



## **Correlates of Disadvantaged Children and Literacy Achievements in Cross River State, Nigeria**

**B.U. Cornelius-Ukpepi, C.A. Agbor and R.A. Ndifon**  
*Berncornel@Yahoo.Com*

*Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Faculty of Education,  
University of Calabar, Nigeria*

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper investigated the correlates of disadvantaged children and literacy achievement in Cross River State, Nigeria. In order to carry out the study, 3 determinant factors of disadvantaged children which relate to children literacy achievement were identified. These factors include, group identity, family expectation and autonomy in thinking. These factors also formed the variables under study and were used in formulating the three hypotheses used for the study. The Ex-post factor research designed was adapted for study. The data collection instruments were a questionnaire titled Correlates of Disadvantaged Children Questionnaire (CDCQ) and a 20 item literacy achievement test. This questionnaire was administered to 120 students who formed the sample for the study. The data collected was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis at 0.05 level of significance. The result after analysis revealed that group identity ( $r$ -value= 0.72), family expectation ( $r$ -value=0.77) and autonomy in thinking ( $r$ -value=0.69) are significantly related to literacy achievement, since their calculated  $r$ -values were greater than the critical  $r$ -value of .178. It was therefore concluded that children are likely to achieve more when they are exposed and made to interact with others and also when parents provide the necessary support they need. Based on the findings, it was therefore recommended that children should be encouraged to interact with their peers at home or in school, and also parents should always provide the necessary support for their children's education. Also, both parents and teachers should encourage the students to think for themselves as a way of developing their own personal autonomy. This will help in enhancing their literacy achievement.

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

In Cross River State and Nigeria as a whole not all children have the opportunity of coming in contact with materials or resources that can help them develop their literacy potentials. These children due to where they come from or where they live lack access to renowned resource persons and materials for literacy development. It therefore becomes pertinent to identify

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those factors that may be responsible for the low or no development of literacy potentials in these children. These factors may be culturally, family or personally based.

Culturally, every child is deeply rooted in his/her own culture and community. Bowman (1993) observed that all children who live in the same community and share a culture are not identical. This implies that even within the same community children still differ because children's behaviour results from the integration of group mores with their own individual genetic and temperature characteristics. This usually shows in the way the children manifest themselves in their culture and this has some relationship with their literacy development and achievement in school.

According to Vygotsky (1978), in a teaching/learning process adults and children make meaning through interaction with one another. Children therefore internalized or reconstruct knowledge and skills as a result of social interactions with older people as well as through their actions. Adults in the community therefore help children in the process of social engagement to organize knowledge in ways that make sense.

Bowman (1993) opined that it is through social interaction that children learn to act, believe and feel in ways that are consistent with others in their community. But where the adults and peers are lacking, the interaction will not take place or may not be effective and the children concern will be lagging behind hence we have the disadvantaged children in our society. This is because it is through the group goals and objectives and the relationships, behaviours and practices recommended by family and friends internalized by a child that contribute to the child's definition of self. Group identity therefore is very important if an individual has to identify his/her self to be able to benefit from any school program and fit into the society. Bredekamp and Copple (1997) opined that children benefit from opportunities to collaborate with their peers and acquire a sense of being a part of a community. When children work with their age mates, they tend to acquire skills easily than when they are left alone. Wood and Wood (2002) in support of this view asserted that being in group influences our behavior and performance. Thus, we behave differently in a variety of ways when we are alone and when we are part of a group.

Also family expectations sometimes conflict with the literacy content and this can hinder proper literacy development in children most especially the ones tagged "disadvantaged children". For example Ellwood (1988) observed that the differences in rewarding certain attributes in the society are factors that can contribute to either high or low literacy achievement in children.

Many families Bowman (1993) believed that prejudice and discrimination prevent children's achievement in school and so often have quite different pictures of what children need from the others. This is because parents understand that the real world works according to rules and they become worried whether their children will learn the rules in less structured classrooms or not.

Some parents as opined further by the author, defeated by the schools themselves easily accept that their children will not learn well and as such lower their expectations for their children's performance. They therefore communicate to their children through their own lowered investment that school is not important and achievement is not expected. On the other hand, other parents, hurt by their interactions with the society, give their children the message "obey the rules but do not be engaged". This is just to help them defend themselves in a hostile society. But this normally conflict with the teachers' hopes and aspiration.

In a situation where the teachers and children share the same lifestyles and world views, and the same context invoke in them similar knowledge and understanding, it will be relatively easier to make meaning together. But where all these are dissimilar, teaching and learning become more difficult and children will achieve less in this situation hence teachers would not be able to tie new knowledge with what the children already had. Benneth (1995) found that children who experience conflict between home and school and those from low income families are often perceived as being disadvantaged, deficient, and lacking in ability to develop learning skills. These skills may be reading, writing or speaking skills.

If what children encounter at home is similar to what they are taught in school most especially in terms of oral English, availability of literacy materials, parents encouragement and others they would likely achieve more in literacy .In accordance with the above view, Wolfe(1992)maintained that disadvantaged children perform poorly because they lack the background knowledge that is perceived as essential to school success. Sharon-Darling (2004) asserted that when young children acquire literacy skills on time, their chances for later school success improves. Uwatt, Ndifon and Cornelius-Ukpepi (2010) affirmed that the environment in which a child grows has a great impact on the literacy skills development of the child. The authors further said that the family is the root of a child's early literacy experiences.

Another correlate of interest is autonomy in thinking. The disadvantaged children who have no access to quality resource materials for literacy development may find it difficult to construct their own knowledge from situations. piagetians believe that providing opportunity for children to construct their own knowledge from the data bank of their experiences will make the children more capable and autonomous thinkers.

According to Burts, Harts, Charlesworth, Fleege, Mosley and Thompson (1992) teachers often want to prepare children to think clearly for themselves rather than depend on adults for answers. They also expect children to continue to use many of the social roles that define acceptable behaviour, but most children have not learned at home what is acceptable to teachers. This may be because many children who live in low income communities do not have the luxury of protection and their world is often dangerous, with limited resources to take chances, at the same time adults are too tired and stressed to create artificial world for children to develop creative talents.

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This, Bowman (1993) said that when Children are encouraged to think and act for themselves they come up with ideas, language and behaviours outside the range expected by teachers or permitted by the school. This implies that when children are allowed to construct their own knowledge, they learn more effectively and achieve most especially in literacy which involves reading, writing and speaking.

The promotion of personal autonomy Winch (2006) has been identified as one of the principal aims of the philosophy of Education. If the education of a child is to be worthwhile, the child is to be provided with access to a wide range of choices and experiences at the same time given the rationale tools to evaluate these choices. This implies that, the child should be allowed to experience the consequences of his/her choices with minimal interference hence the adults are trying to uphold the child's autonomy. But where the child had little or no access to different choices and experiences, there is no how he/she can become autonomous. Broadening the child's awareness and exposing him/her to additional choices and experiences can enhance his/her personal autonomy. Winch (2006) opined that protecting the autonomy of a student is believed to encourage him/her to participate actively in thought and exploration rather than mere recipient of knowledge and ideas. A student with autonomy feels more free to experiment with new ideas but must take responsibility to ensure that his/her contributions have value.

#### **Statement of the problem**

Certain factors are determinants of children's achievement in school most especially when it pertains to literacy achievement. Some of these factors include group identity, family expectations and autonomy in thinking. Children generally are influenced by their peers and adult members of the society, but where the child does not associate with his/her peer group, siblings, adults in the community in order to identify properly, it may become difficult to acquire some skills because proper peer interaction could help in achievement in school. Furthermore, when the expectation from the family for the child's attainment in school is low, the child may tend to achieve less especially in literacy achievement. Also when children have no access to wide range of choices and experiences to learn from to enable them make informed decisions by themselves, they are likely to perform low in school.

Children in remote and semi-urban areas are often regarded as disadvantaged because they lack access to many experiences and family support to identify themselves, take decisions and construct their own knowledge. This may culminate in low or no achievement in literacy skills. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine correlates of disadvantaged children literacy achievement in Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The major purpose of this study was to examine the correlate of disadvantaged children literacy achievement in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether:

1. Group identity relates to literacy achievements of disadvantaged children.
2. Family expectations relates to literacy achievements of disadvantaged children.
3. Autonomy in thinking relates to literacy achievements of disadvantaged children.

### **Research questions**

1. What is the relationship between group identity and literacy achievement of disadvantaged children?
2. How does family expectations relate to literacy achievement of disadvantaged children?
3. To what extent does autonomy in thinking relate to literacy achievement of disadvantaged children?

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant relationship between group identity and literacy achievement of disadvantaged children.
2. Family expectations do not significantly relate to literacy achievement of disadvantaged children.
3. Autonomy in thinking does not significantly relate to literacy achievements of disadvantaged children.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Research design and area of study**

The research design adopted for this study was the ex post-facto research design. The reason for use of this design was that the variables under study are not manipulable because their manifestations have already occurred. In other words, the researchers do not have control over the variables. The area of study was Cross River State, Nigeria. Cross River State comprised 18 local government areas and it is stratified into 3 educational zones.

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### **Population of the study**

The population of the study comprised all the JSS1 students in the study area. The total number of the students according to SUBEB (2010) was 27,245 with 18541 males and 18704 females. The sample was drawn from this figure.

### **Sampling Procedure and Sample**

The stratified random sampling technique was adopted since the state is stratified into three educational zones, the Northern, Central and the southern zones. However, the central educational zone was used and the simple random sampling technique of hat & draw method was adopted to select students from 10 schools .30 students respectively were selected from each school. The sample of the study thus comprised of 120 students.

### **Research Instruments**

Two instruments were used for data collection. The first instrument was a questionnaire titled, Correlates of Disadvantaged Children Questionnaire (CDCQ). The questionnaire was made up of three sections A, B, & C. Section A measured group identity, B measured family expectations and C measured autonomy in thinking. It was a four point scale with the key as shown thus:

AT- All the Time

MT- Most of the Time

ST- Some of the time

NA- Not at all

The second instrument was a 20 item literacy achievement test. The two instruments were face validated by an expert in the area of measurement and evaluation

## **RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

Three research questions were formulated and converted to hypotheses and tested. The result is as follows:

### **Hypothesis one**

The hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between group identity and literacy achievement of disadvantaged children. To test the hypothesis, respondents scores on literacy achievement was correlated with their scores on group identity using Pearson product moment correlation analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in table 1.

**Table 1:** Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between group identity and literacy achievement of disadvantage children (n=120).

Variables		EX	EX <sup>2</sup>	EY	EY <sup>2</sup>	EXY
r-VALUE						
Group identity	2178	5344				
Literacy achievement	2531	6465	74635	0.72		

\* Significant at .05 level, critical r=df=118.

The result in table 1 showed that the calculated r-value of 0.72 is higher than the critical r-value of .178 at .05 level of significance with 118 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between group identity and literacy achievements of disadvantaged children was rejected. This implies that group identity significantly relates with literacy achievement of disadvantaged children.

### **Hypothesis two**

Family expectations do not significantly relate to literacy achievement of disadvantaged children. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was employed to test this hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in table 2.

**Table 2:** Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between family expectation and literacy achievement of disadvantaged children. (N= 120).

Variables		EX	EX <sup>2</sup>	EY	EY <sup>2</sup>	EXY
r-VALUE						
Family expectations	2165	5338				
Literacy achievement	2531	6465	76272	0.77		

\*Significant at .05 level, critical r=.178, df= 118.

The result in table 2 revealed that the calculated r-value of 0.77 is higher than the critical r-value of .178 at .05 level of significance with 118 degree of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis that, family expectation do not significantly relate to literacy achievement of disadvantaged children was rejected. This implies that family expectation has a significant relationship with literacy achievements of disadvantaged children.

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**Hypothesis three**

Autonomy in thinking does not significantly relate to literacy achievements of disadvantaged children. The independent variable involved in this hypothesis is autonomy in thinking while the dependent variable is literacy achievement. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was used to test the hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in table 3.

**Table 3:** Pearson product moments correlation analysis of the relationship between autonomy in thinking and literacy achievement of disadvantaged children (N=120).

Variables		EX	EY	EX <sup>2</sup>	EY <sup>2</sup>
Autonomy in thinking	2294	5809			
Literacy achievements	2531	6465	77363	0.69	

\*Significant at .05 level, critical r=.178, df=118

The result in table 3 indicated that the calculated r-value of 0.69 is higher than the critical r-value of .178 at .05 level of significance with 118 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis that autonomy in thinking does not significantly relate to literacy achievements of disadvantaged children was rejected. This result means that autonomy in thinking has a significant relationship with literacy achievement of disadvantaged children.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

From the findings, the result of the first hypothesis showed that there is a significant relationship between group identity and literacy achievement of disadvantaged children. This implies that students who interact and identify with their peers in either debating clubs, readings groups or quiz competitions achieve more in literacy than those who do not. This finding is supportive of Bowman (1993) who maintained that it is through social interactions that children learn to act, believe and feel in ways that are consistent with others. The finding is also in consonance with Vygostky (1978) who asserted that in a teaching/learning situation, adult and children make meaning through interaction with one another.

The result of the second hypothesis revealed that family expectations have a significant relationship with literacy achievement of disadvantaged children. This implies that the expectations parents or other siblings have about children can enhance their literacy achievements. This finding lend credence to Ellwood(1988) who observed that difference in rewarding



certain attributes is a factor that can contribute to either high or low literacy achievement in children. The findings further supported Benneth (1995) who found that children who experience conflict between their home and school are lacking in ability to develop learning skills. This finding is also supportive of Uwatt et al (2010) who maintained that the environment in which a child grows has a great impact on the child's literacy skills development.

The analysis of the third hypothesis revealed that autonomy in thinking significantly relate to literacy achievements of disadvantaged children. This shows that personal autonomy is the key to children's active participation in thought and exploration of ideas. This finding is in line with Bowman (1993) who said that when children are encouraged to think and act for themselves, they come up with ideas, language and behaviours outside the range expected by the teachers or permitted by the school. The finding further supported Winch (2006) who maintained that protecting the autonomy of a student is to encourage him/her to take active part in thought and exploring ideas rather than mere recipient of knowledge and ideas.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that when children are exposed, made to interact with others, and parents have high expectations for them by providing the necessary support, they are likely to achieve more in school. Also when they are encouraged to think and act for themselves, they may improve in their literacy achievement in school.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

1. Children should be encouraged to interact with peers either at home or in the school in order to be properly identified.
2. Parents should provide the necessary support for their children's education and expect more from them irrespective of what they as parents experienced earlier in life in order to stimulate to study.
3. Both parents and teachers should encourage students to think and act for themselves so as to develop personal autonomy.

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