

PATERNAL DEPRIVATION INDUCED POVERTY AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF RURAL NIGERIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PUPILS

Peter O. Ikoya (Ph.D.)

Abstract

The study examined the effect of paternal deprivation induced poverty on academic performance of rural Nigerian elementary school pupils. It is a casual-comparative study. Two hundred and forty families comprised of 120 paternally deprived and 120 non-paternally deprived were administered instrument. Data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. Finding showed that there is no statistical difference in the performance of both groups in all four tested variables. However, the study revealed that poverty is a major impediment to academic performance among rural pupils. It was therefore recommended, based on these findings that policy makers should be more efficient in the management of public funds at National, State and Local levels to reduce poverty among Nigerian rural families, to enhance pupil's success to quality education.

Introduction

Poverty (Thompson, 1973; Billingsly, 1974; Nwankwo and Lulsegged, 1985; Ukeje, 1986) has been reported to be one of the major impediments to children's access to education in developing nations. And the public's understanding of poverty causative factors generally fall within the groupings of unemployment, debt burdens, indolence, parental status, ignorance, disease, wars, oppression, corruption and poor relationship. Predictably, studies looking into the effects of poverty on academic achievement (Bassey, 2000; Essien, 2000) have tended to be more concentrated in these areas. Yet, there is an important area most often neglected, and this concerns parental deprivation induced poverty and its effect on academic performance.

The African family is male gender dominated. A few culture in Nigeria, for example, still forbid women from taking gainful employment. Indeed, in rare cases where such women are allowed to work, their monthly emoluments go into "joint account" which is exclusively operated by the husband. If for reasons of death, immobilization, imprisonment, or emigration the father (husband), is separated from the family, they suffer a peculiar form of poverty, which can effect the academic performance of the children. This problem has not been adequately examined empirically in the Nigerian society for very obvious reasons.

Firstly, the culture of poverty is not new to the African, and so it appears taken for granted in different endeavours, including education. More importantly, a few decades ago, poverty was perceived (erroneously though) as not being able to stifle African children's educational dream. Politicians, policy makers and even educators are quick to point out that the founding fathers of the nations came from poor families but worked their ways to success. Indeed, there are cases of children from humble home backgrounds who, with the support of their fathers made frantic (and often successfully) efforts, to break the cycle of poverty, through acquisition of education. But these are exceptions rather than the rule. Moreover, a good percentage of these children had their parents (particularly their fathers) by their sides.

No doubt, it is strongly believed with the African family context, that Western education is the gateway to political emancipation, social justice, and above all economic empowerment (Adams, 1972; Musgrove, 1987; Tickamy, 1990; Ikoya, 1999; and Irondi, 2000; Imogie, 2000). Thus, the average Nigerian child goes against all odds to ensure good education. Occasionally, however, they come across constraints, which appear insurmountable. Such is the case when a father is lost at the elementary school age. Adequate studies (Alebiosu, 1999; Daremola, 1979) have not been carried out to examine the effect of paternal deprivation on pupil's academic achievement. Consequently, persistent calls (Peretomode, 1995; Alebiosu, 1999) have often been made for further research in this area. Attempt is made in this study to fill the existing vacuum.

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Theoretical Links to Paternal Deprivation

Sociologists and psychologists have consistently pointed out that parental involvement in their children's schoolwork is a pivotal process through which parents influence cognitive competence (Hynes, 1978; Peretomode, 1995; and Stone, 1966). Other studies (Baker and Stevenson, 1986; Brody et al., 1995; Epstein, 1983; and Reynolds, 1995), have in consonance with Peretomode shown that students, whose parents are involved in their schoolwork, perform better in their academic work. A few studies, Daramola (1999) has also reported no significant difference in the academic achievement of paternal deprived, and non-paternal deprived high school students in Mathematics and English. More of the studies reporting no difference were one or two subjects related, which weakness this study tried to correct. A basic assumption in this study is students could either be particularly good or extremely poor in some subjects. A child that is very good in Fine Art and Craft, for example, may still do well in that subject in spite of the introduction of a variable that could hinder her performance in other subjects where she normally makes average grades. This was why the study examined participating pupils in the 4-core subject areas (English, Mathematics, Science, and Health and Physical Education) offered in the school system.

Study Objective and Related Issues

The objectives of this paper are threefold. First, it assessed the effect of paternal deprivation on cumulative income among single-mother-headed families in rural Nigerian communities. Rural Nigerian families are mainly agrarian farmers. The land in many cases are family owned. In the farming season, each family unit head gets a portion, which he cultivates with his wife and children. This is done every year. Women generally have no land inheritance from their fathers so they have to work with their husbands. Unfortunately, if the husband dies leaving under-age (below 18 years) children, a lot of the man's properties are shared among the (deceased) husband's relations leaving the wife and young children in poverty.

The second objective of the study was to look into the implications of reduced family income on children's education among paternally deprived elementary school children. And thirdly, determine whether or not reduced family income, due to father's absence, has effects on children's academic achievement. The study used data collected from the Student Information Dozier (SID) to examine paternal deprivation induced poverty on academic achievement.

Method

Participants

The study is casual-comparative. Paternally deprived children were categorized to include those whose fathers were: (1) dead (2) traveled abroad for more than 5 years and have since not communicated (3) serving life jail sentence or above five years jail term, and children who were never told their fathers or whose fathers rejected. Based on SID records from the State Primary Education Board (SPEB), of the Ministry of Education, 180 single-mother-headed families were Identified in rural communities of Delta State of Nigeria using cluster sampling. From the identified population, 120 were contacted using community members particularly teachers and pastors who had been earlier briefed on the objective of the study. Of the 120 participating mothers, 27 percent had the first school leaving certificate. Another 33 percent had up to three years of elementary education, while the remaining 40 percent had less than three years of elementary education.

The mean per capital income for the group is N31,680 (\$244:00) per annum national minimum wage is N90,000 (\$692) per annum. Total family annual income range between N10,800 (\$83) and N45,000 (\$346). It could be inferred from these income data that although they all live below national minimum wage, an economic cross-section definitely exist among the rural families sampled. Again, from the study group, 92 (76.67%) suffered paternal deprivation as a result of death. Another 17.7% was due to long jail sentence, 4.17 travelled and for more than 5 years had not communicated with the abandoned families, while 1.67 percent either were never told their fathers or their fathers rejected them.

Instrumentation

A major concern was availability of instrument for accurate measurement of the population under investigation. More of the available instruments for evaluating family processes are based on

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two-parent family set up, which could not be effectively used. In other studies involving single parent families (Daramola, 1999), the focus was more on the perception of high school students, which was also found inappropriate because of age category (6-12 years) under consideration. Consequently, a group made up of educated rural community leaders selected among experienced members of the teaching profession, the ecclesiastical order and members of PTA board was constituted to evaluate the instruments used. In all 24 people were involved, who were also representatives of the population of the planned study, although they did not take part in the study. The group members individually rated each item on the instrument, and the instrument itself, on a four point Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 (not appropriate) to 2 (appropriate) to 4 (very appropriate). Those instruments or items that attained a mean rating of 2.50 and above were retained. Wordings of items in the instruments were reviewed or completely detected for improved validity.

The reliability of the instrument was established using the Split-half correlation method. Forty rural women other than the study groups were administered; the instrument and scores from the paternally deprived and non-paternally deprived groups were correlated. Using the Spearman-Brown formula, the actual co-efficient of reliability for the instrument was determined to be .82.

Procedures

The administration of instruments was planned to take five days. Research Assistants who had prior been introduced to the families arrived the first day for more interaction and confidence development. The next day consent of the mothers were sought regarding the study, and they also agreed that the children's academic records could be obtained from SID in the schools.

In view of the fact that less than 30 percent of participants had the first school leaving certificate, it was assumed that participants could neither read nor write. Consequently, the questionnaires were administered in an interview format. Seventy percent of the Research Assistant completed the administration of their instruments by the fourth day and by day five, all instruments were administered and returned to the office.

Measures

Single items from the demographic section of the instrument were used to measure mothers age, qualification, number of children in the family, length of time for which family has been deprived of father, and annual family income. Scores obtained are presented in Table 1.

Academic performance of participating pupils in the 4 core subject areas were obtained from the Student Information Dozier (SID). The SID was found appropriate because standardized scores are kept in the confidential dozier. Rating of SID scores were coded on a five point scale that ranged from 0-100 with 0-50 = 1; 51-60 = 2; 61-70 = 3; 71-80 = 4; and 81-100 = 5. This rating was used for all the four subjects tested.

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the academic performance of paternally deprived and non-paternally deprived pupils.

Table 1 presents the means, ranges and standard deviations for each demographic and other variables for paternally and non-paternally deprived families used in the study.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations and Ranges for Demographic and Critical Variables

Demographic Variables	Mean		SD		Range	
	G1	G2	G1	G2	G1	G2
Age of mother	32.61	31.98	5.03	5.12	18-45	17-44
Qualification of mothers	1.14	1.15	0.85	0.81	1.5-5.0	1.0-5.0
No. of children in family	4.52	4.67	1.83	1.87	2.0-6.0	2.0-7.0
Period of paternal deprivation	6.33	-	1.65	-	5.0-9.0	-
Annual family income (US Dollars)	2.44	2.46	62.5	61.9	83-346	83-350
Critical variables					G1-G2	
English studies	2.91	3.97	1.17	1.22	-1.06	
Mathematics	2.29	3.63	0.99	0.99	-1.34	
Science	2.82	3.24	1.26	1.15	-0.42	
H.P.E.	3.39	3.56	1.12	1.17	-0.17	

- G1 Paternally Deprived Group.
 G2 Non-Paternally Deprived Group.
 * Had the Highest Mean Scores Difference.

It could be observed from Table 1 that the mean score age for both paternally and non-paternally deprived groups differ by only (32.61-31.98) 0.63 years. Maternal qualification (education) was determined on a five point scale with 1-indicating no formal education, 2-completed three years of primary education, 3-completed five years of primary education, 4-have a first school leaving certificate, and 5-have some form of High School Education. The mean scores for both groups 1.14 and 1.15 respectively.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Mean scores, standard deviation and ranges for the variables examined are presented in Table 1. A wide range of paternal deprivation causative factors was reported and family annual income also varied widely.

It was hypothesized that paternal deprivation induced poverty would have negative effect on academic performance of rural Nigeria elementary school children. The t-test analysis for generated data is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Test and Mean Scores of Paternally Deprived and Non-Paternally Deprived Pupils Subject: English Studies

Groups	N	Mean	S.D	z-value	Table Value	Decision
Paternally (PD)	120	331	2.91	0.55	±1.96	NS
Non-paternally deprived (ND)	120	453	3.37			
Subject: mathematics paternally deprived	120	268	2.29	0.24	±1.96	NS
Non-paternally deprived	120	418	3.63			
Subject: science paternally deprived	120	324	2.82	0.24	±1.96	NS
Non-paternally deprived	120	386	3.24			
Subject: H.P.E. deprived	120	397	3.39	0.10	±1.96	NS
Non-paternally deprived	120	413	3.56			

Significant $p < .05$, $df = 238$, critical z-value = ± 1.96 .

Data presented in Table 2 revealed no statistical difference in the performance of paternally deprived and non-paternally deprived elementary school children in English studies, Mathematics,

Science, Health and Physical Education. However, mean scores for the paternally deprived were found to be consistently lower in all the core courses examined.

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This study, like many research studies of this nature has several limitations. It only examined a small portion of a larger system of variables related to poverty that could affect academic achievement. This could be one explanation for the observed non-significant difference in the academic achievement of the study groups. It was revealed from the study that because of poverty, children in both groups stay away from school in farming seasons (when lands are cultivated) and go to farm to assist their parents to enhance family income. Also children from both study groups get involved in one form of street trading or the other, after school hours. Many of them hawk kerosene, bananas, dried fish, etc. after school hours rather than attend extra lessons as observed (Thompson, 1974), in urban areas. It may not be clear whether or not these factors have greatly bridged the academic gap that ordinarily would have existed between paternally and non-paternally deprived poor rural elementary children in the study groups. But what is obvious is that these problems impede children's effectiveness in their academic works.

Thus, it is important that policy budgetary decisions at national, state, and local levels be made to constantly address the problem of poverty and education. Local government councils (counties) to which primary education functions are devolved complain regularly of inadequate funds from the national government to execute developed statutory functions. Yet there are accusations against these chairmen of using council (county) funds to purchase house in Europe and America; meanwhile children among the rural poor continue to receive poor education that can barely elicit literacy and numeracy. More studies are therefore required in this area. It is through more comprehensive research work using data representing the various social strata, containing many varied aspects of the problem that education policy makers, schools administrators and the general public can come to a better understanding of what the requirements are, and the actions that should be taken. Political office holders, schools administrators, educators and community leaders should be aware of the significant of paternal deprivation induced poverty on academic performance of elementary school children in the rural African context. The Nigerian example covered in this study showed marked difference in the variables examined. It was discovered in consonance with Baker and Stevenson's (1986). findings that paternally deprived elementary school pupils who participated in this consistently scored lower grades in English, Mathematics, Science and H.P.E. The mean scores for both groups presented in Table 3 show that paternally deprived groups obtained their lowest scores in mathematics.

Table 3: Mean Raw Scores for PD and NPD in Tested Variables

Subjects	Eng.	Maths	Science	HPE
Paternally deprived (PD)	65.7	57.2	65.9	69.6
Non-paternally deprived (NPD)	78.6	69.9	67.9	70.4

Although the mean score for English among paternally deprived children appears high (65.4%) it was found to be 13.2 marks lower than their non-paternally deprived counterparts. It is important however to quickly point out that these observed differences were not statistically significant.

More importantly, results from the study uphold findings by (Alebiosu, 1999; Daramola, 1999), where no significant difference was observed in the academic performance of paternally and non-paternally deprived high school students.

The relationship between findings presented in this study and previous works earlier cited from the literature on parental deprivation in general, require some comment. Although the present study as well as others cited, indicate that paternal deprivation had no significant effect on the academic performance of children; it has also been shown that this may not always be the case. (Obidi, 1988; Kurdek and Sinclair, 1986), conducted separate studies that included information on paternally deprived children and found that paternal deprivation has significant effect on academic performance. These results remind us that different links between similar construct may be found for families living in different socio-economic environments. For example, the families in this study were drawn from the rural communities in the South/South Region of Nigeria. In the former, the monthly per capital income of both paternally and non-paternally deprived families were not found to differ significantly, since both groups lived below poverty line. There are no jobs for both PD and NPD mothers, even the men in NPD homes were jobless and lived on the meagre income of their wives and children.

Indeed, the people are actually poor, unemployment is high, coupled with high birth rate with some families having as many as six children. These villages lack good roads, electricity, pipe-borne water, means of communication and other modern infrastructural amenities that could attract industrialization and consequent job creation. Infantile, mortality is high, therefore families tend to have large number of children hoping that enough would survive. By this process, more than actually needed survive and parents are saddled with more children than they can care for. And since there are no jobs for the men, most families rely on the little income from the mother who is engaged in petty trading or daily paid casual labour. In view of the high poverty level, both paternally and non- paternally deprived families can barely carter for the academic needs of their children. This could have informed the observed non-significant difference in the present study.

On the other hand, the poverty level experienced by Obidi's groups in the urban areas studied differ significantly from rural poverty. Many two-parent headed families in urban Nigeria, live in affluence with both husband and wife engaged in gainful employment, with the man generally earning more than the wife. And because of this male dominance in the job market, the absence of the father from the home is more likely to have a negative impact on family income and consequently induce a more severe poverty in the home and on the children's academic performance. Again, findings from this study does not suggest that family process such as paternal deprivation induced poverty examined among rural families should not be considered in the educational process. The literature clearly shows the significance of family involvement in educational development of children. Further investigation of these findings is certainly warranted.

Recommendations

It was recommended, based on these findings, that policy markers in governments at the national, state and local levels take cognizance of the peculiar needs of the rural poor in the formulations of education and budgetary policies to enhance educational development of rural public. Millions of dollars accrue to Nigeria from the international community in form of aid and billions of Naira of internally generated funds are also spent on educational development. Recently, some of these huge investments are beginning to show promising results yet many questions remain unanswered on efficient management (Ikoya, 1999), of these funds. More comprehensive study is therefore required on efficient management of funds developed for rural education to enable the poor, particularly the paternally deprived access to quality education.

Conclusion

This study employed the causal-comparative design to examine the difference in the academic performance of paternally and non-paternally deprived poor rural elementary school pupils in southern Nigeria. Two hundred and forty families participated in the study. Instruments were administered to the mothers in both groups while pupil's achievement scores were obtained from the student Information Dozier of the Ministry of Education. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. Mean scores for paternally deprived pupils were found to be lower in all four tested subjects (Mathematics, English, Science and HPE) than non-paternally deprived, however, observed difference were not statistically significant. Conclusions from the study also show that the high poverty level among rural dweller of South/South Nigeria appears to moderate the effects of other extrinsic variables such as paternal deprivation.

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