

## **SOCIAL CLASS AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT IN NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study was set out to examine the relationship between social class and educational achievement of individuals in Nigeria. The study population includes all Nigerians from various social classes; after the social classes were identified. It utilised a qualitative research design to analyse the variables. Using purposive sampling research method, a total of one hundred and thirty (130) respondents belonging to various social classes were chosen. Using electronic means (Whats App and Facebook), questionnaire which was the primary source of data collection was employed; while the secondary source of gathering data were from journal articles. This study proposes that the educational achievement of an individual is dependent on the social class of the family of a person. A reliability test carried out shows a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.859 which means the instrument of measurement is void of error or bias. The data gathered was presented in tables and tested using correlational coefficient statistical tool, frequencies and simple percentages. The research shows that the social class of an individual does not necessarily have direct impact on his/her educational achievement. Rather it discovered that the determination of an individual access to research grants, scholarships and free professional certifications contribute immensely to the educational attainment of a group; and as such it recommends that government of the nation and other well-meaning citizens and organisations should make such facilities available to all students so that those who are interested in achieving higher heights in education especially children from low income families can do so unhindered.*

**Keywords: Social Class, Educational Achievement, Nigeria.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Every hitherto existing society has records that its members fall within a particular social class based on the criteria which such society use to categorise its people into various social strata. Some societies have it that people are born into the social class to which they belong and remain until death regardless of how hard and smart they work. This can be seen in the caste system adopted by the Indians and 'osu' caste system by Igbos in Nigeria. In some other societies, for instance America mobility of individuals from one social class to the other is permitted as long as such persons have met certain criteria which qualify them to gain entry into any social class. This movement can be upward, downward and even diagonally; and sometimes this free movement from one social class to another can be seen in Nigeria.

There are defined criteria for the observed mobility from one social class to another; and some of the criteria which determine the class an individual may belong to may include; ownership of means of production which is attainable in a capitalist system, ownership of land which is attainable in a feudal

society, birth etc. Ferian and Jereb, (2007). In literature, the placement of people into one of the mentioned social classes is regarded as social stratification, Ekpenyong (2003). This can simply be referred to the social order of categorisation of individuals into groups based on socioeconomic factors; such as wealth, income, level and quality of education, gender, occupation, and social status (social and political). To support this position is Sirin, (2005), who posited that “it has been observed over the years that the social class which a person belongs to influences several other areas of the individual’s life (life style), like the place they live, the things they eat, cars they drive, clothes they wear and even the quality and level of education they receive”.

Education which is one of these socioeconomic factors can be considered as a process of learning both in terms of academics (schooling) and vocational. Education cannot be restricted to the four corners of the school environment only, as it also outspreads to the expanse of the home and other experiences. School learning in context is a combined work of the school, the home and the environment where the individual finds himself. Research has shown that the home and environment in which a person lives will likely have a prodigious bearing on his/her academic potentials; Gardiner (2015); as it is known that education starts from birth to grave and therefore, learning can take place anywhere, including the home.

The family brings to bear an enormous impression on the personality of a child, this personality traits consist of the character and mindset of the child, for example high social class children coexist more with the children of relatively high class parents and this most times gives room for opportunity, progressive ideology due to great level of exposure and wealth to continue to cycle with the people of this class according to Milne and Plourde (2006). In addition, the effect of the background of the family on school achievement is highly prominent in subjects that are decipherable to paternal and maternal perceptions.

Institutional education encompasses economic price by means of tuition fees, textbooks, and other accessories, and so any family that is capable of providing these basics is momentarily estimated to get a child all set for school. Some high socio-economic status parents are known to have a library in the home, have the ability to buy resourceful books for their off springs and even travel them round the world to expand their horizon. In the view of Ferian and Jereb (2007), in all countries, Nigeria inclusive, children from poor families most often lack the economic strength to enroll in good schools and highly apposite to drop out in contrast with the children of more stable families. There are certain ways by which extreme poverty has been observed to impact on school performance of individuals; for instance, poverty can make parents unwilling to retain a child in school; can also make it hard for him to afford books or go on excursions which help a child to learn better and this further limits the possibility of achieving his/her educational dreams and goals.

The foregoing circumstance made Gardiner (2015) to state that “aside looking at the provisions of basic educational resources, the quality of education received also has a direct link with achievement”. In furtherance to this argument are Bankston and Palardy (2005); and Heyneman, (1982); who posit that “with regards to social class having impact on educational achievement of individuals in Nigeria, two schools of thoughts exist; first, is the one with the view that social class influences the educational achievements of people and the second, is of the opinion that social class has no influence on educational achievements of individuals, rather that other factors do”. It is in this light that the study aims to investigate the degree of relationship existing between social class and educational achievements of individuals in Nigeria.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

The study examined how the social class of an individual determined the educational achievements in Nigeria.

## HYPOTHESIS OF STUDY

There is a string relationship between educational achievement of an individual and his/her social class in Nigeria.

## Study Area



**Figure 1: The study Area: Map of Nigeria (Source: Google, 2020).**

Nigeria covers a space of 923,768 square kilometers of the globe. Geographically, Nigeria is located in West Africa, at the north of the equator. Nigeria is an African country on the Gulf of Guinea and have many natural landmarks and wildlife reserves. Nigeria, according to National Bureau of Statistics' latest world population ranking is positioned seventh with an estimated population of 206.14million indicating a 1% annual population growth from the 2006 census. Nigeria is blessed with numerous higher institutions of which as at 2017, had forty (40) Federal universities, forty four (44) State universities and seventy four (74) Private universities which are accredited. Nigeria like every other countries of the world has different Social classes. An individual is only qualified to be ranked as middle class in Nigeria if he/she earns a middle income of between twenty (₦20) million naira and fifty two(₦52.4)million, four hundred thousand naira; Punch newspaper,( 2019).

## CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

### THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CLASS

Ferian and Jereb (2007), opined that the concept of social class was developed by Marx and Engels (1848), who suggested that there were three class categories:

- (1) **The capitalist class**; comprising of the owners and controllers of the means of production, distribution and exchange.
- (2) **The middle class**; which includes managers, small businesses, professionals and the middle ranks of the state apparatus; and

(3) **The working class**; which includes the great majority of the population who sell their labour power, their capacity to work, in return for a wage or salary, and who work under the direction of the owners of the means of production and their agents.

On the other hand, Weber saw three dimensions of social stratification in terms of a continuum. Social class for Weber, included power and prestige in addition to property or wealth. Today, sociologists use the term socio-economic status (SES) to refer to this ranking based on various dimensions of Social inequality Mugure, (2014). Mueller and Parcel (1981) defined social class as individual's or family's position in a societal hierarchy that dictates the degree to which the individual or family has access to wealth and power. Social class can also mean grouping people into any of the three categories; the upper, middle and lower.

### **THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT**

Merriam Webster since 1828 defines education as the knowledge and development resulting from the process of being educated. Education can also be referred to as the field of study which deals mainly with methods of teaching and learning in school.

Achievement according to Cambridge dictionary is anything good and difficult which an individual has succeeded in doing; while Center for Research and Development Academic Achievement (CRIRES) (2005) reports that academic achievement is a construct that measures students' achievement, knowledge and skill. The measurement is based on Grade Point Average (GPA), students' age, previous experience and students' capacity related to social and educational skills.

A significant number of authors explain differences in educational achievement with differences in values of social classes. For instance, Hyman (1953) hypothesizes that:

1. People in the working class do not appreciate education: Schooling after elementary school does not hold much worth for them.
2. They do not value higher professional status. They appreciate employment stability and the promise of early employment for their children. They avoid taking the risk of reaching a higher occupational status.
3. Compared to middle class coevals, they think their chances for promotion are much lower.

In the opinion of Magure (2014), students from low socioeconomic level homes are at a disadvantage in schools because they lack an academic home environment, which influences their academic success at school. In particular, books in the home have been found over many years in many of the large-scale international studies, to be one of the most influential factors in student achievement. From the beginning, parents with higher socioeconomic status are able to provide their children with the financial support and home resources for individual learning. As they are likely to have higher levels of education, they are also more likely to provide a more stimulating home environment to promote cognitive development. Furthermore, parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds may also provide higher levels of psychological support and environment for their children and these encourage the development of skills necessary for success at school.

### **SOCIAL CLASS AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT IN NIGERIA**

Throughout the world, there are students belonging to affluent families that receive distinguished education; and students belonging to low-income families that receive substandard education. These disparate educational experiences contribute to the academic achievement gap that has been a source of concern for decades; Brandon and Murray, (2015). Accounting for differences in academic achievement among individuals and social groups has received considerable global attention from educators, researchers, and policymakers and therefore, efforts to understand and account for these differences have involved an examination of individual student characteristics and the characteristics of their school environment.

In that wise, Palardy (2013) sees social class as one of the most commonly used contextual variables within research on academic achievement; and idea supported by Sirin, (2015). Researches on SES and academic achievement have shown a consistent relationship; to Milne and Palardy, (2006); specifically, it is often the case that high SES is associated with greater academic achievement. Likewise, the educational literature by Reardon, (2011) has provided evidence that SES is one of the strongest predictors of academic achievement and educational attainment.

Bankston and Palardy (2005) in their analysis of cohort data, found that the familial income gap between low-SES children and high-SES children accounted for significant amounts of the academic achievement gap. According to Duncan and Murnanes (2011) conceptual model; high-SES children are more likely to have greater access to high quality child care, schools, and settings that enhance the development of important skills related to education while low-SES children may have parents who cannot afford such resources.

On the part of Heyneman (1982) who conducted a comparative study of high-income and low-income countries in order to further examine the nature of the relationship between SES and academic achievement; their findings show that in high-income countries, there is a stronger association between individual student SES and academic achievement and a relatively weaker association between school-level factors (e.g., school and teacher quality) and academic achievement. However, their analyses also indicated that within low-income countries, school-level factors shared a relatively stronger association with academic achievement than did individual student SES.

Additionally, Gardiner (2015) emphasized that young people from low income families who live in socially deprived areas are more likely to have low aspirations and skepticism about education, and this is associated with high levels of deprivation which lead to low levels of educational achievement. The academic climate a student experiences can also have an impact on the relationship between SES and academic achievement. Evaluating academic climate may consist of determining the types of messages students receive from their peers, teachers, and administrators with regard to academic achievement and educational attainment. It can also involve an assessment of school safety, the average number of hours spent completing homework per week, and the average number of college prep courses taken Rumberger and Palardy, (2005).

Ferian and Jereb (2007) in their study to determine the correlation between social class positions as a determinant of educational achievement partly confirmed that there is significant correlation between individuals' educational achievement in elementary school and the social class of the family of origin ( $r=0.252$  at  $p=0.01$ ); while Marjoribanks (2003) had illustrated this liberal perspective. According to their findings, it can be adumbrated that a pupil's level of aspirations is dependent upon three interrelated and mediating factors, which are: the family socio-economic background, the parental involvement in the child's education, and the pupil's personal beliefs, expectations, attitudes and ability.

## **METHODS**

The study examined the degree of relationship that exist between social class and educational achievements in Nigeria; and it therefore, adopted the quantitative method for measuring the degree of relationship existing between both variables. Its attention was focused on the various existing social classes and its impact on the level of educational achievement in Nigeria. The population of the study includes all adult citizens of Nigeria belonging to various social classes and have achieved a form of educational achievement. The estimated Nigerian population according to 2006 census is 140million, but for the purpose of the study 130 respondents belonging to different social classes were purposively selected using

the snow ball non probability sampling technique. Each respondent was asked to refer others based on their social class using electronic means (Whats App and Facebook). The response rate observed was 110 which represents 84.6% because 20 questionnaires were not completely filled out, but returned.

Data for the study was gathered using questionnaires as the primary source and journal articles as secondary source. The questions were structured in a manner that it permitted the researcher opportunity to search for inconsistencies. A pilot test was carried out and a reliability test revealed a cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.859 which means the instrument of measurement is void of error or bias. The study analysed the data gathered using Microsoft excel spread sheet, 2016. The data was presented in tables and tested using correlation, frequencies and simple percentages.

## RESULTS

### Section A: Socio-Demographic Data

**Table 1 Socio-demographic distribution of Respondents**

S.no	Variables	Frequency(F)	Percentage (%)
<b>1</b>	<b>Gender</b>		
	Male	71	64.5
	Female	39	35.5
<b>2</b>	<b>Age group</b>		
	Less than 20	10	9.1
	21-30	24	21.8
	31-40	55	50.0
	41-50	18	16.4
	51 and above	3	2.7
<b>3</b>	<b>Highest Educational qualification attained</b>		
	School certificate	12	10.9
	Degree/HND	48	43.6
	Masters	33	30.0
	PhD	17	15.5
<b>4</b>	<b>Type of school attended</b>		
	Private owned	37	33.6
	Government owned	73	66.4
<b>5</b>	<b>Where did you complete your last Education?</b>		
	Nigeria	69	62.7
	Overseas	41	37.3
<b>6</b>	<b>Social class of family</b>		
	Low	31	28.2
	Medium	44	40.0
	High	35	31.8
<b>7</b>	<b>Range of family monthly net income (in Naira)</b>		
	0 – 18,000	12	10.9
	19,000 -100,000	25	22.7
	110,000 – 250,000	40	36.4
	260,000 and above	33	30.0
<b>8</b>	<b>Family size</b>		
	3 and below	16	14.5
	4 – 7	51	46.4

	8 – 11	33	30.0
	11 and above	10	9.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: 2020 Survey**

Table 1 in section A above shows the demographic data of respondents. The gender distribution accounts that the male respondents were 71 (64.5%) and female respondents were 39 (35.5%). Indicating that male respondents were more in number. The age group distribution also depicts that majority of the respondents 55, fell within the age range of 31-40 at 50% and respondents less than 20years were 10 (9.1%) were the least represented. The highest educational level attained by majority of respondents 48 (43.6%) was university degree/ HND. The least was school certificate with 12 respondents at 10.9%. The distribution of the type of schools attended revealed that majority of respondents 73 (66.4%) attended government owned schools; while 37 (33.6%) respondents attended private owned schools. The distribution on where respondents completed their last education revealed that 69 (62.7%) of respondents schooled in Nigeria; whereas 41 (37.3%) of the respondents schooled overseas. The social class of family as represented showed that 31 respondents (28.2%) belonged to the low class, 44 respondents (40%) belonged to the middle class and 35 respondents 31.8% belonged to the high social class. Range of family monthly net income showed that majority of respondents 40 (36.4%) earn 110,000-250,000 and the least 12 respondents (10.9%) earned 0-18,000. The family size distribution showed that majority of respondents 51 (46.4%) are between 4-7 in their family and the least respondents 10 (9.1%) were 11 and above.

### **Section B**

**Table 2: Educational Achievement**

<b>S.no</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Frequency (F)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>At what age did you gain admission into the university? Age in years</b>		
	15 – 18	24	21.8
	19 – 22	31	28.2
	23 – 26	45	40.9
	27 and above	10	9.1
<b>2.</b>	<b>At what age did you graduate from university? Age in years</b>		
	19 – 24	14	12.7
	25 – 30	36	32.7
	31 – 36	42	38.2
	37 and above	18	16.4
<b>3.</b>	<b>Do you think your social class has an impact on your academic achievement?</b>		
	Yes	74	67.3
	No	36	32.7
<b>4.</b>	<b>Would you have achieved more educational qualification if you belong to a higher class?</b>		
	Yes	83	75.5
	No	27	24.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: 2020 Survey**

Section B, accounts for the educational achievement of respondents. It was gathered that majority of respondents 45 (40.9%) gained admission into the university between ages 23-26 and the least number of

respondents 10 (9.1%) gained admission between ages 27 and above. In response to the question at what age did you graduate from university, 42 respondents (38.2%) graduated between 37 and above and the least respondents 14 (12.7%) graduated between 19-24years. In response to whether social class has an impact on respondents' academic performance, 74 respondents (67.3%) said yes and 36 respondents (32.7%) said social class has no impact on academic performance. In response to the question would you have achieved better grade if they belonged to a higher class, 83 respondents (75.5%) answered yes, they would have achieved more qualifications and 27 respondents (24.5%) said No.

**Table 3: Correlation test of social class, highest educational level and range of family monthly income.**

Variables	Social class of family	Variables	Highest Educational level attained	Variables	Range of family monthly net income (in Naira)
<b>A</b>		<b>B</b>		<b>C</b>	
None		School certificate	10.9	0 – 18,000	10.9
Low	28.2	Degree/HND	43.6	19,000 -100,000	22.7
Medium	40	Masters	30	110,000 – 250,000	36.4
High	31.8	PhD	15.5	260,000 and above	30
<b>Total Percentage</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>100</b>		<b>100</b>
<b>Correlated</b>	<b>A and B</b>	<b>A and C</b>		<b>C and B</b>	
<b>Spearman Correlation</b>	0.546118402	0.964296514		0.340027979	

Table 3 above depicts the correlational test results of three variables; correlating Variable A: social class and Variable B: highest educational level, Variable A: Social Class and Variable C and C: Range of family monthly income and Variable B: highest educational level. From the correlation test carried out on Variable A and B, the correlation coefficient observed was 0.546118402 which is moderately correlated. The correlation coefficient of the test of variable A: Social class and C: range of family monthly income is 0.964296514 which tilts towards 1 is strongly correlated indicating a strong relationship. The correlation coefficient of Variable C: Range of Family monthly income and Variable B: highest educational level was 0.340027979 shows a low correlation indicating a low relationship between family monthly income and highest educational level.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The research basically investigated the relationship between social class and educational achievement. Based on the hypothesis of the study, the correlation analysis employed showed that:

- There is a moderate relationship between social class and educational achievement of individuals

Other findings include:

- There is a strong relationship between social class and family monthly income.
- There is a low relationship between family monthly income and highest educational level attained.

The first finding shows that although there is a relationship between social class and highest educational level achieved, this relationship is not a strong one, indicating that social class may in some situations influence the highest educational level achieved by an individual, but achieving high educational level does not solely depend on the social class an individual belongs to. Other factors like individual determination, mentorship, attitude toward study, inborn intelligence amongst others, all these factors can



give individuals from a middle or low social class family the opportunity to achieve more educational heights. Several scholarships are made available to outstanding students to further their education like Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF), Common Wealth Scholarship, Chevening, Bilateral Educational Agreement ( BEA) just to mention a few. Various other grants are also made available to students who are interested in conducting relevant research such as the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) post-doctoral fellowship grants.

The second finding established that there was a strong relationship between social class and family monthly income which is to say that the social class which an individual belongs to is greatly influenced by the income of the family to which he belongs. If an individual earns a low income, he automatically belongs to a low social class and this can be seen in the nutritional status, the life style and even the residential area and type and where he receives his healthcare services.

Third, the low relationship which was observed between family monthly income and highest educational level indicates that the income received in a family does not determine the highest educational level attained by members of such family; even though majority of respondents indicate that their social class had impact on their academic achievement. Majority of individuals who have become professors today were not from very privileged homes but their intelligence, zeal, persistence have contributed to their having attained the peak of their educational careers with the hope that education will give them the desired future which is a lot better than that of their pairs. On the other hands, some individuals from high social class have been observed to have dropped out of universities to pursue other life goals. In spite of the low income of some families, some persons still make more sacrifices to ensure their children get good education.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the light of the foregoing therefore, this study concludes that the social class of an individual does not necessarily have an impact on his educational achievement. This is because, the findings of this study disagrees with the finding of Gardiner (2015) who conducted a study on social class and educational achievement in England and found that the gap in social class has resulted in huge degree of educational inequality. However, the findings of this work shows a moderate relationship between social class and educational attainment, whereas, Ferian and Jereb (2007) discovered that there is no significant correlation between individuals' educational achievement and the social class of the family of origin. Finally, the research shows that the social class of an individual does not necessarily have an impact on educational achievement; rather an individual's determination and access to available social resources or facilities go a long way to contributing to the height an individual attains educationally.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study having established that there is no absolute significance existing between social class and educational achievement in Nigeria. The following are recommended;

- All students in spite of their social class should be encouraged to perform their optimum by the government by equipping educational institutions and also providing all necessary incentives needed to make students perform their best; and this may be by way of ensuring merit is upheld, providing scholarships and grants to deserving students.
- Parents and families should also endeavour to send their children to school according to their resources and also provide adequate reading materials which will assist the progenies to work towards achieving excellence in their educational pursuit.
- The operators and managers of educational institutions should motivate their students teaching skills and also encourage hard working students with the grades they award to the students.

- International, national and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should continue to support educational achievement of citizens through their varied educational sponsorships which should also be giving to deserving students and not based on who you know or what part of the nation you hail from.

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