

Social Status of Parents and Students' Academic Performance in Aba Educational Zone, Abia State

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author NAA designed the study, managed the literature searches and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author CCO managed the field data collection, analyses and discussions. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive survey examined the academic performance of SS2 students in Aba Education Zone in relation to the social status of their parents. The population of the study comprised all 4955 SS2 students in Abia State from which a sample of 100 students from four secondary schools were drawn for study. Four research questions were raised to guide the study. The Social Status of Parents Questionnaire (SOSPAQ) with a reliability index of 0.81 Cronbach's alpha coefficient, developed by the researchers was used in collecting data on the social status of parents while students' academic performance was assessed using the raw scores available from school records. Analyses of research data revealed that parents' social status influenced the academic performance of students' in Aba Education Zone of Abia State. The researchers thus recommended that the government, well-meaning individuals and organisations should support parents from disadvantaged social backgrounds in the education of their children by providing—in addition to free, compulsory and qualitative education—bursaries, scholarships and education resources to counteract the impact of low social status of parents on the education of the children.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Academic performance has always been the centre of educational research and despite varied statements about the aims of education, the academic development of the child continues to be the primary and the most important goal of education. Therefore, the importance of academic performance cannot be over emphasized. It acts as an emotional tonic. Good foundation is laid in the school in early years of life. Sound academic records are the pillars on which the entire future personality stands.

While considering the factors of school performance, one possibly ignores those aspects in which individuals differ from one another. The starting point may be academic performance itself where wide ranging variations occur from the point of outstanding performance. If we consider a group of students, a few students are found to be high achievers while others are low achievers and a sizable number of students always appear as moderate achievers. The question arises, why such difference in academic performance exist? This question often appears in the minds of psychologists, educators and educationists.

Social status includes economic, sociological, educational, occupational, residential environment, marital status of parents, on children's academic performance. School systems in low social status communities are often under-resourced and thus may negatively affect student's academic progress [1]. It is often observed too that inadequate parental education affects children's academic performance. Research on parenting also has shown that parent education is related to a warm, social climate in the home. For instance, Klebanov, Brook-Gunn and Duncan [2] found that mothers' education is an important predictor of the physical environment and learning experiences in the home, but that mothers' education alone was predictive of parental warmth. Likewise, Smith, Brooks-Gunn and Kelbanov [3] found that the association of family income and parents' education with children's academic performance was mediated by the home environment. The mediation effect was stronger for maternal education than for family income. Thus, these authors posited that education might be linked to specific performance behaviour in the home (e.g.

reading, playing). Corwyn and Bradley [4] also found that maternal education had the most consistent direct influence on children's cognitive and behavioural outcomes with some indirect influence through a cognitively stimulating home environment. Corwyn and Bradley [4] however examined only two quite broad aspects of family mediators: learning stimulation and parental responsibility. Mediation might have emerged if other parent behaviour and attitudes were examined.

According to Rothstein [5], parents of different occupational classes tend to possess different styles of child upbringing. Rothstein [5] argues that these differences though not identical across families with identical occupations, they have been found to be commonly shared by parents in the specific occupational cluster; they thus represent the average tendencies of families for different occupational classes [6]. Parent's occupation is considered in three levels in this study, the unemployed, self-employed and civil/public servant which are the dominant occupations of people living in the area of the study.

Akinsanya, Ajayi and Salomi [7] maintain that the intellectual development of children could be significantly impacted if they endeavour to follow the career paths of their parents. They gave as an example, mothers doing such low level jobs as hair dressing, sewing, petty trading, farming, catering and so on. Akinsanya, et al. [7] further show that menial occupations engaged in by parents seem to choke off the contact hours parents have with their children. This in turn may impair the development of these children. Moreover, the researcher opined that parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds may want their children to join their trade and as a result play down on the need to invest heavily on the intellectual development of their children.

Researchers such as Beauvais and Jensen [8], Carneiro and Heckman [9], Drummond and Stipek [10], Ford and Harris [11], Krueger [12], Osonwa, Adejobi, Iyam, and Osonwa [13], Szewczyk, Bost and Wainwright [14], and Thompson and Fleming [15], have variously indicated that the socioeconomic background of parents may contribute directly and indirectly to the educational performance of students. This impact may result from the inability of the parents

to provide additional education resources to augment the limited resources available in public schools. It may also result from the inability of the disadvantaged parents, who are engrossed with earning a living, to eke out time and assist their children in other affective ways that may support learning and cognitive development. Generally, however, it is commonly observed that children from high socioeconomic backgrounds tend to do better academically than their peers from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Whether the same influence may be true in the case of social status, which is often closely associated with socioeconomic status, is not very clear.

The impact of parental income in the second specification suggests sizable income elasticity's with a doubling of paternal income increasing the probability of post-compulsory schooling of sons by 50% and of daughters by 34%. The income effect is more than halved when we reintroduce our parental education variables in the third specification but the impact of parental education is still largely insignificant. If we believe that this strategy, which relies on the exogenous component of union status on income, identifies the permanent effect of income, the results are not dissimilar to Carneiro and Heckman [9].

It is generally speculated that children from larger families perform worse academically than children from smaller families. In a similar vein, Powell and Steelman [16] and Van and DeGraaf [17] argued that how much children gain from education is contingent upon the amount of time and money their parents devote to their education. The fewer the number of children there are in the family the more the relative inputs accruable to their education. Joseph [18] adds that these inputs are not limited to money; other essential things like time, attention, and resource dilution are equally required. Furthermore, Booth and Kee [19] confirmed that children from larger families have lower levels of education.

The main purpose of this study was to examine the influence of social status of parents on the academic performance of secondary school students. The specific objectives were:

1. To investigate the influence of parent educational background and academic performance of the students.
2. To examine the influence of parents occupation and academic performance of the students.

3. To investigate the influence of parental income and students' academic performance.
4. To find out the influence of family size and academic performance.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were generated to guide the study:

- (1) How does parents' educational background influence the academic performance of students in Aba Educational Zone?
- (2) How does parents' occupation influence the academic performance of students in Aba Educational Zone?
- (3) How does parents' income level influence the academic performance of students in Aba Educational Zone?
- (4) How does family size influence the academic performance of students in Aba Educational Zone?

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Design

The study utilised the descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design was used for this study because this design allowed the researchers to collect data from a relatively small sample of a relatively larger population and generalise the findings as descriptive of the situation in the entire population [20]. Moreover, this design made suffice the use of descriptive statistical methods in the data analyses carried out in the study.

3.2 Area

This study was conducted in secondary schools in the nine (9) local government areas of Aba Education Zone in Abia State. There are 96 government owned secondary schools in the Aba Educational Zone. As the commercial hub of the state, Aba attracts people from all walks of life thus making it a desirable and suitable area for this study.

3.3 Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of all the 4955 SS2 students in Aba education zone of Abia State. The sample drawn from this

population for the study comprised 100 students from four (4) public secondary schools in the study area. The sample was selected using the multi stage random sampling method. The choice of this sampling method allowed the researchers to select a sample that was representative of the population from schools spread across the study area.

3.4 Instrumentation

The Social Status of Parents Questionnaire (SOSPAQ) developed by the researchers was used in the collection demographic data on the parents of the sampled students. The instrument was validated by experts in educational measurement and evaluation and had a reliability index of 0.81. The instrument was thus considered sufficiently reliable for collecting data on parents' social status for the study. Data for students' academic performance were obtained from schools' records.

3.5 Research Procedure

Students' academic records were obtained with permission from the schools heads and the raw scores of the students selected to participate in the study were collected. Thereafter, copies of the research questionnaire assessing parents' social status were numbered based on the students' record numbers. The research questionnaire was administered with the assistance of the class teachers. The researchers carefully retrieved the completed copies of the questionnaire to ensure that none was missing. The data were subsequently collated along with each respondent's raw score and analysed using descriptive statistics to answer the questions this study sought to clarify.

4. RESULTS

Field data collected by the researchers was analysed and the results were employed in furnishing answers to the questions raised to guide this study as shown hereunder.

4.1 Research Question 1

How does parental education level influence student's performance?

As shown in Fig. 1, the descriptive analysis of research data provided the answer to Research Question 1. It would be observed on the chart

that students of parents with no formal education had a mean score of 37.64, those of parents with primary education scored 39.2, those of parents with secondary education mean score of 54.10 while those of parents with tertiary education had a mean performance score of 70.32. This result indicates that parents with tertiary education have positive influence on students while those with no formal education have negative influence on student performance. Generally, the data analysed shows that parental educational level influences the academic performance of students such that more educated parents tended to have children who performed better in school than parents with limited or no formal education.

4.2 Research Question 2

How does parental occupation influence student's performance?

To answer this Research Question 2, parental income was categorized into three: no employment, self-employed and government employed. The result obtained indicated that students whose parents has no formal employment had a mean score of 23.10, those that are self –employed had a mean score 50.60 whereas those that are employed by government had a mean score of 66.04 (See Fig. 2). This result revealed that the influence of parental occupation on students' academic performance is such that students whose parents are employed by government perform far better than students whose parents were either self-employed or unemployed.

4.3 Research Question 3

How does parental income level influence student's academic performance?

Parents' income level was examined at three levels of low, middle and high. It was observed that student's from low income background had a mean score 33.12, than those from middle income background who had a mean score of 58.13 and lastly those with high income background had means score of 74.24 (See Fig. 3). These put together gave a clear answer to Research question 3, that income level influences student's performance in such a way that students from high income families performed better followed by those from middle income families and the least was those from low income families.

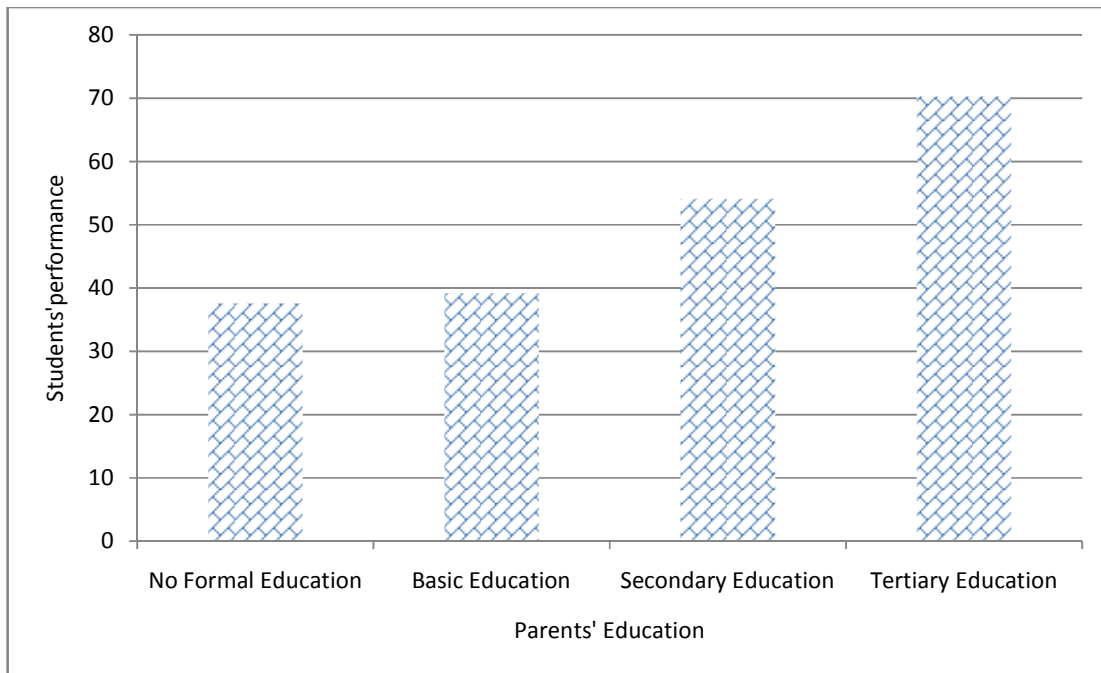


Fig. 1. Parental education level and students' academic performance

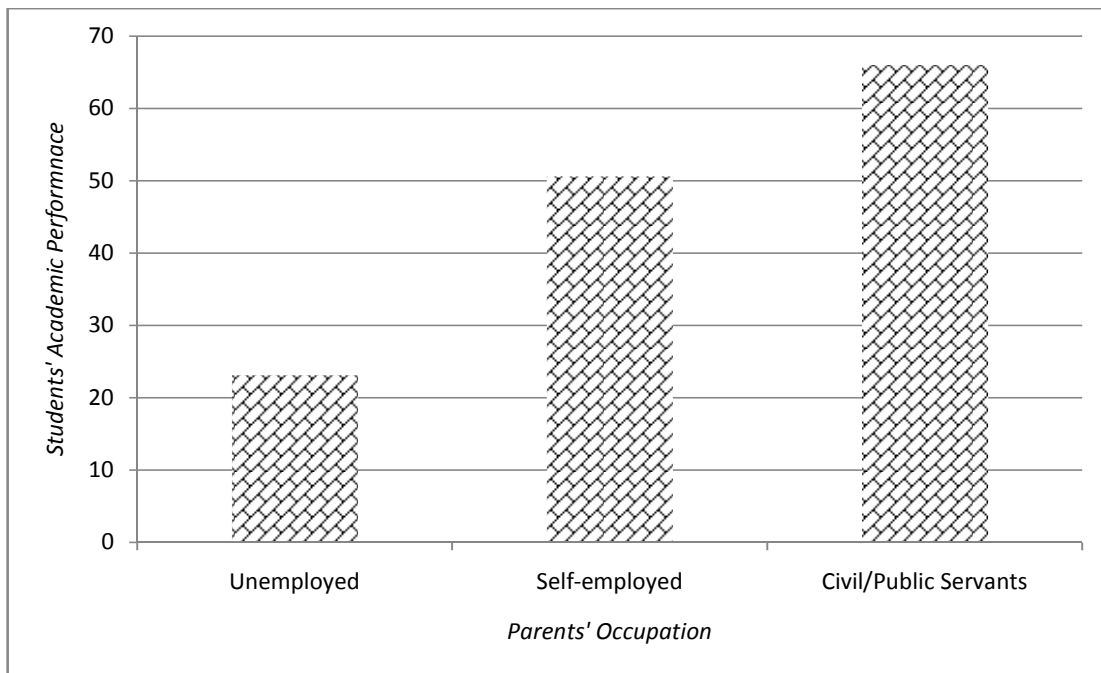


Fig. 2. Parental occupation and students' academic performance

4.4 Research Question 4

How does family size influence student's academic performance?

Family size was examined based on the four types commonly observed in the study area. The result indicated the students from families where there is only one child had a mean score 46.67, those that are two had mean score of 60.31, next was those that are three had mean score of

47.16 and lastly those that are four and above in the family had mean score of 39.59 (See Fig. 4).

These put together answers the fourth research question that family size influences student's performance such that large families with 4 or more children predispose students to poor performance while those that are one or two perform better; probably because of the extent of care and provision of school materials by parents.

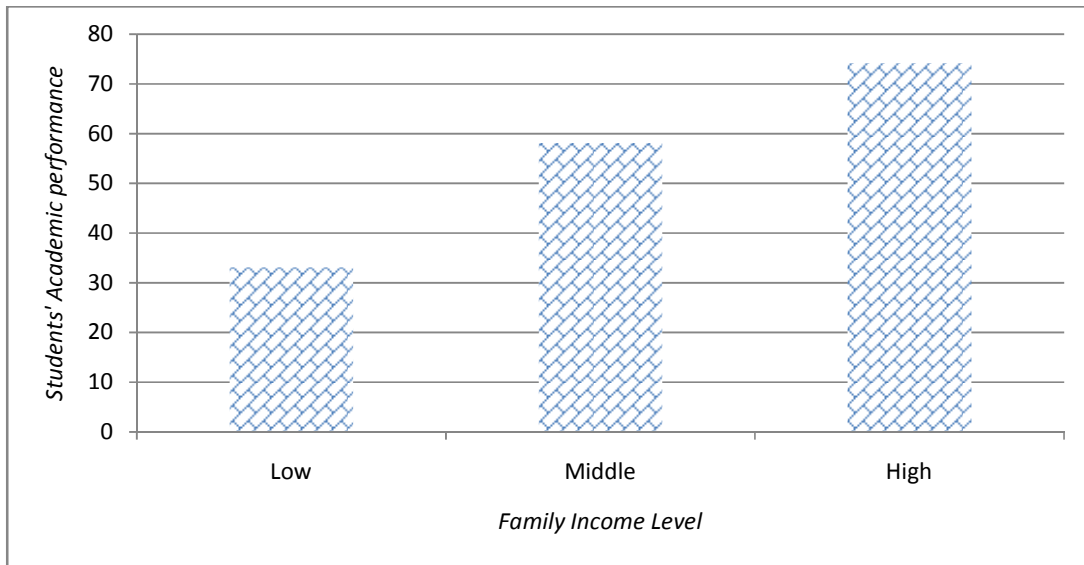


Fig. 3. Family income and students' academic performance

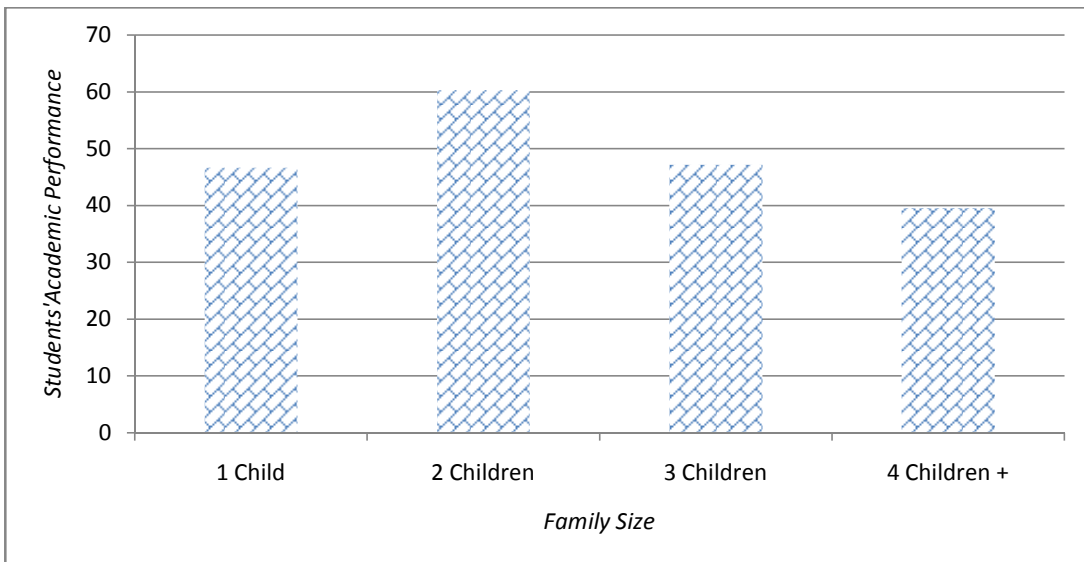


Fig. 4. Family size and students' academic performance

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Analyses of data obtained in this study showed that majority of the students, whose parents were well educated, performed better than those whose parents had limited or no formal education. This finding is in consonance with the findings of Aikens and Barbarin [1] who reported that inadequate education and increased dropout rate affect children's academic performance. Corwyn and Bradley [4] also found that material education had the most consistent direct influence on children's cognitive and behavioural outcomes with some direct influence through a cognitively stimulating home environment.

Variations were also observed in the academic performance of students from various parental occupational backgrounds. Analysis of data obtained in this study showed that children whose parents had well-paying government jobs performed better than their counterparts whose parents were either struggling on their own or completely unemployed.

Similarly, a significant relationship was found between family income and the academic performance of the students under study. The result of this study showed that the higher the income of the family the better the educational outcomes of their children. This result is in consonance with the findings of Thompson and Fleming [15] who reported that children from low socio-economic parental backgrounds do not have access to extra learning facilities and therefore lack the opportunity to excel academically. This may be due to the fact that these children from low income families often have to fend for themselves thus thwarting their academic endeavours. Beauvais and Jensen [8] showed that poverty contributes towards educational failure because poor children are culturally disadvantaged and their health and nutritional status inadequate to allow for the maximum mental development and for the realization of their educational potential. This report buttresses the findings of this study.

This study also showed that family size, in terms of the number of children in the household, has a significant influence on the academic performance of students in the study area. This finding is in line with the submissions of Powel and Steelman [16] and Van and DeGraaf [17] who reported that children's educational attainment depends on imputes of time and money from their parents. Thus, the more

children there are in the family the less the inputs accruing to each child. These key inputs are not usually money; such other essential things as time and attention are key to improved academic attainment by the children. Another report by Booth and Kee [19] also confirms that children from larger families have lower levels of educational achievement. A child who comes from a family with smaller number of sibling stands a better chance to receiving care and academic guidance from parents; more than a child who came from a family with many other children.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings discussed in this study the researchers conclude that parental social status has great impact on the academic performance of students in Aba Education Zone. The same situation may be true in other localities that share the demographic characteristics of the current study region. Therefore, the following recommendations are advanced:

Parents should pay more than the usual attention to their involvement in their children's academic work. They should give more attention to their children's academic progress by monitoring their activities in and out of school, ensuring that home work is done, providing necessary educational materials and partnering with their teachers to guide and assist their wards to maximise their gains from schooling.

Parents with limited education and limited economic resources should be assisted in providing for the academic needs of their children. The government may do this by ensuring that education provided in public schools is free, compulsory and qualitative; especially at the basic education level so that these children may build a good educational foundation for further training. Moreover, the government may ensure that public education is not substandard. Attention should be given to the educational infrastructure in public schools. If such educational infrastructures are improved, it may go a long way in improving the educational outcomes of students from low income households whose parents may not have the ability to provide remedial or supplementary educational resources.

Since education for all is the responsibility of all, well-placed individuals in the society and organisations may do well to support the

education of children from low socio-economic backgrounds. Such support may come in the form of scholarships, education grants, and provision of educational resources such as books, textbooks, and bursaries. All these if put to work may, to a very great extent, counteract the impact of disadvantaged parental backgrounds on students' gains from education.

7. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that parents' level of formal education, parents' occupation, parents' income level, and family size have potent influences on children's propensity to maximize their gains from education. This study has shown that children whose parents had more formal education tended to achieve more than their peers whose parents had comparatively lower education. It also shows that children whose parents were in the public/civil service and who invariably had better earnings gained more from their education than children whose parents were struggling on their own either as unemployed or self-employed. Finally, this study has revealed that children from families with only two children did better than children from families with more than two children. These findings provide data for further research and interventions on family variables and students' academic achievement.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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