

REVELATION OF SELECTED YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE IN RURAL & URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ACCESSING EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper reveals the experience of some selected young people in both rural and urban setting in Nigeria, precisely in Kogi State. It is an empirical analysis of young people's knowledge drawn from a qualitative research method, using both the in-depth interviews (IDIs) and the focus group discussions (FGDs). This paper tends to explain poverty in relation to secondary school education in relation to young people's experience. It reveals the family life and daily routine, economic activities, education and aspiration or future ambitions of the young people under study. It further implicated the young people's religious activities, family economic status, size or structure of the young people's life in relation to their access to secondary schools in both rural and urban areas. Lastly, the paper was able to express the experience of the young people's access to secondary schools in relation to their gender practices as a parlance to accessing secondary school education. It concludes by making some recommendations for policy makers and government in relation to young people's access to secondary schools in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Family structure, Poverty, Rural, Secondary schools, and, Urban.*

Poverty and Young People

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon. There is relatively large literature addressing the concept at global level. While poverty has been acknowledged as a universal phenomenon, which cut across every known human society, there is no consensus on its conceptualization. According to UNDP (1997) the perception as to what constitutes poverty has evolved historically over the centuries and as well varied tremendously across

societies and cultures. Within sociology and policy terms, poverty is usually defined in either its absolute or relative terms or both (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 2006, p. 304). Absolute poverty is that which could be applied at all time in all societies, such as the level of income necessary for bear subsistence to the extent of being capable to protect human dignity.

Poverty is here conceived with respect to the distribution of the population based on minimum subsistence income level. An individual is therefore said to be living in poverty if he falls below such standard. The inability of an individual to achieve some basic necessities of life like food, clothing, shelter, water, and health subject a person to poverty (UNDP, 1997; World Bank, 2001).

Meanwhile, the relative approach relates to the living standard of the poor to the standards that prevail elsewhere in the society in which they live (Schubert, 1994). Essentially, relative poverty holds that an individual is poor if he has significant less income and material property than average person in his community. Relative poverty is measured in terms of judgement by members of a particular society of what is considered a reasonable and acceptable standard of living and current lifestyle (Abercrombie, et al., 2006). According to Townsend & Walker (1984) individuals, families and groups can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diets, participates in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities widely encouraged and approved in the society in which they belong. They also lack adequate level of education, have no access to basic necessities of life and are unable to meet social and economic obligation (Townsend, 1971).

Poverty is therefore the state of being in which individuals and groups lack basic necessities of life and are less privileged than other members of their society. The poor are more liable to disease, have limited access to services and information, lack control over resources, and are subordinates to higher economic class, face utter insecurity and other psychological manifestations including the erosion of human dignity and self-respect. Similarly, the World Bank report (World Bank, 1991) conceptualize poverty as hunger, lack of shelter, being sick and not being able to go school, not knowing how to read, not being able to speak properly, not having a job, fear for the future, losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water, powerlessness and lack of representation and freedom. Meanwhile the World Development Report summarizes these various dimensions of poverty as a lack of opportunity, lack of empowerment and lack of security (World Bank, 2001).

Southern (1998, p. 13) introduces the notion of divine perspective to the conception of poverty when he adopted the concept of a universal human society in which, every man has its status in society and few men were allowed to seek very much or rise much higher than the status in which they were born. Implied in this explanation is that every man is placed into position of poverty or influenced in accordance with divine arrangement.

Sociologically, poverty is viewed as part of the broader social problems affecting the social system. As a social problem, poverty brings undesirable consequences to individuals, groups, and the entire society. For instance, Strauss (1998, p. 11) stressed on the damaging effect of poverty when he observed that poverty encompasses the bulk of low status members of society who are economically poor, often disenfranchised, under-educated,

carrying high risk of morbidity and burdened with a stigma which is extended at birth to each new member.

Across the world, the incidence and prevalence of poverty varies according to region. For instance, the World Bank identifies regions in the southern hemispheres (Africa, Latin America, Caribbean and Asia) with the most serious problem of poverty. Again, the study conducted by Federal office of statistics (FOS, 2004) puts the population of the poor in Nigeria in that year as 36 million out of total population of 102million. Out of this proportion, 10 million are estimated to be extremely poor with about 84 percent of this category living in rural areas (Odumosu, Atere&Adewumi, 2000).

According to world development report (World Bank, 1990), about one billion people in the developing world live in absolute poverty. This figure represents the proportion of people who are struggling to survive on less than 370 dollars a year.

In African contexts, research have shown that over 350 million people, (that is, over half Africa's population) live below the poverty line of one dollar a day (World Bank, 2004). Most of the people affected by poverty have no access to basic infrastructure and are restricted to subsistence life styles of extreme deprivation.

Poverty is highly visible in most African countries including Nigeria, these countries are characterised by overcrowded settlements in major cities without basic social services alongside remote and isolated rural areas. Most of these people live in subsistence lifestyles indicating extreme poverty (Odumosu, et al., 2000).

Akeredolu-Ale (2000) further argued that the profile of human deprivation is evident in most African societies which can be observed when refers to life situation characterised by want, frustration, human suffering covers both life-quality and human development dimensions such as population without access to health services, population without access to water, population without access to sanitation, children dying of before age of five, children not in primary or secondary school, adult illiteracy rate and illiteracy rate for females.

Family life and daily routine

As revealed by most of the participants particularly in the FGDs, it is a source of pride for young people to live with their families. It is commonly believed that those who lived with their parents or at least with relatives grew up to be more responsible and well-behaved. Data from participants revealed that most young people tended not to wish to leave their parents at an early stage except for reasons linked with prospects of employment, to study in another location or to marry. The following responses were given to focus group questions by a group of female participants:

Interviewer: Do young people generally live with their parents or live on their own?

Tola: Well, it is shameful to live on your own as a young woman when your parents are still alive, it is a time to stay with ones parents and learn how to become a good future wife and husband except when you're not in the same town with your parents or guardian... *although you can have your own place as a grown up man* who is working or preparing to get married..., but as a woman it is either you're in school or living with your parents... or if you're married, of course, you will be living with your husband, but if you're in the same town with your parents, people will

see you as a disobedient child... who doesn't want to be trained or disciplined, in fact, many parents will not want their children to get close to you... (FGD: Male, year 5, aged 20)

Bose: ...it is expected that as a young lady, you stay with your parent and learn how to behave properly...you know like you wake up in the morning and do your normal house chores like cleaning, washing and the rest even for the boys you're expected to to perform some duties like cutting fire wood and a few things that seems hard for the girls...(FGD: Female, year 3, aged 14).

Comfort: yah, and if they are all boys or girls in the family they have to do all the works... (FGD: Female, year 3, aged 14)

Majority: [Nodding in agreement with Comfort and shared similar ideas]
In another focus group:

Bimbo:yeah, you either live with your parents or guardian until you're in school or married, otherwise people will be thinking that you're getting wayward or something ... (FGD: male, year 5, aged 20).

Tope: exactly, in fact many landlords will not want to let their house to a young person... although in some situation they may consider boys ones they have the money but generally people are more skeptical about girls...(FGD: male, year 4, aged 17).

James: Yah, in actual fact, people see girls that live on their own as prostitutes....they are expected to live with their parents till they are full adults to learn how to make a good home when they get married...(FGD: male, year 3, aged 14).

Sam: ...there is time for everything, at this age people generally live with parents or relatives, that's the time you're trained to become useful in life...most of the time I go to the farm with my Dad and my sisters work with mum in the market and in doing all the cooking stuff...[FGD: Male, year 6, aged 20].

From the above data, it became clear that the young people particularly young women are expected to live with their parents or guardians until they are married, to portray themselves as obedient, well cultured or well brought up. A gender dimension from some of the young people's accounts is that the young men (such as Tope) were freer to live on their own as long as they had the economic capacity. As these data reveal, the community is patriarchal and gendered in the way it socialized its young members. For instance, activities assigned to young persons varied according to gender. It could also be observed that young people generally engaged in physical work, ranging from domestic tasks to participation in agricultural production, which was a key to family life particularly in Kabba.

However, what was consistent was that young people of both sexes helped their parents with farming and household tasks, with a tendency for boys to do more physical work like chopping wood or working on farmland, while girls were more likely to engage in the

domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning. Moreover, this finding is consistent with previous studies in Nigeria communities which revealed that the cultural socialization of young men was aimed largely at training them to see themselves as heads of household and breadwinners, while the young women were socialized to adopt maternal and matrimonial roles, to be faithful, loving and subservient wives (Smith, 2003; Izugbara, 2004).

Economic activities

One of the themes emerging from this study of the family background of young people in Lokoja and Kabba is that the young people's parents are dominantly engaging in farming and petty trading. As such most young people in the study were equally involved in economic or income-generating activities, or at least helped their parents to conduct family businesses and farming. This was reflected from the responses to the general question posed at the start of the interviews and focus groups, asking participants about their parents' occupation, how they spent their leisure time and what they did after school and during the school holidays. The following responses are typical of most participants, beginning with females.

Kemi: Most of the time I use my time after school to help my mother in selling in the market, then I have my own separate little business with these products [that] I hawk around as well for quicker sales ... [FGD: Female, year 2, aged 13].

Candy: I help my mum in selling hot food (*akara*), so I help her before going to schoolevery morning ... then sometimes after school I work in the shop ... [FGD: Female, year 1, aged 12].

Tenny: most of the time... I work in a restaurant with my mum to save money to buy those thingsI need for school... [IDI: Female, year 4, aged 17].

Dupe: ...I help my mother in her petty trading during the weekend... then after school I also go round ... [hawking] those products ... [FGD: Female, year 6, aged 20].

The young men gave similar responses:

John: Most of the time I go to the farmland to join my Dad after school..., on Saturdays and after school. Then, during the holidays, I work for people to make money,... on their farmland... [FGD: Male, year 6, 20].

Taiwo: We have a big shop where my father repairs shoes, umbrella and stuff like that... I always go there after school to learn and work with him... [FGD: Male, year 6, aged 17].

Kunle: ...I spend some of my time at my Dad's business outfit... and train people on how to repair various items. ... Since my father owns the place... I don't have to pay for training, but I'm responsible for attending to customers that come for repairs especially in the evening after school and holidays. [IDI: Male, year 6, aged 19].

Jide: ...my Dad is a farmer, many times I go to farm with him but I now have my own motorcycle. That's what I live on... I use it for a transport business... and support my family with it. [IDI: Male, year 3, aged 17].

Lanre: My father works in the ministry and also has a farmland, so most of the weekend, we all go to the farm...I'm planning to save towards my higher

education, that's why I'm in the transport business to finance my schooling... [IDI: Male, year 6, aged 20].

The above data cover a wide range of economic activities including farming, trading, transport, and hawking, performed by youngsters of both genders in the research areas. As observed in the above excerpts, young people in this setting were from background where Agriculture is the main occupation for men and petty trading for their women. Moreover, most of the participants' comments particularly those from the rural area reveal their fathers' occupation as dominantly based subsistence farming, while a majority of young women refer to their mothers as mainly engaging in trading activities. This is also reflected in the type of economic activities that the young members were undertaking to support their schooling, and material needs. Such accounts, especially those of young women like Kemi, Candy, Tenny and Dupe, who said they often assist their mothers in petty trading before and after school, and those of young men like Kunle, Taiwo, Jide, and John, engaging in farming activities along with their fathers. As will become clear in the following sections, the present study has found that such local economic realities appeared to have had significant implications for young people's access to secondary education.

Education and aspiration

Nearly all the young people in this study stated that education was a priority for them, giving them reasons to be proud among peers and representing their best hope to secure a brighter future. For instance, the biographical data of the young people reveal that they all had the intention to continue their education at a higher level even though their parents appeared to have little or no formal educational qualification as the following data illustrates:

- Interviewer: Let's talk about your hopes and aspirations...
- Titi: Well, [] I want to pass my O-level exams and get into a higher institution...
my parents have always said they wanted every one of their children to be well educated...since they both lack formal education, they believe that their children must not suffer the same...[IDI: Female, year 6, aged 17].
- Dolapo: Yes, it's prestigious to be highly educated, especially in our town here. That's how people can respect you. That's why even if your parents [cannot afford] to pay your school fees, you will do anything to get money on your own to go to school... so that in future you will have opportunities to get good jobs and so many good things ... [FGD: Male, year 6, aged 22].
- Deolu: ...my parents never attend school they always encourage me to go school..I want to be a pharmacist, that's my dream...[FGD: Male, year 4, aged 22].
- Bimpe: hmm, by the grace of God, I will be a lawyer...my Dad also support my dream even though he has a little education...he knows the importance...[IDI: Female, year 1, aged 12].
- Amos:no, my parents are not educated, but if God helps me I'll be a doctor...in fact, my mum and Dad both wish I become a medical doctor to make them proud [FGD: Male, year 3, aged 15].

- Folake: ... although I don't know where such money will come from...if God provides, I think I want to be a midwife... my father work as a clerk in the Ministry, I think he has only primary school certificate...[FGD: Female, year 2, aged 12].
- Richard: in this community, most of our parents like mine are farmers who never attended any school...I don't want to suffer the same way they're suffering...that's why I'm in school...I want to be the first graduate in my family, get good job and help my parents as well...(nterviewer: Are your parents supporting your ambition?)...ah very well, they want me to do well in school, it also a prestigious thing for them...[FGD: Male, year 4, aged 14].
- Dolapo: yah, most parents want their children to be great, as in to get good job, become a doctor, lawyer and the rest...my father work in the ministry, he's also a farmer but he always encourage us to go to school and get serious with our studies... I pray to gain admission [to higher education] to study economics like my father's wish...he really wants me to have my own company... [FGD: Male, year 6, aged 22].

The above excerpts exemplify the accounts of most young people in the study and the ways in which they express their future ambition and intentions. Although education is not compulsory at any level in Nigeria, the young people generally viewed education as giving them a sense of pride and strong identity. It was also confirmed in this study that many young people, regardless of their gender want to go to higher institutions.

Considering the comments expressed by most of the participants like Richard who acknowledged his father as, Deolu and Amos it could be said that most of their parents are not literate, the children however are greatly interested in pursuing educational goals. In addition, a number of young people such as Amos and Bimpe suggest that most parents have understanding of the importance of education and would support their children to pursue educational goal.

Religious activities

Another important theme that emerged is that the respondents also come from a religious background, which was evident in the manner in which they expressed their hopes and aspiration in the previous section (education and aspiration). The general questions that respondents of both sexes were asked at the beginning of each interview concerned what was their parents' religion and whether they share similar belief. Most responses to such questions were prefaced with expressions of religious faith:

- Dami: My Dad and mum are both Christians...it is compulsory that we attend all Church services...my parents believe in helping us grow up to be decent and responsible children...and to know how to worship God... [FGD: Female, year 2, aged 15].
- Alice: ...I love to go to church, in fact my Dad is a Deacon, and he want us to know how to serve God ... [IDI: Female, year 4, aged 17].
- Layo: ...my parents are Christians ... we all attend Catholic church ... [FGD: Female, year 5, aged 17].
- Biola: ...my parents are well known in our town because our great grandfather brought Anglican church to Kabba...my Dad is an elder in the church

- ...but I attend a Pentecostal church now... though, I still follow them a times... [FGD: Female, year 5, aged 21].
- Taiwo: [nodding] yeah there are times I follow my brothers to one Pentecostal church near our house..but I still attend Anglican church with my parents... [FGD: Male, year 6, aged 17].
- Lola: We're strong dedicated Muslim in our house, I believe in the religion and pray all my prayers ...I also attend Jumat service every Friday...[FGD: Female, year 4, aged 18].
- Banwo: We're Christians in our family, we strongly believe in God and our parents are teaching us in the way of the Lord... [FGD: Female, year 1, aged 11].

These data is representative of the religious background of the young people as affiliated to Christianity or Islam. With reference to the analysis of young people's view in the previous section, where respondents were asked concerning what career they would like to pursue, most responses to such questions were prefaced with expressions of religious faith. This was observed in the manner in which some of the young people talk about their future ambition with phrases such as "by the grace of God, I will be a lawyer" (Bimpe), Richard, "I pray for financial blessings", "I pray for admission" (Dolapo) and so on.

It could further be observed from the data that the young people are predominantly from Christian background; most young people of both sexes go to church and like Dami commented, it is often made mandatory by parents as a way of helping them to develop moral conduct in life and "to know how to worship God" (Dami, aged 15). In both Kabba and Lokoja, young people predominate in Pentecostal churches and many of those attending these newer churches do so in response to their modern image in terms of music, fashion tolerance and mode of worship, which are largely absent from the more orthodox churches. Young Muslims in the study reported that they would attend different services in their mosques, particular the *Jumat* (weekly service), where all Muslim families gather to worship.

As will become clear in the following section, the present study has found that young people were dominantly influenced by virtue of these factors (such as family social, economic, religious, and other relational factors and practices), it is however important to reveal how they are being influenced and the implications of such factors.

Family socioeconomic status

Many young people in this study stated that education was a priority for them as they believe it is what gives them reasons to be proud among peers and representing their best hope to secure a brighter future. For instance, the biographical data of the respondents in both Kabba and Lokoja revealed that they all had the intention to continue their education at a higher level. However, a majority of them view their parental financial condition as an influential factor on their gaining access to school. This is affirmed by the young people's accounts when asked to talk about their family socioeconomic background in relation to their educational pursuit:

- Biola: ...most of our parents are farmers and can not afford school fees and other things needed for school, that's the major problem a lot of us are facing in this community... we all know that it's prestigious to be highly educated, especially in our town here... That's how people can respect

you... That's why you will see many of us doing a lot things to pay our school fees, and exam fees..., you will see many boys in all sorts of business you know, just to get money to go school... because once you are educated, you will have opportunities to get good jobs and many good things in future ... [FGD:Female, year 5, aged 21].

Sam: ...[] my main objective is to pass my O-level exams and get into a higher institution... it's good to be well educated, apart from the fact that it is a pride for me to be seen as a graduate, I will also be able to get a good job and excel above those that didn't pass through the system...but you know, my main concern is money, because things are some how hard for my parents...In fact, I almost missed the chance of coming to secondary school because after the death of my Dad, I was living with my uncle who said he couldn't afford the cost of sending me to school, it was after he died that I was returned to my mother who now decided that I must have secondary school certificate despite her difficult financial condition, so I didn't start secondary school until I was almost 14 years...[FGD:Male, year 6, aged 20].

Kay: ...the fact is that a lot of us really want to go to school but many parents cannot afford the cost of sending their children to higher education...in fact, many parents cannot afford to pay their fees for secondary school education because the money is just not available... that's why many of us engage in selling different stuff before going to school in the morning and even after school ... and if you are a boy, you have to join your family in farming or any business that can generate money to help your parents and junior ones...[FGD: Male, year 3, aged 14].

Similarly, it could be observed from the interview data that young people's access or decision to further their primary education to secondary school is largely influenced by parental socioeconomic positions.

Seun: Most of the time I use my time after school to help my mother in selling in the market, and then I have my own separate small business with these products [that] I hawk around... (Interviewer: so you really have to do that to assist your parents?) Yes, that's what make it possible for me to be here (i.e., secondary school)... in fact my father suggested that I go for apprentice but my mum encourage me...she believe that she can afford my school expenses if I continue to sell for her...[FGD: Female, year 3, aged 14].

In a similar account:

Alaba: I help my mother to sell hot food (*akara*) every morning before school... sometimes after school I work in the shop ...that's how we're able to survive in my family, In fact, I repeated a class twice when I was in primary school because my result was bad, you know, because I was never punctual in school... I was always busy hawking for my mother before and after school... I had always wanted to further my study, that's why I wouldn't mind helping her in doing anything that can generate money... [IDI: Female, year 4, aged 16].

- Jide: ...I was actually out of school when I was in year 3 because I couldn't pay for the JSS exam (junior secondary school)... because my father couldn't get the money before the deadline...I was then asked to repeat year 2 class so that I can enrol for the exam in the following year but I instead of repeating year 2, I decided to leave school to go into okada (motorcycle) business and that's how I started earning some money...but this year, my parents advised me to return to school... [IDI: Male, year 3, aged 17].
- Wumi: ...after the completion of my primary school education, my father took me to a fashion designer to become apprentice, I have learnt it for almost two years until my uncle from the city came and advice them that they should let me go to secondary school...and promised to give them financial support ...[FGD: Female, year 2, 15].
- Stephen: most of the time I go to the farmland to join my Dad after school...then, on Saturday and in the long holiday, most days I work on the farm with my Dad...that's the way I contribute to our survival ...it is also from the farm produce that we get money for my school... [IDI: Male: year 6, aged 20].

The above data is representative of the various ways in which young people's socioeconomic background is closely linked to their chances of gaining access to secondary education. Evidence emerged repeatedly from the study that while young people may be expected to be economically dependent on their families to a large extent, 'full' parental support seems to have been limited by the low socioeconomic development of this community and the relatively poor standard of living of most of its members, is common with many other communities in Nigeria. It could be observed from their narratives that a number of young people, such as Stephen, Alaba, Seun, and Kay are engaging in a wide range of economic activities including farming, trading, and hawking to generate income for their families' survival. This suggest that many families would find it difficult to survive if their children did not work. This is evident from the young people's comments like Sam who could not attend secondary school until he was 14 years, and Jide's dropping out of school for "okada business" due to limited financial support from their parents. In addition, some of the young people like Wumi started their secondary education at a later age due to the poor financial circumstances of their parents while other youngsters like Alaba recounts how he had to repeat a particular class in primary school due to his involvement in selling goods as a means of generating income to help in sustaining the finances of the family. This finding is consistent with several studies in African societies and across the world in revealing the effect of socioeconomic status of parents on their children's educational achievement (Graetz, 1995; Eamon, 2005;). For instance, using data from the 1992 national longitudinal study in the US, Jeynes (2002) assessed the effects of parental involvement on the academic achievement of grade 12th African-American youngsters. As Jeynes (2002) observed, family socioeconomic status as well as parents' income, education and occupational status are major influential factors that determine the educational attainment of the African-American children.

Family size / structure

As well as socioeconomic status, family size appeared as an integral part of factors influencing young people's access to secondary education. This was remarkable as a number of participants express how they were confronted with poor financial situation due to the large number of children in their families as well as the polygamous nature of their families.

Interviewer: Do you have any worries about paying your school fees and other things you may need to continue schooling?

Lanre: ah, yes. Very well. In fact the most pressing one at the moment is how to get money for my school cert exam... Up till now my father has not said anything... and that's how he usually remain silent ones he doesn't have money to give...he's actually working at the state ministry of health but I think there are too many people are demanding money from him ...(Interviewer: how?), my father has 2 wives and 11 of us (children) so he's always complaining, his salary can not sustain us...and my mum is only a petty trader, the profit from her business is nothing compare to our needs...[IDI: Male, year 6, aged 20].

Samuel: ...I actually intends to further my education after completing secondary school, but I still don't know how the money will come, two of my elder brothers have just gained admission into higher institution and my Dad is struggling to cope with their tuition and all their demands..., because he has another wife, he also spend part of his income on to the needs of his second wife and her kids, so things are really tight for us...may be I will need to work for a while before I look for admission to higher education but honestly I would have loved to enter higher institution as soon as I complete my secondary school...[IDI: Male, year 5, aged 18].

The above excerpts represent the view of some of the young people on the effects of having come from large family with limited economic power as negatively influencing their educational pursuit. Such accounts, especially those of young men like Lanre, and Samuel, reveal that they come from polygamous family where there is relatively large number of children. As these data suggest, it could be said that having a large family with limited financial sources hinders or limit children's access to education. Moreover, the cases of these young people like Lanre referring to his father as "always complaining" or Samuel who described his families' financial status as "tight" or viewing his father as 'struggling to cope with tuition, and other material needs provide an understanding of the considerable effect of poverty affecting young people in the research communities.

In a similar account, one female interviewee recounted how she was taking to live with her grandmother who could not afford the cost of her schooling and she was out of school for a period of four years that she stayed with her grandmother in another village:

Alice: ...I should have completed my secondary school education by now...but I'm just in year 4, ... I was almost giving up coming to school because I was sent to live my aged grandmother who was ill in our village...I was sent to my grandmother to look after her until she died, so I wasn't going to school...(Interviewer: but why?), she doesn't have the money and was not ready to do anything that will take me out of her presence for a long

time...(how about your Dad?)...honestly I don't know, my mum told me that they were not actually married when they had me and my brother...so going to my grandmother's place was a relief to her...so it was my grandma who suggested that I should go to learn hair dressing work in a place that is very close to our house ... I was gladly doing that...it never occur to me that I was missing school until she died... Am now back to my mum, but she's married to another man, she's only managing to have me in school on the note that I will be assisting her in selling her foodstuff.... [IDI: Female, year 4, aged 17].

And for Mary:

Mary:we're 7 siblings and I'm the first child...many times I go to work to sell for my mum you know just to support my family, ...at a time I was working in a restaurant ... I met this guy who used to be one of our customers...though he's far older than me but somehow we became close friends and somehow started dating... He has cement business, so he's somehow buoyant, as in, financially okay... In fact, he's been advising me to stop working at the restaurant...most times he gives me money even when I didn't I ask him...that's how I sort out things on my own...[IDI: Female, year 5, aged 18].

During an FGD session, another young woman recounted how her father was not attending to her needs in school due to the polygamous structure of their family:

Grace: ... since Dad married a second wife, things have been really changed for us ...the new wife and my own mum are constantly quarrelling over who gets the largest share of Dad's income... even though Dad later open a business for both of them so that they will both directly cater for our (the children) needs including school fees and the rest...it's still not enough to take care of us...she could not even afford to pay for our school expenses and my Dad is not helping her... up till now I've not been able to pay for the school certificate exam...[FGD: Female, year 6, aged 17].

The above narratives demonstrate different ways in which some of the young people commented on the structure and size of their families (in terms of the polygamous setting) and the financial implication of such situations on their access to secondary education. These accounts of both young women and men concerning the polygamous nature of their families coupled with limited economic situation make it evident that many young people like Alice in this setting might be denied access to school while others like Grace, Samuel, Lanre are confronted with difficult financial situation in terms of meeting the demands for school fees, exam fees and other material needs. Not surprisingly, the case of Mary suggests that many young women engaging in hawking goods might be contemplating or persuaded to start 'dating' relationships with older men or men of their age who are their customers. Such relationships that are reinforced by economic circumstance have been identified as increasing the exploitation of women by men through socioeconomic power (Walby, 1990; 1995). Further, it has also been argued that most relationships formed on economic relations may lack the type of commitment that is required to develop an intimate relationship that is based on emotional, democratic and equal negotiation (Giddens, 1992).

Gender practice

Conventional gender practice is also found as an important mediating factor on young people's access to secondary education. This theme emerges clearly from FGDs with most of the young women, who commented on how females are often denied access to school than their male counterparts for economic reasons. They also reveal how they were often involved in economic activity to support family income, and how they are often designated to certain roles such as caring for younger and older members of their family.

- Biola: ... I think it is even better for boys than girls (Interviewer: how do you mean?) ... ah, some of our parents believe that it's a waste of money to send their female children to school...you know they always believe that boys should be sent to school since girls will be getting married and go their husband's house...[FGD: Female, year 5, aged 21].
- Lola: Exactly, in fact I have a friend that we both lived in the same compound..., she has even started her year one in secondary school when the Dad withdrew her for apprenticeship...she told me that her father said he could not afford cost of sending three children to school at the same time...so her two brothers were allowed to continue their school...you know very painful... [FGD: Female, year 4, aged 18].
- Taiwo: [nodding] in fact it really affected me...my Dad said he was not ready to stress himself on female children or do anything special for us...but thank God my mum has a good business so, she could fix many things without any need of going to Dad to ask him for money..That's why I don't mind to help her in shop even when it cost me to be absent from school for some days ... [FGD: Male, year 6, aged 17].
- Banwo: in fact my Dad doesn't hide his feelings... he will tell you that he love all his children but that he can do anything for the boys... there was a time my elder sister had to repeat a particular class even though her performance was okay... Dad made her to repeat that class because our elder brother failed and wasn't promoted to the next class, they both repeated the classes that year... [FGD: Female, year 1, aged 11].
- Comfort: [nodding in agreement with Banwo] yah, even my Dad has the same character..., he believe that a girl should marry early and the husband should be the one to send her to school...most of the time it is my mum that provide all that has to do with my school... infact my sister married before she finished secondary school because my Dad introduced his friend's son to her and somehow they got married...the worse thing is that she's not enjoying the marriage abit...I've told my mum I want to go to higher institution before marriage...[FGD: Female, year 3, aged 14].

From comments by the female respondents, conventional gender practice appeared to be an essential component of factors influencing young people particularly young women's access to school. A particularly salient impression that was revealed by most female participants is the cultural norm that constructed male children as superior to female ones. Importantly, the young women noted the ways they were treated differently in their families by virtue of their gender. This was revealed in Biola's comments that many parents

believe that “it’s a waste of money to send their female children to school...” , and as Comfort also recounted how her sister was forced into early marriage by her father to avoid bearing the cost of education. Such accounts reveal that some parents prefer to give financial support to their male children than the females, with the notion that the male children would uphold the family name when the females end up in their husband’s house. This was also observed in the accounts of other young women like Lola reinstating how her friend was withdrawn from school for apprenticeship on the basis of gender bias. This apart, Taiwo may have been denied access to school if she had relied on her father’s income while Banwo’s narrative of how her sister had to repeat a class on the basis of her gender typifies the extent to which female child are being discriminated in this research setting. In similar accounts, some of the female interviewees recounted how they were often assigned to certain role that denied them access to school:

Dami: Um, [] actually I should have completed secondary school by now but I didn’t begin secondary school until I was 13 years... (Interview: please can you tell me what causes the delay?). I was working with my mum in her in her shop...my father suggested that I should learn about business from my mum... he said that’s how people learn and establish their own in future... it was my mum’s friend that later advised her that if my siblings that are boys could go to school ... that I deserve the same opportunity...that was how my mum decided to release me... so I only work for her during the weekends and after school... [FGD: Female, year 2, aged 15].

Alice: Um, like I said earlier, I was sent to take care of my grandmother at a time, she was the one that took me to an hair salon for apprenticeship (Interviewer: where was your brother at that time?)... she was with my mum (Interviewer: what was he doing?), he was going to school... my mum was actually finding it hard to cope with the two of us that was why she took me to my grandma as a way of relieving her... [IDI: Female, year 4, aged 17].

In these accounts, a strong impression is created of gender norm as a powerful influence on young women’s access to secondary education, making young women like Dami and Alice to begin secondary school at ‘older’ age than their male counterparts. Such accounts of conventional gender practice concur with several studies in African communities, where studies have revealed that male children are valued more than females and the former are socialized quite early to see themselves as heads of household and breadwinners, while the cultural socialization of females aims largely at training them to become responsible mothers and submissive wives (Izugbara, Duru & Dan, 2008). Similarly it has been observed from the viewpoint of African patriarchal society that families with limited economic resources prefer to enrol their male children in school before the females on the believe that boys will continue the family lineage (Okeke, Nzewi & Njoku, 2008).

A related study have examined over 3000 Australian students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds to observe the extent to which their family background such as socioeconomic status, gender and other relational factors determine children’s educational attainment (Considine & Zappala, 2001). One of the major finding from the

study is that girls suffer an educational disadvantage relative to boys especially in situations when parents are confronted with limited economic power .

In addition, studies have also affirmed that parents sometimes subject their daughters to marriage at an early age or to child labour, for economic purposes (Olateru-Olagbebi & Afolabi, 2004). For instance, the 1991 population census in Nigeria revealed that about 2 percent of married women had been married by the age of 10, 8 percent at 12, 25percent between 13 and 15, 40percent at the age of 15 and 64percent by the age of 18. The average age of marriage for females was found to be 16.5 years (Olateru-Olagbebi & Afolabi, 2004).

Similarly, a common reason for the gender gap in education within the developing countries is the view general notion that girls have a much lower rate of returns to education than boys. This was observed in a study which revealed the effect of low female schooling on labour market in India suggest that parents make an active choice about the values of educating their children on the bases of their gender (Kingdon, 1998). In other words, they are less inclined to invest in the female child's education than that of a male. In a similar manner, Patkar (1995), explores the socioeconomic status of Indian women and argues that gender discrimination is "clearly institutionalised by society through the sexual division of labour and strong patriarchal system... play a major role in determining subjective education-related decisions" p. 402.

Religiosity

Another important theme that emerged is that the respondents were also influenced within the context of their religion. Although, this was revealed only by a few participants while commenting on how some parents would prefer their children to learn about Quran by attending Islamic school.

Lola: ...because my father is an Imam, he has to follow the precept of our religion that's why as the first child of the family my brother was taken to Islamic school to learn Quran instead of coming to secondary school... even my elder sister attends the same school now... it's just that my father felt I should come to this school... [FGD: Female, year 4, aged 18].

Dolapo :well, I don't think money is the only thing that could stop people from attending school, I remember when we were in year 2, a particular girl was withdrawn from our class to an Islamic school by her parent, you know, just to learn about Quran...they see it as more prestigious for the family than for her to gain western education... [FGD: Male, year 6, aged 22].

Richard: Yah, that's true. We have many of our mates in Islamic school not because they have financial problem, but because their parents prefer to have them study Quran in those schools so that they can become strong Muslim leaders, like an alpha or something like that... [FGD: Male, year 4, aged 14].

These data reveal the strength of the affiliation to Islam of many parents in the research area where religion remained important. With reference to the analysis of young people's comments in the FGDs, some of the young people were often influenced by Islamic doctrine, which determined which school were expected and considered acceptable by parents for their young members.

Recommendations

Based on my findings in this study, my recommendation is based on the belief that poverty can be eradicated or at least reduced through empowerment of the less privilege and facilitating young people in both rural and urban areas to secondary education regardless of family socioeconomic status. Therefore, my recommendations are strategies that could be adopted by local bodies such as schools, NGOs and policy makers in the education sector.

- There is need for government to redirect its resources towards family support programme through provision of free secondary education for all Nigerian children.
- There is need to reverse the conventional gender imbalances and practices that relegate the importance of educating the female child.
- Non-governmental and international organization should provide necessary assistance and aid for the poor particularly in the rural areas to tackle high incidence of poverty.
- Government and some private individuals should provide welfare system, which are programmes aimed at helping people who are unable to support themselves fully or earn a living. Those that would benefit from such activities would be elderly people and those that have children with no sufficient income. This will reduce the effect of poverty on young people as well as reduce the level at which young people are being subjected to child labour and the effects of some risky activities they engaged in.

Finally, there is need for more research on the specific need of young people in rural and urban settlement so that they could be incorporated in the planning and provision of services such as education and training that could integrate young people into social life and to lead them out of poverty.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper provides insights into the different social contexts within which young people's access to secondary education in both rural (Kabba) and urban (Lokoja) areas are dominantly influenced. Overall, this paper has shown clearly that various social contexts played essential role in young people's access or enrolment to secondary education. It could be concluded that poverty is a major problem that has been deeply embedded in Nigerian culture and its negative effect is stronger on young people from large family, those that are strongly affiliated to their religious faith and the social norm that prescribe the male child as superior to the female. This is particularly true for those young people who are left with no choice but to engage in various types of income-generating activity for their survival and that of their families. Participants' accounts illustrated how they endanger lives in the process while a number of young women become vulnerable to sexual harassment and men who exploit women sexually in exchange for money, a form of relationship that will often limit young women's capacity for sexual negotiation and safety.

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