A CASE STUDY: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF LOW-SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA SOUTH COUNTY, ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

A proposal submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the department of the

DIVISION OF ADMINISTRATION AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

doctor of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
ST. JOHN’S UNIVERSITY
Jamaica, New York

By

Patrick C. Okafor
65 Nadine Lane
Port Jefferson Station, NY 11776
914-9802237
Email: okaforp@stjohns.edu
Patokafor2001@yahoo.com

Submitted: April 4, 2007
Approved:

Date: __________________________

Signature: Patrick Okafor
Student

Signature: ______________________
Mentor
Abstract

This study will investigate academic success among academically high achieving students who will be selected in the select group of Schools in Anambra South County of Anambra State, Nigeria., who, despite the severe threat and challenging obstacles inherent in low socio-economic status (low- SES), and/or low parental educational attainment, miniscule parental job opportunities, and other possible unforeseen obstacles, record remarkable success in their education. The major data to be analyzed will be gathered via interview and questionnaire from 100 students, to be selected from 50 schools in the Anambra South County’s 4 school districts, the sample students’ current English and Mathematics teachers and their parents. The result will be discussed to highlight the findings and implications for all the stakeholders. This study will challenge the already affirmed position among the educational experts that students from low- SES households are bound to academic underachievement. And more so, since, most similar studies focused more on students’ academic failure and underachievement than their successful experience with school.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Background: Nigeria

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. It is on the West of the Continent and shares borders with the Republic of Benin in the west, Chad and Cameroon in the east, Niger in the north, and with the Atlantic Ocean on the south. Over 200 languages are spoken in Nigeria but the most popular are Hausa in the north, Igbo in the east and Yoruba in the west. The official language of education and communication is English. This is because Nigeria was under British colonial rule from 1852 to 1960 when it regained independence. Nigeria consists of 36 states and the federal capital territory.

Overview of the Study:

In most African Countries and the Western World, socio-economic status of a family is usually linked with the family’s income, parents’ educational level, parents’ occupation and social status among the kiths and kin and even at the global level. Ford and Harris (1997) followed this logic while examining parental influences on African American students’ school achievement by focusing on specific socio-demographic factors, including parents’ level of education, marital status, and family income.

It is generally believed that children from high and middle socio-economic status parents are better exposed to a learning environment at home because of provision and availability of
extra learning facilities. This idea is supported by Becker & Tomes (1979) when they assert that it has become well recognized that wealthy and well-educated parents ensure their children’s future earning by providing them a favorable learning environment, better education, and good jobs. In contrast to this belief, children from low socio-economic status parents do not have access to extra learning facilities; hence, the opportunity to get to the top of their educational ladder may not be very easy. Drummond & Stipek (2004) while discussing their “Low-income Parents’ beliefs about their role in children’s academic learning” mentioned that a few of these parents indicated that their responsibilities were limited to meeting children’s basic and social-emotional needs, such as providing clothing, emotional support, and socializing manners (p198). So these parents’ shortsightedness toward their responsibilities in the educational processes of their children and scarcity of fund to intensify such processes could be a challenge to their children’s success.

But does the affirmed impact of low socio-economic status of the parents really account for students’ low academic performance? In and of themselves such socio-demographic variables do not fully account for the academic successes or failure of minority students (Smith, Schneider, & Ruck 2005). But previous studies in the same field have established that other factors in spite of SES can boost academic successes among students. Studies which examined African American parents recorded that parents who maintained positive views about the value of education and who hold high academic expectations have children who often experience higher levels of academic achievement (Ford and Harris, 1997; Steinberg, 1992; Stevenson , 1990).

This study will investigate academic success among one hundred academically high achieving students who will be selected from a group of Schools in Awka County of Anambra
Success of low-SES students in Nigeria

Despite the severe threat and challenging obstacles inherent in low socio-economic status (low-SES), and/or low parental educational attainment, miniscule parental job opportunities, and other possible unforeseen obstacles, these students record a remarkable success in their education. This study will challenge the already affirmed position among the educational experts that students from low-SES households are bound to academic underachievement. And more so, since, most similar studies focused more on students’ academic failure and underachievement than their successful experience with school. The current study will seek to identify factors that contribute to the academic success of these low SES students in Nigeria.

Rationale: The Need and Significance of the Study

A major concern of school leaders and school service providers is student academic performance. This idea is supported by Hoy and Sabo (1998) when they observed that, Schools with high student achievement have a strong internal press for academic excellence. Teachers and administrators set a tone that is serious, orderly, and focused on academics….Principals use their influence with superiors to get the necessary resources and support for the instructional program, teachers set reasonable academic goals for their students and go extra mile in helping them achieve, and students accept the importance of academics and work hard to be successful (high academic press). (p.114)

Failure to witness the realization of this task has been blamed on a number of factors, among which low SES of the parents has been deemed primary. This is in line with the discovery made
by Hoy and Miskel (2001), while researching on “Academic Achievement” they stressed the correlation between SES and Student Achievement:

No matter how they are measured differences in socioeconomic background of the family lead to significant differences in student achievement. A reasonable interpretation is that measures of socioeconomic status are proxies for the quality of the learning environment in the home—nutrition, physical surroundings, parental attitudes, education, and so forth. (p.299)

Therefore, SES is not the sole determinant of student achievement. While studying the “Against the Odds: A profile of academic achievers from the urban underclass”, Pollard (1989) talked about Psychosocial Factors as alterable variables. These are psychosocial factors in students themselves or in their environments that are theoretically manipulatable, and that lead to successful outcomes.

So we intend to examine how these variables might interact to explain high achievement among the students from low-SES households.

This study differentiates itself from the previous ones, because it would explore through a case-study analysis, the family and community expectation/influence, leadership in the school and personal determination/resilience, to figure out the factors that contribute to the academic success of the sample students. This aligns with the findings made by Driessen, Smit, & Sleegers (2004) which state that:

there are three important contexts or social institutions which can influence the education and socialization of children: the family, school and local community. It is assumed that at least some of the objectives of the various institutions—such as support for the development and school careers of children—are shared and therefore
best reached by communicating and cooperating. …The congruence between the
different spheres of influence is then seen to be of considerable importance for the
optimal development of children, and partnership is viewed as a means to realize
this. (p.511)

This is in place because, facilitation of children’s education is more than the responsibility of
their parents; the school and the society have a stake as well. That being the case, there should be
mutual understanding and a spirit of sustained shared responsibility among the parents, the
school and the community when it comes to academic formation of the students.

Although background and SES undoubtedly factor into at-risk status for poor and minority
students, these variables may only partially explain the level of academic achievement attained.
Models focusing on background characteristics cannot explain why students possessing one or
more risk characteristics do not drop out of school, nor can they explain why students possessing
none of these characteristics drop out. Moreover, reliance on these explanations seldom leads to
improvements in educational service delivery because student backgrounds are difficult, if not
impossible, to change (Renee, & Singh 1998).

**Significance:**

It is hoped that identification of the factors that contribute to academic success of
students from low-SES households in Nigeria, will spark the interest of school leaders and
instructional leaders globally to seek to identify similar attributes that will contribute to the
resiliency and academic achievement of low SES students internationally. I know we’ve talked
about this, and I’m not going to be here to help you with this but this would make a wonderful
study. Perhaps you felt overwhelmed because of the vastness with which you conceived this study. If you cut down the size of your sample to make this manageable and if you are planning on going home for a visit anyway you could conceivably conduct this study in a relatively short period of time.

**Definitions:**

**The structure of Nigerian Education:**

The Nigerian education system is generally guided by the National Policy on Education. An important effect of this policy, which was revised in 1981, mandated that the entire educational system come under the control of the Federal Government which now makes laws that affect all levels of education in all states of the federation. The new policy introduced a 6-3-3-4 structure of education in line with the American system. This means, 6 years of primary, 3 yrs of junior secondary, 3 years of senior secondary and 4 years of university education. It also recognizes a pre-primary education for children, popularly known as kindergarten.

**The Examination system in the primary and secondary school level:**

Promotion from one class to the other in both the primary and secondary schools depends on the passing of an end-of-year examination. Failure in such an examination requires that one repeats the class. To be admitted into the secondary school from the primary school one has to pass a competitive (Common) entrance examination. Admission into the University depends also on passing a competitive (JAMB - Joint Admission & Matriculation Board) examination.
Resilience:

Resilient children are said to be those who beat the odds or bounce back under adverse circumstances (Floyd, 1996).

Academic success/Achievement:

For the purposes of this study, students’ achievement simply means the average of students’ scores on standardized examinations: Common Entrance Examination (CEE) for the primary school and West African School Certificate (WASC) for the secondary School.

Socioeconomic Status:

A composite measure available in the data set, consisting of father’s education, mother’s education, father’s occupational status, mother’s educational status, and family income.

Limitation of Study

Every level of analysis is often restricted to a certain parameters. The present study will sample only the perceptions of the selected teachers, students and their parents in four districts of one state in Nigeria. This research would report only the factors that contribute to academic achievement and resiliency despite low S.E.S on select students in one State in Nigeria. There is a tendency that a different result may be arrived at if similar study were to be conducted in another country which has a totally different view of evaluating SES, Children resilience and academic achievement.
Chapter II: Review of the Related Literature

A considerable number of researches repeatedly have shown that Low-SES is linked to a range of indicators of child and adolescent well-being, including students’ academic achievement (Beauvais & Jensen, 2003). Birch and Gussow (1979) claim that poverty contributes toward educational failure, not simply because poor children are “culturally disadvantaged”, but because their health and nutritional status is inadequate to allow for the maximum mental development and for the realization of their educational potential. The likelihood that the poor children would end up being at-risk in terms of deficient development is a reality that could begin even before birth. In that regard, Birch and Gussow emphasized that society should concern itself more with the full range of factors contributing to educational failure, among which the health of the child is a variable of potential primary importance.

According to Rumberger (1995), student ‘family background is widely recognized as the most significant important contributor to success in schools’. Rumberger’s position supports the finding of earlier scholars who argued that the home has a major influence on student school success (Swick & Duff, 1978) and that it is the quality of relationships within the student’s home environment that has an important effect on school performance (Neisser, 1986; Selden, 1990; Caldas, 1993). Additionally, Jacobs & Harvey recently established that many variables in the family background have strong (direct and indirect) associations with students’ success throughout school and in young adults’ eventual educational and occupational attainment. Such variables include family structure (socio-economic status and intact/single-parent family status), parent education level, parental involvement, and parenting style.
According to Evans (2004), lower income children have less stable families, greater exposure to environmental toxins and violence, and more limited extra-familial social support networks. There is no doubt that parents in such settings would report lower educational expectations, less monitoring of children’s school work and less overall supervision of social activities compared to students from high socio-economic and intact families. Evans repeatedly discovered that low SES children are less cognitively stimulated than high SES children, as a result of reading less and being read to less, and experience less complex communications with parents involving more limited vocabulary.

Earlier on, Donovan (1984), estimating a path model for low-SES African American youth, found the direct effect from parents’ education and that family income has little if any direct effect on achievement. The investigation carried out by Keith and Benson (1992) also examined effects on high school grades across five ethnic groups and concluded that the path from family background to achievement was constrained to zero because it was found to be non-significant.

How do we reconcile the seemingly conflicting ideas of different educational researchers concerning the effect of SES on student academic achievement?

There are some factors that could despite the impact of SES, enable the students perform successfully at school. It is on record that a number of scholars have studied what they termed individual characteristics that could account for the academic achievement of the students who are ordinarily distinguished as being ‘at risk’. Two of those researchers, Borman and Overman (2004), while studying the Academic Resilience in Mathematics among Poor and Minority Students, developed four measures of individual characteristics: Self-esteem, students efficacy,
student engagement, and students’ overall disposition toward school. According to their findings, the “univariate analyses for resilience status revealed statistically significant main effects for all four outcomes, student engagement, self-efficacy in mathematics, positive attitude toward school, and self-esteem, all of which favored resilient students”. (P.188). Similar characteristics are identifiable in other studies: individual characteristics of resilient children typically include high self-esteem, high self-efficacy, and autonomy (Wang, Haerttel, & Walberg, 1994). While poverty and students’ low SES background could be considered a concern regarding students’ academic performance, they are not to be belabored because, the individual characteristics are variables that align to students’ performance. There is no doubt that such conditions can impact students negatively, but the strongly determined and motivated students are likely to beat the odds of greater risk of academic failure and perform with distinction in school. These students we identify as resilient children. Resilient children also are actively engaged in school (Finn & Rock, 1997), have strong interpersonal skills, and maintain healthy expectations, and have a high level of activity (Benard, 1991). According to Borman & and Overman, (2004) all of these characteristics highlight the underlying perseverance, strong will, and positive disposition of the resilient child.

Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, Kielsmeier, and Benson (2000) concluded that “a developmentally attentive school environment and a more experimental curriculum may help compensate for the detrimental effects of low-SES. This confirms the study done by (Hoy et al., 1991), that the single best organizational climate predictor of student achievement is academic emphasis. These researchers using high school as a focus point, found that high schools with an orderly and serious learning environment, with teachers who set high but achievable goals, and
with students who work hard and respect others who do well academically, have higher levels of student achievement, even when data are controlled for socioeconomic status (Hoy et al., 1991).

Schools that foster student resilience have been found to emphasize academic learning and opportunity for all students, active student and parent involvement, and sensitivity to student diversity (Wang & Gordon, 1994). According to Floyd, (1996) teachers who bridge the gap between home and school and are sensitive to and knowledgeable of their students cultural and community heritages provide better learning environments, particularly for students from low SES backgrounds.

Several studies have identified resilience as a factor that enhances higher academic performance among students of a low SES background. In his studies, Floyd (1996) noted that there are students who succeeded despite economic hardships in their respective families. Floyd observed that in their homes, there was limited money for extracurricular activities like football or basketball games, dances or senior proms, or even senior pictures. Furthermore, Floyd found that these students managed to continue focusing on and excelled in their education despite the occurrence of serious problems due to or related to socio-economic insecurity.

At face-value, observations in Nigeria appear to align with this information regarding the resiliency of children despite low SES status. Despite numerous obstacles and challenges, there are some Nigerian children from poor and low-income families that seem to experience considerable academic success in school. However, until now, no study has explored this relationship. The purpose then of this study will be to determine if indeed students who come from low-SES and single parents homes experience success academically and to discover what the factors are that are related to this success.
Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between academic achievement for primary and secondary school level children in Nigeria and S.E.S.?

2. How can partnership of parents, teachers and community foster academic success among children from low S.E.S homes?
Chapter III: Methodology

Procedures and Research Design

The current study will utilize a mixed methodology (quantitative & qualitative) aimed at understanding and interpreting the outcomes and factors that support students’ achievement for primary and secondary level students of low SES background in Anambra State, Nigeria. Interviews and questionnaires will be the main sources through which data will be gathered. The data from the interviews are intended to provide information directly from the participants. The interviews will be face-to-face interpersonal role situations in which I will ask questions and the respondent responds to them comprehensively.

Subjects and Instrumentation

The data for this study will be collected from the Anambra South County in Anambra State Nigeria. Ten Schools covering both primary and secondary will be selected out of 50 schools in the 4 districts of the County. In the selection of schools, I intend to use the table of random numbers along with an alphabetized list of the schools.

The sample will consist of 100 students from the 10 selected schools. Mathematics and English teachers of the sample students will be part of the data. And a parent or a primary guardian of each sample student will be actively involved. Their contributions would enable us juxtapose the impact of SES on students’ academic achievement.
The researcher will administer a questionnaire to collect demographic information from the target students about their parents-entitled- Socio-Economic Status and Academic Performance Questionnaire (SESAPQ).

For exploration and indication of academic achievement of the sample students, Common Entrance Examination (CEE) for the primary schools and West African Examination Council (WAEC) for the secondary schools will be used. These data for the student achievement will be collected from the students’ individual schools and the State Ministry of Education.

Before ever the proposed data are collected, the researcher plan to write official letters to the State Education Board, the four participant school districts, and the respective school principals, seeking permission to carry out this research while stating clearly the purpose of the study and with a pledge of confidentiality regarding all information collected. This letter will explicitly explain that participants’ anonymity will be guaranteed by assigning identification numbers in lieu of names. Parental and student consents will be obtained for all minor children participating in this project. The researcher will explain the purpose of the study in general terms, guarantee anonymity and emphasize the need for candid responses on the part of all participants. Demographic information collected will include gender, age, and parents’ occupation. Socio-economic status: level of education, ownership of a house, ownership of a car, etc. The Academic performance of the students will be assessed via individual scores on Standardized Exams: Common Entrance Examination (CEE) for the primary school candidates and West African Examination Council (WAEC) for the secondary school candidates, which will be obtained from student records and the department of education.
Teacher participants will be asked to use their background and experience to explain their perception of how teaching can create effective learning environment and to give their evaluation of factors contributing to student success. Teachers will be asked to explain factors contributing to student-teacher rapport, and what they consider to have been significant in fostering academic achievement for the sampled students.

The parents of the sampled students will be interviewed in order to have their view of the factors that foster academic achievement among their children.

Students will be asked to share the source of support in their academic career; they will identify the factors that have sustained their efforts and have contributed to their high academic performance in school.

All the interviews will be planned for between 30-45 minutes for each participant and will be conducted during the school hours and in the school premises.

Conclusion

Theoretical Significance

The primary goal of any school is teaching and learning and school effectiveness must be evaluated along this principal goal. The present study hopes to generate more studies by providing not just theoretical foundation of factors that contribute to student success despite the debilitating effect of SES, but also empirical findings that will guide improvement on the academic front.
References


