

POVERTY AMONG TERTIARY INSTITUTION STUDENTS: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE (A STUDY OF NASARAWA STATE POLYTECHNIC LAFIA)

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ABSTRACT

The quest to acquire higher education has greatly increased in recent time in Nigeria. Education is seen as a means of escaping from poverty and at the same time, poverty has also pose a challenge/limitation or hindered many from acquisition of qualitative education. In order to ascertain the influence of poverty in tertiary institutions, this study seeks to identify the prevalence of poverty among students generally with particular reference to Nasarawa State Polytechnic students, Lafia. The methodology adopted descriptive survey which involves the use of structured questionnaire for the collection of information on the level of total students' consumption expenditure and other socio-economic characteristics, which might influence the occurrence of poverty in one way or the other. A sample of 120 respondents was selected using purposive sampling method and data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study reveals that there is prevalence of poverty among students of the polytechnic, and this affects more male students than female students which also influence their academic performance.

Keywords: poverty, tertiary, institutions, students, gender

1.0 Introduction

Education is described as an instrument “par excellence” for national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2004). This implies that for Nigeria as a nation to attain a

sustainable development in its economy, polity and technology, its citizens must be educated. It is through education that intellectual knowledge, technical skills and expertise as well as moral and spiritual values of the society develop and regenerate itself. The bedrock of development of every nation (Fafunwa, 1991) is anchored on education.

Education can lead to poverty and hunger reduction, because it increases employment opportunities by empowering the people to contribute to their nations' economies through meaningful participation and this have increased the quest to acquire tertiary education in Nigeria. However, education is seen as a means of escaping from the scourge of poverty and at the same time, poverty has also pose a challenge or hindered many from acquiring qualitative education. Poverty in this context is measured relatively in terms of the minimum levels of basic needs in a particular community. These basic needs are used in categorizing students into absolute poor or relatively poor.

Tertiary institutions students have recently emerged as a group of people caught in poverty trap. In order to ascertain the incidence of poverty in tertiary institutions, this study seeks to identify the prevalence of poverty among students generally and influences on gender with particular reference to Nasarawa State Polytechnic Students, Lafia.

2.0 Statement of problem

Education is a means through which people can liberate themselves from all forms of barrier to employment, leadership positions and a means to better standard of living. Investing in education and training means empowering the under-serviced citizens. However, it seems that poverty is standing as a stumbling block or hindering acquisition of qualitative education. The basic needs that are necessary to enhance students' education have been deprived by reason of poverty. The

income dimension of poverty defines poverty as a situation of low income or low consumption. Hence, students are counted as poor when their measured standard of living in terms of income or consumption below the poverty line and this invariably affect their academic performance and quality of education they have access to. Several students of tertiary institutions were unable to complete school for lack of funds, while others were expelled for failure to pay school fees on time. Many have no comfortable accommodation for learning and are unable to feed while in school.

3.0 Research Questions

The following questions have been set to guide the study:

1. What is the impact of poverty among Nasarawa State Polytechnic students; ability to pay school fees?
2. Is there any gender difference among students in meeting their living expenses at school?
3. Are there any strategies that both male and female students can use in coping with incidence of poverty?

4.0 Purpose of study

The central concern of this study is to explore the implications of poverty among tertiary institutions students using Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia as a case study. The study is also aimed at understanding gender differences as regards incidence of poverty among students.

The specific objectives include the following:

1. To study the impact of poverty among Nasarawa State Polytechnic students; ability to pay school fees

2. To find out, if there are gender differences in meeting their living expenses at school
3. To find out the strategies used by both male and female students to cope with poverty at school.

5.0 Conceptual Framework

Poverty can be defined as an extreme state of social and economic deprivation. It is a situation where an individual or household fails to attain and maintain a specific level of well-being which is considered as the acceptable minimum standard of living in a given society (Tamande, 2003). Townsend (1979) considers poverty as the lack of those resources that are necessary to permit participation in the activities, customs and diets commonly approved by society. To Mack and Langsley (1985), those people classified as poor are those who are excluded from the way of life most people take for granted. Thus poverty is a condition that relates to the absence or scarcity of requisite substances or elements.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1996) identified three types of poverty viz: absolute poverty, relative poverty and material poverty. Absolute poverty refers to a condition whereby a person or groups of persons are unable to provide for physical subsistence to the extent of being incapable of protecting human dignity. It implies lack of food, clothing, shelter, potable water, health services, basic education, public transportation and work. Relative poverty connotes the deprivation of some people in relation to those who have, “it is universal and inescapable, even in rich societies, and there are still some who live in relative poverty. It depends on the values and benchmark of living that any society sets; those who live below it are poor” (Nnoyelu, 2007). Material poverty on the other hand implies lack of ownership and control of physical assets such as land, house etc (Gbor, 2008).

What seems important, then, is people's relative standard of living. Resentment of poverty is probably more common among the poor in a wealthy nation than it is among people who have an absolutely lower standard of living in a poor nation. Relative rather than absolute poverty was given as the reason for this difference. When Grant (2004), carried out a research on student poverty, using live experiences of University of Queensland, they defined poverty as a situation where students combine employment with study due to financial difficulties.

6.0 Methodology

The methodology adopted descriptive survey which involves the use of structured questionnaire for the collection of information on the level of total students' consumption expenditure and other socio-economic characteristics, which might influence the occurrence of poverty in one way or the other. A multi-stage random sampling method was used to select respondents for this survey. This is possible using the sampling frame which was received from the polytechnic. In the 2014/2015 academic session when the data were collected, a total of 4,122 students registered as new students out of about 6000 admitted (Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Academic Office, 2015). It is important to note that all the five schools namely, (School of Administration and Business Studies, School of Basic and Remedial Studies, School of Environmental Studies, School of General Studies and Pre-ND and School of Science and Technology) were sampled for the study in order to have a representative sample. The second stage involved a random selection of two departments in each school for the study. In doing this, a list of all departments in each school was obtained and arranged in alphabetical order. Thus in all, a total of ten (10) departments were selected. A sample of 120 respondents was selected, this was achieved by randomly selecting twelve (12) students (six males and six females) from each of the ten departments to allow for equal representation.

Information was sought from the sampled students on both quantifiable and non-quantifiable factors affecting income and students expenditure pattern using structured questionnaire which indicate whether there is an incidence of poverty or not. These factors, inter alia include income and employment, study expenses, living expenses and health.

7.0 Result of Findings and Data Analysis

In order to facilitate an understanding of the different experiences of students in various areas, the results have been organized around six focused categories in alignment with the model utilized by Grant (2004). The four categories of results are: Income and employment; Study expenses; Living expenses and Health.

Information on socio-economic characteristics of parents of respondents can be seen on Table 1. With reference to the educational level of the parents, the table shows that 25% of the respondents' fathers had higher education as against 16.6% of the respondents' mothers. In addition, 37.5% of fathers had secondary education as against 29.2% among their mothers. The table shows that majority of parents were not educated or has low educational attainment.

The data on parents' marital status show that 20.8% of the parents were living together (married), 22.5% were separated; 31.7% were divorced, while 25% were widowed. Furthermore, 55.8% of the respondents' parents were living in rural areas while 44.2% were living in urban areas. Information on the economic status of parents shows that majority of the students (68.3%) were from low income families; 23.3% were from medium income families, while only 8.3% were from high income families. In addition, 12.5% of the students claimed to have come from families where parents have 1-4 children; 54.2% from families with 5-9 children while 33.3%

were from families of 10 and above. Most students were from large families, they were just one of several siblings.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by their Parents' Socio-Economic Background

Parents' socio-economic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Fathers' highest level of education		
None	15	12.5
Primary	30	25
Secondary	45	37.5
Higher	30	25
Total	120	100
Mothers' highest level of education		
None	35	29.2
Primary	30	25
Secondary	35	29.2
Higher	20	16.6
Total	120	100
Parents' current marital status		
Living together (married)	25	20.8
Separated	27	22.5
Divorced	38	31.7
Widowed	30	25
Total	120	100
Parents' place of residence		
Rural	67	55.8
Urban	53	44.2
Total	120	100
Parents' economic status		
Low income	82	68.3
Medium income	28	23.3
High income	10	8.3
Total	120	100
Parents' number of children		
1-4 children	15	12.5
5-9 children	65	54.2
10 and above	40	33.3
Total	120	100

Source: Field survey, August 2015

Table 2: Classification of Students by Income Group/Month

Income Group #	Male %	Female %	Total %
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Less than #2000	20	5	12.5
2001 – 4000	31.7	20	25.8
4001 – 6000	20	25	22.5
6001 – 8000	16.7	21.7	19.2
8001 – 10000	8.3	15.2	11.7
Above 10,000	3.3	13.3	8.3
Total	100	100	100

Source: Field survey, August 2015

The table shows income groups from less than #2000.00 per month to above #10,000.00. In each groups, the frequencies of both sexes were identified. In order to identify the poor and the non-poor, we used #8,000.00 per month as our poverty line. Therefore, any student that earns less than #8,000 is assumed to be poor and living in poverty. As shown in the table, fifty-three male students earn less than #8000, while (43) forty-three female students fall within this group.

Table 3: Classification of Students by Employment with study

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	28	68.3
Female	13	31.7
Total	41	100

Source: Field survey, August 2015

Out of the total sample, forty one students are engaged in one employment or the other. Others are either not working or have decided not to disclose their status. However, in relative terms, more male students (28) are combining employment with study while only 13 female students are in the same category. What could be deduced from this is that it was possibly the inadequate capability that made them take up jobs to supplement their incomes.

Table 4: Classification of Students by access to course materials

Mode of Access	Male %	Female %
Buying	33.3	66.7
Borrowing	58.3	33.7

Unable to buy nor borrow	8.3	0
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, August 2015

Table 4 reveals that, 33.3% of male students and 66.7% of female students could afford to buy course materials. This shows that more female students were able to buy course materials of different kinds (books, literature, lecture notes, photocopying etc) while male students find it more difficult. 58.3% of male students could not afford to purchase course materials and as such, resolved to borrowing from their colleagues. However, 8.3% of male respondents could neither buy nor borrow.

Table 5: Classification of Students by Late-Registration

Late-Registration	Male %	Female %
Early Registration	28.3	46.7
Late Payment of fees including payment during Examination	71.6	53.3
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, August 2015

Still under study expenses, the result from the survey reveals that majority of students pay late registration even though there are more male than female as represented by 71.6% to 53.3%. This shows the extent of poverty among students of the polytechnic.

Living expenses

In this study, “living expenses” is defined as expenses on accommodation and transport.

Table 6: Classification of Students by Accommodation

Type	Male %	Female %	Total	Percentage
Flat	1 (1.7)	4 (6.7)	5	4.2
Self-Contained Room	2 (3.3)	10 (16.7)	12	10

Single Room	10 (16.7)	22 (36.7)	32	26.7
Boys Quarter	18 (30)	12 (20)	30	25
Sharing Room with Friends	29 (48.3)	12 (20)	41	34.2
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Field survey, August 2015

Table 6 shows the classification of students by accommodation. A type of accommodation is flat, which accommodates just 4.2% of the total sample. Out of this, only one male student and four female students could afford a flat. For a self-contained room, a total of 12 students, representing 10% of the sample. Only two male students and ten female students could afford this type of accommodation. The third type is single-room. The frequency of students who could afford to rent a single room for him/herself alone is 26.7% of the sample. The female students dominate this category with 22 of them having the ability to afford this type of accommodation. For boys' quarters, the frequency of male and female students is 18 and 12 respectively. The last type of accommodation is a room that is shared by 2 or more students. A total of 41 students representing 34.2% of the sample, are in this category. Out of this, 29 of them are male, while only 12 are female.

Transport

In order to capture this area, the respondents were asked whether they, at one time or the other, had to trek from the school to their various residences because of financial difficulty. The frequency is shown in table 7.

Table 7: Classification of Students that have trekked from the Campus to their Residences regularly

Sex	Yes %	No %	Total
Male	55 (91.7)	5 (8.3)	60
Female	58.3 (58.3)	25 (41.7)	60
Total	90 (75)	30 (25)	120

Source: Field survey, August 2015

As shown in table 7, 75% of the sample disclosed that they had trekked from campus to their various residences on a regular basis. Out of this, 91.7% are of male respondents while the female students represent 58.3%.

Health care has been identified as a major concern of the respondents. Deferring health care was a prominent theme among the students. In order to measure how poverty or financial difficulty has affected their health, students were asked what steps they would take if they suddenly fall sick. Their responses are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Responses of Students on steps to be taken if they suddenly fall sick

Responses	Male %	Female %	Total	Percentage
Visit the school/nearest clinic	10 (16.7)	12 (20)	22	18.3
Apply self-medication	20 (33.3)	30 (50)	50	41.7
Drink herbs	10 (16.7)	0 (0)	10	8.3
Defer it till I get back home	20 (33.3)	18 (30)	38	31.7
Total	60 (100)	60 (100)	120	100

Source: Field survey, August 2015

From the table above, 18.3% of the students would prefer to visit the nearest or school clinic, while 50 students representing 41.7% would apply self-medication. 10 students (8.3%) would prefer to take herbs and 38 students represent 31.7% would defer it till they get back home. The above result reveals that 20 male students (33.3%) would defer medical attention because of financial difficulties, while 18 (30%) would act the same way.

Conclusion

From this study, an insight has been provided into life experiences of students of the Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia. Poverty has made it difficult for parents to pay school fees for their wards and children. It could be observed that more male students live below poverty line based on the yardsticks that were used to measure poverty incidence. These include; income and employment; study expenses; living expenses and health. In view of these difficulties in meeting all these basic needs by students (both male and female) even though it appeared that male students suffer more, it will adversely affect their performance and the possibility of completing their education.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study and in order to avert the negative consequences of poverty among students, the researchers suggest the following:

1. Adequate funding of education in the forms of bursary allowance, loans, and grants should be provided by the government.
2. Increasing education's share in the budget of the three tiers of government and a proper monitoring.
3. Hostel accommodation should be provided in a subsidized rate in order to make them affordable.
4. Removal of all policies that are inimical to education in a developing country like Nigeria. For example, tuition fees should be abolished.
5. The school curriculum should be more flexible in such a way to allow combining studies with employment where applicable. This will help poor students to cope better.
6. Tertiary institutions should create jobs where indigent students could work part-time on hourly basis.
7. Administrators and Lecturers should desist from extortion and several acts that may bring untold hardships on students.

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