



## **Influence of Poverty on the Educational Rights of Children in Niger State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The study explores the influence of poverty on educational right of the children in Niger State. Two objectives with corresponding research questions and hypotheses were generated to guide the study. The research design that was used for this study was cross-sectional survey research design. The total number of senior public secondary school students in Niger State at the time of the study was 45, 620, while the total number of senior public secondary schools was 85. The sample size of the study consisted of 354 public senior secondary school students drawn from 12 secondary schools. The sample size of study was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select the participants who responded to the questionnaire. The instrument used for data collection was a 12-item Questionnaire called "Students' Questionnaire on the Influence of Poverty on Educational Right of Children" (SQIPERC). The questionnaire was rated using a 5 points Likert scale type measurement of strongly Agree (SA=5), Agree (A=4), Disagree (D=3), strongly Disagree (SD=2) and Undecided (U=1) for positively worded questions, while for negatively worded questions, the scoring is reversed. The two (2) formulated hypotheses were tested using t-test statistic at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study revealed that poverty has a significant influence on student's school attendance in Niger State, Nigeria, as a result of the influence of poverty on dropout rates among secondary school students in Niger State and it equally has a significant influence on children access to quality secondary education in Niger State. The study recommended that secondary education has to be made free and compulsory by Niger State Government to reduce the rate of drop out among students from poor family background, and public secondary schools in Niger State need to be well-equipped and staffed with qualified teachers to enable every child in the state to have access to quality secondary education.

Key words: Poverty, children's educational rights, school dropouts, access to quality school etc.

### **Introduction**

Education is a basic tool for the transmission of societal values. It is an area of prime importance for government, voluntary agencies, individuals, families and communities. This is because all of them are investing a lot of resources in order to achieve a great success in the educational sector

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(Christian, 2015). The overall importance of education to mankind cannot be over-emphasized as no nation could afford to neglect education at any level, and hopes to be successful in any area of human endeavour. Education is very useful for producing human resources necessary for socio-economic, scientific and technological development needed for advancement of any nation. It performs the role of helping children to be aware of their fundamental human rights. Ondere (2012) observed that educating a child is beneficial, as it contributes to economic productivity, social development, intergenerational education, social equity and sustainability of developmental efforts of a nation. Education enables children to have greater control of their lives and provides them with skills to contribute positively towards the growth and development of their societies.

United Nation's International Children Emergency Fund (2009) reported that adequate educational opportunities for children could lead to more equitable development, stronger families, better services, better child health and effective participation in governance. The indispensable roles which education plays in all-round development of a child led to the adoption of a Convention on the Right of the Child by United Nations General Assembly on 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1989. The convention had special focused on the right of education of a child in articles 28 and 29 which states that;

*Every child has the right to an education. Primary education must be free and secondary education must be made available to every child. Discipline in school must respect children's human dignity. Wealthy countries must help poorer countries to achieve this. Education must develop every child personality, talents and abilities to its full capacity. It must encourage a child's respect for human rights as well as respect for their parents and other cultures (p.132).*

Education is the process of teaching and training a child. It leads to impacting of skills and acquisition of knowledge of a particular profession using different teaching methods and strategies. It is an instrument for the development of an individual and the society at large. Enamiror (2007) looked at education as a systematic procedure for the transfer and transformation of culture through formal and informal training of people in the society.

Under the Nigerian Law, an individual is classified into four folds namely: an infant (age 1-6 years), a child (age 7-13year), a young person (14-17years) and an adult (18years and above). However, the Nigerian Child Rights Act of 2003 classified an individual below the age of 18 years as a child. Similarly, the Convention on the Rights of the child (CRC) defined a child as any human being who is below the age of 18 years, except the law of the child's country states otherwise (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2009). A child in this study is therefore seen as any human being below the age of 18 years in Niger State. A child level of education depends to a large extent on the following factors: parent's educational level, their family background, the value they attached to education, family types, marital status, occupational level of parents, number of children, income level of the parents among others (Eneji, Ubom, Eneji, Obogo, and Dunnamah, 2013). Those whom their parents are poor sometimes find it difficult to have access to quality education.

Poverty refers to the condition of not having enough income to meet the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. It is a term used to describe people with very low incomes. Besides, poverty is measured by determining how much an individual has to buy the basic necessities of life, a minimally adequate diet, the minimum housing unit and so on. Poverty means more than lacking financial means as it has to do with one's state of mind and perception about issues of life. Mutua (2014) described poverty as the inability of an individual, group or nation to provide shelter, nutrition and other material items that enable people to live a comfortable life. The concept of poverty includes material deprivation (e.g., food, clothes and shelter) and access to services (e.g., health and education). It constitutes a multiple breach of the fundamental rights of human beings and above all, a violation of the right to live a comfortable life.

Poverty brings about inadequate educational resources in the school system, which in most cases hinders effective teaching and learning. Without providing relevant school facilities, teaching materials, textbooks and conducive classrooms, it becomes difficult to enhance effective teaching and learning. Moreover, poverty is a constraint to educational achievement both at the macro and micro levels. Hence, poor nations generally have lower levels of school enrolment, while at the

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micro level; children of poor households receive less education. Ahmad and Najeemah (2013) asserted that children from families who are suffering from poverty do not only have limited opportunity to school enrolment, but in most cases, such children are deprived complete access to formal education.

Taking a critical look at the extent to which poverty influence school attendance, Eneji, Ubom, Eneji, Obogo, and Dunnamah, (2013) were of the opinion that parents household income and their occupational status is an important factor in determining access to education; this is so because educating a child attracts some potential costs right from during the registration of the pupils to completion. The author further explained that such costs include school fees, cost of purchase of compulsory textual materials as introduced from the school, uniforms, travel, equipment and the opportunity costs of sending a child to school. Most studies have shown the link between household income and student's school drop-out (Cardoso and Verner, 2007; Anang, 2007; Ekanem, 2011). Cardoso and Verner, (2007) whilst describing exclusions rather than drop-out painted poverty as 'the most common primary contributory factor for students school drop-out.

These authors further observed that formal schooling especially learning that is not directly linked to work is mostly available only to wealthy people, which are not easily available for the poor. While confirming the position of Cardoso and Verner, (2007), Eneji, et al., (2013) further found that when it has to do with schooling, all low income countries have one common generational trait in common, they ration their education according to social stratification, where children from rich homes attain the best schools, while students from poor home attain the worst schools. In most poor countries of Africa, less than half of all children ever get to school and for the world as a whole, just half of the children reach the secondary grade. As a result 15% of Latin American, 39% Asians and 40% of Africans are illiterate. This assertion and finding led Hunter and May (2003) to call poverty 'a plausible explanation of school disruption. Directed by the position of Hunter and May, (2003), Eneji, et al., (2013) asked a series of question to parents and guidance about the financial circumstances surrounding their children's academic endeavors.

Fernel, (2010) found that the perception people have about schooling and the importance placed on it at all times do shape interactions between schooling, household income and dropping out, poor household tend to have lower demand for schooling than richer household. It is pertinent to understand that whatever the benefits of schooling, the costs, for them are more difficult to meet than is the case for richer household. Fernel, (2010) describes the link between wealth and schooling retention in more detail. He noted that amongst those who had never been enrolled in any school; children at school were on average from better – off households than those who dropped out who were in turn from richer background than school-age children who had never enrolled. Children in rural areas, and children in poorer homes drop out of school earlier, in greater numbers, and fail to make the transition to junior high schools compared to their peers in richer homes (Olubadewo & Ogwu, 2005; Fernel, 2010, Ekanem, 2011). It includes every form of income for example, salaries and wages, retirement benefits and interest from investments. The nature of the income of a given household determines whether a child will enroll in school or not, frequency of attendance and the likelihood of dropping out of school permanently (Ananga, 2011). This is so because a family is the earliest and most fundamental socialization institution for developing a child. The family provides pivotal foundations and experiences for children future lifestyles including their academic achievement in school (Muthoki, 2015).

Amadi, (2013) observed that the level of education acquired by children in Niger State is influenced by the parents' level of income. The level of parental income influences the demand for schooling not only because it affects the inability of households to pay fees and other costs associated with education, but because it is associated with a high opportunity cost of schooling for children which some parents consider as waste of finance. As children grow up, opportunity cost of education becomes larger, hence, increasing the pressure for children to work and earn income for the household as opposed to spending time to acquire education. Household income determines the ability of a household to invest in their children education. If the cost of a child being in school is considered to be too high by parents, the chances of dropping out of school would be high

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especially in some traditional societies where education is not considered as an important issue as compared to farming and marriage issues (Adams, Lemaire & Prah, 2013).

Some families with low income give out their female children to early marriage to raise money for family upkeeps. As a result of poverty, some parents send their children for hawking during school hours thereby limiting their right to education. Poverty is one of the major reasons why many children drop out of school. Okoro (2011) called poverty a plausible explanation of school disruption. Children from families that are financially stable are likely to remain in school, whilst those who are poorer are more likely never to have attended, or to drop out of school after certain period of enrolment. In determining access to education by children, family income is an important factor because there are many costs associated with schooling and educational process ranging from school fees, uniform, Parents Teachers Association fees and the opportunity costs of sending children to school. Family income is linked to a range of factors when children start school, how often they attend, whether they have to temporarily or permanently withdraw from school.

In Niger State, the high rate of child abuse and children in the streets as a result of poverty is a thing of concerned. Children whom their educational rights have been violated by not having access to school enrolment or dropped out from school due to their parental level of poverty are used as hawkers, beggars and bus conductors in most parts of Niger State. Other worst forms of child abuse due to poverty which comes in form of child labour include street hawking, drug trafficking, herding of livestock, children used by the physically challenged in begging along busy streets and sneaking. Others include child trafficking, commercial sex working activities, slavery practices, child domestic servitude and child exploitation (Ismail, 2014). The above social vices which children are exposed to as a result of poverty in their respective households however contradict section 15 of the 2003 Nigerian Child Right Act which states that every child has the right to free, compulsory and Universal Basic Education at least up to Junior Secondary Education. It is on this basis that this study was designed to explore the influence of poverty on educational right of a child in Niger State.

Poverty has torn the process of education apart and deprived people from getting access to it. Unlike the demand for goods and services, education attainment is a derived demand because it does not bring immediate satisfaction upon consumption. Instead, it is based on the desire for a long-term accumulation or improvement in what is sometimes called human capital. Poverty determines children's faith in terms of education. Many boys who drop out of school are filled with evil intention and possess sophisticated weapons which help them to involve in robbery activities successfully in the society, while girls who failed to complete their studies may end up with early pregnancy or get engaged in commercial sex working' activities. The effect of poverty on education is disheartening as some students struggle and battle with hardship to study, without adequate learning materials such as text books, writing materials and school uniforms. The inadequacy of such learning materials could prevent children from having access to quality education. As a result, this study is aimed at surveying the influence of poverty on educational right of a child in Niger State.

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Examine the influence of poverty on dropout rate among secondary school students in Niger State, and
- ii. Determine the influence of poverty on access to quality secondary education in Niger State.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What is the level of influence of poverty on dropout rate among secondary schools' students in Niger State?
- ii. What level of influence does poverty has on access to quality secondary education in Niger State?

### **Hypotheses**

The study was guided by the following hypotheses:

- HO<sub>1</sub>.** Poverty has no significant influence on dropout rate among secondary schools' students in Niger State.

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**HO<sub>2</sub>.** Poverty does not significantly influence children access to quality secondary education in Niger State.

### **Methodology**

The research design used for this study was a cross-sectional survey research design.

The population of the study comprised of all senior public secondary school students in Niger State.

The total number of senior public secondary school students in Niger State at the time of the study was 45,620, while the total number of senior public secondary schools was 85. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select the participants who responded to the questionnaire.

The sample size of the study consists of 354 public senior secondary schools' students drawn from 12 schools. The sample size of the study was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size. The table illustrated a determined sample size for a given population for easy reference. Mean and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions, while the hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

The instrument used for data collection was a 12-item Questionnaire called "Students' Questionnaire on the Effect of Poverty on Educational Right of Children" (SQEPERC). The questionnaire was rated using 5 point Likert scale measurement of Strongly Agree (SA=5), Agree (A=4), Disagree (D=3), Strongly Disagree (SD=2) and Undecided (U=1).

### **Results and discussion**

**Question 1:** What is the level of influence of poverty on dropout rate among secondary schools' students in Niger State?

The result on table 1 shows the simple percentage analysis of the response provided by respondents with regards to the six questions posed on the instrument. From the responses, based on the five point Likert types response options, it was found that a total 298 (84.2%) of the respondents



strongly agreed that the six items listed on the instrument strongly influence student’s presence in schools. 1.9 percent, representing 7 respondents were undecided, while 49 respondents (13.9%) disagreed that the factors listed above does not influence students attendance of school in Nigeria state.

Table 1: The Level of Influence of Poverty on Dropout Rate among Secondary School Students in Niger State.

No	Questionnaire items	Response options					
		SA	A	UN	D	SD	Total
1	Due to lack of societal support, poor children choose to engage in menial labor which prevent them from participation in educational program	155	106	12	48	33	354
2	Children drop out of school at any time when parents can no longer support their education financially.	199	100	12	25	18	354
3	Illiterate parents encourage their children to drop out of school to support the family, and take on informal labour schemes when they seem to have financial challenges.	208	90	4	30	22	354
4	Children growing up in households with poor economic background are forced to drop out of school.	202	100	1	25	26	354
5	As a result of poverty many parents hiding under cultural practices encourage their children to stay away from school and marry earlier.	189	130	2	13	20	354
6	Children are either pulled out of school or not enrolled at all due to the financial constraints of their affected HIV families	200	110	10	22	12	354
	Total response	1153	636	41	163	131	2124
	Percentage of response	54.3	29.9	1.9	7.7	6.2	100
	Summation of response in percentage	84.2		1.9	13.9		100

From the analysis above, it is clear that 298 respondents representing 84.2% agreed that these factors influence students presence in schools, while a paltry 49 respondents (13.9%) and 7 respondents (1.9%) of the respondents disagreed and undecided respectively. It therefore means that these six questions listed on the instrument does influence students school attendance in Niger State.

Based on this result, therefore, poverty has high level of influence on dropout rate among secondary school students in Niger State. Specifically, Children are either pulled out of school or not enrolled at all due to the financial constraints by their. When the mean and standard deviation were calculated, it shows that there is a high lelve of influence of poverty on school dropout among students in Niger State. This is followed by Children growing up in households with poor economic

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background are forced to drop out of school. 4.80, Poor children due to lack of societal support choosing to engage in labor which seemingly disqualifies them from any participation in an educational environment, Illiterate parents encourage their children to drop out of school to support the family, and take on informal labour schemes when they seem to have financial challenges, and lack of support from parents have 4.67 each and As a result of poverty, many parents hiding under cultural practices encourage their children to drop out of school and marry earlier has 4.50 mean scores.

**Question 2:** Poverty does not significantly influence children access to quality secondary education in Niger State.

Table 2: the level of Influence of Poverty on Children Access to Education in Secondary Schools in Niger State

No	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	RESPONSE OPTIONS					Total
		SA	A	UN	D	SD	
1	Poor children due to lack of societal support choosing to engage in labor which seemingly disqualifies them from access to education	163	125	12	38	16	354
2	Lack of financial support from parents deprives children access to education.	189	110	12	18	25	354
3	Parents' level of educational influence their children access to education.	199	103	4	23	25	354
4	Children growing up in households with poor economic background influence their access to education.	210	110	0	20	14	354
5	Cultural practices affects children's' access to education.	199	123	2	10	20	354
6	Children are not enrolled in schools due to the financial constraints of their affected HIV families	211	88	10	23	22	354
	Total response	1171	659	40	132	122	2124
	Percentage of response	55.1	31.0	1.9	6.3	5.7	100
	Summation of response in percentage	86.1		1.9	12.0		100
		304		7	43		354

From the simple percentage analysis on table 2, the result shows that 304 respondents representing 86.1% strongly agreed that the items listed on table 2 are factors of poverty which strongly influence student's access to quality education in Niger State, 7 respondents (1.9%) were undecided

as to whether these items listed here as indicators of poverty which are parameters measuring poverty influence student's access to quality education in Niger State, while 43 respondents (12.0%) strongly disagreed that these factors listed as parameters for measuring poverty level do not influence student's access to quality education in Niger State. Since the result is positive towards those who strongly agreed based on the data analyzed, it is therefore strongly believed that these parameters of poverty o strongly influence student's access to quality education in Niger State.

An overview of the mean responses indicated that most of the respondents agreed that all the poverty related factors on the questionnaire influence children access to quality secondary education. Hence, poverty has high level of influence on children access to quality secondary education in Niger State. On the poverty related factors, Parents' level of education influence their children access to education 4.67, this is followed by lack of financial support from parents deprives children access to education, Children growing up in households with poor economic background influence their access to education and Cultural practices affects children's' access to education with 4.56. Poor children due to lack of societal support choosing to engage in labor which seemingly disqualifies them from access to education with 4.40 and Children are not enrolled in schools due to the financial constraints of their families with 4.00.

### **Test of Hypotheses**

**H** , Poverty has no significant influence on dropout rate among secondary school students in Niger State. Table 3 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the influence of poverty on secondary school dropout rates in Niger State. From the analysis, the calculated correlation value is 0.78 at 0.05 significance level and a degree of freedom of 342, while the critical table value is 0.178, the calculated is far higher than the critical table value, following the rule of the thumb, the null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternate hypothesis is accepted, therefore, poverty does significantly influence the rates of secondary school students dropout in Niger State. Table 4 shows the result of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation *Analysis*, the calculated value is 0.88 at 0.05

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significance level and 352 degree of freedom, while the critical table value is 0.178, since the calculated value is higher than the critical table value, the null hypothesis which stated that poverty does not significantly influence children access to quality secondary education in Niger State is rejected, while the alternate hypothesis which states that poverty does significantly influence children access to quality secondary education in Niger State is accepted.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the influence of poverty on secondary school student's dropout rates in Niger State (N=354)

Variables	$\sum X$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-val
Influence of Poverty	3905	3378	56939	0.78
Dropout rates among secondary school student	2883	2879		

Significant 0.05 level, critical  $r=0.178$ ,  $df=352$ .

From the analysis therefore poverty plays a very significant influence in student's dropout in secondary schools.

**H<sub>0</sub>** , Poverty does not significantly influence children access to quality secondary education in Niger State.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the influence of poverty on children access to quality education in Niger State (N=354)

Variables	$\sum X$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-val
Influence of poverty	3998	3265	62198	0.88
Children access to quality education	3112	2798		

Significant 0.05 level, critical  $r=0.178$ ,  $df=352$ .

Based on this result and decision therefore, poverty does significantly influence children access to quality secondary education in Niger State.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study revealed that poverty has a significant influence on dropout rate among secondary school students in Niger State. The study agreed with Okoro (2011) assertion that poverty is the major factor which disrupts the successful completion of secondary education by many students from poor family background. Poverty refers to the condition of not only having enough income to meet the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, but it is also the inability to have access to adequate medical and educational services. Poverty is one of the major reasons why many students drop out of secondary schools. Children from poor family background drop out from school as a result of the inability of their parents to pay school fees. Such drop-out children, in the view of Ismail (2014), are victims who are often used as hawkers, beggars, bus conductors, child labour, drug traffickers, kidnappers, slavery, commercial sex workers and they are easily lured into cultism. Limited and incomplete access to education is highly associated with children from poor family background.

The findings of this study also revealed that poverty has a significant influence on children access to quality secondary education in Niger State. The findings of this study agreed with Ahmad and Najeemah (2013) who submitted that children from poor families do not only have opportunity to school enrolment because such children are deprived the opportunity of complete access to formal education. Quality education is the situation where children have the opportunity to attend schools that have high academic standard with qualified teachers and conducive learning environment. Children from poor family background do not have access to schools that are well-equipped with modern facilities because such schools are always too expensive in terms of school fees payment. Some parents' financial condition is worst to the extent that it is very difficult for them to send their children to secondary school, thereby depriving such children their right to education. Poverty brings about inadequate school facilities which limit effective teaching and learning in the school system. The inadequacy or complete absence of learning resources such as textbooks, conducive classrooms, well-equipped library and laboratory limit the quality of education being received by students in secondary schools.

## **Conclusion**

Education is a fundamental human right and the key to sustainable development, peace as well as stability within and among different countries globally. Education is an indispensable means for every individual to contribute positively towards the growth of the society in the twenty-first century, which is influenced by rapid globalization. It is the basic human right which is meant to be enjoyed by all children. It ensures a better quality of life for all children and a better world for all people. However, if some children are left behind due to poverty, it becomes difficult for the lofty goals of education to be achieved.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings of this study.

1. Secondary education has to be made free and compulsory by Niger State government to reduce the rate of dropout among students from poor family background. On this note, parents whom their children of school age who are found roaming the streets should be prosecuted.
2. Public senior secondary schools in Niger State have to be well-equipped and staffed with qualified teachers by state government to enable every child in the state to have access to quality secondary education.

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