

## **Influence of Parents' Socio-Economic Status on Academic Achievements of Secondary Schoolstudents in Owerri Imo State, Nigeria.**

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**Abstract:** Continuous low academic achievements records of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in secondary schools particularly in science, social science and art subjects is a threat to national development. Proper understanding of the issues involved must be explored in order to address the problem globally and more so in developing countries. The present study investigated the influence of parents' socio-economic status on academic performance of students in secondary schools in Owerri Education Zone, Imo State, Nigeria. A descriptive research design was employed. The population of 38,700 students in SS II in the sampled Local Government Areas was used and 387 students, representing 10%, were selected randomly. The data collected was analyzed using percentages, mean and standard deviation. Hypotheses were tested with ANCOVA. The result showed that students from low socio-economic backgrounds attend public schools more than those from high socio-economic backgrounds and they achieve less academically than those of high socio-economic backgrounds. The differences in achievements were significant. The socio-economic backgrounds of students also influenced their enrollment in sciences, arts and social sciences. Governments should encourage students from low socio-economic backgrounds by equipping public schools with necessary facilities.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic background, secondary school students, achievement.

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### **I. Introduction**

Every responsible government and that should be all democracies, is always making efforts to bridge the gap between the poor and the rich in society. This enables all citizens to have say in the affairs of the state. One way responsible governments tackle this malady of the widening gap between the rich and the poor is through education. Public schools and their states of up keep, both of personnel, equipment and enabling policies are governments' true positions in the issue of bridging the gap between the rich and the poor.

One of such demonstrations is The Government of Imo State, Nigeria, in the regime of Governor Rochas Okorochoa. Very early on his taking up the mantle of leadership of the state, he declared free education for all citizens of the state from primary to the university. This pronouncement attracted many reactions from supporters and critics alike. While some were of the view that education cannot be really free, somebody somewhere must be paying the bills somehow. Good education without a cost is a utopian dream, critics argue. However, many of the supporters, most of whom were the masses were simply jubilant. Consequently, mass movements of students were observed in the state into public schools. Students, who entered schools in class one of the junior secondary school at the inception of this free education mellow drama, (The Governor himself used to go to schools and physically dole out fiscal cash to students as pocket money for their lunch), are now in the final year of the senior secondary school level. Enough records must have accumulated to study some impacts of that gesture of government on different segments of the immediate society.

It is an experience of life that all are not equal in all societies. Some people are very rich; some are averagely rich while some are poor. Some have different levels of education while some are uneducated. Consequently, a whole society can be sub-divided into strata or classes of people each being referred to as a social class (Okoye 2000). In most societies, there are basically three classes: These are the upper class, made up of the wealthy and aristocrats, the middle class, made up of the educated elites and the professionals. The third class is the lower class, made up of the masses who are mostly unskilled (Ayeni & Adu 2003).

The upper class in modern capitalist societies is often characterized by the possession of large amounts of inherited wealth (Okoye 2000). The ownership of large amount of property and income derived from it confer many advantages upon the members. They are able to develop distinctive life styles based on extensive cultural pursuits and leisure activities. They exert a considerable influence on economic policies and political decisions. They also procure superior education and economic opportunities for their children that help to perpetuate family wealth.

The middle class consists of professionals such as engineers, accountants, lawyers, medical doctors, the academia and even directors of public and private organizations. They usually have high income and command resources. They are well educated with life style peculiar to the middle class. No wonder, therefore their children are expected to do well in school. Children from middle class backgrounds are more often than not exposed to high achievements, given their academically rich environments.

The lower class is made up of persons who hold low paying and low skilled jobs. Lower class is generally characterized by poverty and dependence on wages. Associated with these conditions are relatively low living standards and restricted access to quality education.

Keeves and Saha (2000) opined that in most countries of the world educational achievements are related to social backgrounds of the students. These include the class of the family, ethnicity and language characteristics of the students. It has been demonstrated that socio-economic status indirectly influenced students' performance. While the direct effect on students' performance are associated with other variables such as teaching methods, teaching aids and students' interest in the subjects and parents' level of education, social class still made a significant contribution to achievement. Research shows that status is associated with a wide array of health, cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes in children with effects beginning prior to birth and continuing into adulthood. A variety of mechanisms linking socio-economic status to children's well being have been proposed with most involving differences or reactions to stress-inducing conditions faced by both the children themselves and their parents, (Ndukwe, 2002). For children, socio-economic status impacts well-being at multiple levels including both family and neighborhood. Its effects are moderated by children's characteristics, family characteristics and external support system (Olueye, 2002). Enrollment into an educational institution based primarily on its low financial involvement and deriving benefits from a government gesture may still be socio-economic background dependent.

## **II. Statement Of The Problem**

It is generally believed that there is a close relationship between students' school performance and their family background (Okoye 2000). In Imo State, Nigeria, for instance, Government made education free for all students from primary to the University level. The aim, no doubt is to bridge the gap between the poor and the rich and to make education affordable by children of lower class families. It will be of utmost importance to investigate if Government's intentions are being met. It is common observation in Imo State that this free education offered by the government may have led to poor funding of education, especially at the secondary school level. This scenario is may be interpreted by parents from high and middle classes as poor quality education and unacceptable by their social class. There is a suspicion that many parents have withdrawn their children from public schools. This notion is contrary to numerical enrollment figures which obviously have exploded in public schools in the state. Is it that the upper class families withdraw their children from public schools while parents of the lower class rather enroll their children into government schools? Most children in public schools therefore, may be from similar socio-economic backgrounds. The researchers are poised to find out enrollments patterns in public schools in Imo state and the achievements of the students according to their socio-economic backgrounds. Are these different or the same? The central question in this study therefore is: To what extent do students' socio-economic backgrounds influence their enrollments and academic performance in public secondary schools in Imo state, Nigeria?

## **III. Objectives**

The general objective of this study was to find the extent students' socio-economic backgrounds influence their enrollments and academic performance in public secondary schools in Imo state, Nigeria.

To find out the following specifics gave impetus to this study:

- i. The socio-economic group of upper, middle or lower, which most students in public schools belong.
- ii. The comparative achievement of students from upper, middle and lower socio-economic backgrounds in science, Arts, social science and Trade subjects
- iii. Proportion of secondary school students from different socio-economic groups study science, Art and Social science?

## **IV. Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses emanating from corresponding specific research questions were tested in this study:

- i. Ho: There is no significant difference in the proportion of students enrolled in public schools from upper, middle or lower class socio-economic backgrounds.
- ii. (Ho): There is no significant difference in the academic achievements of students from different socio-economic background in Arts, Science, social science and Trade subjects.
- iv. (Ho): There is no significant difference in the proportions of public secondary school students from different socio-economic backgrounds who study Science, Arts, and Science subjects.

## **V. Significance Of The Study**

The outcome of this study will be beneficial to teachers, students, Government, Guidance and Counseling personnel.

Every teacher wants to have the best performance from his/her students. This will help the teachers to select teaching method that will minimize low performance of students in lower socio-economic backgrounds in science, arts social science and trade subjects if they not meeting up with school challenges. This study will provide the teacher with information on how best to improve the performance of students in science, social and trade subjects, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Students from different socio-economic backgrounds will be informed on how best to improve on their performances in arts and social science subjects. Education planners, curriculum developers and advocates of innovation will equally gain from this study. The study will provide evidence that will aid stake holders in planning educational programs and policy statements.

Moreover, guidance and counseling personnel will benefit from the outcome of this study. It will provide them with information on how to counsel and manage students from different socio-economic backgrounds in science, social sciences, arts and trade subjects. The outcome of this study will also provide room for further studies on the influence of parents' socio-economic backgrounds on academic performance of their children in science, Arts, social and trade subjects, especially in public schools. Of particular note is the need to find out if the introduction of free education in public schools can close the gap in achievements of children from different socio-economic backgrounds.

## **VI. Theory**

This research is based on some theories related to parental socio-economic backgrounds and influences on academic performance of students. These include the family stress and motivation theories of learning. Conger (2000), developed the family stress theory to explain how financial problems influenced the lives of rural families going through the several down turn in the agricultural economy. The family stress theory states that economic problems will lead to poor academic performance as well as mental problems. Although the family stress theory focuses on economic conditions, it also tends to capture the influence of limited educational attainments. For example, education is an important predictor of income across societies (Kinger, 2001). Education has strong positive association with occupation, prestige and income. According to the family stress theory, the experience of pressure gives psychological means to economic hardship. The proponent, contrary to the suggestion by some researchers said that economic pressure involved subjective impression (White & Rogers, 2001).

However, in motivation theories of learning, psychologists believe that increased achievement by students is tied up with their motivation and that it is higher with reinforcements. According to McClelland (1953) motivation theory of achievement explains that students who experienced success in the past are motivated to succeed in a given task than those who did not. Ndu (2001) said that middle class educated elites are known to be anxious about the educational success of their wards. Such wards often hear their parents discussing secondary school or even university they attended and are brought up to believe that someday they themselves would go to the university. They are given the necessary encouragement by advising them to work hard in order to pass with good grades that will enable them gain admission into higher institutions. They are sometimes promised that if they pass well, they would be taken abroad on holidays or be bought new dresses for. As a result they become anxious in taking their studies seriously.

On the other hand, the lower class or working class children rarely get an encouragement or motivation from their parents. They do not hear their parents talk about education like their counterparts from educated homes. Lower class parents hardly care to know what happens in the school except at the end of the term or years when the child comes home with a report card. Stub (2000) writes to corroborate the perceived effects of social class on students' academic performance by saying that status, prestige and income of parents go a long way in influencing the academic achievements and provision of personal needs of their children. Parents of high class are usually desirous to maintain their status quo and tend to give their children best education. Thus parents from the lower socio-economic tend to view the pursuit of education as a difficult endeavor because of their inability to provide their children with those facilities and tools which are necessary for success in school. According to Otite and Ogionwo (2005) social stratification is a special type of social differentiation. This is because it involves the existence of a systematic hierarchy of social positions whose occupants are treated as superior, equal or inferior to one another. This is also applicable to their children. Children while in schools, even in government schools, are already stratified in one way or the other that make it impossible to benefit equally with provisions made to close strata boarder lines. Home backgrounds and parents' economic powers have already left their impacts. According to Cole and Corandstaff (2000), the child of a middle class family lives in a home in which he has his own bedroom, his own clothes and he is never without food, light, shelter. This is contrary to their peers from lower socio-economic homes. The child of a lower class family may share

rooms, beds, clothes, and knows what it is to be hungry and cold. These conditions are consistently related to school progress more than native intelligence does.

The researchers suspect that even the ability of a person to benefit from an opportunity is already class dependent. Some may argue that native intelligence is what is required in higher achievement in schools. It is even a common believe among native folks that providing a child's every need leads to academic disadvantage as such children lose grips with reality and become incapable of working hard. What therefore, is academic achievement really dependent on? Can this be discerned in the achievement patterns of students in public schools?

## VII. Method

This is a survey research designed to ascertain the influence of parents' socio-economic status on educational performance of secondary school students in Owerri Education Zone of Imo State. The sample for this study consisted of 387 SSII students. A total of seven local government areas (LGA) were randomly selected from the zone of eleven LGAs. A total number of 12 schools were selected using randomly sampling techniques. Thirty five students were randomly sampled from all the arms of senior secondary class II (SS2). The students were gathered in an empty classroom and served the questionnaire. Students who willingly completed and returned their copies of the questionnaire were finally used in the study.

The main instrument for this study was the Socio-Economic Background Questionnaire (SEB-Q). The questionnaire was constructed on a Likert four point scale with three sections. Each section focused on a particular SEB. A respondent's SEB is the section of the SEB-Q of his/her highest score. Other piece of information about the respondents like the subjects offered and achievement scored were collected using an observation schedule. The data collected were analyzed using percentages, means and standard deviations. Chi-square and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## VIII. Results

**Hypothesis one:** There is no significant difference in the proportions of students from different socio-economic backgrounds enrolled in public secondary schools in Owerri education zone of Imo State.

**Table 1:** Percentage of students enrollments according to social class

Socio-economic group	Frequency	Percent
Upper class	50	12.9
Middle class	145	37.5
Lower class	192	49.6
Total	387	100

**Table 2:** Chi-square test on the difference in socio-economic background of students in public school in Owerri education zone of Imo State.

X <sup>2</sup> calculated	X <sup>2</sup> critical	df	α	Decision
635.322	18.3	10	0.05	Reject Ho

Table 2 data shows that the obtained X<sup>2</sup> difference in socio-economic background of students and public school enrollment was 635.322 and a critical X<sup>2</sup> value is 18.3 at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated value (x<sup>2</sup>cal = 635.322) exceeds the critical value (X<sup>2</sup>crit = 18.3), null hypothesis one of this study was rejected. Therefore, socio-economic background of students and enrollments into public school are not independent. Consequently, There is significant difference in the proportions of students from different socio-economic backgrounds enrolled in public secondary schools in Owerri education zone of Imo State, Nigeria.

**Hypotheses Two:** There is no significant difference in the academic achievement of students from different socio- economic backgrounds in Arts, science, trade and social science.

**Table 3:** Mean achievement scores of students from upper, middle and lower class in Art, science, social science and trade subjects.

Group	Science		Arts		Social Science		Trade	
	X	SD	X	SD	X	SD	X	SD
Upper	74.16	8.46	72.50	6.93	72.09	6.20	75.08	5.50
Middle	66.47	4.64	65.39	4.54	66.29	4.88	66.38	5.59
Lower	52.50	6.26	52.46	6.61	52.55	6.05	53.20	6.71

**Table 4:** Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of students means achievement scores from different socio- economic background by subjects.

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	F Cal	□
Between groups	49404.9	2	24702.45	698.9	0.05
Within groups	27285.8	772	35.344		
Total	76690.7				

The results of analysis in table 4 shows that the calculated (Fcal) of 698.9 is greater than the critical (Fcrit) of 3.00, at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there is a significant difference in the achievement of students from different socio-economic backgrounds in Arts, science, trade and social science subjects.

**.Hypothesis Three:** There is no significant difference in the proportion of secondary school students from different socio-economic background and choice of subjects in science, social science and trade subjects.

**Table 5:** Proportions of students' Enrollments in School Subjects Based on socio-economic Backgrounds.

Socio-economic group	Science (%)	Arts(%)	Social Sc. (%)	Total
Upper class	29 (34.9)	25 (30.2)	29 (34.9)	83
Middle class	81 (34.2)	89 (37.5)	67 (28.3)	237
Lower class	95 (28.7)	128 (38.7)	108 (32.6)	331
Total	205	242	204	651

**Table 6:** Chi-square test on the difference in proportion of students from different socio-economic background and subject offerings.

X <sup>2</sup> calculated	X <sup>2</sup> critical	df	α	Decision
5.0083	9.49	4	0.05	Accept Ho

Table 6 shows that the chi-square calculated ( $x^2_{cal} = 5.0083$ ) is less than the critical value ( $x^2_{crit} = 9.49$ ) at 0.05 significance level, we accept the null hypothesis three and conclude that the proportion of students from different socio-economic backgrounds is independent of choice of subjects in science, social science and Arts subjects.

### IX. Summary Of Findings And Conclusion

- It is obvious from the results that Government schools in Owerri Education Zone of Imo, State, Nigeria are mostly attended by students from the Lower socio-economic backgrounds, followed by those from middle and upper classes respectively.
- Students from Lower socio-economic backgrounds achieved significantly least of all while those from upper class achieved significantly most of all.
- Students whose socio-economic background were of the upper class studied science and social science subjects more than those from the other socio-economic backgrounds. Students from middle class families studied more of Arts and students from lower class families studied more of social science subjects, where Trade Subjects are grouped. However, the differences in enrollments in these different subject groupings were not found to be significant.

Being in a public school did not change the orientation of the upper class children to excel and to study more of the subjects that lead to higher career and leadership prospects. Tuition free school prospects may have afforded more of children of lower class families opportunity to attend school and acquire education yet it did not change their inclination to remain lower on the ladder of achievements and choices for a comparable future with their counterparts from upper socio-economic backgrounds though they attended similar schools. The findings of this study are consistent with literature: There is a socio-economic influence in enrollment into public schools and achievements, (Cole &Corandstaff 2000, Stub 2000, Otite&Ogionwo, 2015, Ndukwe, 2002 McClelland, 1953).

### X. Recommendations

Government should do more than mere provision of free education. The schools should be equipped fully with instructional materials: Well-equipped libraries and laboratories. School programs, especially public schools, should enhance socialization among students. .Such programs may include sports, clubs, humanitarian associations and volunteer groups. Such social groups which erect equal platforms for students will eliminate to a large extent superiority-inferiority complexes among students due to socio-economic background traits. Through such groups, what the children of the poor lack at home may be complemented by provisions in schools. Workshops and seminars should be organized for teachers to enable them deal with issues of socio-economic gaps in student populations and their influence on school attainments and performance.

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