

Proximal Bioecological Systems and School Attendance Among Lower Basic Education Learners in Ogun State

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Abstract

The necessity of basic education is so enormous that it is the foundation for the future learning and development of children. This study examined the link between proximal bioecological systems and school attendance problems among lower basic education learners in Ogun state. The study adopted a correlation research design. The sample for the study was 251 pupils who were purposively selected from Ogun Waterside and Abeokuta South Local Government Education Authorities in Ogun State. Data were collected through a researcher designed questionnaire and interview schedule and were analyzed using frequency count and percentage while the hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. Results showed that there is a strong correlation between learners' identifying characteristics and lower basic school attendance in Ogun State; there is a significant relationship between learners' mesosystem connections and lower basic education school attendance in Ogun State. The study concluded that greater attention should be given to the identified broad range of factors to ensure learner's development and achieve the goals of education. The study made some recommendations that there is a need for more advocacies especially at the individual, family, school and community levels on the need for community to engage schools in various ways to support the pupils' school attendance in the communities.

Keywords: Absenteeism, Bioecological, Systems, School, Attendance

Introduction

Central to the realisation of basic education goals is the regularity of learners' school attendance. School attendance is the regular or daily participation of learners in school activities (Gottfried, 2010). It is a means through which learners have access to consistent educational support for their academic attainment. Regular school attendance is a pupil's commitment to classroom activities and times from the day of enrolment to completion of a full academic programme. Attending school can be understood both as behaviour and as a developmental outcome because it is one of the indicators of the child's

developmental capacity to separate from their caregiver and be engaged at school. The consensus among scholars is that basic education is a critical element in the overall development of any nation and school attendance is essential for the cognitive and social, emotional development of all children (Melvin, Heyne, Gray, Hastings, Totsika, Tonge & Freeman, 2019). This means that regular school attendance is essential for pupils to be provided with opportunities to achieve lifelong learning and achievement. Thus, pupils need to avoid chronic absenteeism and attend school regularly to be highly engaged with classroom activities which tend to have positive effect on their lives.

In the face of absenteeism and other school attendance problems which have undermined the goals of basic education in many parts of the world, there is a growing interest in the link between school attendance and the learners' proximal bioecological systems. Given the broad range of school attendance problem factors spanning multiple contexts, which have undermined the goals of basic education in many parts of the world, some researchers (e.g., Lyon and Cotler, 2009; Guralnik, 2015; Gottfried and Gee, 2017) have explored the link between school attendance and the learners' proximal bioecological systems. The expectation is that the exploration of the proximal bioecological processes could inform approaches to prevention of and intervention in school attendance problems.

For clarity of purpose, the concern here is how the proximal bioecological environments and systems are linked to school attendance problems that could undermine the goals of basic education in the context of this study. School attendance problems (SAPs) may be differentiated by type. Four types described by Heyne, Gren, Landell, Melvin, and Gentle-Genitty (2019) are school refusal, truancy, school withdrawal, and school exclusion. Often, school absences are differentiated according to whether they are excused (e.g., illness) or unexcused (e.g., truancy), and there is some evidence that risk for academic impairment is greater for learners with unexcused absences relative to those with excused absences (Gottfried, 2009; Hancock, Gottfried, & Zubrick, 2018). Hancock, Shepherd, Lawrence and Zubrick (2013) noted that in practice and research, it is difficult to reliably establish whether absence is excused or unexcused, and policy and practice differ within and between countries. The fact remains that absence for any reason is a risk factor for negative student outcomes (Gottfried, 2009; Hancock, *et al.*, 2013).

The effects of poor attendance can be myriad. When pupils are not in school they miss school lessons and also miss essential instruction which often times cannot be duplicated. Absence from school jeopardizes children's education and their social and emotional development. For example, poor school attendance predicts lower academic achievement over time (Hancock, *et al.*, 2013) and subsequent school dropout (Schoeneberger, 2012).

Environmental factors and proximal and distal factors like parental and familial have connections with absenteeism and problems associated with the maintenance of school attendance. Sekiwu (2013) explained that in many societies in Africa, compulsory school attendance has not been seen as a legal requirement for certification and this partly explains why there is increase in the rate of truancy among students in the continent. The early research conducted by Lehr, Sinclair, and Christenson (2004) in the area of school attendance problems and students' academic achievement in elementary and middle school in the USA showed that lower attendance rates have negative consequences on pupils' learning and academic achievement. The researchers argued that chronic absences are predictive of higher risk factors for students both in their concurrent and future years of education. These findings showed that school attendance problem is global, affecting learners of all ages, spanning multiple bioecological systems across local, national, regional contexts. Therefore, research on the link between proximal bioecological systems and school attendance problems in developing populations across multiple contexts in Ogun State, provides a useful starting point for examining the same phenomena in other parts of the country with a view to offering a useful way to navigate the complexity of absenteeism and SAPs (Lyon & Cotler, 2009; Guralnick, 2015). This is predicated on the essentiality of regular school attendance to pupils'

academic attainment and on the need for measures to be designed for encouraging pupils' attendance at the basic education level in Ogun State, in particular and Nigeria in general.

The consequences of absenteeism from school usually extend beyond the four walls of the academic environment: it affects the pupils, the family and the society at large. For instance, pupils with low school attendance are at risk of non-completion of school, more health problem, low self-esteem, a greater chance of dropping out of school, and involving in criminal activities and antisocial behaviours (Rumberger, 2011). These are pointers to the fact that something tangible must be done urgently to address the problems associated with pupils' school absenteeism in Ogun State. Extant literature suggests that many of the available studies on school attendance problems typically address one or two variables relating to school absenteeism, e.g., influence of parental and community involvement. This suggests a paucity of research addressing the interplay of proximal bioecological systems and school attendance problems among basic education learners in Ogun State, Nigeria. It is against this background that this study investigated the link between bioecological proximal systems and school attendance problems among basic education learners in Ogun State, Nigeria. Ogun State, a state in South-West Nigeria is not an exception. Nevertheless, the peculiarities of Ogun Waterside and Abeokuta South Local Government Education Areas of the state make a study on proximal bioecological systems and school attendance problems in Ogun State quite compelling. Apart from the ethnic peculiarities of the inhabitants who are mostly the Ijebus, Egbas, Ikaes, Ilajes, and Egbados, it would be observed that such proximal bioecological processes as culture, parental influence, and socioeconomic conditions, among others tend to play significant role in the school attendance problems in the areas.

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between proximal bioecological systems and school attendance among lower basic education learners in Ogun State. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to: i) ascertain whether there is any correlation between learners' identifying characteristics and lower basic school attendance; ii) ascertain whether there is any relationship between learners' proximal mesosystem connections and lower basic education school attendance;

The null hypotheses generated and tested in this study are: i) There is no correlation between learners' identifying characteristics and lower basic school attendance; ii) There is no significant relationship between learners' mesosystem connections and lower basic education school attendance.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first is the introduction, then the literature review; the study methods, result and discussion; and last part is the conclusion and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Basic Education in Nigeria

In the recent years, the Universal Basic Education has gained an increasing interest across the globe for various reasons. One of the reasons is that education is amongst the most important factors that determine the increase of economic growth and development of a country (UNESCO, 2012). The Universal Basic Education (UBE) was launched on 30th September 1999, by Federal Government of Nigeria as part of the efforts aimed at providing functional education that comprises both the range of formal schooling as well as a wide variety of non-formal public and private educational activities to meet the learning needs of all groups of people (FME, 1999; Ige, 2020). Basic Education has been clearly highlighted by various international policies as an important foundation for further learning and development of children, irrespective of gender, socio-economic status and place of residence (UNESCO, 2011). The importance of promoting universal basic education across the world led to the organisation of a conference for the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) (UN, 2015).

School Absenteeism

In school today, absenteeism is one of the most important dimensions of school attendance confronting the educational institutions, especially at the basic education level. Zubrick (2019) categorized school absentee into five dimensions namely: truancy, absenteeism, dropout, expulsion, and mobility. Balfanz, Herzog and MacIver (2007) were of the opinion that chronic absenteeism is most prevalent among low-income students because these students often face economic challenges and may lack ability to pay their school fees timely and to meet other school financial obligations. Globally, reasons for school absenteeism vary greatly depending on peculiarities of the individuals (Melvin, Heyne, Gray, Hastings, Totsika, Tonge and Freeman, 2019). A careful review of extant literatures (e.g., Namrata, 2011; Jimoh Abdulkadir, Ahmad, Mansir, and Abubakar, 2015; Kearney, 2016) suggests that a broad range of proximal, individual, parental, familial, and environmental factors are implicated in absenteeism and school attendance problems. These factors include but are not limited to students' physical and mental health (Allison and Attisha, 2019), family and neighbourhood socio-economic status (Mingat, 2007; Evangelista de Carvalho Filho, 2008; Gottfried, 2014; Jimoh Abdulkadir, Ahmad, Mansir, and Abubakar, 2015), family functioning (Carless *et al.*, 2015), parent mental health (Bahali *et al.*, 2011), school climate (Hendron and Kearney, 2016), and social norms and practices (Prakash, Beattie, Javalkar, Bhattacharjee, Ramanaiik, & Thalinja, 2017). For instance, learners may be absent due to anxiety about being away from parents or being amongst other children at school; difficulty with school work or disinterest in learning; because parents keep a child at home; family transport problems; an illness or medical appointment; and the school's exclusion of learner engaged in problematic behaviour at school (Melvin, *et al.*, 2019).

School Attendance and Universal Basic Education

School attendance holds significant implications for the Universal Basic Education which, in the recent years, has gained an increasing interest across the globe for various reasons. Basic education is the first stage of compulsory education that children acquire during the first nine years of leaving home for schooling, coming between early childhood education and secondary education (FME, 1999). Basic education has specific goal that meets the special needs that children have. The importance of promoting universal basic education across the world led to the organisation of a conference for the World Declaration on Education for All-(EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015).

For the goals of basic education to be realised, regular attendance to school is very important, especially during educational activities or academic studies. However, it may be difficult for a child to achieve the goals of basic education in the face of persistent school absenteeism as well as low or non-school attendance. Non-school attendance or absence from school jeopardizes children's and adolescents' education and their social and emotional development. Non-school attendance is the persistent, habitual, unexpected and unexplained absences from school of a child of compulsory school age. It results from excused or unexcused absences from school by a child (Reid, 2005).

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

The study adopted a correlational research designs. Generally, the population for the study comprised all the 65 and 43 primary (basic) schools in Ogun Waterside and Abeokuta South Local Government Education Areas respectively; 5,345 and 5,724 basic 1-3 pupils (herein otherwise referred to as learners); all the 177 and 247 class teachers of basic 1-3 classes in Ogun Waterside and Abeokuta South Local

Government Education Authorities respectively, as well as all the education stakeholders and community representatives in Ogun Waterside and Abeokuta South Local Government Education Areas of Ogun State. Specifically, the target population includes all primary schools in Ogun Waterside and Abeokuta South Local Government Education Areas. The sample of the study consisted of two hundred and fifty one (251) participants who were chosen from 21 basic schools in Ogun Waterside and 21 schools in Abeokuta South Local Government Education Authorities. In each school selected, three lower basic education classes (that is basic 1-3) were identified and involved in the study. In each class, 2 male and 2 female school absenteeism prone learners were purposively selected with the assistance of the head teachers and the teachers, using the information available from each of the sampled class attendance register. Each of the teachers involved in the study was purposively selected on the basis that they were the ones teaching the lower basic classes involved in the study.

Three research instruments were used to elicit needed information, which were subsequently scored to obtain useful data for the study.

Data collected through the questionnaires were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis 1: Learners' identifying characteristics do not significantly correlate with lower basic school attendance.

Table 1: Learners' identifying characteristics and lower basic school attendance

<i>Pearson correlation between learners' identifying characteristics and lower basic education school attendance</i>	
Pearson correlation coefficient	0.77
Significance value (F)	0.0035
Type of correlation	Positively Strong correlation
α	0.05
Criterion for significance	$F < \alpha$
Significance of correlation	Significant
Null Hypothesis	Rejected

The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.77$) between teachers' and pupils' responses on the impact of the individual identifying characteristics on school attendance indicates that there is a strong positive correlation between them since the value of r is greater than $+0.50$. Also, since the significance value (i.e. $F = 0.0035$) meets our criterion for significance (i.e. $F < 0.05$), the correlation is significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no correlation between learners' identifying characteristics and lower basic education school attendance would then be rejected. This implies that there is a strong correlation between learners' identifying characteristics and lower basic education school attendance.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between learners' mesosystem's connections and lower basic education school attendance in Ogun State.

Table 2: Learners' mesosystem connections and lower basic school attendance in Ogun State

<i>Pearson correlation between learners' mesosystem connections and lower basic education school attendance in Ogun State.</i>	
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Pearson correlation coefficient (r)	0.94
Significance value (F)	0.00057
Type of correlation	Positively strong correlation
α	0.05
Criterion for significance	$F < \alpha$
Significance of correlation	Significant
Null Hypothesis	Rejected

The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.94$) between teachers' and pupils' responses on the Mesosystem on school attendance indicates that there is a strong positive correlation between them since the value of r is greater than $+0.50$. Also, since the significance value ($F = 0.00057$) meets our criterion for significance (i.e. $F < 0.05$), the correlation is significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between learners' mesosystem connections and lower basic education school attendance in Ogun State would then be rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between learners' mesosystem connections and lower basic education school attendance in Ogun State

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study showed a strong positive correlation between family structure and pupils' school attendance. This result underlines the importance of the family structure as a key determinant of parental support. It corroborates Dukuly's (2000) observation that a child from polygamous home, especially where such is troubled, is usually insecure, disturbed. Many psychologists believe that neurotic incapacities and difficulties in studies are on the increase and are attributable to the failure of the family, individuals, with basic and indispensable emotional satisfaction. If childhood experiences are severely disturbed, it may reflect in social malaise and poor learning outcomes. Also, the result implies that there is a significant relationship between learners' mesosystem connections and lower basic education school attendance. This finding further buttresses socio-economic status as a significant variable in learners' school attendance. This finding further underscores the assertion by Abasi (1995) that children from high socio-economic class tend to perform better in some areas like verbal, spatial and mechanical aptitude than children from lower socio-economic status. It also corroborates the study by Abasi (1995) which indicated that children from high socioeconomic class tend to perform better in some areas like verbal, spatial and mechanical aptitude than children from lower socioeconomic status. Family's socioeconomic condition is, therefore, powerfully associated with children's educational development (Duncan et al., 1998).

CONCLUSION

In this study, an attempt was made to examine the relationship between proximal bioecological systems and school attendance problem among lower basic education learners in Ogun State. Although the study primarily focused on learners (pupils) and teachers' opinions on the relationship between proximal bioecological systems and school attendance, The research maintained transparency, communicability and coherence in the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation. The study has been able to establish that bioecological processes such as learners' identifying characteristics, mesosystem connections (with school, community, etc); indirect environment (e.g., parents' workplaces); the chronosystem (including social and cultural values), and the chronosystem (changes over time, including socioeconomic conditions) positively strongly correlate with learners' school attendance in the study area.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings and the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Efforts should be made to constantly appeal to and orientate using multimodal means, all parents - active and potential- on the need to become more involved in their children's education and school activities. Such parental involvements would go a long way in boosting children's academic achievements.
- ii. There is a need for more advocacies especially at the individual, family, school and community level on the need for community to engage in a number of ways with the school to support the pupils' school attendance in the communities.
- iii. There should be greater focus on family education to reduce the incidents of divorce, separation and other emergent family structure challenges that are significantly affecting children's school attendance and, by extension, academic achievement and overall wellbeing.

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