

# **A Study of the Influences of Some Variables of Socio-cultural Dynamics on Academic Achievements of Secondary School Students in Plateau State**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The desire by Nigerians for the Nigerian child to achieve significantly, the outcomes of the teaching and learning activities in schools can no longer be over-emphasized. What perhaps, needs emphasis is the grip of factors that are underpinning the maximal achievement of academic standards in Nigerian schools. The study examined the influences of some socio-cultural factors on the academic achievements of some selected secondary school students in Plateau State. The design adopted for the study was the survey method.

A questionnaire was designed to elicit from the respondents, an indication of their socio-cultural backgrounds as well as their school academic achievement standings. The clarity of the items of the questionnaire was confirmed after a pilot test on forty (40) respondents outside the study sample group.

A total of 840 secondary school students of five socio-cultural groups were drawn from a population of 12,375 located in 262 senior secondary schools spread across Plateau State. The answering of the two research questions was restricted to the descriptive statistics of mean ( $\bar{X}$ ), standard deviation and percentages (%). The results showed that the academic achievement levels of the students was moderate or average while the socio-cultural factors did not appear to strongly determine the directions of school academic achievements for both students who were exposed to favourable and unfavourable conditions.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The incidence of school failure or underachievement in Nigeria and other countries in the developing world is an issue of serious concern. This is because the rate of development has been adversely affected by this situation, as Ikeobi (1997), observed that at the moment, social services in such sectors as food, health, education, transport, housing, security as well as environment are in very deplorable standards.

Similarly, Ajayi (1986, p.18) remarked that:

*our aeroplanes fail to take off as scheduled, our roads take many years to complete, our telephones do not work well, there is miscarriage of justice and students cheat massively during examinations*

The socio-cultural milieu of the Nigerian school child often presents as a gauge for the child's academic achievement. However, to what extent can this assertion be relied upon? That was why, this study was intended to ascertain the extent that some socio-cultural background resources of students either enhanced or impeded the achievement of school academic successes. It was the presumption of the re-

searcher that, this effort would be significant in identifying and either reinforcing or suppressing such factors that are essential in promoting school academic success.

## THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The social and cultural characteristics of the society apparently determine the personality of the new individual into it and his future prospect. Thus the nature of human cultural character is a strong factor determining the direction of the individual's personality development. Amalaha (1979), asserts that, with a positively endowed cultural disposition, a child is more likely to develop a positive personality than in an impoverished culture.

A general conceptual understanding of "cultural deprivation" theory which forms the basis of this study underscores the fact that an individual is a complex product of his society and culture. Watson and Johnson (1972), argue that, culture is the matrix that moulds the main characteristics of most or all the members of a society. That everybody is laid in a cradle of custom. How the individual views the world, speaks, thinks, plays and works and enjoys himself, his ethical ideas and how he worships, largely are predetermined by the cultural setting into which he is born and bred. In fact, the individual is only an incident in the life-history of the society. One of the early exponents of cultural deprivation theory that added substantial understanding to the knowledge of the sub-culture of the culturally deprived was Charlotte K. Brooks. Brooks (1972), outlined these characteristics of the culturally deprived child:

*He is essentially the child who has been isolated from these rich experiences that should be his. This isolation may be brought about by poverty, by meagreness of intellectual resources in his home and surroundings, by the incapacity, illiteracy or indifference of his elders or the entire community (Friedman 1976, p. 121).*

The theory states that, the sub-culture of the culturally deprived child is deficient in certain important respects and this accounts for the low educational achievements of the child. The catalogue of deficiencies of the culturally deprived child according to Haralambos and Heald (1983), include linguistic deprivation, cognitive and personality deficiencies and a wide variety of "substandard" norms, attitudes and values which serve as constraints to the child's maximum school performance.

However, Keddie (1976), in a sharp criticism of the theory of cultural deprivation rejected and labelled it as a myth. That those children so labelled, are not in any way culturally inadequate but simply different. The abundance of information alluded to, in the description of the culturally deprived child as seen in various literatures makes it difficult for Keddie's position to be outrightly consented to by scholars in this field. In fact, Bernstein (1973) and Musgrave (1979) agree that, where cultural deprivation occurs, it affects a child's cognition (ability to perceive, conceive and know) in his formal and content aspects.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was anchored on the survey design, a descriptive research. The sole instrument for the collection of data was the Socio-cultural Dynamic Scale (SDS).

The reliability of the instrument was tested and it gave a value of 0.92 while a subsequent calculation of the level of significance yielded to total of 8.8. The interpretation showed that, the coefficient correlation of 0.92 is significant beyond the 95% confidence level. The internal consistency of the items using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was determined to be 0.61. These values gave credibility to the suitability of the instrument as used for the study.

Accompanying the SDS were sets of Proforma which were used to collect the test and examination scores of the samples. The SDS was used in measuring the variables of socio-cultural dynamics as the independent variables of the students' academic achievements at school which served as the dependent variable. A study sample of 840 students was used. This was drawn from 12,375 senior secondary school students in Plateau State that were located in 262 senior secondary schools. The study was restricted to SS II students who were readily available for the exercise but only of at least average physical, intellectual and cognitive characteristics and development. These students had over the years enjoyed steady class promotions to warrant being in their present class.

The study population excluded students who were unable to do well at school because of physical or learning disabilities and whose teachers needed special training. These techniques were control measures employed to ensure that only students of average innate ability potentials were used. The students were placed into five stratified groups of gender, family structure, family size, family location and socio-economic status.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the academic achievement profile of secondary school students in Plateau State?
2. How do the relative nature of socio-cultural factors of the different categories of students determine their levels of academic achievement?

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Research Question I:

Table 1:

Social-Cultural Valuables		Statistics		
		N	X	S
Gender	Male	451	50.6763	10.1966
	Female	389	50.7018	10.2247
Family Location	Urban	640	51.0641	10.2737
	Rural	200	49.485	9.9051
Family Size	Small	148	50.1284	9.611
	Large	692	50.8078	10.3286
Family Structure	Monogamous	584	51.2432	10.5779
	Polygynous	256	49.4219	9.1879
Socio-Economic Status	High	227	51.7533	10.4999
	Low	613	50.2936	10.0717
<b>Overall</b>		<b>840</b>	<b>50.6881</b>	<b>10.2035</b>

Table 1 reveals that the academic achievements of the students was average. This is against the backdrop of the mean being 50.6881 while the standard deviation was 10.2035. The results also indicated that students who reside with their families in rural areas and actually attend school there as well as students from polygamous homes achieved lower means than the group mean. The result of this study has given confirmation to the reality that secondary school students are either just performing at average level or below. This has manifested in the levels of academic performances of students in the school certificate examinations. Since the sample population was composed of SS II students who were preparing to sit for the senior school examination, the tendency is that these students may be working towards the achievement of average passes or below. The researcher's opinion can be corroborated by the trend of performances observed for candidates from Plateau State between 1997 and 2000 (Source: ERC, Jos), which is quite dismal. This situation must have pre-empted the public outcry bordering on the desirability of the school system as a viable enterprise for societal advancement. With failure of such magnitude, it is vivid that young men who hitherto could not make it in school and who ordinarily cannot gain admission into higher institutions resort to other means of survival in the society which may not be acceptable. Pressures are thus exerted on the society and these have not only retarded meaningful growth but have questioned the resilience of the school system.

**Research Question II:  
Tables 2 - 6**

**Table 2:**

Nature of Socio-cultural influences of Students by Gender	Level of Academic Achievements				Total
	High (50% & Above)		Low (Less than 50%)		
	N	%	N	%	
Male students exposed to favourable influences	99	56.25	77	43.75	176
Male students exposed to unfavourable influences	126	45.81	149	54.18	275
Female students exposed to favourable influences	108	49.09	112	50.90	220
Female students exposed to unfavourable influences	87	51.47	82	48.52	169
<b>Total</b>	<b>420</b>		<b>420</b>		<b>480</b>

**Table 3:**

Nature of Socio-cultural influences of Students by Family Size	Level of Academic Achievements				Total
	High (50% & Above)		Low (Less than 50%)		
	N	%	N	%	
Students of small size family exposed to favourable influences	70	51.85	65	48.14	135
Students of small size family exposed to unfavourable influences	5	38.46	8	61.33	13
Students of large size homes exposed to favourable influences	301	48.54	319	51.45	620
Students of large size home exposed to unfavourable influences	32	44.44	40	55.55	72
Total	408	-	432	-	840

**Table 4:**

Nature of Socio-cultural influences of Socio-economic Status (SES)	Level of Academic Achievements				Total
	High (50% & Above)		Low (Less than 50%)		
	N	%	N	%	
Students of higher SES exposed to favourable influences	83	51.23	79	48.76	162
Students of higher SES exposed to unfavourable influences	37	56.92	28	43.07	65
Students of lower SES exposed to favourable influences	153	49.83	154	50.16	307
Students of lower SES exposed to unfavourable influences	140	45.91	166	54.08	308
Total	413	-	427	-	840

**Table 5:**

Nature of Socio-cultural influences by Family Structure	Level of Academic Achievements				Total
	High (50% & Above)		Low (Less than 50%)		
	N	%	N	%	
Students of monogamous families exposed to favourable influences	187	52	170	48	357
Students of monogamous families exposed to unfavourable influences	109	47.66	118	52.33	227
Students of polygynous families exposed favourable influences	57	42.85	72	57.14	129
Students of polygynous families exposed to unfavourable influences	55	41.81	72	58.18	127
Total	408	-	432	-	840

**Table 6:**

Nature of Socio-cultural influences by family location	Level of Academic Achievements				Total
	High (50% & Above)		Low (Less than 50%)		
	N	%	N	%	
Students of rural location exposed to favourable influences	61	42.95	81	57.04	142
Students of rural location exposed to unfavourable influences	24	41.37	34	58.62	58
Students of urban location exposed to favourable influences	82	43.85	105	56.14	187
Students of urban locations exposed to unfavourable influences	264	58.27	189	41.72	453
Total	431	-	409	-	480

From the figures articulated of the five tables presented for research question II, it is obvious that, irrespective of the stratified groups of the sample and whether they were exposed to favourable or unfavourable influences of socio-cultural factors, the directions of academic achievements levels were not meaningfully determined by socio-cultural considerations. For instance, in table 2, of the 176 students that were male and exposed to favourable influences of socio-cultural nature meant to enhance their school performances, 99, representing (56.25%) scored 50% and above, while as many as 77 (43.75%) scored below 50%. Similarly, 275 male students agreed that they were exposed to unfavourable socio-cultural influences which could have posed as constraints in their doing well at school. Incidentally, 126 (45.81%) of this population achieved 50% and above performance.

Out of the 142 students that came from rural locations and were exposed to favourable socio-cultural influences likely to have enhanced their school learning, 61 (42.95%) scored 50 and above while 81 (57.04%) scored below. The results of this study have contrasted with the opinion of Orhungur (1990), who reported that where cultural influences at home are positive or favourable, they turn out a beautiful student for school and if however, they are negative, they can make the child unfit for both school and society. For the avoidance of doubt, because of the differences in time and space between the time Orhungu made this assertion and now, the time lag could have created the change which manifested in this current study. In fact, the society is dynamic and so liable to social change. Sule (2001), had observed that the society is in a state of rapid change resulting in the change of peoples' perceptions, attitudes and social values.

#### **IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

From the findings of this study, it is pertinent to note that, the school is perhaps, the most important institution that significantly determines the directions of school academic achievements. Home socio-cultural influences which children carry to school decline continuously as he/she progresses in school. However, Simmons (1986), agrees that although home background is important in the primary and early secondary grades, its influence diminishes as the student moves upward. In spite of the outcome of this study, it is important that socio-cultural influences at home

be presented as pleasantly as possible so as to provide good leveling ground in the school for children.

It is recommended that secondary schools should be improved upon in terms of availability of teaching staff, their retention of tenure, provision of teaching and learning materials as well as the renovation of dilapidated classrooms.

In conclusion, all stakeholders in education should systematically address the issue of funding in order to provide quality learning and teaching so as to remedy school failure.

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