



Economic Insecurity and Academic Performance Among Modern-Day Nigerian University Students

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Abstract

The lamentation, 'students don't read anymore' is increasingly becoming prevalent on the lips of teachers, school administrators and other academic players. This statement is obviously a fall out of the generally deteriorating students' performance in their academic endeavors as seen every year in the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC), the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME) results as well as the Low Cumulative Grade Points (CGP) in tertiary institutions. Although economic insecurity expresses itself in many fronts, this paper considers basically two of its indices which include; food insecurity as well as poor accommodation in relation to students' academic attainment in Nigeria. The functionalist theory was deployed to build a framework while the descriptive survey research methodology with the use of questionnaire was adopted. Samples were sourced purposively and with the aid of the snowballing technique. The findings show that the two identified variables of economic insecurity impede academic stardom. The study recommends that Government should invest adequately in education to cater for quality and sufficient accommodations in our public schools as well as free quality feeding for the sake of the poor.

Key words: *Academic attainment, Economic insecurity, functionalist theory, poor feeding, poor housing*

Introduction

The reality of economic insecurity in Nigeria which is largely a function of an ailing economy is undeniably growing worse by the day particularly among the proletariat population of the nation. For instance, the Nation maintained the 163rd position in the United Nations Human Development Index ranking between 2020 and 2021 (Bailey, 2022). Also, the world bank as at 2020 put unemployment rate for men at 46.4 per cent and 40.6 per cent for women (Mboho, 2021)

Economic security is defined as the ability of individuals, households or communities to cover their essential needs sustainably and with dignity (International Committee for Red Cross (2015). Going by this definition, economic insecurity will mean the inability of individuals, households, or communities to cover their essential needs sustainably and with dignity. This dimension of insecurity finds expression in food insecurity, poor housing, poor hygiene condition, poor health seeking behavior etc. (Latunji & Akinyemi 2018; International Committee for Red Cross, 2015).

Public school students who are a largely dependent population are not at all immune and in fact are one of the most vulnerable groups to the fall out of economic insecurity of sponsors as their resources are mostly dependent on the incomes of those they depend upon. Among students are classes on the basis of economic conditions which is largely a reflection of the economic status of their sponsors. Hence, we have the class of the rich students who have much more money to lavish after meeting their basic financial needs. This group consist of students who live in 'palatial' accommodations, drive in posh cars, often travel by flight, and sometimes dressed in flashy wears. However, the class of the average students are just able to meet their needs, and the financially poor students struggle to eat, pay fees and basically squat with friends due to their inability to afford an accommodation. As it is in the mainstream society, the first group are usually very few, the second group are usually more and the poor group are usually much more in number. The class of the third is so overwhelming that they mostly represent the face of the university student.

Furthermore, and probably most common, is the fact that students are stratified on the basis of academic performance which refers to the measurement of students' achievement across various academic subjects. Students performance is measured usually using Grade Point Average (GPA) (Ballotpedia, nd) and Cumulative Grade Points Average (CGPA) at the end of sessions. For certificate exams like West African Examination Council (WAEC), and Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) the scores and grades are simply used to measure. For instance, the annual rate of failure of mathematics from 1991 to 2018 have been well over 50% except in 2005 where it dropped to 46.20 % (Test Development Division, West African Examination Council Lagos as cited by Zalmon & Wonu, 2017). In 2012, only 38% got the required five credits and above in the MAY/JUNE WAEC and only 29.17% passed the 2013 November-December WAEC. Similarly, in 2017 and 2018, less than 27% and 18% passed respectively with required 5 credits (Lawal, 2018). Similarly, National Examination Council (NECO) recorded 90% failure in 2011 and about 84% failure in 2010(Life Learners, 2020).

In the same vein, UTME examinations have not shown good performance of Nigerian students generally. Lucky (2020) observed that in 2020 for example, whereas just 275,206 had 200 and above, more than 1,352,988 scored between 199 and 120 in a 400-mark examination. To buttress this observation, the spokesperson of JAMB, Dr. Fabian Benjamin noted the 2021 UTME exams recorded low score similar to what has been obtainable in other years (Idako, 2021).

One of the surprising observations is that these failures are occurring in the midst of high level of examination malpractice in the nation. Life learners (2020) for instance, noted that about 51% of private and public schools, colleges, exam centers and universities in Nigeria were involved in

examination malpractices from 2005 to 2011. Also, about 53% of staff (teaching and nonteaching), students and principals of private and public schools as well as some colleges are involved in this academic crime (Life Learners, 2020).

Among the factors that scholars have identified as influencers of academic performance are economic factors such as parent's income level, social factors like parents' level of education, textbook factors, teachers' factors, library status and truancy (Brew, Nketiah & Koranteng 2021). Masud, Mufarrih, Qureshi, Khan, Khan, & Khan (2019) added peer, motivation, parental support, parenting style, as well as environmental factor as other potent influencers of academic outcomes of students.

One may also find a connection between academic performance and a certain degree of comfort arising from an average accommodation and basic food supplies as they have both psychological and anatomical connection with the mental state of the Student. This is because the supplies (energy and nutrients) that the brain and the mind require for effective functioning are derived from both quality food and rest. Gomez-Pinilla (2008) cited in Burrows, Whatnall, Patterson & Hutchesson, (2017) identified some necessary micronutrients for brain development and functioning to include Omega 3, folate, and iron. Functionalist theory which portrays the individual as a system with interdependent parts that must work optimally for the entire system to thrive aligns with this argument.

This study is concerned with examining the relationship between economic insecurity and academic performance but in specificity, the paper will find out the role food insecurity and poor housing/accommodation on the academic performance of Nigerian students in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State Nigeria.

Problem of the study

The rate of failure among students in recent years have been so alarming in spite of the rising examination malpractice level in the country. High failure rate of WAEC, NECO and UTME remains a consistent decimal for over 20 years now. This situation is so bad that some graduates who obviously manipulated their ways through WAEC, UTME and the higher institutions, find it difficult to spell their names correctly and fill any simple form at Nigerian Youth Service Corps (NYSC) camps. This negative unfolding is occurring simultaneously with the deteriorating economy of the nation where students find it quite difficult to feed adequately, make basic increasing school payments and afford decent accommodation that can support studies. Even the alternative culture of night classes where students use the lecture halls to study at night is gradually eroding due to security reasons. University of Calabar management for instance as at the time of preparation of this manuscript had reportedly banned night classes on grounds of insecurity of their facilities. This situation sharply contrasts what was obtainable in the 1760s, 1970s and 1980s, where education in the nation was almost free with some incentives like free adequate feeding and commodious hostel accommodations with laundry services for all public university students were provided.

The rate of failure recorded particularly in ordinary level examinations have attracted considerable attention even among Law Makers. Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) as well as their counterparts in polytechnics have embarked on several industrial actions to get the government to revitalize the academic sectors. But nothing tangible has been done to improve the situation just as nothing appreciably is being done to boost the economic security of the populace. Also, other scholars as cited in this article have attempted to discuss factors influencing academic performance in the nation, but specific efforts at examining the possible connection between economic insecurity

with special focus on food insecurity and poor accommodation does not appear to have received necessary attention it deserves- Hence the need for this research.

Literature and Theory

Theoretical literature review

Food insecurity and academic performance among students

According to Okafor, Odo & Onodigbo (2020), a child that has good nutrition will increase in weight, focus better and therefore do better in academics. They observe further that dietary diversity translates into high academic performance implying that high dietary diversity translates into high academic performance. In the same vein, Morris, Smith, Davis, and Null (2016) argued that students with a grade point average (GPA) below 3.00 are more likely to experience food insecurity compared to those with a GPA more than 3.00. This argument must be anchored on the prevalent belief that diet affects students' mental aptitude, and that inadequate macro- and micro-nutrients undermines students' ability to concentrate. Gomez-Pinilla (2008) cited in Burrows, Whatnall, Patterson & Hutchesson, (2017) posited that micronutrients such as folate, iron, and omega 3, play crucial roles in brain development and functioning. Corroboratively, Healthy food choice in schools (2019) citing Chenoweth (2007) opined that deficiencies in other vitamins and minerals, specifically thiamine, vitamin E Vitamin B, iodine and zinc have been shown to inhibit cognitive ability and intelligence level of students. Burrow et.al (2017) argued also that the brain requires significant amount of energy to function optimally. The associations between higher consumption of nutrient rich foods such as fruits and vegetables and lower consumption nutrients poor foods such as junks could then be explained by higher intake of essential micronutrients. In addition, the association of consuming breakfast and regular meals with higher academic performance could be that more frequent and regular eating occasions provide a vehicle for the delivery of these nutrients as well as adequate energy to fuel cognitive function (Murakami & Livingston, 2016)

Food insecurity according to Andrew, Ndiyo, Ugo, and Nwagbara (2021) have negative consequences for good health. A weak or sick student surely cannot not effectively participate in necessary academic rigor and as such is likely to obtain very weak grades at the end of the term or semester. Also, students who are extremely food insecure might be engaged in "side hustles" to survive and to make ends meet. This will in most times, compete seriously with their commitment to their academics as the tendencies to miss lectures and submit assignments late will increase. These arguments agree with extant studies which according to Wilder Research (2014:2) have demonstrated that "nutrition affects students' thinking skills, behavior, and health, all factors that impact academic performance".

Voluminous researches according to Lampion (2012) specify that children living in penury and are at high risk for cognitive impairment and lower academic achievement apparently because as expected, children of low socioeconomic status often do not have consistent access to sufficient food and therefore their brains are starved (for a short-term or long-term) of the energy and nutrients needed to function properly. Even after controlling for confounders, researches have established significant correlation between food insecurity and poor mathematics as well as reading performance; long-term food insecurity seems to amplify academic deficiency while on the contrary, becoming food secure reverses such deficits (Hollar, Messiah, Lopez-Mitnik, Hollar, Almon, & Agatston, 2010).

Poor accommodation and academic performance

Studies have shown that there has been enormous amount of housing inadequacy and dissatisfaction among students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, especially those owned by the government i.e. public institutions (Ajayi, Nwosu, & Ajani, 2015; Akinpelu, 2015). Although academic conduciveness was the original idea behind the construction of hostels within the first-generation tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the hostels today are far from being conducive partly because of the excessive pressure exerted by the increasing number of students gaining admission which according to Akinpelu (2015) results in the frequent breakdown of the sewage disposal system and unsanitary conditions of the hall of residence. These conditions Adama, Aghimien and Fabunmi (2018) noted is believed to have significant influence on the performance of students in affected institutions. The increasing number of students' population in the halls of residence also accounts for rowdiness of the environment which makes any serious academic venture a near impossible task. Owolabi (2015) hypothesized that when students live in accommodations where they lack access to resources such as computer and information technology, exercise facilities, and other extra-curricular activities their academic performance might be negatively affected.

Attaining adequate sleep and being physically active are particularly known to improve cognitive functioning and subsequently academic achievement (Castelli, Centeio, Hwang, Barcelona, Glowacki, Calvert & Nicksic, 2014). According to Ojua (2010) Erikson's Psycho-socio development theory suggest that the social circumstances of individuals influence the development of their internally existing emotional feelings which in turn determines their distinguishable personality nature. The type of accommodation students occupy is an environmental factor that can play a role in determining their emotional readiness to learn. A poor accommodation apart from depriving the student the opportunity for adequate rest may also facilitate the development of negative emotional feelings that may inhibit sound learning process and a good academic performance. In addition, living in an indecent environment predisposes one to frequent sickness which does not augur well for productive academic output.

Elger (2007) in his theory of academic performance proposed three axioms for effective performance namely; performer's mindset, immersion in an enriching environment and engagement in reflective practice. Real reflective exercise will necessarily require sustained attention enhanced by degree of serenity and this is scarcely achievable in poor accommodations where some students dwell.

Walberg's (1981) theory of academic achievement posits that psychological characteristics of individual students and their immediate psychological environments influence educational outcome. His research identified nine factors that influences academic outcomes of student among which were, learning environment and home environment (Accommodation).

Empirical literature review

Food insecurity and academic performance

In a study conducted in south eastern Nigerian Universities, it was revealed that food insecurity rate among university students in south east Nigeria was 80.7% (Ukegbu, Nwofia, Ndudri, Nwakwe & Uwaegbute, 2019). As expected, the findings from high-income countries suggest that few university students are at risk of food insecurity. Instances of studies in Australia show estimates ranging from 12.7% to 46.5% and 39.2% in United States. Ajayi, Amos, Ajayi and Adenegan (2015) found a relationship between school children's food insecurity and academic performance.

Ahmad, Sulaiman and Sabri (2021) found that food security status was associated with academic performance. According to their study, only 11.4% of student found to be food insecure had a CGPA more than or equal to 3.7 with the mean being 3.42. This implies that about 89% of students found to be food insecure had CGPA of less than 3.7. Another study found that grade 5 students with less nutritious diets performed worse on a standardized literary assessment (Florence, Asbridge, & Veugelers, 2008). Kleinmana, Hallb, Greenc, Korzec-Ramirez, Pattonb, Paganoe, and Murphy (2002) in their study argued that children who reported low nutrient intakes had lower GPAs and higher rates of absenteeism and tardiness than children from the same schools who reported higher levels of nutrient and energy intake. Students who reported low nutrient intakes had more symptoms of hunger and psychosocial problems (by both their own and their parents' reports) than students with higher nutrient intakes. Perhaps even more importantly, students who increased their nutrient intakes after the start of a free school breakfast program were more likely to improve their nutrient intake status and academic and psychosocial functioning. Improved knowledge, skills, as well as partaking in food assistance programs were factors shown to improve of the provender security status of university students (Mukigi, Thornton, & Binion, et al. 2018 cited in Ukegbu, Nwofia, Ndudri, Nwakwe & Uwaegbute, 2019).

Poor accommodation and academic performance

Ajayi et al. (2015)'s assessment of students' satisfaction with hostel facilities within the Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria, shows that students were dissatisfied with the adequacy and functionality of some facilities within their hostels. Snyder et al. (2011) found no significant relationship between students' residence in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and their academic performance. In the same vein, Zortovie (2017) discovered no significant effect of accommodation type on the academic performance of students in Ghana. Similarly, Shoukat et al. (2013) observed that student's accommodation in Pakistan has no statistically significant effect on their academic outcomes.

However, on the contrary Owolabi (2015) averred that there is a significant relationship between students' residence and their academic performance in the university of Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria. Owolabi found a difference in the academic performance of students staying on-campus and those staying off-campus. According to the study, the former performed better than the latter in their academics judging from the CGPA. Adama, et al (2015) negated Owolabi with their findings which shows that the residence of students (either off or on campus) have no statistical relationship with their academic class. However, in consonance with Owolabi's findings, Onclin, (2014) noted that "tertiary institutions' involvement in accommodation would influence student success, student retention rates, and student satisfaction". Nimako & Bondinuba, (2013) also identified accommodation as an important factor that enhances tertiary students' living and learning and suggested that adequate accommodation facilities be provided to students so that they could make the most of their educational opportunity.

Functionalist perspective

Functionalism sees society as a complex system whose parts work harmoniously by performing specified but interrelated functions to promote social stability (equilibrium), progress and wellness of the entire system. The theory believes that the failure of any part of the system in performing its very essential function will destabilize or lead to the breakdown of the entire system. Some of her proponents include Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton and Herbert Spencer. For Instance, Parsons identified some system imperative which is referred to as Adaptation, Goal

Attainment, Integration and Latency (AGIL). For him, if any system must exist in the state of harmony that is, without upsetting challenges these four functions must be performed by different institutions (subsystems) of the society which he also identified.

Functionalism is often criticized from the standpoint of conflict theory which emphasizes dissensus of component parts of the society (Dahrendorf, 1976 as cited by Charles 2014:161). In this regard it can be argued that not all components of a social system actually work harmoniously. Sometimes harmony and progress may come as a result of disagreement or deliberate refusal of a component of a system to perform its function. A good example is the industrial actions that workers often embark upon to ensure that equilibrium and progress returns to a system. In spite of this weakness, the theory is considered apt for the study as obvious in its application below.

Applying functionalism to this study, would engender an argument that food as well as accommodation are components of a system (academics) which necessarily have functional roles that must be performed if the system (Academics) must stay alive and buoyant. Also, viewing the student as a system, the stomach where the food goes as subsystem and the body which enjoy the comfort as another subsystem. It could be argued that the body and the stomach must be in good shape through the necessary supplies for the brain to perform well since the brain depends on them for its own optimum functioning. Hence in situations of food insecurity and poor accommodation, academics might be affected negatively. Adama et al (2018) argued that this is because students need comfortable accommodation to be able to carry out their primary function in their institutions. Supporting this view is the theory of academic performance espoused by Elger (2007) and that of academic achievement by Walberg (1981). Elger mentioned immersion in an enrich environment as one of his three axioms for effective academic performance and Walberg identified home environment as one of influencers of academic achievement. A conducive accommodation is required because students who lack for instance: a reading table, lightening, electricity, good and accessible toilet, as well as a comfortable and accessible bed to sleep might be prone to a whole lot of psychological, emotional and physical strain that might undermine their academic possibilities. In summary, what affects any part of the body and its proper functioning will also affect the brain and the mind since they are interdependent part of the same system.

Also, the imperative of adequate food both in quantity and in quality for academic attainment have been stressed by Wilder Research (2014) who noted that nutrition affects students' thinking skills, behavior, and health. Implying that food insecurity is a threat to an enviable academic performance as it can weaken students' aptitude, make students misbehave and result in health breakdown all which portends for academic woes of her victims. Talking about students' misbehavior, a number of them have been observed and some of the possible offences a hungry student may engage in are truancy in search of money as well as cultism, recalcitrance, riot and vandalism as a reaction to the strain arising from lack. For instance, the recently recurring arson experienced in the university of Calabar (Felix, 2022; Obia, 2022) is suspiciously students' way of reacting to what they perceive as inhumane fee policies of the current university administration (Obia, 2022). Other forms of possible misbehavior include: thuggery, robbery and larcenous offences as criminal innovative means to meet basic needs (Andrew, 2017), drug use as a coping strategy for hunger (Bassey, 2022), examination malpractices which could take the form of cheating (because time and energy that would have been invested in studying have been compromised in search for daily bread), impersonation to earn monies to meet their provender and accommodation, as well as other needs.

Sharing the sentiments of critics of theory who contend that conflicts or challenges sometimes engenders progress equilibrium or wellbeing, the paper acknowledges that a few instances may exist

where students have succeeded overwhelmingly in the face of starvation and poor or no accommodation. Nevertheless, this paper pontificates that such cases are exceptional and not the usual and thus adopts the functional perspective as the framework for the study.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted for this research 460 university students from 300 level and above constituted the purposively selected sample due to the assumption that at this level they must have gathered sufficient experience required for reliable responses to the items on the self-administered questionnaire. The snowballing technique was also heavily relied upon to identify respondents as one student had to link researchers to other student colleagues. The research was carried out in Calabar Metropolis where survey was conducted between the month of March and August 2022. By this period, Academic Staff Union of University were on their 8 Months long strike which spanned between mid-February and early October 2022. As such, respondents which constitute students from University of Calabar, Cross River State University Arthur Jarvis University and a few from other universities were found at the hostels, sports viewing centers, churches, social gatherings, restaurants and football fields. Well-filled copies of retrieved questionnaire were collated and analyzed using the simple percentage and tables.

Findings, Analysis and Discussion

Table 1

Food insecurity and academic performance among students

Statement	Responses				Total
	Very True	Partially True	False	Uncertain	
When there is no food most students find it difficult to read and understand	447 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	447 (100%)
When food is lacking most students are discouraged from attending lectures	354 (79%)	86 (19%)	7 (2%)	0 (0%)	447 (100%)
Inadequate food intake often predisposes students to sickness which weakens academic output	402 (90%)	33 (7%)	6 (1%)	6 (1%)	447 (100%)
Self-sponsored students have little time left for their academics compared to those who are sponsored by others	353 (79%)	45 (10%)	49 (11%)	0(0%)	447 (100%)

Source: Field Survey 2022

From table 1 above, the whole 447 constituting 100 percent of the respondents answered in affirmative to the first statement which contends that lack of food makes it difficult for students to read and understand. 400 respondents constituting about 98 percent answered in affirmative to the second statement which suggests that lack of food discourages students from attending lectures while 7 respondents constituting 2 percent answered in the negative. Responses to the third statement which maintains that inadequate food intake often predisposes students to sicknesses which weakens their output academically show that 435 (97%) answered in the affirmative, 6 (1%) respondents answered in the negative while 6 (1%) were uncertain. Responses to the last statement on table 2 show that 398 (89%) of respondents believe that self-sponsored students have little time for academics in relation to students sponsored by others.

These findings are in consonance with the finding of Morris, Smith, Davis, and Null (2016) who argued that students with a grade point average (GPA) below 3.00 are more likely to have experienced food insecurity compared to those with a GPA more than 3.00. Also, the findings agree with Wilder Research (2014:2) which demonstrated that “nutrition affects students’ thinking skills, behavior, and health, all of which impacts on academic success.

Table 2

Poor accommodation and Academic performance

Statement	Responses				Total
	Very True	Partially True	False	Uncertain	
The need to queue up to use the restroom reduces the time students give into their studies	52 (12%)	271 (60%)	116 (26%)	8 (2%)	447 (100%)
epileptic power supply affects students' studies negatively	343 (77%)	99 (22%)	5 (1%)	0 (0%)	447(100%)
Students who live in rowdy accommodations may find it difficult to secure sufficient sleep	327 (73%)	107 (24%)	6 (1%)	11 (2%)	447(100%)
Living in poor accommodations may make one fall ill and then perform poorly in academics	105 (24%)	252 (56%)	41 (9%)	49 (11%)	447(100%)

Source: Field Survey 2022

Table 2 above focuses on statements which seek to illicit respondents’ opinion on poor accommodation and academic performance. The first statement bothers on the role general rest rooms as common in public school hostels play in stealing productive time from students. Responses as indicated above show that 323 representing 72 percent of the 447 respondents agree that the need to queue up to use the restroom reduces the time students would have invested in their academics. 116 representing 26 percent of the 447 respondents disagreed while 8 representing 2 percent were uncertain. Reactions to the second statement considering the impact of epileptic power supply another feature of poor accommodation on academics show that 442 representing 99 percent of the 447 respondents affirmed that the epileptic power supply affects negatively 5

representing 1 percent answered in the negative and none was uncertain. On the third statement, 434 representing 94 percent of the 447 respondents affirmed that living in rowdy accommodations inhibit the chances of having adequate sleep. 6 representing 1 percent responded in the negative while 11 representing 2 percent were uncertain. Finally, reactions to the fourth item show that living in poor accommodations may make one sick and thereby negatively affecting their academic performance.

These findings although having slightly different indices, agree with Owolabi (2015) who discovered a significant relationship between students' residence and their academic performance in the university of Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria. Also, the findings strengthen Adama, Aghimien and Fabunmi (2018)'s belief that conditions of accommodations have significant influence on the performance of students in affected institutions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The work focused on the student's economic insecurity and its impact on academic performance in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper considered how two manifestations of economic insecurity (food insecurity and poor accommodation) influence academic performance among students. The literature reviewed agreed that food insecurity among students inhibits their best academic performance while those reviewed on accommodation and academic performance exhibited contradictory stance- that is, some opined a relationship while others established no relationship between the two variables. However, the work from the stand point of functionalist theory and the field findings as analyzed above concludes that economic insecurity in general and food insecurity, as well as poor accommodation in particular undermine the academic performance of students.

On the basis of the position of this paper, the following recommendations are thus proposed:

1. There is need for the revitalization of the economy such that unemployment will be minimal. By this, guardians, parents and sponsors would be better positioned to supply the needed food and accommodations for the students they are responsible for.
2. The government should invest more in education to improve the quantity and quality of hostels in our public schools which should be given out to students with the Nigerian Nationality at no cost for the duration of their academic programs.
3. Free, quality and transparent feeding programs should return to our schools from primary to tertiary level for the sake of the poor. This will in no small measure help improve students' mental and physical health and eventually cascade into better academic performances.

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