

DEPRIVATION: AN IMPEDIMENT TO THE PROGRESS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA

YA'U HARUNA USMAN Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Many Nigerians have attributed the falling standard of education in this Country to inadequate Government support of the educational sector as well as the insufficient number of trained and qualified teachers. This author is however, of the opinion that the falling standard of education in Nigeria is, primarily, as a result of deprivation. Deprivation, by the consensus among scholars is the lack of what is essential for adequate development or a failure to satisfy basic needs. There are a number of children whose educational progress has been impeded by environmental handicaps, such as poverty, poor housing conditions, inadequate parental care, linguistic and emotional deprivation, lack of parental interest in their education, material deprivation and absence of a father-figure, and a background offering little stimulation, among others. Furthermore, there is no doubt that those children would have recorded an improved school progress if there had been an improvement in the condition in which they live. It is strongly recommended that governments (Federal, State and Local) should do everything possible to alleviate the suffering of the Nigerian populace and raise their levels of awareness about the importance of education, so that children could get their desired education.

Introduction

It is generally accepted in Nigeria today that the standard of education has fallen drastically. Reports from the National Teachers Institute (NTI, 1999/2000) and the West African Examinations Council (WAEC, 2009/2010) and the National Examination Council of Nigeria (NECO, 2009-2010) have clearly attested to this fact. Many concerned Nigerians have attributed this problem to the Government (Local, State and Federal) in not providing enough facilities for teaching and learning. Others consider parents and

teachers as the ones to blame for the falling standard of education in the country.

There is no doubt that many factors are involved in educational achievement, for example, intelligence, health, learning styles, interest of learners, teachers, learning materials, management effectiveness and the general atmosphere of schools, parental background and education, children's upbringing and situation of home among others. Although, many people attribute the falling standard of education to governments and parents, the writer

is of the opinion that it is primarily caused by 'deprivation'. This is because, there are a number of children whose educational progress is impeded by poor socio-economic background, or a background offering little stimulation. There is no doubt that those children would make better school progress if there was an improvement in the condition in which they live.

It is therefore, safe to assume that deprivation is one of the major causes of the falling standard of education in Nigeria. Then what is deprivation? What are its causes? And how does it impede school progress of the Nigerian child?

Meaning of Deprivation

According to Article 25 (1), Universal Declaration of Human Rights, every human being has the right to live a fulfilled life devoid of deprivation, the article reads:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and that of his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old

age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Deprivation has been defined, viewed and interpreted differently by scholars. Townsend (1979) for instance defined deprivation as 'inability of living a decent life'. Sen (1983) emphasised the notion of 'shame' when he defined deprivation as inability to live a decent life with dignity. Many Scholars are of the view that material deprivation is an "exclusion from the minimum acceptable way of life in one's own society because of inadequate resources" (Callon *et al.*, 1993; Nolan and Whelan, 1996; Kangas and Ritakolho, 1998; Layte *et al.*, 2001; Whelan *et al.*, 2002 in Ercole *et al.*, 2006). Another group of scholars have defined deprivation as "the lack of socially perceived necessities" Bradshaw and Finch, (2003); Nolan and Whelan, (1996) in Ercole *et al.*, (2006). A survey conducted by Townsend (1979) included most important things required for a good standard living. The items included are; a balanced diet, adequate clothing and shelter, education, health, conducive environment, family activities and a sound social relations. In the opinion of the scholar, the extent to which individuals and households could satisfy four types of needs determines their level of deprivation.

The basic needs that needed to be satisfied include food, clothes, ability to keep the home warm during winter, etc these needs are critical to physical survival of living in the area the survey was concluded.

There is also the ability to afford basic leisure and social activities. This includes having a week of holiday away from home, at least annually, and the ability to invite friends and relations to one's home for meals or drinks. There is also the ability to own consumer durables, items needed for the day-to-day domestic chores or activities.

It is pertinent however, to note that material deprivation has different meanings to different societies. For example, healthcare and education may not be problems in advanced societies, while they are an essential requirement in other less advanced societies. Similarly, perception of social deprivation may differ from society to society. Some socially-perceived necessities may not be priorities to others, e.g while personal computers may be necessities in advanced countries where information technologies are critical to securing a job and a luxury good in other countries d'Ercole, *et al.*, (2006).

In most cases, material deprivation is viewed from the angle of ownership

of properties that are considered necessities by a majority of people in a given society. Those who have the items are considered rich while those who do not have these are considered deprived. Scholars submitted that essentially, the absence of items is taken to reflect deprivation and the greater the number of items absent, the greater the degree of deprivation (Townsend, 1979; Desai and Shah, 1988; Mack and Lansley, 1985; Nolan & Whelan, 1996).

According to Townsend, (1978: 126) deprivation is multi-dimensional; it covers five domains or aspect of living. According to the scholar:

Deprivation takes many different forms in every known society. People can be said to be deprived if they lack the types of diet, clothing, housing, household facilities and fuel and environmental, educational working and social conditions, activities and facilities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies to which they belong Townsend, (1987: P.126).

Deprivation according to Baitey *et al.*, (2005) however, is simply "lack of goods, services, social relations or

inadequate physical or social environment which results from a lack of financial resources". They further stated therefore, that any discussion on the measure of deprivation should focus on "the poor material and social living standards which people face as a result of poverty". (UHI policy Web, 2005).

Sources of Deprivation

From the above discussion on the meaning of deprivation, it can be seen that most of the definitions centre on issues relating to poverty. By implication, therefore, poverty is the major cause of deprivation. For a better understanding, it is quite important to define poverty and see how it serves as the major source of deprivation. Like the concept of deprivation, poverty has been defined, viewed and interpreted differently by scholars and specialized bodies. The United Nations Organisation for example defined poverty as follows:

Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity; it means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or

clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation (UN Statement, 1998).

The United Nations Organisation went further to define child poverty as:

Children living in poverty are deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, access to basic healthcare services, shelter, education, participation and protection, and that while a severe lack of goods and services hurts every human being, it is most threatening and unable to enjoy their rights, to reach their full potential and to participate as full members of the society (UN, January, 2007).

As stated earlier, scholars are not unanimous over the definition of poverty. Ravallion and Chen, (1997), World Bank, (1990); in Klasens,

(2000) perceive poverty primarily in financial terms. Some other scholars have however given it a wider perspective. Dreze and Sen, (1989) and Klasens, (2000) are prominent among the scholars having the latter opinion, they emphasized that, Poverty should be seen in relation to the lack of important "basic goods" or "basic capabilities" some of which cannot be purchased with money as they are under-provided in a market system. Financial resources according to the scholars are not the only means to achieve well-being and that well-being outcomes should be measured directly rather than measuring its proxies.

Whatever definition or perception poverty is given, and whatever dimension it takes, the simple fact is that it has some negative effects on children's school progress because it prevents parents from allowing their children to continue with their education. It prevents parents from providing learning materials for their children. Poverty also prevents parents from financing their children to attend school expeditions or excursions, which are very important for children's school progress. In order to understand the negative effects of poverty on children's school progress, there is the need to analyse poverty issues and how they impede school progress, especially for the Nigerian Children.

A study conducted by the International Research on Working Children in Nepal in 2007 reveals that severe poverty, and the requirement of additional labour is one of the factors that keeps children out of school and pushes children into work. The study established a connection between changes in the circumstances of the home and dropout of children from such homes. Children are also forced to work, according the study as a result of fallout of an earning member due to illness or death, so also is the incidence of financial loss due to other causes such as robbery. The implication of these changes in the home circumstances is that, workload in such homes increases and children are therefore required to assist, especially the older ones. The study further establishes that:

There are many cases where the work that children are asked to do leads to (temporary) absence from the village and thus to non-enrolment, irregular attendance or dropout. In the Mountains, children join older family members when they take their cattle outside the village in search of food, thereby leaving the village for a few months (International Research on

Working Children. Nepal, 2007:x. Executive summary).

In a study about Poverty, Health, Education and human Deprivation in India, Sarvalingam, and Sivakumar, (2004) have supported the previous scholars views on poverty, thus:

Poverty is a state of deprivation. In absolute terms it reflects the ability of an individual to satisfy certain basic minimum needs for a sustained healthy and a reasonably productive living. Poverty is hunger, poverty is lack of shelter, poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not being able to school and not knowing how to read. Pp 9.

Holman (1970) added that parents of low-income families usually return home late from work, as such they have little time to teach their normal lesson. The Nigerian situation is most pathetic due to the serious economic hardship in the country. Many parents cannot afford three square meals a day for their families

Bad Housing Conditions

Apart from the poor hygienic condition of many homes, there is also the problem of overcrowding

which is very common among low-income families in Nigeria. Some families are even homeless. The problem of homelessness is a major factor in the breaking-up of families as well as frustration, strain and disharmony within affected families, with consequent adverse effects on children's progress and adjustment in school. For instance, a low-standard accommodation and overcrowding mean a lack of privacy for the child and un-satisfactory facilities at home (Chazen *et al*; 1976). In such a situation, the development of the younger children is seriously affected by inadequate space for play and free activity, both within and outside the home (Hunt, 1966). Townsend (1979) however, described housing conditions as follows:

Housing conditions relate to both the physical characteristics of the dwelling (e.g availability of electricity, water supply, or indoor flushing toilet or whether parts of the dwelling are deteriorated or damaged) and to the areas where dwellings are located (e.g exposure to noise indoor pollution etc) (Townsend, 1979: 13).

Such bad housing conditions affect a considerable number of children in

Nigeria. Many homes are overcrowded especially those of the low income families. As a result there is no chance for children in such homes to play.

Inadequate Care

Studies have indicated that there is a remarkable improvement in the general standard of health and cleanliness especially in the developed countries; this is evident by the faster rate of growth of children and by the reduction in the number of physical defects found with children (Plowden, 1967). On the other hand, there are a considerable number of children, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, whose nutrition is inadequate or who suffers from some form of neglect or physical deprivation. Even though physiological growth is controlled by so many factors, it is generally accepted by physicians that malnutrition and illness during childhood can have a delaying effect on the physical development of the child, probably with consequent educational retardation (Tanner, 1961). Tanner's assertion has been supported by a more recent study conducted by UNICEF on Childhood Poverty in 2009 in Tanzania. The study opined that:

Despite progress in Child Survival, Children are extremely to shocks and stresses occasioned by poor living conditions, malnutrition and ill-health, and thousands of Tanzanian children succumb to preventable deaths every day. Child malnutrition, which indirectly accounts for between a third and a half of under five deaths, is still wide-spread (UNICEF, 2009: ix).

Nigeria, being a developing country like Tanzania suffers a similar problem of lack of adequate care for children. Apart from malnutrition, physical deficiencies such as poor vision, impaired hearing and dental decay, which are mainly caused by inadequate health care, are very common in low-income families in Nigeria. Due to poverty and illiteracy many parents cannot afford to provide basic things like toothpaste, insecticide against mosquitoes and other insects that cause ailments for children. Many parents in Nigeria do not know the value of personal hygiene.

Sensory Deprivation

The need for exposing children to a diversity of experiences, especially in early childhood, has been stressed

by Harvey (1966) and Dannenberg (1966). A monotonous environment, which is particularly prevalent in low-income families in Nigeria, can be a source of sensory deprivation (Jensen, 1967). In Nigeria, many children live in a dull and unstimulating environment where there is neither beauty nor variety. They also live in homes where there is a lack of toys, books and such related materials considered necessary for the cognitive development of children. Due to the lack of adequate sensory stimulation, such children enter school with relatively less-developed visual and auditory discriminatory abilities which may retard their learning to read.

Linguistic Deprivation

Growth in speech and language development by children is affected by so many factors. It is observed that deprivation in the language experience does affect even children from well-to-do families, especially when they lack adequate contact with their mothers, a good speech model and satisfactory emotional atmosphere in the home. Studies have shown that children from low income families are particularly more handicapped by the poor linguistic background. According to Bernstein (1965)

Children from the extreme social groups in societies are exposed from an early age to distinct and separate patterns of learning before their formal education begins ... The lower working class child becomes sensitive only to this public or restricted code of language and grows up in a family environment where action is more important than explanation.

Similarly, Riesman (1962) commented on the verbal impoverishments of many children from a poor home background. He stated that "deprived" children use a great deal of words with some degrees of precision, but which are not the words needed for school.

Lack of Parental Interest in a Child's Education

In spite of the importance of socio-economic status in children's academic achievement, it has been discovered that children who lack parental interest in their education do not make significant progress in school even when they come from well-to-do families. Douglas (1964) demonstrated the importance of this variable in school achievement when he conducted tests on intelligence, vocabulary and scholastic attainment between some primary school

children among those whose parents were interested in their education, on one hand and those whose parents showed no concern, on the other hand. The highest average score were made by children whose parents were more interested in their education while the lowest score was by those whose parents were least concerned. The problem of parental interest and encouragement in their children's education is more prominent in large and extended families like the ones commonly found in Nigeria.

Some parents are determined to educate their children despite low-income; they take on extra work or get loans. They also convince and encourage their children as to the importance of their education. However, some parents do not seem to know the importance of education seen in how they are not inclined to sending their children to school. Such parents consider schooling as a waste of time that could be spent instead on other important things. A study conducted on urban Poverty and Basic Education Deprivation by the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, Karnataka (2002), supported the views of earlier studies on parental interest and children education. The study submitted that:

More than the parent's occupation or income levels, it was their aptitude and orientation that impact on the children's education opportunity. Parents who considered education to be important and did not devalue it in any way were those who persisted in ensuring that their current living conditions and as a way to ensure a better life for their children (National Institute of Advanced Studies, 2002:26).

The study therefore concluded that some barriers to children's education in developing countries are likely to be overcome if parents develop an interest in the education of their children.

Emotional Deprivation

Although emotional deprivation is experienced by all categories of children, irrespective of their social class, there is a tendency for a higher incidence of emotional deprivation to be found in low-income families (Lewis, 1962; Wilson, 1962). Evidence from studies such as those of Vernon (1969), Lewis (1962) and Wilson (1962) have shown that the intelligence of young children develop well in an atmosphere that is democratic.

Emotional deprivation may result from many sources but primarily, children feel it more seriously when they are fatherless or motherless and when warmth and affection are missing in the families even when both parents are present. Let us take the cases and see how they affect child educational development.

Maternal Deprivation

On many instances, children lose their mothers, either as a result of death, re-marriage or separation. Such an event could lead to emotional maladjustment, delinquency, education problem and even psychopathic behaviour (Bowlby, 1952).

Separation, especially due to break-up of marriage in the Nigerian society is inevitably followed by adverse effects either in the short-term or a long-term, depending on the age of the child, the quality of the mother-child relationship before separation and the nature and extent of the separation experience. There is no doubt, however that prolonged and traumatic separation in marriage does impair the emotional development of the child and in turn affects his school progress.

Absence of a Father

The important role of a father in a child's development is a recognized fact especially in Nigeria where fathers are the breadwinners for most families. Both the status and good image of the child depend to a very large extent on the father's occupation and social status. A child from a fatherless family can no doubt be considered a deprived child.

Marsden (1969) also highlighted the hardship of unmarried, separated, divorced and widowed mothers and their children. Children in such conditions are marked off from their school mates in a number of ways. For example, they lack good clothes for parties, they cannot go to cinema houses and they cannot join groups where uniformity was required. Moreover, such children cannot meet any financial demand; they cannot go on school trips and excursions. Similarly, emotional deprivation occurs when the father, though living at home, withdraws himself completely from the family; the family recognizes that, for all practical purposes, he can be regarded as absent. There are some other parents who work with private organizations throughout the day from 7am-7pm. They leave home before their children wake-up from sleep and return home only after the children have slept. In many cases,

their children do not know them personally. As such, such fathers have no time to monitor the school progress of their children, especially with regards to school attendance.

Conclusion

The effect of deprivation on the child's school progress is enormous and children under such conditions as poverty, poor housing, overcrowding and unhygienic situations, inadequate care and other such related conditions are really disadvantaged as far as school is concerned. Although other sources of deprivation like lingual and emotional affect even children from rich families, they are more prevalent among low-income families.

Recommendations

In respect of the issue, therefore, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Government should do everything possible to alleviate the sufferings of the Nigerian Populace, so as to enable parents provide their children with adequate material and moral support for their education;
2. Wealthy individuals should establish business ventures and philanthropy to provide employment opportunities and

support for unemployed parents so that they can have resources to cater for their families;

3. Parents, on their part should assist their children or wards with the little they can afford and be more interested in and concerned about their children's education;
4. Parents should also make their home environments as clean and hygienic as possible, to make the houses germs-free and more conducive for healthy living and learning, and
5. The Larger community should also cooperate and contribute to the welfare and education of deprived children.

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