INFLUENCE OF POVERTY ON HIGHER EDUCATIONAL PURSUIT EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the influence of poverty, experience by young people in Kogi State, Nigeria, in relation to gaining access into the higher education. A major issue addressed in this paper arises from the fact that existing literatures have focused on enrolment in formal educational institutions in urban areas. Those that are in the rural areas need to be addressed as well, enabling or constraining their access to higher educational level. The findings of this paper will provide innovative insights into those factors that are influential on young people’s access to higher education and also provide reliable data for positive policies and educational responses to be made.

Keywords: Higher Education, Nigeria, Poverty, Rural, Urban, Young People

INTRODUCTION
In many African countries, studies have identified groups of young people (both children and youth) as the disadvantaged group with high number of those neither with a job nor enrolled in school. However, little or none of these studies have focused on enquiring from the young people the causes of their limited access to school or impact of their educational attainment. This is based on the fact that previous works have centered mainly on quantitative analysis of the number of those dropping out of school or never attending schools or those engaging in one form of economic activity or the other (Okpukpara and Odurukwe, 2003; UNESCO, 2003; Tahir, 2005; Ofoegbu, 2009).

Following closely on this recognition of formal education as a way of ensuring the integration of youth into social life and to lead them out of poverty (World Bank, 1996; Durston and Nashire, 2001; Ucha, 2010), or as a prerequisite to the development of human society, there has been increasing global concern over young people’s access to formal education, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where young people have been identified as those with the lowest literacy rates (EFA, 2006). In Nigeria, young people are central to the discussion of problems relating to the lack of access to formal education. As a result, various governmental and non-governmental organizations have initiated policies to address the problems attributed to young peoples’ access to formal education.

While these studies and other highlighted literatures have described precisely the non-participation of young people in formal education in a decontextualized manner: it cannot
provide in-depth analysis of why young people are dropping out or not participating in formal education. In the light of this importance, this study extends the focus to different social and cultural contexts such as social class, economic circumstances and other relational factors that may influence young people’s access to higher education. Essentially, expanding this study beyond a problem-centered approach will enable an exploration of young people’s access as related to African environment and specifically the Nigerian context, which appears to be endlessly complex.

Accordingly, the specific objectives will include examining the influence of poverty on young people’s access to higher education and in pursuing their desired educational goals. Based on this objective, this paper shall be guided by the following research questions: What are the ways in which young people narrate their social and economic backgrounds in relation to their access to higher education?

Rational For the paper

In Nigeria, much research work on young people’s participation in formal education is framed within a problem-centred analysis of those attending school or dropping out of school (UNICEF, 2002; UNESCO, 2003; Tahir, 2005; Ofoegbu, 2009). The number of young people affected by poor socio-economic backgrounds are numerous across African countries and a high percentage of the age group affected by poverty in Nigeria are young people (UNICEF, 2002; Ofoegbu, 2009). Various intervention programmes have addressed the need to improve enrolment of young people in formal education. For instance, the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria have recently introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) and School Meal Programme (SMP) among others to increase enrolment and participation of young Nigerian people in schools. This has not yielded the desired result (FMOE, 2006). Despite these concerted efforts, accesses to education for all Nigerian children have remained unattainable (UNICEF, 2002; Okeke et al., 2008).

What this paper will add

Since several studies have used quantitative methods in examining learner’s enrolment and dropping out of school, this paper extends the focus to wider different social contexts such as traditions, culture, norms, values and beliefs and other relational factors using qualitative methods to examine young people’s access to higher education. Another requirement to be addressed in this paper arises from the fact that existing literatures have focused on enrolment in formal educational institutions in urban areas while excluding the rural. Those that are in the rural areas need to be addressed as well. This study incorporates both rural and urban scholars in terms of those factors that may be facilitating or inhibiting their access to formal education and particularly higher educational level at the appropriate age.

The findings of this paper will provide innovative insights into those factors that are influential on young people’s access to higher education and also provide reliable data for positive policies and educational responses to be made. The voices of young people with focus on gaining access or entry into higher education are chiefly absent from existing literature and this paper seeks to address this identified gap.

Apart from contributing to existing knowledge, the findings of this paper will also assist the government, opinion leaders and other stakeholders in planning and implementing intervention programmes which will mitigate the effect of poverty and socio milieu among young people particularly in Nigeria and especially, Kogi State. Additionally, findings
from this paper will provide relevant information that could serve as a tool for further research inquiring into the factors that limit Nigerian young people’s access in terms of gaining entry and completion of studies at higher educational level.

**Poverty and Young People’s Access to Higher Education in Africa**

Empirical studies have demonstrated that children from higher socio-economic backgrounds have better chances or access to higher educational attainment compared to their counterparts from lower economic backgrounds (Kainuwa and Yusuf, 2013). Similar to most countries in developing regions, evidence from available studies across Sub-Saharan Africa have shown that the numerous strategic policies adopted by various governments to attain sustainable literacy rates for young people in Africa have often been thwarted by the depth of poverty level which confronts the African region (Ogujiuba, 2014). In most African countries, young people have continued to be vulnerable to the effects of poverty, keeping a high number of them out of school and others as drop-outs. Evidence from empirical findings from different nations of Africa such as Senegal, Sierra Leone, and the Republic of Congo have revealed that more than half of the adult population are among the working poor masses, with the highest rates of them being young women and rural youth (Hervish and Clifton, 2012).

Undoubtedly, Africa is one of the highly populated continents in the world. Consequently, the high population growth especially in the Sub-Saharan region is noticeable to be exerting extreme pressures on the available resources such as housing, health and educational facilities which are the most basic of human needs. For instance, evidence from a study conducted in Ghana reveals that poverty is an essential factor that shapes access to higher education. As Pryor and Ampiah, (2003) unfold, after considering the households income and the financial implications of schooling, a majority of Ghanaians in the study viewed formal education as ‘relative luxury’. This apart, a number of statistical and empirical studies have affirmed the link between poverty and access to school (UNESCO, 2002; Nwaobi, 2003; Okpukpara and Odurukwe, 2003; Tahir, 2005; Bruneforth, 2006; Hunt 2008; Ofoegbu, 2009).

A review of literature on the poverty situation in Nigeria presents a paradox as it is observed that despite the fact that the country (Nigeria) is endowed with vast human and material resources, the level at which poverty is being experienced by a large proportion of the Nigerian populace is pervasive, chronic and multifaceted (Omonona, 2009; Yakubu and Aderonmu, 2010; Ogujiuba et al., 2011; Ojimba, 2011). In the same vain, several quantitative analysis have attested to the growing incidence of poverty at its depth across the nation (Nwaobi, 2003; Okpukpara and Odurukwe, 2003; UNESCO, 2002; Tahir, 2005; Ibrahim and Umar, 2008; Ofoegbu, 2009). More so, as Lincove (2009) argues, given the high levels of poverty in Nigeria where about 68% of the population live below the poverty line (below $1.25 per day) (UNDP, 2013) enrolment and retention of children in school by poor parents may be impossible (Ejere, 2011). Also, it has often been observed that enrolment of children and their level of educational attainment are highly dependent on the family’s socio-economic status (Lewin, 2009).

Similarly, Kainuwa and Yusuf (2013) examine the influence of parental socio-economic status and educational background on their children’s education. It was observed that parents’ level of education often determine their perceptions of the benefits associated with
formal education, and their decision to enrol their children in school as well as the children’s level of educational attainment.
It has been well documented that in many parts of the country, young people are often constrained by unsafe and degraded environment, poor sanitation, and lack of access to health care facilities, clothes, food and other basic amenities by virtue of their social and historical backgrounds (World Bank 2001; Ogujiuba et al., 2011). The effect of poverty predisposes young people to dropping out of school and raises the need for many young people to combine schooling with economic activities.

Theoretical Framework:
Lewis' Culture of Poverty
The concept of ‘culture of poverty’ is a social theory that began to attract academic and policy attention since 1960s following the publications of the work of Oscar Lewis (1968) at the international Congress of Americanalists in San Chose, Costa Rica (Harvey and Reed, 1996). Oscar Lewis was the first to popularize the concept of the “culture of poverty” and stimulated empirical analysis about poverty in the scientific world. Although, Lewis position has been well criticized but found relevant in the development of knowledge and conceptualization on poverty and culture.

Oscar Lewis’ argument on Culture of Poverty
Lewis (1969:190-192) described the culture of poverty as way of life or a combination of certain traits from individual, family, and community that are socially and economically marginalized from a modern society. Such individuals develop certain patterns of behaviour to deal with their low status and from then, transfer such values from one generation to the next. In articulating this theory, Lewis (1969) emphasized the distinctive lifestyle of the poor which grew out of the experience of poverty. Poor people share particular ‘deviant’ cultural traits which differentiated them from the rest of society and that such characteristics perpetually maintain them in the position of poverty. That is to say, poor people have remained in their poor position not necessarily because of their marginal or low economic condition but as a consequence of the peculiar ideas and cultural values which they have developed from poverty (Lewis, 1969). In his study of culture and ‘subculture’ of the urban poor, Lewis (1964:150) observed that individuals feel marginalized, helpless and inferior, and thus adopt certain attitudes of living for the present. Their cultural traits comprise helplessness, dependence, inferiority, a strong present time orientation with relatively little ability to defer gratification, and sense of gratification and fatalism (Lewis, 1964:150). The theory also holds that the circumstances of poverty are similar in many respects in different societies, and similar circumstances and problems tend to produce similar responses, which are often developed into culture and subcultures. Thus, the culture of poverty includes a relatively distinct subculture of the poor with its own norms and values (Lewis, 1964; see also Eitzen and Baca-Zinn, 1994).
Essentially, Moynihan’s (1965) report of the ‘Negro Family’, has argued that “culture of poverty” restrained poor people in impoverished conditions despite various intervention programmes designed to assist them. Moynihan (1965) reports that the American poor black families as being caught in a “tangle of pathology”, he argues that the problems of the inner city black families resulted from the breakdown of existing norms such as the decline of male–headed households to matriarchal or
female-headed family structure (Small, Harding and Lamont, 2010). As he further argues, the existence of family breakdown is attributed to the condition of slavery, unemployment, leading to black males’ powerlessness, dependence, and the creation of pervasive cycle of poverty among American black people (Small, Harding and Lamont, 2010). Viewing the report of the study of the Negro family together with his (1966) study, Lewis concluded that poverty is sustained by a set of cultural attitudes, beliefs, values and practices which are transmitted from one generation to another. Thus, the theory of culture of poverty is premised on the assumption that poor people would continue to live in impoverished condition even if structural conditions that gave rise to poverty changes. Similarly, Eitzen and Baca-Zinn (1994: 173) in analyzing Lewis’s concept of poverty assert that the poor are qualitatively different in values due to the peculiarity of their orientations/culture and such cultural differences explain why they are trapped in condition of poverty with little chance of escape. In addition, those that are trapped in the culture of poverty are also known for their peculiar cultural traits such as high divorce rates which often result to large numbers of female headed households. They have limited access to social services and healthcare facilities, parents in this context are permissive or less verbal in raising their young people; while their young people have drastically different orientations to life when compared to their middle class counterparts (for instance, they are more likely to work while very young and to experience early initiation to sex). In most cases, their families are based on consensual marriage; and less interested in formal education (Long, 2011; Eitzen and Baca-Zinn, 1994:173).

In sum, Lewis described the culture of poverty as a way of life, a combination of certain traits of poor people, which creates cycle of intergenerational poverty. Culture of poverty is further understood as “adaptation to poverty” or “being at the bottom in an industrializing/ized capitalist society” (Gajdosikiene, 2004:90). As Harvey and Reed (1996) observe, Lewis’s analysis was from a Marxist background and initially geared towards contending with the racial, national, and regional discriminatory explanations on culture. However, the wordings of Lewis’ concepts and analysis were later criticized for contributing to racial explanations which links poverty with the black race (Gajdosikiene, 2004).

It could also be observed from Lewis’s (1964) perspective that while the culture of poverty becomes a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in society, it goes beyond a mere reaction to a situation as it takes on the force of culture with peculiar behavioural disposition which are internalized by the poor and passed on through generations. In sum, the culture of poverty then tends to perpetuate poverty through its characteristics which are mechanisms for maintaining or surviving the situation. However, Lewis argues that the culture of poverty is not prevalent in the developed countries but most applicable to the less developed or third world countries in the early stages of industrialization (see also Eitzen and Baca-Zinn, 1994).

Overall, although only a few social scientists agree with Lewis’s analysis (Suh and Heise, 2014), the theory of culture of poverty offers a useful concept for this present study. Despite the various criticisms to this perspective, Lewis’s analysis essentially affirmed that culture constitutes a set of norms and values that guide the behaviours of individuals, families and community and provides an important context to this paper. In addition, the theory also suggests that people might be adopting certain behavioural patterns or values by virtue of their orientations or by their specific social
and economic circumstances or as a strategy for surviving such conditions. This provides additional context within which to explore young people’s access in terms of whether the young people were found to be influenced by their different social and economic circumstances in their access to higher education.

Critics of Oscar Lewis’s Culture of Poverty

Lewis’s theory has been recognized for its contribution to the analysis of the concepts of culture and poverty particularly within the sociological and anthropological frameworks (Harrington, 1962; Eitzen and Baca-Zinn, 1994; Harvey and Reed, 1996). However, his basic ideas about the subculture of the poor have attracted a wide range of criticisms. One of such criticisms is his overemphasis on the negative aspects of the culture of the poor (Guata, 2004). His negative description of culture of poverty betrayed the basic assumptions of the culture of the poor. Critics suggest that there is need to consider some positive aspects on the subculture of poor people which Lewis has out-rightly neglected in his study (Berndt 1969:188 cited in Guata, 2004). In addition, Lewis has been condemned for his assumption that poverty is caused and retained by poor individuals due to their peculiar lifestyles and values. Such perception negates his earlier intention to conceptualize culture in terms of emphasizing the dignity and worth of the poor people (Gajdosikiene, 2004:91). Lewis analysis has been generally viewed by other scholars as blaming the victims for their problems, a perception that assumes that poverty can be eliminated by a change of culture (Bourgois, 2001).

Another important limitation identified by Small and Newman (2001) is Lewis’s view of culture of poverty as unchanging or as a continuous process. That is, once poverty begins; it continues to perpetuate itself from one generation to another. Such perception ignores the dynamic aspects of human culture, as other scholars have argued; culture is a dynamic concept, which is subject to change, and some forms of modification. Thus, the subculture of the poor has possibilities of being transformed and people’s behavioural patterns, including values, and ideas are subject to modification by different social conditions that people encountered during their life’s course (Small and Newman, 2001). The idea present by the culture of poverty has also been accused of sustaining racism and discrimination in attributing the culture of poverty as applicable to the third world or developing countries or nations in their early stages of industrialization (Harrington, 1962). There are lower class communities in American society where the basic ideas of the culture of poverty are equally applicable. In addition, other scholars have also contended with an aspect of Lewis’ (1969) view, which describe individuals from poor social strata as those who take more radical approach to life situations compared to young people from the middle class. For instance, Eitzen and Baca-Zinn cited in Long (2011:10) have argued that most poor people attempt to live by society’s value but their struggle is frustrated by externally imposed failures because society have not provided a means to achieve those goals.

Overall, the theory of culture of poverty offers a useful concept for this paper. Despite the various criticisms to this perspective, Lewis’s analysis essentially affirmed that culture constitutes a set of norms and values that guide the behaviours of individuals, families and community which provides an important context to this paper. In addition, this theory also suggests that people might be adopting certain behavioural
patterns or values by virtue of their orientations or by their specific social and economic circumstances or as a strategy for surviving such conditions. This provides additional context within which to explore young people’s access to higher education in terms of whether the young people were found to be influenced by their different social and economic circumstances. Having considered the theoretical perspective to the concept of poverty from Lewis’s perspective, it is imperative to conduct an empirical study to further observe how poverty has affected the selected communities in Kogi State and on both rural and urban Nigerian young people particularly in relation to their access to higher education.

**Methodology**

This section focuses on the methodological approach used in addressing poverty as a causal factor on young people’s access to higher education. Given that the present study focuses on exploring young people’s access to higher education in relation to some underpinning factors, such as poverty and other social factors. This study adopts both exploratory and descriptive research design. One feature that led to the decision for these approaches is that exploratory research has the potential of providing explanation on a particular problem or a phenomenon which has not been clearly defined (Blaikie, 2006). In this context, the exploratory approach is in line with the qualitative research strategy which is the most suitable option for a study of this nature as it aims to produce what Mason (2002:3) describes as “rounded and contextual understanding on the basis of rich, nuanced and detailed data”.

Most empirical research on the effects of poverty on education, particularly in African countries, has emphasized causal explanations and the frequent occurrence of young people dropping out of school or not attending school. Such findings provide little understanding of the various contexts and absence of the voices of young people themselves on what might be influencing their informed choices. Moreover, it is pertinent to this study to employ a method that would enhance a rich data in understanding the effects of social norms among young people in relation to their access to higher education.

Meanwhile, the descriptive aspect of the research involve the use of questionnaire survey to gain general knowledge of the respondents on their biographical data, and their knowledge on factors that facilitate or limit young people’s access to higher education. In line with the purpose of this paper, the research sought transformative ways by adopting suitable methods of generating data that could maximize or provide in-depth understanding of poverty which either facilitates or constrains young people’s encounter in achieving higher education.

**Justification for Using a (Mixed) Triangulated Method**

Triangulation is an approach in research which uses the multiple sources of data with similar focus which provides a rich collection of data designed to reveal similarities and differences in different settings (Mitchell 1986; Brewer and Hunter, 1989). As Mitchell (1986) observes, there are four types of triangulation, namely: data, investigator, theoretical and methodological triangulations. The first, which is data triangulation, is the use of multiple sources of data which all have similar focus. Second, investigator triangulation occurs when more than one investigator is involved within a particular study. Third, theoretical triangulation involves the use of several hypotheses which are considered within the same body of data while the fourth, which is the most commonly used type of
triangulation is methodological (Mitchell, 1986; Duffy 1987). This involves the use of two or more methods of data collection within one study.

In this paper, both data and methodological triangulation were adopted. Data collections included: the use of questionnaire (quantitative approach) and the use of individual in-depth interview (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) (qualitative approach). The use of triangulation in this paper provided an in-depth understanding (qualitative) and current status (quantitative) of the intricacies of poverty, culture and traditional beliefs of the young people and the extent to which these have been associated with their access to higher education.

**Negotiating Access and Recruitment of Participants**

For both the in-school and out of school, the participants comprise equal numbers of females and males aged 18-28 who were selected for the in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). The decision for this composition was to examine whether there would be differences or similarities in poverty and other social factors on young people’s access to higher education based on their gender. In other words, it is important to establish an approximate gender balance in the sample, in order to observe the influence of the various social contexts on both genders. One major reason that led to the decision of participants’ age restriction (18-28) was an attempt to ensure that they would be relatively independent in deciding on their own whether to participate in the study or not, without the need for the researcher to further seek parental approval.

In sum, the non-probability sampling techniques were adopted for both the IDIs and FGDs in order to reach the target sample quickly and enhance more objectivity in the selection process.

The targeted young people according to this study are 18 to 28 years that are in-school and out-of-school. The total population of the study is put at 120. For the IDIs a total of 40 respondents were selected for two in-school respondents and out of school respectively; 10 participants each from the two in-school, making 20, while 20 participants are from the out of school. Further, the FGDs comprise 20 respondents from the two selected schools. On the other hand, 40 questionnaires were administered to cover the two in-schools under study.

**Ethical Issue**

The study participants were made to understand that participation was strictly voluntary and that they had the right to renegotiate consent during the research process or to ignore particular questions without giving an explanation and they might withdraw from the study at any point. The researcher also encouraged participants to ask any questions they wished in relation to the study/title of the research. Thus, rather than going directly into the interviews, the researcher had preliminary conversations with most of the IDIs and all of the FGDs. Also, the researcher gave participants informed consent and written consent forms for them to confirm their participation in the questionnaires, IDIs and FGDs.

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**
Evidence from young people’s account from the IDIs and FGDs also reveal that most of the participants’ mothers had lower level of education compared to their fathers. Qualitative response to the level of parental education is captured in the excerpts that follow.

...my mother told me that she never attended any school as against her wish... but my dad was lucky to be his dad’s favourite... so he had an HND... [FGD, in-School: female, aged 19]

...I had three elder sisters who had completed secondary school, but not in school any more... my dad believed that should be the peak of girls’ education... only two of us that are boys are in higher education now...[IDI, in-school: male, aged 20]

The unequal access to higher education might be attributed to the fact that Nigeria as in other African nation states is a male dominated society, where the male child is provided with greater socio-economic benefits and prioritized over their female counterparts. Similarly, previous studies (Duze and Yaz’ever, 2013; Amadi, 2014; Osagiobare, et al., 2015) across African societies have identified gender differentiation as a major determinant in gaining access to school in most African societies. Apart from the occupational categories analyzed the IDIs and FGD revealed that parents were engaged in dual or multiple income activity. For instance, some participants revealed the following:

...ah for many of us to survive and go to school... most of our parents have to combine different jobs with farming... (others nodding in agreement) [FGDs, in-school: female]

...my parents are farmers, at the same time my dad works in the Local Government as a security officer, he opened a shop for my mom where she sells different items... so most time we’re either on farm or shop to assist them... so, that is how we survive as family... [IDIs, in-school: male, aged 18]

...my father works in the Ministry and also has a farmland, so most of the weekends, we are all in the farm... but I’m still planning to do more works on my own and save towards my higher education... [IDIs, out of school: female, aged 24]

From these responses, one could observe that the levels of income or economic generating activities in the study locality are generally low and insufficient to see their children through higher education. This is evident by such responses in the IDIs where a female participant, aged 24 expressed her intention to seek further employment or income generating activity to be able to achieve her desire in obtaining higher education. Such comments are typical of many young people’s accounts in this study. For example, a number of in-school young people were found combining economic activities with their schooling, while some of the out of school were found engaging in various income generating activities which confirms their enthusiasm to save towards schooling. When similar questions were posed to participants in the IDIs and FGDs, their narratives further confirm that parents are the sole providers for their children’s education. The following comments affirm the statistical findings:
... even though I work for people to make additional money...I still depend on my Dad for tuition and feeding allowances...the money I make on my own only cater for my clothing, transport within school and some other small expenses ... [IDI, in-school: male, aged 24]

...we have a big shop where my father repairs shoes, umbrella and stuff like that...that’s what we rely on for our upkeep and schooling... [IDI, in-school: male, aged 21]

...my Mum’s business outfit is the main source of income for our family...then because his income is not regular, sometimes my mom has to go out to borrow money to pay for our school fees... my dad is just a farmer so he doesn’t have much to add... [IDI, in-school: female, aged 19]

...none of us here are under any social benefits or government funds...we only rely on God and our parents and money from our hustling... [FGD, in-school: male, aged 23]

Previous studies have affirmed that Nigeria’s latest population figure is about 167 million people which make Nigeria the seventh most populated country in the world (Ololube and Egbezor, 2012). The continuous increase in Nigeria’s population has been recognized to have placed pressure on the natural and financial resources of the country which limits the extent to which government can implement policies that would assist poor youth (Adedokun and Oluwagbohunmi, 2014). One of the implications of the above findings is that the lack of financial support experienced by young people could exert negative influences on them resulting in frustration and challenges.

Having established from the findings that parents are the major source of funding for young people, the study further probed whether the financial support from their parents was consistent and adequate. While only 31.7% of respondents indicated that they were satisfied by parental funding, more than two thirds (67.5%) in the survey reported that they were not having consistent and adequate funding from their parents. In the case of the latter, 87.5% of the respondents viewed financing their education to be a major challenge. Concomitantly a number of young people in the IDI and FGDs lamented on the pressure they undergo in relation to funding their higher education. This economic strain experienced by respondents is presented in the following statements:

...well, we even thank God that we are able to make it to be in school... but many of us are just struggling to survive on campus... but we know that God will see us through...[FGD, in-school: female]

...ah it’s not funny o... last week my dad sent me some money, but I still need more to make up... I’m even trying to ask money from my Uncle... [IDI, in-school: female, aged 25]

...Em, well, I still thank God for everything...because I’m coping... my parents are trying their best, but the money they send to me is not enough, but my boyfriend has been helpful...most time I depend on him to support my schooling...but you know, when one begin to depend on boys for money, it’s not usually funny...
so I’m still not happy as I should... [IDI, in-school: female, aged 23]

...I just went to call my mum to send money for my project...I’m supposed to have submitted the project... even now I’m still battling with how to raise money to sort it out... [IDI, in-school: male, aged 21]

It becomes clear from the above excerpts that many young people acknowledged that they were undergoing financial strain in meeting up their needs while in school. One of the implications of economic difficulties encountered by young people is that they may become vulnerable to dropping out of school or having low academic performance. Evidence from available studies (Mudzielwana and Maphosa, 2013; Mwenda and Mwenda, 2013) has attested to the fact that formal education is an important way of improving young people’s capacities for economic development. This can be most observed in Nelson Mandela’s assertion that, education is the gateway to personal development and a major process through which “the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the president of a great nation” (McCullum 2005:1). However, such an assertion by Mandela becomes problematic among young people in the present study as most parents cannot afford to train their young ones through higher education due to their economic condition. Moreover, scholars have also established that in spite the progress made in advancing the educational system in Nigeria, socio-economic status play a major determinant role in the unequal distribution of access to education among different social classes in Nigeria (Maqsud, 2011).

In similar vein, when the young people were further asked whether their financial constraint had any implications on their academic performance, the following comments are compelling to take note of:

...you know sometimes, I won’t even have money to buy textbooks, make photocopies...and many times we’re asked to do some online assignment, I kept needing money most time to fix many things in school... but I know God will see me through [IDI, in-school: male, aged 18]

...like in my first year, I was in the upper class, but now I’m in lower class due to the fact that I cannot afford some materials that were recommended and... even now I have to combine my school with some petty jobs to make ends meet... the painful thing is that my grade has dropped because I’m not concentrating enough... [IDI, in-school: male, aged 27]

...in fact, I left school at a point when I couldn’t cope again... I kept needing to pay this and that...and no hope from anywhere...I had to take time off to look out for money...even as I’m in school now, I still go out to do my business so that I can survive...so, we’re really struggling to get through... [IDI, in-school: female, aged 28]

These qualitative responses provide insights to some of the barriers faced by young people in school in sustaining their enrolment and performance. It confirms that a number of
learners struggle for economic survival which has a direct impact on their academic performance. In the survey a vast majority respondents (81.7%) affirmed that their performance in school have been negatively affected due to economic constraints. Such findings corroborate with existing literature across Africa that young people are vulnerable to the effects of poverty, resulting in a large number dropping-out of school (Ogujiuba et al., 2011; Hervish and Clifton, 2012).

A further analysis of the findings suggests that young people face different levels of constraints due to economic factors. In particular, a considerable number of respondents (68.3%) attest to the fact that some of their relatives or siblings could not negotiate their way to higher institutions of learning as they were economically constrained. Also, the accounts of young people in the IDIs and FGDs revealed how participants recalled their relatives and peers dropping out of school resulting in some not making an attempt to seek admission into higher education institutions due to financial constraints:

...most parents want their children to be great, as in to get good job, become a doctor, lawyer and the rest...but most times their wishes for us seem to be cut short when it comes to money... [FGD, in-school: male] ...we thank God that at least we’re in school now...many of our mates are wondering about at home still hoping to raise money for their school...even some have dropped out because they couldn’t cope...[FGD, in-school: female] ...because my parents wanted every one of us to be in school, they encourage us to learn how to manage the little money they’re able to give us...so I’m coping well, but my elder sister left school at a time because she was angry that her allowances always insufficient... [IDI, in-school: female, aged 18] ...

Those excerpts exemplify the accounts of young people both in the IDIs and FGDs on the ways in which financial constraint have limited their peers, siblings and relatives from gaining access to higher education. Even though the young people generally view higher education as giving them a sense of pride and strong identity, these findings confirmed that many young people might be left within the same circle of poverty as argued in the works of Lewis (1969). One could observe from this finding that many parents who are economically constrained could not afford the cost of financing their children in higher education. A major implication of such condition is that such parents of low economic status may transfer these values to their next generation since education is generally recognized to guarantee a brighter future for youth or as a way out of poverty (Durston and Nashire, 2001; Ucha, 2010; Adedokun and Oluwagbohunmi, 2014).

Another remarkable account drawn from the young people's responses on financial constraint was whether they would have preferred to be enrolled or admitted into another higher institution other than that in which they were studying. Unsurprisingly, 89.2% of the respondents indicated their preference for another form of higher institution which they believed was more prestigious and of greater quality than that in which they were studying. Similar responses were made in the IDIs and FGDs where a number of participants commented that they preferred private higher institutions as compared to public ones which
have relatively stable academic calendar and better infrastructures. The following narratives demonstrate circumstances that constrain their choices of higher education:

...ah, even me I left the university admission due to financial problem...I couldn’t afford the school fees... [FGD, in-school: male, aged 21]

...not easy at all...the money for University education is higher than what I’m paying here...I made a choice to be here to avoid financial frustration...at least I can still get a job with the certificate I’m pursuing now... [IDI, in-school: female, aged 23]

...of course... supposing my parents could afford the cost of university education that would have been my best choice... [IDI, in-school: male, aged 21]

...I had already gotten an admission in the university, shortly after that I lost my dad in a motor accident...my father’s family dominated all his properties and abandoned every one of us... so I couldn’t go to resume...I began to follow my mum to make sales in her shop...later, my mum advised that I seek admission into a less expensive higher institution... [IDI, in-school: female, aged 25]

...I made a choice of coming here because two years of obtaining ND certificate, I’ll be able to work for some times and save enough money before proceeding for HND certificate...but you know university education is run at a stretch so you don’t have long break to do serious work... [IDI, in-school: male, aged 28]

These comments constitute a common explanation from the young people regarding their economic capacity as a major influencing factor on their choice of pursuing higher education. However, despite the general view of higher education especially university education which is the bedrock or citadel of learning and most admirable for most people (see also Aluede, et al., 2012), this study affirmed that the low socio-economic background of many young people in this setting act as a major barrier to their enrolment and retention in the university education system. Additionally, existing studies have demonstrated that the differences in the cost of attending higher educational institutions varies from federal, state and private universities particularly when considering that many Nigerian families are of poor socio-economic status (Esomonu and Adirika, 2012). In the same vein, other studies across Africa have found that the working and lower class young people are more likely to attend government schools than attending private universities compared to their peers from families with greater access to economic resources (Hearn, 1990; Goldrick-Rab and Pfeffer, 2009; Rosenbaum, 2004).

Even though a number of young people from this study could not make informed decisions to attend their desired choice of higher educational institution, a further probe on the extent to which poverty have affected them revealed that a considerable number of them had to combine schooling with income generating activities. This is particularly true since a number (60.8%) of respondents from the survey show that in-school young people had at one point in time engaged in various types of income generating activities for their survival. Participants’ accounts in the IDIs and FGDs illustrate how young people were economically constrained and had to negotiate access to higher education through their involvement in economic activities and other sources that could generate monetary rewards for them. The following responses are representative of most participants.
...many times we do businesses that fetch us money while on campus...some do different part-time works like barbering, photography, plating of hairs, okada rider, tailoring and so forth... so we don’t wait for our parents to fix everything from their little incomes...[FGD, in-school: female]

Umm... as a young boy I’m very responsible and committed to anything I want to achieve...since I decided I wanted to go to school I started okada business (motor cycle) for transportation on commercial basis...even though it’s a risky business ...it helps me to raise some money before I got the admission that got me here... [IDI, in-school: male, aged 26]

...I don’t stress my parents any more for tuition or maintenance...I have mini cabs (locally referred to kekemaruwa or napep) I used to transport people at my leisure and during weekends... recently I added another one which I rent out for returns (money)...I have no regret going into transport although there was a time I had an accident while returning from town and couldn’t walk for about 2 months but thank God I survived it... the money I realize here on this campus is enough for me...sometimes I even assist some of my friends and younger ones in need... [IDI, in-school: male, aged 28]

...before coming to this school, I had learnt tailoring...so I came to school with my sewing machines... leave off campus, so am able to relate with many people that patronize my service...I have an album where my customers can select their styles and many people patronize my service...doing tailoring has really sustained me on campus but consume much times (Interviewer: How?) you know people can bring their clothes and expect you to complete the work in few days, so many times I miss my lectures because I don’t want to lose their patronage ...(But don’t you think such can affect your grade?)...well, I know...but I need the money to survive for now... [IDI, in-school: male, aged 26]

...well, I was able to raise some money during my IT (Industrial Training)¹ ...they still call me occasionally to come and help them do one thing or the other and pay me some amount of money... [IDI, in-school: male, aged 26]

...I plait hairs for other students and they pay me in return...I use this money to settle my hands out and other small expenses... [IDI, in-school: female, aged 25]

Yeah...I decided to go into modeling about 2 years ago...I model for some companies and they pay me very well...the only problem I have is timing of their events because sometimes they want me to come when I should be in school...it clashes a lot with my lectures and sometimes my exams...many times I also work with advertising agencies to showcase some products for different companies...that’s how I make some money... [IDI, in-school: female, aged 25]

¹This is a one year internship programme usually a prerequisite for HND programme in the polytechnic
Additionally, young men in a particular focus group session recounted how their male and female peers engage in sex for money:

...well, people survive somehow while on campus...some of our girls are into aristocracy business or sugar daddy...they make money by going out with rich men that come to pick them for weekends...we also have big boys that make money by arranging those girls on campus for those rich men... [FGD, in-school: male]

These excerpts are representative of the narratives of most of the young people which reveal the social context in which they negotiate their access to higher education. The above data covers a wide range of economic activities such as trading, tailoring, transporting, hair dressing, modeling and including sex works as coping strategies for many in-school young people. As revealed earlier in this section, while young people may be expected to be economically dependent on their parents to a large extent, ‘full’ parental support seems to have been limited by the low socio-economic status of these communities and the relatively poor standard of living of most of its members which is common in many other communities in Nigeria and other parts of Africa (Oyefara, 2009; Yakubu and Aderonmu, 2010; Ogujiuba et al., 2011; Ojimba, 2011).

As observed in the excerpts, young people in this setting were engaged in different forms of economic activities to support their schooling and material needs. Such accounts, especially those of young people who engage in businesses that conflict with their lecture hours demonstrate the level at which the participants were economically disadvantaged or affected by the poor economic status of their parents. Moreover, the cases of young females engaging in activities such as modeling and tailoring often clash with their lecture hours further provide an understanding of the impact of poverty on the educational achievement level of respondents. Importantly, one could then argue that such local economic realities appear to have significant implications on their psychological wellbeing. For instance, a particular young on campus male was involved in a road accident whilst undertaking his transport business (mini cab) while another male described his Okada (motor cycle) business as ‘a risky one’.

In a FGD with male participants, a number of them recounted that some of their female colleagues would often negotiate contact with men they view as rich or relatively buoyant with whom they would start ‘dating’ relationships. Also in some of the IDIs with females, some on campus females made reference to their male partners being a source of additional income that supplements their economic survival. In a similar vein, other researchers have reported cases of women transacting sex because of their poor economic status. For instance, Bene and Mertene (2008), in an in-depth analysis of sub-Saharan African fishing communities, observe that transactional sex between fishermen and fish sellers is a well-recognized practice. In particular, widows and economically disadvantaged young women were commonly found to engage in such transactions as a means of survival, because of lack of sufficient funds to start a fish business conventionally. In many such African communities, according to Allison and Seeley (2004), Kissling et al., (2005), and Seeley and Allison (2005), it appears that this pattern of sexual practice has remained a means of livelihood for women of low economic status, despite the stigma of being seen by others as prostitutes. An important implication of such pattern of relationship is that apart from the existing gender power relations in sexual relationships, women who are tied or

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2A term commonly used to describe young girls into sex-for-money relationships
committed to their relationships for financial gains are often not in a position to fully negotiate their sexual desires, feelings and safety (Wojcicki, 2002; Kaufman et al., 2004; Langen, 2005). Moreover, considering Connell’s (1995) arguments, a ‘pure relationship’ cannot be easily achieved within economically motivated relationships. As such, he further argues that such relationships often widen the gender gap between women and men.

In addition, although this study did not engage participants’ on their sexual safety and wellbeing, evidence from studies that examines the factors which includes increase in the spread of HIV/AIDS in most countries across sub-Saharan Africa have identified economic factors as a major influence on the women’s sexual negotiation power for protected sex because women often lack the capacity to negotiate protected sex when involved in transactional kind of relationships (Stoebenau et al., 2011; Macpherson et al., 2012; Tiruneh et al., 2014).

In summarizing this section, it is worth noting that data from the on campus respondents illustrate how they became economically active actors. For instance, analysis of their narratives reveals how they were actively involved in negotiating access to higher education in the form of accepting the local norms of their community that accorded prestigious status to educated individuals and the believe that education guarantees their access for brighter future. This was demonstrated by a number of them placing conscious efforts such as engaging in income-generating activities, seeking admission into the kind of institution their parents can afford rather than insisting on their desired type of educational institutions such as private universities. Also, a number of them were also found to spend some time after their post-secondary school education in engaging in ad hoc businesses such as okada transportation and apprenticeships in skillful works which will enable them to render some services for which they will be remunerated to fund access to tertiary level educational institutions.

Within sociological discourse, Lewis (1964) emphasized the distinctive lifestyle of the poor which grew out of the experience of poverty. He studied the culture and ‘subculture’ of the urban poor in the western context as constituting shared ‘deviant’ cultural traits characterized by helplessness, inferiority, dependency and so forth. Thus differentiating them from the rest of society and as such maintained them in a position of poverty. Importantly, as Lewis observed, one of the characteristics of African-American urban poor is that their young people were less interested in formal education and thus remained in the cycle of poverty passing from one generation to another (Lewis 1969; see also, Eitzen and Baca-Zinn, 1994:173; Long, 2011). While Lewis argument appeared to be particularly true for the urban poor in the western context, evidence from the present study reveals that the local norms expressed by on campus young people appear to be in contrast with Lewis’s arguments.

**Recommendations:**

There is a need for regular financial support for young people in Nigeria and particularly the studied area. As observed in this paper, young people have solely relied on parental support and ‘self-help’ to meet the financial demands for attaining higher institution. Moreover, none of the participants in the studied area attested to have benefited from any form of scholarship or aids. In order to reduce the socio-economic hardship for young

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3 A term which Connell used to describe relationships where a considerable level of sexual and emotional equality exists (Connell, 1995)
people who may be qualified and interested in furthering their education up to higher educational level, there is need for policy makers and different NGOs advocating for young people’s participation in higher education to provide regular financial supports in the form of scholarships, bursaries and different forms of aids that could encourage young people’s participation in higher education.

Resources should be reallocated to introduce free education/subsidy for higher education. Given the significance of economic difficulties among young people in the studied communities, it will be of great importance to policy makers and other stakeholders to gear efforts towards a reallocation of resources into the educational sector and to introduce free education at higher educational institutions or at least a remarkable subsidy to enable candidates from low-income backgrounds to have due access. Also, considering the importance of university education in developing a competent workforce and contribution to national development through high level training, private universities should also be encouraged to lower school fees/tuition for the affordability of young people from low income earning families, thereby making the government pay for subsidies to the private higher educational institutions.

**Conclusion:**

This paper has highlighted that despite the absence of social benefits or scholarships for young people, formal education especially at higher educational level is generally desire by young people since most parents aspire to see their children becoming graduates. It is also observed that many young people strive hard to ensure their access to higher education and secure their retention. Arguably, one could conclude that the attainment of higher education may transform the lives of the younger generation who gain access to higher education and hence develop a competent workforce, thereby making them to break away from the cycle of poverty as opposed to Lewis’s conclusion.
References:


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