

Poverty: The Malaise That Maligns The Attainment of Educational Goals By The African Child. The Nigerian Experience.

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is a well endowed and blessed country situated in the earthquake and hurricane free zone of the world: a nation with rich fertile landmass, huge human and mineral resources that if properly harnessed, could cater for the entire African continent and provide qualitative and sustainable education for her citizens, but she is engulfed with misplaced priorities, outright irresponsibility on the part of politicians and policy makers and unprecedented level of corruption. This work examines the education of the Nigerian Child taking into cognizance those factors that have perpetually hampered its access. Specifically, poverty has remained the bane of the educational misfortunes of the African child and will remain so, unless the stakeholders become more committed and proactive towards issues bordering on the attainment of educational goals. The Conflict and Socio-Cultural Theories were considered to explain the phenomenon of poverty as it maligns the educational attainment of the Nigerian child. The findings revealed a high poverty profile which accounts for the accelerated corruption and unemployment thereby impacting negatively on the Nigerian child's educational attainment. Some recommendations were made among which include; that the Government should introduce a Comprehensive Scholarship Scheme which can be easily accessed by the Nigerian Child through a compulsory education programme.

INTRODUCTION

What qualifies Nigeria today in the global indices assessment is poverty, unemployment, diseases, corruption, communal clashes with its attendant and political undertone resulting in the near collapse of the educational system which cannot be easily accessed by all Nigerian children. Nigerians, especially the elite class (politicians) have continued to fudge-rush the prevailing circumstances and score political and diplomatic points globally – thereby shielding the true state of affairs in the educational sector and pretending that all is well (Ayuk,2012).This situation is not only peculiar to Nigeria, but a reflection of the damages meted to the African child continentally. For example, UNICEF (retrieved on 19th,April 2003..wikipendia), stated that more than 100 million children in Africa do not have access to education in primary schools, with over 150 million school dropouts, while user fees, including levies charged for access to education have excluded 77 million children (especially girls) from going to school due to lack of funds. For the disadvantaged ones (socially, economically, politically, AIDS orphans and physically challenged), access to education is particularly difficult. The consequence is that at least fifteen percent (15%) of children between 15-24 years in African countries are illiterate.

Poverty and the low level of educational attainment in Africa are seemingly inextricable. This explains why Africa and most third world nations are retrogressive in technology, employment, investment level in healthcare services, financial transparency, security, agriculture to mention but a few (Ering, 2012 & Ayuk, 2012). High poverty rate in Africa manifests virtually in all social and economic relations and behavior patterns of most citizens of African nations. Buttressing this assertion, Ayuk (2012), maintained that poverty manifests in the feeding pattern whereby a lot of homes can hardly afford three (3) square meals daily, inaccessibility to basic education, lack of portable drinking water, standard Medicare and security.

The Copenhagen Declaration (retrieved on wikipendia, 19th April 2013), described poverty as a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including education, food, safe-drinking water, sanitation, health, shelter and information. Unfortunately, these requirements are ostensibly lacking and largely, these lacks are manmade. Many researchers in Nigeria overtime have raised concerns about the impact of poverty and its bearing on the educational attainment of the average Nigerian child, and by extension Africa. Poverty is becoming widely recognized and takes various forms such as: lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihood, hunger and malnutrition, ill-health, limited or no access to education and other basic services, increased morbidity and disease

related mortality, homelessness and inadequate housing, unsafe environments, and social discrimination and exclusion (Ogwuma, 1999).

Governments successively in Nigeria have refused to create adequate employment opportunities, improve the educational system and formulate policies that are people-oriented. Rather, politicians use government institutions and machineries to hegemoniously enrich themselves and perpetuate their hold on power at the expense of developing and sustaining institutions. For instance, Nigeria maintains one of the lowest budgetary allocations of 8 percent to education in the world even in the 21st century, while the population of the country continues to grow and expand. Ordinarily, the government is supposed to increase allocation to the educational sector to commensurate with increase in population. Amazingly, little or nothing is done to address this anomaly and guarantee every child education, irrespective of family and socio-economic background.

AFRICAN, NIGERIAN CHILD AND EDUCATION

The Nigerian law promises compulsory and free education for children between ages 6 and 15, from Primary One through Junior Secondary School Class 3 (JSSIII). In spite of this provision, education is still inaccessible to the average Nigerian child. Candidly, education is not free in Nigeria, because parents are compelled to provide for uniforms and pay charges like: Parent Teachers Association fees (PTA), security fees, development fees, crafts and so many sundry levies that make the phrase free education a travesty (Ochai, 2012).

Unfortunately, even with these levies, children are made to study in sordid, debilitating and unsavory conditions, especially those in public government schools. Some classrooms are akin to war ravaged ruins. Some teaching and learning take place under trees with no learning and instructional materials (Uko, 2001). More disturbing is how the school children are used by their teachers as manual labourers. Teachers especially in rural areas employ the services of school children to clear their farm bushes and mount sand moulds for them to plant crops.

Ayuk (2012), observed that the average Nigerian child go through these ordeals because of poverty and failure on the part of government to constitutionally deliver on its mandate. As the case is, among the several functions of government, provision of education is essential and compulsory. The Nigerian child's education is more quantitative than qualitative, except for a few, whose parents are rich and top government officials. These categories send their wards to private nursery, primary, secondary and universities with

high school fees beyond the reach of the common man (Ayuk, 2012 & Etobe, 2002).

Besides the decay of facilities, children are constantly faced with various forms of abuse by their teachers such as rape, sexual slavery etc- that often result in early pregnancy for the females. Equally, the combined ravages of AIDS and war in Africa have created a large pool of orphan refugees and displaced children with no precursor legal guidance to care, direct and protect them. With this, the African child's educational pursuit is constrained. More than 100 million children in Africa and developing nations do not have access to school, over 150 million drop out due to lack of funds. According to UNICEF, 25,000 children die each day due to poverty and about 1.1 billion people in developing countries cannot access water, shelter, health- while 640 billion children have no access to safe drinking water, health, shelter and are likely to die before age five. With these gory and pathetic revelations, the conditions are clear that it is nearly impossible for the African child to secure and attain the predetermined goals of education.

POVERTY AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Evidence abound of the incidence of poverty in Nigeria. The Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) Publication (2007), shows that about 45% of Nigerian Population live below the poverty line. FOS estimated the poverty level in Nigeria at about 66%; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1991), showed that 45.5% Nigerians need help. One of the foremost measures of Poverty is Human Development Index (HDI) which considers variables like longevity (life expectancy); educational attainment (adult literacy and school enrolment) and living standards (per capita income and living income indices) (Ibiam and Ugboaja, 2008). Countries enjoying high Human Development Index are characterized by lower inflation, lower budget deficit and external debts; better rule of law, low foreign exchange premium and lower financial crises (Alam, 2007).

The United Nations Report (2005), showed that Nigeria's Human Development Index was about 0.416, which places Nigeria among the poorest nations in the world. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) (2003), reports on poverty as: "a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his/her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, is unable to meet social and economic obligations, lacks gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem, and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, portable water and sanitation and consequently, has limited chance of advantage to his or her welfare to the limit of his or her capacities".

Poverty has a correlational relationship with educational attainment. Poverty can give birth to low educational attainment, while low educational attainment can also breed poverty. The poorer the parents and guardians, the lower the chances of the children attaining or accessing education in Nigeria.

Education and poverty have links because modern societies can become or remain materially wealthy only if they are managed by a large group of educated individuals with the right mix of technical and organizational expertise. The expertise and related behavioural attributes are readily acquired and transmitted through modern educational institutions, of which basic educational attainment lays the foundation (Nkang, 2008).

This relationship can be clearly observed when comparing the developed nations with developing ones. The developed nations (USA, Britain, Canada, Japan and France), have more educated and enlightened populations with a high ratio of industrial output, diverse economic innovations with high technological background and breakthrough. But in the African nations (Nigeria, Ghana, Niger, Cameroon, Namibia, Kenya, Zimbabwe to mention but a few), poverty is pervasive with low ratio of industrial output to total population, high population density, economic backwardness with inefficient technological background..., it would be difficult to make appreciable impact on the education of the child (Jhingan, 2011).

According to Uko (2013), a child from a rich home would likely enjoy early and best educational opportunities compared to a child from a poverty-stricken background. Children from poor homes may equally perform abysmally because of family pressure, no money to buy textbooks or browse the internet for materials, or even to eat a balanced diet. A poor child may likely lack the time to study because of chores and other activities to eke out a living. This is because after school he/she is found in the farm with either the parent/guardian, or hawking wares on the street, tasks that children from rich homes cannot do.

McVeigh & Shostak (1978), argued that poverty is a primary social problem in developing nations that give rise to illiteracy and other social problems. Some of these social problems include:

Child Abuse / Labour

Generally, abuse is using a thing outside its latent function. As observed by Etuk (2002), child abuse/labour is non-accidental, but intentionally exerting affliction of physical or emotional pain or injury on a child by a person or persons responsible for the Child's welfare. This phenomenon is so common in Nigeria and other African nations. Many have argued that lack and inaccessibility to education occasioned by high-level poverty is

responsible for this. Despite the avalanche of Laws, Acts and Charters, both Local and International invalidating child abuse (like hawking on the street, housekeeping, child marriage etc), children are still put into forced labour. Funny enough, Nigeria (Africa) has domesticated and sign into law most of these Conventions, Declarations, Statutes and Acts (Child Right Act). For instance, Convention on The Right of the Child of 1989, Article 24, states inter-alia; “That States, parties recognize the rights of the child to enjoy the highest attainable standard of healthcare facilities for treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health; States, parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to health and education”. Also, laws against trafficking in persons and forced prostitution, and several other Conventions entered and domesticated by Nigeria are yet to be fully implemented. As a result of poverty, accessibility to education in Nigeria remains a serious challenge. The web of poverty, conflict, political belligerence and discrimination in economic opportunities affect so many children in respect to educational attainment.

High Unemployment

Unemployment, no doubt is now a global issue, but its level in Nigeria is astronomical and severe. To say the least, it is a malady associated with low level of educational attainment by the Nigerian child. The problem is not lack of jobs per say, but lack of the needed qualification to fit into the available jobs. Therefore, low educational achievement and attainment lead to the resultant deficiency to secure employment. This again is seen as arising from poverty in most African countries and over reliance on foreign aids which to a great extent impede job creation initiatives and retard investment opportunities, thereby, escalating the indices of unemployment.

Should the right kind of education be placed at the disposal of Nigerian citizens, and by extension Africans, it will make possible to produce quality goods and services to meet both domestic and global demands in order to mitigate unemployment woes. Nevertheless, the absence of the needed qualitative education has led to further impoverishment of African countries resulting in intellectual slavery, subservient relationship and lifestyle, financial and moral decadence and perpetual indebtedness to western nations.

Brain Drain Syndrome

Brain drain is another hiccup that is connected to poverty occasioned by poor educational attainment in Nigeria, Africa. The absence of modern educational facilities, has forced lots of Nigerians with productive and sound minds to migrate abroad for “greener pastures” and in most cases they do not

return. This is in addition to those who leave the country to get "any-kind-of-job" as long as they will step out of the poverty-ridden enclave to "keep body-and-soul together" or to garner foreign exchange to alleviate the plight of their families (Mgbekem, 2004).

High Crime Rate And Juvenile Delinquencies

Crime in Nigeria [Africa] is troubling, as it's meteoric rise with no sign to curb spells danger. Crime is any act that violates the formal code (law) of a nation usually committed by adults (18 years and above). Delinquency on the other hand is a broad range of behavioral patterns from everything found to be offensive to occasionally serious deviation like shop lifting...; it also includes acts of disrespect by young persons (Ottong and Bassey, 2011). In Nigeria, the poor are often treated with disdain while the rich are accorded respect and honour even those who become rich dubiously. Some criminal activities associated with poverty include armed robbery, ritual killing, drug trafficking, advanced fee fraud (419) etc. All these crimes are concretized and common in Nigeria due to poverty which has led to low educational attainment.

Prostitution

The society comprises the "haves and have nots". This maxim of Karl Marx defines the Nigerian society because the class structure of the poor and rich shows the structural disparity even in educational attainment of the African child. For instance, it is not uncommon to see someone in prostitution (either as harlot, gigolo or pimp) because of lack, that is, what to eat and settle sundry bills. Education is acquisition of knowledge and a channel to liberation from poverty. Children would indulge in all manners of unscrupulous means to attain education, especially those from poor background. In Nigeria, students in higher institutions engage in sexual relationship with men and women old enough to be their grandparents (sugar daddy and sugar mummy). This of course, is not done out of pleasure but the constraint to meet and realize their educational pursuits (Ayuk, 2012).

Children consent to homosexuality, lesbianism and other activities related to sex trade because of poverty. To attain the high cost of education which most parents cannot afford, their wards resort to untoward deeds. The School system in Nigeria favors the rich and it is applicable to other social services; like hospital/healthcare services, housing, loan schemes, recreation etc.

VIOLENCE AND POVERTY

Poverty and illiteracy often lead to political and communal conflict or violence. For instance, the emergence of "Boko Haram", a terrorist

organization in Nigeria is attributed to poverty (Adesoji, 2012). It all started by the illiterate young moslems in Northern Nigeria as war against Western education. The poor incidentally are the majority in Nigeria and are those likely and easily convinced to detonate bombs and other criminal cum dastardly acts. Dishonourable politicians also exploit their poverty mentality and status by offering them stipends to wreck havoc especially during elections. The educated and rich seldom fight, even in the face of strong disagreement; they sit back with their families in secured homes manned by security guards or operatives. To attain their political and economic ends, they mobilize the illiterate and poor masses at the offer of just a pittance.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION

This study employs two Theories to underscore the phenomenon of poverty, in relation to the educational attainment of the African Child. The theories are;

THE CONFLICT AND SOCIO-CULTURAL THEORIES

Conflict Theory is associated with Karl Max (1818-1883). The theory assumed that the society is demarcated into two sections, namely: The Minority (Bourgeois) and the Majority (Proletariat). The Bourgeois (Minority) according to Max own and control the means of production while the Proletariat (Majority) own nothing, but their labours are often exploited by the bourgeoisies (Charles, 2010). By this perspective, the "Haves" are responsible for the ills of the society. Their activities of exploitation is the reason for wide spread poverty which results in low and inaccessibility to education by the African child. The bourgeoisies lay claims on the "surplus gains" which truthfully are from the sweat of the proletariats. Unfortunately, out of these surpluses they are meagerly paid which causes them to live from hand –to- mouth. Given this scenario, the proletariats will not be able to pay for their wards' qualitative education.

The bourgeois also own good schools and fees are made exorbitant and out of the reach for the poor masses. This they do, to inhibit the "have nots" from attaining quality education so that their hegemonious position could not be threatened. The Socio-Cultural Theory of development was proponented by John Stuart Mills. The emphasis here is the role of non-economic factors such as customs and other social phenomena which tend to engender poverty and under-development in Nigeria (Africa).The theory condemns wastage- output by ostentatious living of a few, because it reduces capital formation and greater effort, thereby limiting opportunities or discouraging the establishment of meaningful and proactive ventures. Mills

observed that developing nations are not prudent in spending. Instead of spending on productive concerns, trivialities are given priority. For example, Nigerians spend huge sums of money on birthday celebrations, funerals and chieftaincy coronations, but little is invested in the education of their children and wards. The implication is that, the future and the prospect of qualitative and sustainable education for the average Nigerian child, nay Africa may not only be bleak, but will remain in perpetual comatose. This arguably has been adduced as one of the causes of cyclical poverty and an impediment to educational attainment of the Nigerian (African) child.

HYPOTHESIS:

The hypothesis was formulated as follows;

The inability to access education by majority of Nigerian children is not associated with poverty

METHODOLOGY

Survey design was adopted in this study. Reason being that variables under study are diverse, hence this method is for easy collection of data, tabulation, analysis of data and generalization of findings.

The area of study is Nigeria and the sample population was 600, drawn from six States that comprise the South- South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria;

- 1) Akwa Ibom State -100
2. Cross River State-100
3. Rivers State-100
4. Bayelsa State-100
5. Delta State-100
6. Edo State-100

Total= 600

This population was believed by the researchers as large enough to represent the study area and findings generalized and reflective as true assessment of the poverty level of the people affecting attainment of education in Nigeria vis-a –vis Africa.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the States and Local Government Areas. In each of the States (Local Government Areas), ballot was cast and those whom the lots fell on were selected to form the sample population.

The instrument for collecting primary data was a Four Point Likert Type Questionnaire designed by the researchers and tagged; Education, Poverty, and African Child (EPAC). The secondary data consisted of textbooks,

journals, newspapers, seminar papers etc. The statistical tool was Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis.

TEST OF HYPOTHESIS

The inability to access education by majority of Nigerian children is not significantly associated with poverty.

TABLE I

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis Of The Relationship Amongst Nigerian Children, Poverty And Education (N = 600)

Variables	X	SD	R	Sig of r
Education and Poverty Nigerian Children	22.73	3.32	.105	.085

Significant at the 0.05 level of significant: $df = 226$, $r = .095$

From Table I above, r-value is used than critical r-value of 0.095 needed for significance at the 0.05 level of significance with 226 degrees of freedom. Implying that the level of poverty can affect a child's education, hence there is an association.

Discussion Of Findings

The thrust of this study has been to establish the connection between poverty and educational attainment of the African child. From the findings, it was revealed that the Nigerian (African) Child's most serious impediment to educational attainment is poverty. Poverty is a state of lack that incapacitates ones access to the necessities of life. Almost every family in Nigeria experiences this phenomenon as parents find it almost impossible to pay school charges of their children, thus: these children are often driven out from schools thereby disrupting the learning process and academic programmes of the children.

In such situations, parents are compelled to engage them to hawk, do some menial jobs like hewing firewood for sale, fetching water for block molding and even serve as housemaids/househelps to raise money to augment their school fees. During this period, lessons are still in progress and this category of students who incidentally form the largest population of Nigerian children; miss so much and in most cases return just few days before the examinations are administered, while others do not return at all, and at the end of the day, they do poorly in the examinations or drop out from school. Consequently, some female ones become pregnant through rape or casual sex, while most males join armed robbery and terrorism groups or gangs.

For example, the following discussion ensued in the field by the researchers and a respondent (parent) in what is called Pidgin English in Nigeria:

Researchers: *Good morning sir*

Respondent: *Welcome my pikins, wetin cari una come my house?*

Researchers: *We come to ask how you de manage pay your pikins school fees*

Respondent: *My pikins, poverty no greeooo!!, I dey suffer with my Pikins—them don Commot School all. If I get small money I go go pay make the boy learn work, but for my girl, I dey find person wey fit marry am.*

Researchers: *Government no provide scholarship for your pikin?*

Respondent: *Hahahah! all of them na thief people them be.....them carry their children go for oyibo school for oyibo country.*

Translation:

The excerpt captured in above interview with the respondent means:

Researchers: *Good morning sir*

Respondent: *Welcome my children. What brought you to my house?*

Researchers: *We came here to find out how possible it is to pay your children's school charges*

Respondent: *My children, Poverty is killing me and I'm going through hell to raise money for my children's school charges. You can see, they are out of school. For the boy, I am sourcing for money to enable him learn a trade while the girl, I pray a man should come and marry her.*

Researchers: *Government should have provided scholarship scheme as a form of assistance for your children?*

Respondent: *He laughed. All of them (government officials and politicians) are criminals. Their children are in best schools in Europe and America, so it does not concern them even if our children do not go to school.*

These majorly were the opinions of Nigerians whose views were sought in respect to poverty and educational attainment of the Nigerian child. Furthermore, it was revealed that apart from poverty, there is almost, total neglect of public schools by the Nigerian Government, especially in the rural areas. Some schools (primary & secondary) visited wore the semblance of war ravaged buildings. No roof (zinc), buildings almost collapsing and supported by wooden pillars infested with termites, while junior classes were seen receiving lessons under mango trees. Which confirms Etobe (2002) and Ayuk, (2012), assertions that Government lack of commitment in

education is because those who are in government, their children are in good schools (private in Nigeria and abroad). Finally, it was discovered that, the inability to access education by majority of Nigerian children is occasioned by poverty and corruption and government's non-implementation of existing policies. As a result, a number of children who have been denied education by the actions or inactions of the Government functionaries have chosen to indulge in prostitution, armed robbery, terrorism, touting and delinquency, etcetera.

CONCLUSION

Education is good, accessing it better and attaining it meaningful. It is the best and beneficial option, not only to the beneficiary but for the entire good of the people and humanity. The crux of the work was principally to examine how poverty can affect or otherwise influence the educational attainment of the African child. From what was confirmed, given the findings regarding the state of Nigerian schools, it was revealed that the Nigerian Child is an embodiment of deprivation and poverty, Nigerian Schools are travesties and the Nigerian Government functionaries are insensitive, corrupt and greedy looters of public treasury and unconcerned about the plight of the citizenry and progress of the nation.

Given the fact that no nation can develop economically, socially, industrially and politically if her citizens (especially youths) are denied qualitative education, this work therefore concludes with the following recommendations:

- ❖ Compulsory education should be for all Nigerian children from primary to secondary schools.
- ❖ Scholarship Schemes should be instituted and made accessible for all children of school age irrespective of class, religious affiliation and ethnic extraction.
- ❖ Adult Literacy Programmes should be enforced especially by the States and Local Governments to reduce the percentage of the illiterate masses.
- ❖ All schools should be provided with adequate facilities and teachers properly developed and adequately remunerated to give their best to the school system.
- ❖ Annual Budgetary allocation for education should be increased to at least 15% of the total budgetary provisions.
- ❖ A Legal Bill should be enacted and enforced for the Private Sector to contribute to education at least 5% of their Profit After Tax (PAT) especially the Conglomerates.

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