Students’ achievements in secondary school subjects are of interest to researchers, educationists and parents alike. Correlates of academic achievements in secondary school subjects in many disciplines have been identified. For example, findings have shown the contribution of student factor, school factor and home environment to students’ achievements in various disciplines (Chacho, 1981; Touray, 1982; Odubunmi, 1983; Onocha, 1985; Umoinyang, 1999; Umoinyang and Okpala, 2001; Odinko, 2002; and Falaye, 2006). Socio-economic status of parents is one of them. Socio-economic status is viewed here as the social class the students’ parents belong to, high, average or low. Mulvenon, Ganley and Fritts-Scott (2001) carried out a study on the impact of socio-economic status (SES) on student performance in Arkansas. Specifically, they used the percentage of free and reduced lunch participation (%FRL) as a proxy measure of SES and to determine if SES was a predictor of student performance on the Fourth Grade Benchmark Exam. The result indicated that %FRL was a strong predictor of performance in the Fourth Grade Benchmark Exam.

Other authors (Woolfolk, 1998; Nwachukwu, 2002) admit that students’ socio-economic status has a profound impact on their attitudes and behaviours in school. Durojaiye (1976) studied the effect of some socio-economic variables on pupils’ academic achievements using socio-economic background, family size and parental occupation. The findings of the study were that children from poor homes performed badly in school because their parents could not provide them with the required texts and other necessary facilities that fostered learning at home and school; children from poor homes were often subjected to malnutrition problems and rarely afforded a balanced diet. Similarly, Banks (1991) found that the socio-economic status of the family influenced the academic achievement of a child. The findings also indicated that extreme poverty exerted a negative influence on school
achievement. Duncan, Featherman and Duncan (1992) studied children from professional workers, traders and shop owners, clerical and manual workers. Subjects were in three categories. The first group had 300 people under the high socio-economic status level. The second had 400 under low socio-economic level and the third comprised 160 people who were classified by the researchers as unemployed. The researchers analysed the opinion of the children from each group and discovered that each child expressed three forms of opinion which were categorised as the source of authority, its mode of expression and its efficiency.

The result of the study showed that children from high socio-economic background performed significantly better than their counterparts in the low socio-economic status class. In a similar study with 198 pupils in Scottish primary schools, Jennings (1995) concluded that children from a low socio-economic background learned to read with greater difficulty than those from a high socio-economic class. Adepoju (1996) discovered that malnutrition which is associated with the low socio-economic status affected school activities. The author asserted that balanced food and feeding habits helped the brain and an underfed child was always thinking about food even in the classroom. It was concluded that this affected the child’s concentration on the lesson going on in the class. Consequently, a child who is unable to concentrate cannot achieve a high academic performance. In the same vein, Esu (2000) contends that poor diet can retard a child’s growth or rate of development thereby affecting his or her academic achievement. According to Fan (2008) parents who are rich provide adequately for the physical and educational needs of their children. Children from such families have access to radio, newspapers and magazines, television, toys, libraries and other materials that stimulate learning: a desideratum for effective learning of social studies. Similarly, Ezewu (1983) submits that parents who take an interest in the education of their children go through their children’s books to assess their performance. Commenting, Apepende (2000) avers that in modern times, one’s socio-economic status tells the type of attitude the parents will have towards educating their children. That is, parents of high socio-economic status value education greatly and as such sponsor children’s education while children of low socio-economic status are made to engage in petty trading in order to earn income with which to pay fees and buy textbooks. Such children are likely to exhibit poor performance unlike their counterparts from high socio-economic status class.

Ngwu (2000) posits that when parents are economically depressed, basic necessities of life, including school needs, will be lacking. Children from such homes become aggressive with their peers in school, delinquency sets in and poor academic performances are exhibited. Etim (2000) avers that parents will facilitate teaching and learning by complementing the teacher’s work of supervising the child’s schoolwork after school hours. This will not be feasible if the socio-economic level of the parents cannot afford them the provision of books and other learning materials for their children, or if the parents are illiterate and belong to the low socio-economic status class where
they see no relevance in academic interaction between parents and children. The author points out that high achievers in school are usually children of parents who show lots of interest in their schoolwork and concludes that where parents play active roles in commending success and condemning failure, positive achievement motivation is generated in the children.

Iitsuokor (1991) puts it succinctly that children from educated homes tend to score higher than those from less educated homes on tests of intelligence and reading comprehension. In like manner, children of professionals, teachers and civil servants tend to score higher than children of traders and unskilled workers on such tests. The above phenomenon could be hinged on the parents’ ability or inability to provide for their children’s educational needs, apart from either being well informed or ignorant. This is corroborated by Nwachukwu (2002) who submits that children from high socio-economic families tend to perform relatively higher than their counterparts from low socio-economic status because they have many things that enhance academic achievements at their disposal unlike their less privileged counterparts. Slavin’s (1994) study clearly demonstrated the impact of social class on academic achievement. Students from various social strata achieved quite similarly during the school year. After summer vacation, children from poorer families lost much of their achievements. The author argued that the children from poor families were not exposed to a wide variety of learning experiences inside and outside their homes during the vacation. Ochuema and Esu (1999) studied the influence of home environment on pupils’ performances in English language in primary schools in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. It was hypothesised that family size, socio-economic status and parental educational attainment would have no significant influence on pupil performance. A sixteen-item questionnaire and a teacher-made test were administered to 200 randomly selected primary six pupils. Using the independent t-test and an analysis of variance, it was found that family size, socio-economic status and parented educational attainment significantly influenced academic performance of primary school pupils in Akamkpa Local Government Area. Obasi (1999), however, showed that socio-economic status of parents did not significantly influence students’ academic achievements.

The result of the hypothesis showed a significant influence of parents’ socio-economic status on students’ academic performances. Students from high socio-economic background outperformed students from average and low socio-economic backgrounds. A plausible explanation is that parents of high socio-economic status class have the resources to provide their children with all the required educational support materials such as books, pens, etc. Besides, the high class parents are capable of providing good living houses fitted with special study rooms. These provide the atmosphere for effective study which culminates in high academic performance. High socio-economic status parents also have the resources to provide variety in terms of food with rich nutritional contents as well as good clothing and general health care for their children. A well-fed child who enjoys good health is
likely to obtain a high performance in school. Besides, the high socio-economic status parents are conscious of the fact that good education is a status symbol and would therefore utilise their resources on training their children. The result is consistent with the findings of Mulvenon, Ganley and Fritts-Scott (2001), Nwachukwu (2000) and Adepoju (1996) who found that parents’ socio-economic status significantly influenced their children’s academic performances.

However, the result of this study is at variance with the findings of Obasi (1999). One wonders why Obasi found no significant influence of socio-economic status on students’ academic performances. This may be attributed to a faulty instrument used for data collection. This work maintains that parents’ socio-economic status has a significant influence on students’ academic performances in social studies. Lack of family cohesiveness is a factor underlying child abuse in Nigeria. Children from broken homes lack love and proper cultural socialisation. The cause of child hawking is poverty. Many families in Nigeria live below the poverty level with no gainful employment and no idea of the source of the family’s next meal. Children are therefore made to hawk goods along the streets, highways and the markets. They are also engaged in child labour such as bus conductors and carrying loads with wheelbarrows in the markets. They become sources of money to the families and providers in the families. Some parents fail to meet the children’s basic educational needs. A stimulating environment exists where parents are able to provide educational toys, reading materials, radios and televisions. It is recommended that curriculum experts should take into consideration the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of learners while designing the curriculum.

References


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