1997) found the “A” student in a poor area scored at the 36 percentile on standardized mathematics and reading tests. In comparison, the “A” student in a wealthy area achieved greater, with an average of 87 percentile in mathematics and 81 percentile in reading (Hoff, 1997).

Using data from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study-Repeat (TIMSS-R), differences between schools with high-SES students and schools with low-SES students were found. Students attending high-SES schools had greater achievement when compared to students with the same SES level but in lower SES schools (Choi & Kim, 2006). Thus, the schools’ overall SES levels made a difference in the achievement level of students. In Nigeria for example this problem is further compounded with frequent strikes due to non-payment of teachers’ salaries. Also, teachers in most of this poor schools do not cover their syllabus due to negligence and in some cases complain over the location of the schools. However, to make some changes, often more resources are needed.

Funding in Schools

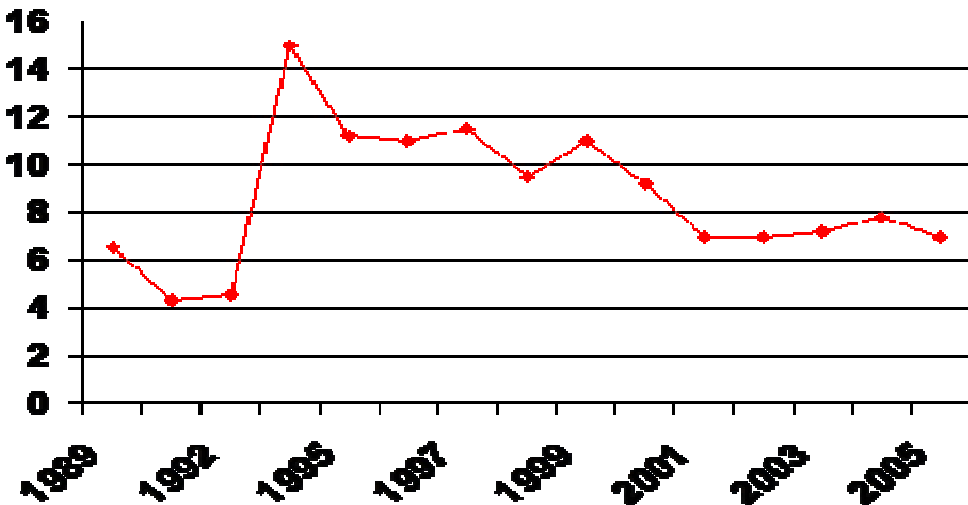
The well-known 1996 Coleman Report suggested poverty levels, family environment, and community involvement affected student achievement more than school expenditures (Mulvenon et al., 2001). Using funding data and poverty rates, Payne and Biddle (1999) uncovered a statistically significant relationship between school funding and childhood poverty and student achievement. When comparing mathematics achievement of eighth-grade American students to other countries, students in wealthy school districts with low student poverty matched up to students in other countries, such as the Netherlands, and ranked second highest in the world. But if the comparison used the scores from children in poor school districts with high student poverty, then the United States would be equivalent to the third world countries, such as Nigeria and Swaziland, and ranked third from the bottom (Payne & Biddle, 1999). States with higher per-pupil expenditures and prekindergarten students, but lower pupil-teacher ratios and teacher turnover achieved higher National Assessment of Education Progress scores (Grissmer et al., 2000). The poor state of education in

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Nigeria is aptly captured in the National Empowerment Development Strategy (cited in Igbuzor, 2006):

...the delivery of education in Nigeria has suffered from years of neglect, compounded by inadequate attention to policy frameworks within the sector. Findings from an ongoing educational sector analysis confirm the poor state of education in Nigeria. The national literacy rate is currently 57 percent. Some 49 percent of the teaching force is unqualified. There are acute shortages of infrastructure and facilities at all levels. Access to basic education is inhibited by gender issues and socio-cultural beliefs and practices, among other factors. Wide disparities persist in educational standards and learning achievements. The system emphasizes theoretical knowledge at the expense of technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial education. School curricula need urgent review to make them relevant and practice oriented.

Similarly, education is inadequate funded by federal, states and local governments, to the extent that funding has been in response to conditionalities imposed by international financial institutions (IFIs). Statistics show that federal government expenditure on education between 1997 and 2000 has been below 10% of overall expenditure. The national expenditure on education cannot be computed because various states expenditure on education cannot be determined.



Federal Government of Nigeria's spending on education

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Furthermore, there is the problem of access as a result of the re-introduction of user fees. User fees re-introduction has excluded many particularly the poor in Nigeria. A study conducted by Action Aid published in 2003 showed that the reason why pupils do not go to primary schools include costs of schooling, opportunity costs, illness and hunger, limited economic costs of education and low quality of schooling (ActionAid, 2003). The study further showed that the opportunity cost for parents sending children to school is the children's time that could have been of economic importance to the family either in terms of income generating activities or in supporting the functioning of the household. Illness and hunger either of the children themselves or members of the family can prevent children from going to school. Limited economic benefits in terms of the fact that those who have completed school have no jobs do dissuade people from going to school.

Marx Theory of Class

For the purpose of this paper, we have decided to use the Marxist Theory of Class to explain the socio-economic dilemma of educational achievement in Nigeria. Karl Marx (1818-1883) gives a complex and profound analysis of the class system under Capitalism. In Marx's view two primary classes exist under capitalism. The capitalist class are those who own the production and the working class are those who sell their labour for wages. These two classes were further divided into two classes: The Petty bourgeoisie - small business owners, managers - those who can be identified or named as middle class. Those people associated with the interests of the capitalist class but who do not own the means of production. The second was lumpen-proletariat; they are the workers who sell their labour for wage. In present day Nigeria they are known as underclass, the homeless.

Reflecting on Marx, Andersen & Taylor (2003) noted that with the development of capitalism the capitalists and working class would become increasingly antagonistic of each other - referring to as class struggle. When class conflicts become more intense, the two classes would become more polarized the petty bourgeoisies become deprived of their property and dropping into the working class. This analysis is still relevant in present day Nigeria and the point is when the classes become more polarized then the rich get richer and everyone else worse off. Marx therefore saw the capitalists as the basis for other social institutions (e.g. law, education, the family etc). Thus, according to Marx the law supports the interests of capitalists, the family promotes values that socialize people into appropriate work role and education reflects the interest of the capital class.

The question is why do people support such a system? Here ideology plays a role. Ideology refers to belief system that supports the status quo. According to him the dominant ideas of a society are promoted by the ruling class, because through their

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control of the communications industries in modern societies the ruling class is able to produce ideas that butters their own interests. Then, the underclass was under the ruling class and this is still the case in present day Nigeria. This is so because the underclass is still dependent on the capitalists and is exploited by it, because it does not own the means of production. Marx, further pointed out that the more stratified a society, the less likely that society will benefit from the talents of its citizens, because inequality limits the life chances of those at the bottom, preventing their talents from being discovered and used. Marx analyses has proven true as the tendency of wealth remain long in few hands and majority worked only to make ends meet. This wealth that has remained in few hands further affects educational achievements for the majority.

Conclusion

Conclusively, education is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustained economic growth. Education also has powerful synergistic effects on the other development objectives: empowerment, better health, and good governance. In this paper, we found that socio-economic status has continued to affect student achievement and while there is a gap in achievement, there is also a difference in the growth rates for children who are economically disadvantaged versus those that are not. The conclusion can be drawn that children learn the same amount of information, but in actuality, economically disadvantaged children start out behind and remain behind and can only go forward if the socio-economic dilemmas of educational achievements in Nigeria are removed.

Suggestions for the Way Forward

From the above analysis, it is clear to us that the state of education in Nigeria is poor and hence the socio-economic dilemma of educational achievements. In order to reduce and possibly checkmate these problems, the following suggestions are put forward for policy consideration:

1. Adequate resources should be made available which will be needed to build new schools, train more teachers etc;
2. Implementation of the UBE Act and ensuring that all forms of user fees are abolished;
3. Deal with the quality issues including size of classes, student-teacher ratio and provision of materials.
4. Tutoring, after school programs, and summer school are necessary components to “catch up” a child in poverty. For example, reading remediation. The formulation and implementation of the Accelerated Reading Initiative is very important in order to improve the reading habits of students from low SES. Furthermore, setting expectations for students prior to certain national examinations causes teachers to be more accountable.

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5. When families lack resources for extracurricular instruction and other educational resources, schools and communities have been able to compensate by providing these resources. Thus, to prevent the social and economic consequences of academic failure among poor Nigerians, local, state, and national policies should provide funding for additional educational resources in schools serving low-income families. Alternatively, resources could be given to families directly.
6. Proper governance of schools and implementation of Schools Management Committees (SMCs);
7. Tracking of resources to ensure proper, adequate and accountable utilization of resources budgeted for education;
8. Improvement of teacher quality through employment of professional and qualified teachers, in service training and retraining and implementation of the teacher salary structure.

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