

## **SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT VARIABLES AND STUDENTS' INTEREST IN SCHOOL IN THE SOUTHERN EDUCATIONAL ZONE OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigates the causal relationships between some social environment variables, and their influence on students' interest in school in Southern Educational Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. The research design employed was ex-post-facto. The sample consisted of 600 senior secondary school students stratified and randomly selected from 15 secondary schools in the study area. One hypothesis and one research question were formulated to guide the study. A 31-item validated questionnaire developed by the researcher was used to collection data for the study. Multiple regression and one way analysis of variance were the statistical instruments utilized to analyze the data collected. The findings indicated that out of the four social environment variables (peer group influence, teacher – student relationship, parental academic stimulation and parental socio-economic status), three contributed significantly to the prediction of the students' interest in school. Only parental socio-economic status did not contribute significantly to students' interest in school.

Interest refers to likes, dislikes, preferences and aspirations that tend to distinguish individuals in their daily activities (Joshua, 2005). Joshua further asserts that people tend to pay more attention of get more involved and more dedicated in what interests them most. Interest spurs students to learn willingly with receptive minds that will lead others to academic success. The revival of interest as an educationally relevant motivational concept in its own right was initiated by Hams Schiefele, in the late 1970's. Together with a small group of colleagues, he developed an educationally oriented theory of interest and stimulated research in to the theory (Schiefele, Krapp, Prensel, Heiland and Kasten, 1983). He argued that the prevailing concepts of achievement motivation were insufficient from an educational stand point for several reasons, the most important of which was its inability to address the content specificity of a learner's motivation to learn. Therefore, a researchable concept was needed that was motivational, that could be used as the basis for an educational theory, and could be related to issues and concepts in existing motivational theories.

According to Frensel, Goetz, Pekrun and Watt (2010), contemporary approaches define interest as a motivational variable that refers to an individual's engagement with particular classes of objects and activities.

In a cumulative form the child develops certain characteristics like attitudes, motivation (interest) and self-concept which are capable of either promoting or inhibiting his learning (Ezewu, 1987).

Eyo (2003) asserted that an individual is born into a social environment and it is only through interaction with that environment that he is able to develop a consciousness of self and affective characteristics.

Parraga (1990) saw environment as the factor that can affect a person's behaviour. He pointed out that there are social and physical environments. Social environment includes family members, friends and colleagues, while physical environment is the size of the room, the ambient temperature or the availability of certain foods.

Teacher – student interaction (relationship) is equally seen as a major factor in the learner’s social environment. School learning, according to Ezewu (1987), is a direct consequence of teacher – learner interaction with materials. The way the teacher relates with the learners, the way he treats them and the methods he uses in making them learn bear directly on children’s learning in school. For instance, if a teacher treats his pupils fairly, recognizes their individual differences and provides for them, the children will no doubt develop positive self-concept of themselves, they will be interested in the teacher and consequently will show interest in what the teacher presents to them to learn.

Baker (1999) carried out a study on teacher – student interaction in urban at-risk classrooms and student satisfaction with school. Multiple methods of data collection, including classroom observation, interviews, and self-report questionnaires, were used with 61 third through fifth grades. Results suggested that perceptions of a carrying, supportive relationship with a teacher and a positive classroom environment were related to school satisfaction by as early as third grade. It was found that students’ learning interest will be aroused and increased if teachers convey their interest into what they teach (Sergovanni, 1994).

Socio-economic status of parents as an aspect of the social environment of students refers to parent’s occupation, income level, household possessions, living space in the home and their general social stratification in the society (Essideh, 1995). Socio-economic status is often categorized into the upper, the middle and the lower class (Mawah, 1989). The socio-economic class of parents, it is believed exert a pronounced effect on the behaviour of adolescents in and out of the classroom more than any other variables in their social environment (Lindgren, 1976).

Breakwell and Beardsell (2002) investigated the extent to which variance in science attitudes and involvement in science activities may be attributable to gender, parental and peer influences upon 11 – 14 year olds in the UK. The data presented were derived from a sample of 391 pupils drawn at random, but stratified by age and gender, from Local Education Authority Schools (i.e. schools within the state sector where parents make indirect payments for education). Attitude towards scientific change, involvement in scientific extra-curricular activities, liking and performance in school science subjects and participation in peer youth culture were indexed, in addition to estimates of the amount of positive regard for science expressed by peers and parents. The results indicated that a positive attitude to science was strongly positively related to coming from a lower socio-economic status.

Apart from the socio-economic status of parents, another important element of the social environment that impacts greatly on the learner’s interest in school is the peer group. The influence, power, and functions of peer groups in socialization which schooling is inclusive have been stated by Datta (1984,p67) thus:

“A peer group shelters and protects its members. It gives them psychological sustenance by meeting emotional needs of affection, understanding and acceptance ... Its members can interact directly with one another. It thus provides an affective learning situation; it transmits the culture of society (in diluted form), teaches certain roles on social expectations and conditions and attitudes and sentiments of its members”.

Sakawu (2003) described peer group as the group that a child interacts and plays with within his/her immediate environment. According to him, while in the group the child enjoys a free world, more indecent in thought and action and he/she has freedom to discuss matters of interest.

Parental academic stimulation is another component of the social environment that impacts on the learner. Parental involvement, according to Jeynes (2007), is defined as “parental participation in

the educational processes and experiences of their children". If there is little parental involvement in a child's education, there is more of a likelihood that the student will not succeed. When a parent is not involved or interested in his or her child's education, there is a greater chance that the child will not be interested in his or her own education.

Research has shown that the psychological state of the home, according to Adie (1992), significantly affected the behaviour and social adjustment of the adolescent. He further stated that whether the home is emotionally conducive or not, greatly depends on the parents who are the pillars of that home. Breakwell and Beardsell (2000) studied the extent to which variance in science attitude and involvement in science activities may be attributable to gender, parental and peer influences upon 11 – 14 year olds in the UK. A sample of 391 pupils was used and results showed that greater involvement in scientific extra-curricular activities was predicted by having a father who supports science, having parent who engages in activities jointly with their children, and having scientific peers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Stakeholders of education in Nigeria appear to regard and assess educational output at all levels of learning only in terms of cognitive outcomes. The learner is often screened and labeled an achiever or otherwise merely on the basis of how well or poorly he performs in school subjects. This cognitive index or parameter for measuring student's performance in school is by no means representative or reflective of the child's whole learning. Anderson and Bouke (2000) argued that affective outcomes are as important or even more important than any cognitive or psychomotor domain objectives that are targeted at schools. Bloom (1974) believed that the affective values of a child cater for his mental hygiene and his emotional development along with his socialization, and that this domain describes changes in interest, attitudes and values and adequate adjustment.

Most studies have tended to strictly examine the relationship between students' interest in school and one or two other factors without adequate consideration given to the interactive influence of many others taken together, so that even when a level of significance has been established, the composite effects on interest in school have remained untouched. Moreover, the student's interest in school appears to be dictated and fashioned from the interaction of many factors. In other words, student's interest in school, whether positive or negative, does not show up on their own. They are probably certain social environment factors that account for them. The question then that readily comes to mind is, do social environment variables such as peer group influence, teacher – student relationship, parental academic stimulation and parental socio-economic status have any significant effect on students' interest in school?

This study is therefore a predictive work that is to provide empirical evidence of the interactive effect of some social environment variables on interest in school among senior secondary school students in the southern educational zone of Cross River State.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study was designed mainly to investigate the extent to which some school environment variables (peer group influence, teacher – student relationships, parental academic stimulation and parental socio-economic status) predict students' interest in school.

### **Research Question**

One research question was formulated to guide the study.

To what extent do the following social environment variables (peer group influence, teacher – student relationship, parental academic stimulation and parent's socio-economic status) predict students' interest in school?

### Research Hypothesis

One research hypothesis was formulated to guide the study and will be tested at 0.5 level of significance.

Social environment variables (peer group influence, teacher – student relationship, parental academic stimulation and parent’s socio-economic status) do not jointly and individually significantly predict students’ interest in school.

### Method

An ex-post facto design was used for the study. The study covered all the students in the fifteen secondary schools in the southern educational zone of Cross River State. The population comprised all the senior secondary school students in the education zone. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select six hundred students (600) comprising SS1 and SS2 students from the fifteen (15) secondary schools in the five local government areas of the southern educational zone of Cross River State for the study. A self-structured questionnaire developed by the researcher was used for data collection. The questionnaire contained thirty one (31) items which were structured on a 4 - point likert scale ranging from strongly agree (4 points) to the strongly disagree (1 point) and a 7-item check-list for socio-economic station of parents. The questionnaire comprised two (2) main parts A and B. Part A which sought to elicit personal information on the variables that guide the study was divided into five (5) sub-sections comprising a total of thirty one (31) items with six (6) items for each of the independent variables except socio-economic status which had 7 items. The dependent variables (interest in school) had six (6) items. Validation of the instrument was done by an expert in test and measurement in the University of Calabar. The reliability of the instrument was also established through test-retest which yielded co-efficient values from 0.50 to 0.75. Six hundred questionnaires were administered by the researcher to the subjects but five hundred and fifty eight (558) were properly filled, retrieved and used for the analysis. The data obtained were statistically analyzed with multiple regression and analysis of variance (ANOVA) at .01 and .05 levels of significance.

### Data Analysis and Results

The mean scores and standard deviations of subjects on the sociable environment variables and students’ interest in school considered in the study are presented in table I

<b>Variables of the Study</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Peer group influence	558	18.10	3.51
Teacher – student relationship	558	11.41	3.42
Parental academic stimulation	558	19.27	3.42
Socio-economic status	558	17.83	4.17
Interest in school	558	20.47	3.40

The result in table one (1) shows that the mean scores for the independent variables: peer group influence, teacher – student relationship, parental academic stimulation and parent’s socio-economic status range from 11.41 to 19.27, while the standard deviations range from 3.34 to 4.17. The mean and standard deviation of students’ interest in school stand at 20.47 and 3.40 respectively.

### Hypothesis

The hypothesis was tested with the application of multiple regression analysis on the data. The result of the contributions of the four social environment variables towards students’ interest in school is presented in table 2.

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**Table 2a**

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis of the contributions of the four social environment variables to the prediction of students' interest in school.

Multiple R	=	.487
Multiple R Square (R) <sup>2</sup>	=	.237
Adjusted Multiple R Square	=	.231
Standard error of estimate	=	2

**Table 2b**

**Analysis of Variance of Students' Interest in School**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean sum of Square	F
Regression	1523.181	4	380.795	42.89
Residual	4904.672	553	8.878	
Total	6432.853	557		

\* Significant at .01 probability level.

Table 2a shows that the four social environment variables (peer group influence, teacher – student relationship, parental academic stimulation and parent's socio-economic status) in predicting the students' interest in school yielded a co-efficient of multiple regression (R) of .487 and a multiple R – square (R<sup>2</sup>) of .237. Table 2b shows that analysis of variance for the multiple regression data provided an F-ratio of 42.891, significant at .01 level. This result means that the four social environment variables are significant predictors of students' interest in school. A multiple R<sup>2</sup> of .237 implies that the independent variables explained 23.7% of the variance in the dependent variable.

To obtain the contribution of each of the four social environment variables to the students' interest in school, multiple regression analysis was applied on the data in order to test the significance of the regression weights. The results are presented in table 3.

**Table 3: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis of the Relative Contributions of the Individual Social Environment Variable to the Production of Students' Interest in School**

Variables	Unstandardized regression weights	Standardized regression weights	SEb	t-ratio	P-level
(PGI)	.138	.142	.038	3.592	.000*
(TSR)	.145	.146	.042	3.478	.000*
(PAS)	.331	.333	.042	7.803	.000*
(SES)	.01175	.014	.030	.388	.699

SE<sub>b</sub> = standard error of estimate

\*b = significant at .01 probability level

Table 3 reveals that t-ratios of three variables (peer group influence, teacher – student relationship (TSR), parental academic stimulation (PAS) and parent’s socio-economic status (SES) were significant at .01 level. That of parental socio-economic status was not significant.

### **Discussion**

The result of the study clearly showed that the four social environment variables (peer group influence, teacher – student relationship (TSR), parental academic stimulation (PAS) and parent’s socio-economic status (SES) taken together are really effective in predicting students’ interest in school. The observed f-ratio of 42.891 for students’ interest in school was significant at .01 level. This implies that the effectiveness of the joint contribution of the social environment variables in predicting students’ interest in school could not have occurred by chance.

This result is not surprising because it supports the works of some researchers. The findings of Breakwell and Beardsell (2002) indicated that greater involvement in scientific extra-curricular activities was predicted by having a father who supports science, having parents who engage in activities jointly with their children, and having scientific peers. The findings of the study further revealed that the social environment variables individually contributed significantly to the prediction of students’ interest in school, except parental socio-economic status. This result, however, seem to agree with the findings of Breakwell and Beardsell (2002) whose results indicated that positive attitude to science was strongly positively related to coming from a lower socio-economic status.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, of the four social environment variables that predict students’ interest in school, parental academic stimulation (PAS) has the most significant influence, while parental socio-economic status (SES) accounted for the least influence.

### **Recommendation**

The Parents – Teachers Association (PTA) is a veritable machinery for parents to be sensitized on how to relater with their children or wards in secondary schools. At PTA meetings, special slots should be given to teachers and school administrators to sensitize parents and guardians on how to stimulate students academically at the home level. The need for the constant sensitization can not be overstressed, since it is clear, from this study that, parental academic stimulation is the most significant of the independent variables, predicting students’ interest in school.

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