

# THE RELATIVITY OF SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

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## ABSTRACT

This article is based on assessment of factors affecting youth's access to higher education in Kogi State, Nigeria. It analyses both quantitative and qualitative data involving 120 youth (respondents) in the survey; six focus groups (10 participants in each session) and 20 in-depth interviews making a total of 200 participants (100 females and 100 males), aged 18 to 28. The study illuminates the different social factors and contexts that were influential on youth's access to higher education.

Evidence from findings in the study suggested that youth are confronted with various contradictory norms and social constraints with respect to their gender, economic status and relational positions in gaining access to higher education. This apart, the youth were constrained in many ways that were often in conflict with other expectations widely held in their religious communities. For instance, contrary to the social and religious norms within the local context of the youth that encourage youth to attend formal education up to higher educational level, the existing gender norm limits female access to higher education. The study concludes that socio-cultural factors played an essential role in youth's access to higher education while limited economic resources had a major impact on their educational pursuit.

Accordingly, the article recommends the need for resources to be reallocated to introduce free education and subsidy at higher educational level. It also suggests the need for more research on youth's access to higher education through the voices of youth themselves and studies that attend to the contexts of what implicated on access for youth's education.

**Keywords:** access, higher education, youth, Nigeria, Africa

## INTRODUCTION

In the world today, education is generally conceived as a basic necessity of life (Mwenda and Mwenda 2013). Education has been empirically proven and universally acknowledged to play

a critical role in the continued survival, growth and development of a nation (Ahmed 2015; Ogunniyi and Dosumu 2014; African Higher Education Summit 2015). Based on this global recognition of education as an essential social context, a considerable attention has been directed by various governments and international bodies towards the participation of individual particularly young people who are indisputably the future of any nation.

For Africa, education has been recognized as an essential drive for effecting development in the continent or to reduce or totally eliminate poverty (Asiyai 2013). However, access to basic and secondary education appeared to have increased over the past decades (UNESCO 2002; 2013b). Studies have revealed that there has been little attention on improving access to school at higher institution levels (Frempong and Mensah 2012). For instance, the Dakar summit on 'Education for All' in 2000 was advocated towards increasing enrollment in primary education as a leading instrument for economic growth, with no recognition of the place of higher institution (Tilak 2003). This may probably be owing to earlier studies which have found no positive relevance of higher education to economic growth or poverty reduction (Tilak 2003).

However, as opposed to the early perception, recent empirical and non-empirical studies from developmental perspective have persistently revealed that higher education has numerous economic benefits both at private and public domains (Bloom, Hartley and Rosovsky 2006; Asiyai 2013). Significantly, higher education serves as an instrumental force to achieving social, cultural, intellectual, economic, and political development of any nation (Republic of South Africa 1997). For instance, a recent report asserts that Africa records the highest level of return to investments in higher education with about 21 per cent (State of Education in Africa Report 2015). It has further been argued that higher education holds the potential for nurturing the less developed economies and attainment of equitable level of development for the marginalized and socially disadvantaged groups (State of Education in Africa Report 2015).

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (NPE) which articulates the specific goals for instituting higher education has been a major area of focus (Olujuwon 2002, 2). Part of the goals of NPE was that higher education would enhance both physical and intellectual skills that would enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of their society. It was also envisioned that higher education would assist individuals' capacity to contribute to national development through generation of high level of manpower trainings that would inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and the society. Similarly, higher education is viewed capable of assisting country's economy to generate higher tax revenue, savings and investment, improve technology, nation's health as well as leading to a more entrepreneurial

and civic society (Bloom, Hartley and Rosovsky 2006).

As can be argued, one of the ways to achieve these developmental promises that higher education holds is through the empowerment of young people's capacities in terms of facilitating their access to higher institutions of learning to produce a set of educated and skillful workforce that would contribute positively into the development of their nations (World Bank 2002; Boughey 2011). Moreover, with globalization, there has been increasing demand for skilled workers that would accelerate development of a new culture of information technology and effective delivery strategy for their society to become a part of the global village.

However, despite the overwhelming recognition and concerns often expressed on many aspects of young people's lives across different societies especially as it relates to their access to formal education, only a few studies have attended to the link between the multiple factors and the various contexts that influence young people's access to higher education. Also, while there has been a proliferation of research on the high incidence of drop outs and non-enrolment of young people in school in African countries particularly among the Nigerian populace, only a few existing studies have focused on asking young people themselves on the effects of poverty and culture on their educational attainment. Even the research that attends to important areas such as the determinant factors on young people's enrollment and dropping out of school often focuses on the psychological aspects or the views of parents, teachers and other stakeholders (Osakwe and Osagie 2010; Morcke et al. 2012; Mhele and Ayiga 2013; Eweniyi and Usman 2013; Mucee et al. 2014; Rahbari et al. 2014).

Against the above-mentioned background, this study presents a socially and culturally situated study of how young people's access to higher education can be constructed within their local context. By examining young people's access to higher education through the voices of young people themselves, this study will also explore other relational positions such as the effect of poverty on young people's access to higher education in Kogi State, Nigeria.

## **THE STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA AND NIGERIA**

Higher education which is also referred to as post-secondary or tertiary education is an education system which consists of Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of education and professional or specialized institutions (Federal Ministry of Education 2004). In Sub-Saharan African countries, higher education has been recognized as the pre-requisite for an investment in human capital and economic development for both African young people and the entire society (State of Education in Africa Report 2015). As further argued, higher education has increased the rates of employment opportunities and job prospects, improved quality of life,

economic growth and development (State of Education in Africa Report 2015). Despite these tremendous benefits attached to higher education in Africa, the numbers of people that have access to enrolling in higher institution are still limited.

Enrollment rates in higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa are by far the lowest in the world. Although, the gross enrollment ratio has increased in the past decades, as at 2015, only 6 per cent of young people in sub-Saharan Africa are enrolled in higher institutions compared to the global average of 26 per cent (State of Education in Africa Report 2015). More worrisome is the fact that many countries in Africa are struggling even to maintain these low enrollment levels. For instance, in Mozambique, despite low enrollment ratio, the country is confronted with challenges of overcrowding campus, and poor quality of courses. These apart, the high cost of tertiary institution suggest that many potential candidates from poor socio-economic background cannot enroll. Consequently, less than 3 per cent of total staff in national public administration has attended higher education (UNESCO 2006).

Similarly, in Nigeria, the higher educational sector is confronted with multi-facet problems such as poor funding, brain drain, unstable curriculum, poor infrastructure, lack of sufficient academic staff in most federal and state higher education leading to overcrowding in lecture halls with statistics showing an average of 50 per cent more students per professor (Asiyai 2013; Iruonagbe, Imhonopi and Egharevba 2015). These aforementioned challenges and many other problems confronting higher institutions in Nigeria has hindered many young people from gaining admission into higher institutions especially University education which is viewed as bedrock or citadel of learning and most admirable for most people that determine to attend a higher education institution (Aluede, Idogbo and Imonikhe 2012). Furthermore, it is also significant to mention that apart from the University education system, other higher institutions have emerged which is of increased demand in the country.

In a study conducted by Esomonu and Adirika (2012), it was observed that the available universities are still relatively few compared to the population of eligible candidates. This apart, the differences in tuition among the federal, state and particularly private universities coupled with poor socio-economic status of many Nigerian families and poor academic performance were all identified as major barriers to accessing higher education in Nigeria (Esomonu and Adirika 2012).

Another study conducted on need to ascertain access to higher education in Nigeria revealed that out of the total population applying for higher education admission in Nigeria between 2003 and 2012, only candidates between 13.12 per cent and 26.52 per cent succeeded in gaining admission to either Universities, Polytechnics or Colleges of Education, while a high

number of 73.48 per cent to 86.88 per cent are denied admission to enter either of the higher institutions (Kpolovie and Obilor 2013).

Similar to the observed trend, Aluede, Idogbo and Imonikhe (2012) have reported that only candidates between 5.2 per cent and 15.3 per cent gain entry to University education in Nigeria with the denial of over 90 per cent of those seeking access to study further argue that several factors attributable to the poor access to higher education which include inadequate public financing, economic constraints, poor infrastructural facilities and challenges relating to curriculum delivery (Aluede, Idogbo and Imonikhe 2012).

## **SOME DETERMINANT FACTORS INFLUENCING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

Much research have identified some determinant factors that may facilitate or discourage access to formal education among different age groups in their specific context (Evans 2002; Egwunyenga and Oyeabo 2004; Nakpodia 2010; Olaniyan 2011; Abdukarim and Ali 2012; Dichaba 2013; Aliyu 2015). However, there has not been an extensive research through the voices of young people themselves on the effects of socio-cultural context on their access to school especially to higher institutions of learning.

In a study that reveal the perceptions of parents on factors that determine girl-child' access to formal education in northern part of Nigeria. Eweniyi and Usman (2013) found that, one of the major social factors that shape access to education for a girl-child is parental religious orientation. Most parents expressed their fulfilment in adhering to their religious obligation which entails denying their female children access to western education. Similar findings have also been reported in a study by Bagudo (2007) on assessment of girl-child education in Sokoto State, also in northern Nigeria. Due to parental religious beliefs and love for Qua'ranic education for their children, Bagudo observed that female children were restrained from attending formal school. This was coupled with the fear that formal education may expose their children to other religious orientation, western values and teenage pregnancy (Bagudo 2007; Eweniyi and Usman 2013).

Observably, studies have found that there is a close link between economic status and access to school. For instance, in a study conducted in the Eastern part of Nigeria, Onyeka (2013) observes that a number of young men were dropping out of school in pursuance of prosperous business. As this study observes, a number of young men could not complete their secondary school education while some who could do not attempt seeking entry to higher degree due to the notion that they would find it easier to accumulate wealth as young

businessmen. However, as Onyeka (2013) concludes, many of the young men in this setting do not become successful business men due to lack of adequate skills and literacy level that higher education would have imbued on them.

In a related study that examined key determinant of school drop-out in Uganda, Mike, Nakajjo and Isoke (2008) identify parental educational status as key determinant to young people's access to school. The study observes that parents with high academic attainment are most likely to facilitate access for their young adults and prevent them from dropping out of school than the non-educated parents.

A similar study was conducted in Nigeria to reveal the socio-economic and educational attainment of parents as instrumental to their children's access to formal education. Through a critical review of existing literature, Kainuwa and Yusuf (2013) reported that parents' level of education, occupation and income act as dominant influence on parents' attitudes towards their child's education which also determines the level of support they provide for their children. It was observed in the review that parents with relatively high socio-economic status and educational attainment often facilitate their children's access to school, and encourage their completion and achievement of higher educational goals.

Also in a Kenyan Study, Mucee et al. (2014) examine the socio-cultural factors that influence students' access to secondary school in Tharaka south sub-county of Kenya. Through the survey of the opinion of teachers, principals, and head teachers in this region, the study found that family size, gender preference, parental educational attainment and social class are major influences that determine young people's access to school in this region. It was revealed that majority of parents in this setting are from large families (with 5–8 children) with limited economic resources. This led to preference for male children's enrolment in secondary school with a number of parents involving their children in income generating activities. Also, given that only one per cent of parents in this region had higher educational attainment, they lacked the capacity and social status to ensure the retention of their children's enrolment in school or to facilitate their entry into higher education.

In a more recent report by the National Literacy Statistics, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2013a) reported an overall literacy of Nigerian young people to be 51 per cent. As can be observed, Nigeria remains the most populous nation in Africa with an estimated population of 167 million people of which women constitute more than 50 per cent (National Population Commission 2011). Despite the influence of modern values, empirical evidences suggest that several factors have continued to widen gender gap, and subjugate women to inferior and marginalized positions. For instance, among the young

population, from ages 15 and above, a report states a gender disparity between the male and female status, of which the literacy rates are 61.38 per cent for males and 41.4 per cent for females. Similarly, for adult population of ages 15–24 years, literacy rate is found to be 66.4 per cent for males and 58.0 per cent for females (UNESCO 2013a). This observed gender discrepancy has resulted in the violation of women's social, economic and cultural rights, and their denial of human rights as full Nigerian citizens.

More recently, Osagiobare, Oronsaye and Ekwukoma (2015) examine various ways in which religious and cultural beliefs have impacted on girl-child education in six area councils – Areas of the Federal Capital Territory – Abuja. It was affirmed that literacy rates among young women have remained low due to the cultural interpretations and negative meanings attributed to females' access to education. Consequently, a number of girl-children from this region were found in circumstances or victims of early marriages, poverty-stricken conditions and mainly occupied with domestic duties of which they are culturally constrained (Osagiobare, Orosaye and Ekwukoma 2015).

Taken together, the above studies illuminate different ways in which certain factors such as socio-economic situation and practices may constrain young people's access to higher education. However, a major criticism of the literature reviewed above is that most of the studies were conducted among stakeholders in relation to young people attending primary, secondary schools and tertiary institutions. This study provides insights from the perspectives of both in school and out-of school young people in order to explore the disparities and similarities in their experiences and factors that impacted on their access to higher education within the Nigerian setting.

## **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF BOURDIEU**

The explanatory framework of Pierre Bourdieu was found relevant in analyzing the limitations experienced by young people in gaining access to higher education. Bourdieu's notion of social capital is explicitly focused on the social contexts that produce and reproduce dominant class in the capitalist societies. Social capital is explained in terms of individuals' ability to sustain and utilize one's social networks as resources to move up to a higher social hierarchy (Bourdieu 1986). In furtherance to Bourdieu's analysis, it has also been argued that habitus forms a powerful medium through which cultural capital are constructed, shaped and reproduced. In this sense, cultural capital is described in the form of non-monetary assets, a particular stock of knowledge and competencies acquired through educational knowledge/credentials, familiarity with cultural history or specific cultural practices which are found expressed in one's

behaviours, thoughts, class relations and practices (Bourdieu 1986; Bennette and Silva 2006).

As Bourdieu (1990) further argues, there are three states of cultural capital: the first is the embodied cultural capital which explains the way individuals display their educational attainment through language, dispositions, and communication of knowledge, lifestyles and thus develop their characters and relationships. The second is the objectified cultural capital which takes the form of cultural goods that are acquired by individuals. This consists of physical objects such as works of arts (painting), books, dictionaries, and machines/instruments that can be transmitted in exchange for monetary benefits or acquisition of highly prestigious status which can further enable/ facilitate individuals to possess symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1979; 1990). Thirdly, the institutional form of cultural capital as discussed by Bourdieu (1990) explains the different patterns of institutional recognition and educational qualifications acquired by the individuals. These include academic success, certificates of competencies, diplomas etc. In sum, the major argument behind cultural capital is the fact that it embodies or generates practices that established social hierarchies in a given context (field) across societies. One of the major criticisms of the Bourdieuan's perspective is that it overwhelmingly focuses on economic and class conflicts and ignores the possible absence of class struggle/ power relations in social relationships. Another important limitation identified is the fact that Bourdieu's theory is viewed as elastic. For instance, only young people with rightful connections (such as those from wealthy background) are viewed as those who can access more social capital. It flouts the possibilities that the less privilege may also benefit from their social ties. Despite the above criticisms, however, Bourdieu's view of social, economic, cultural and symbolic forms as instrumental to acquisition of capital offer a useful contribution. Such an understanding is essential to this study, as it focuses on the social and cultural systems that shape young people's access to higher education in African and particularly in the Nigerian context.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This section describes the methodological framework that informed the selection and application of research methods for this research. Essentially, given that the present study assumes that young people's access to higher education are informed by the social and cultural values, attitudes and beliefs within Nigerian local contexts and particularly Kogi State. The epistemological underpinning of this study recognizes the importance of cultural and social values as a process embedded in the social system in which young people's access and life choices in general are being shaped. While purposive and snowballing sampling methods were



utilized in selecting participants for the in-depth interviews for the in-school young people, the purposive sampling was employed among the out of school to select the age range of 18 to 28 for the study. The locations of the fieldwork/research are specifically Kabba (being a town), Okene (a town) and Lokoja (being a city), all in Kogi State, a North-Central region of Nigeria. Kogi State is one of the 36 states that make up Nigeria (See Map of Nigeria showing Kogi State being the study areas. The consent of the institutions concerned was sought and a formal approval letters (gatekeepers' letters) was obtained before conducting this research. This exercise enabled the researcher to meet with the potential participants for the questionnaires, individual interviews (in-depth interviews) and the focus group discussions (FGDs). In each of the institution, the FGDs were undertaken in two sessions: males' and females' session. The researcher ensured a relaxed atmosphere in which they could freely discuss the topics for the study. In all, 120 questionnaires were administered to respondents that were selected for the survey, six focus groups (10 participants in each session) and 20 FGDs making a total of 200 participants (100 females and 100 males), aged 18 to 28.

**Table 1:** Demographical variables of the respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	100	50.0
Female	100	50.0
Total	200	100.0

In terms of gender representation in the study, respondents were equally distributed. In the survey, a total of 60 males and 60 females, making a sum of 120 participated in the survey. It was found necessary to include an approximate number of males and females in the sample to avoid the domination of opinion over each other.

The defined study population consisted of young people aged 18 to 28 who are currently in one of the higher education institutions within the study area.

**Table 2:** Characteristics of study population by age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18–21	110	55
22–25	67	33.5
26–28	23	11.5
Total	200	100.0

From Table 2, it can be observed that just over half (55%) of the respondents were between the ages 18 to 21 and about a third (33.5%) are between the age ranges of 22 to 25, while the remaining 11.5 per cent of respondents were between the ages 26 to 28 years. This wide range age distribution of respondents suggests that the study is well represented in terms of age.

## DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

In assessing the various factors that impacted on young people's access to higher education within the study, the following research questions are listed in Table 3 together with the responses from the qualitative data.

**Table 3:** Factors that impacted on young people's access to higher education

Variables	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)
Are there financial supports you received from government of your or other agency to achieve higher degree?	0.0	96.7	3.3
Are your parents directly responsible for your funding/sponsor?	69.2	30.8	0.0
Has the financial support been consistent and adequate for you?	31.7	67.5	0.8
Would you say that financing your education is a concern to you?	87.5	11.7	0.8
Do you think that your financial status is affecting your academic performance in a way you don't like?	81.7	18.3	0.0
Do you have siblings or other relatives that could not attend higher institution due to financial hardship?	68.3	31.7	0.0
Would you have preferred to be in another school if not for financial reasons?	89.2	10.8	0.0
Have you been involved in economic generating activities while in school in order to raise money for your schooling?	60.8	39.2	0.0

From Table 3, it will be noted that almost all respondents (96.7%) indicated that they do not receive any form of financial assistance from either private or public institutions. It can be further observed that parents are the main sponsor (69.2%) for most young people within the study. When similar questions were posed to participants in the FGDs and IDIs, their narratives further confirm that parents are the sole providers for their children's education. The following comments affirm the statistical findings:

... even though I work for people to make additional money ... I still depend on my Dad for tuition and feeding allowances ... the money I make on my own only cater for my clothing, transport within school and some other small expenses ... (IDI, in-school: male, aged 24).

... we have a big shop where my father repairs shoes, umbrella and stuff like that ... that's what we rely on for our upkeep and schooling ... (IDI, in-school: male, aged 21).

... none of us here are under any social benefits or government funds ... we only rely on God and our parents and money from our hustling ... (FGD, In-school: male, aged 23).

Previous studies have affirmed that Nigeria's latest population figure is about 167 million people which make Nigeria the seventh most populated country in the world (Ololube and Egbezor 2012). The continuous increase in Nigeria's population has been recognized to have placed pressure on the natural and financial resources of the country which limits the extent to which government can implement policies that would assist poor youth (Adedokun and Oluwagbohunmi 2014). One of the implications of the above findings is that the lack of financial support experienced by young people could exert negative influences on them

resulting in frustration and challenges.

Having established from the findings that parents are the major source of funding for young people, the study further probed whether the financial support from their parents was consistent and adequate. While only 31.7 per cent of respondents indicated that they were satisfied by parental funding, more than two thirds (67.5%) in the survey reported that they were not having consistent and adequate funding from their parents. In the case of the latter 87.5 per cent of the respondents they viewed financing their education to be a major challenge. Concomitantly, a number of young people in the FGDs and IDI lamented about the pressure they undergo in relation to funding their higher education. This economic strain experienced by respondents is elucidated in the following statements:

... well, we even thank God that we are able to make it to be in school ... but many of us are just struggling to survive on campus ... but we know that God will see us through ... (FGD, in-school: female).

... ah it's not funny o ... last week my dad sent me some money, but I still need more to make up ... I'm even trying to ask money from my Uncle ... (IDI, in-school: female, aged 25).

It becomes clear from the above excerpts that many young people acknowledged that they were undergoing financial strain in meeting up their needs while in school. One of the implications of economic difficulties encountered by young people is that they may become vulnerable to dropping out of school or having low academic performance. This can be most observed in Nelson Mandela's assertion that, education is the gateway to personal development and a major process through which 'the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the president of a great nation' (McCullum 2005, 1). However, such an assertion by Mandela becomes problematic among young people in the present study as most parents cannot afford to train their young ones for higher education due their poverty-stricken economic condition. Moreover, scholars have also established that in spite the progress made in advancing educational system in Nigeria, socio-economic status play a major determinant in the unequal distribution of access to education among different social classes in Nigeria (Maqsud 2011).

A further analysis of the findings suggests that young people face different levels of constraints due to economic factors. In particular, a considerable number of respondents (68.3%) attest to the fact that some of their relatives or siblings could not negotiate their way to higher institutions of learning as they were economically constrained. Also, the accounts of young people in the FGDs and IDIs revealed how participants recalled their relatives and peers dropping out of school resulting in some not making an attempt to seek admission into higher education institutions due to financial constraints:

... most parents want their children to be great, as in to get good job, become a doctor, lawyer and the rest ... but most times their wishes for us seem to be cut short when it comes to money ... (FGD, in-school: male).

... one of my cousins that we were both planning to be in same school is now doing tailoring, because her parents couldn't sponsor her to the higher education ... (IDI, in-school: female, aged 26).

These excerpts exemplify the accounts of young people both in the FGDs and IDIs on the ways in which financial constraint have limited their peers, siblings and relatives from gaining access to higher education. Even though the young people generally view higher education as giving them a sense of pride and strong identity, these findings confirmed that many young people might be left within the same circle of poverty as argued in the works of Lewis (1969). One could observe from this finding that many parents who are economically constrained could not afford the cost of financing their children in higher education. A major implication of such condition is that such parents of low economic status may transfer such values to their next generation since education is generally recognized to guarantee a brighter future for youth or as a way out of poverty (Ucha 2010; Adedokun and Oluwagbohunmi 2014).

Another remarkable account drawn from the young people's responses on financial constrain was whether they would have preferred to be enrolled or admitted into another higher institution other than that in which they were studying. Unsurprisingly, 89.2 per cent of the respondents indicated their preference for another form of higher institution which they believed was more prestigious and of greater quality than that in which they were studying. Similar responses were made in the FGDs and IDIs where a number of participants commented that they preferred private higher institutions as compared to public ones which have relatively a stable academic calendar and better infrastructure. The following narratives demonstrate circumstances that constrain their choice of higher education:

... ah, even me I left the university admission due to financial problem ... I couldn't afford the school fees ... (FGD, in-school: male).

... not easy at all ... the money for University education is higher than what I'm paying here ... I made a choice to be here to avoid financial frustration ... at least I can still get a job with the certificate I'm pursuing now ... (IDI, in-school: female, aged 23).

... I made a choice of coming here because two years of obtaining ND certificate, I'll be able to work for some times and save enough money before proceeding for HND certificate ... but you know university education is run at a stretch so you don't have long break to do serious work ... (IDI, in-school: male, aged 28).

The above comments constitute a common explanation from the young people regarding their economic capacity as a major influencing factor on their choice of pursuing higher education.

However, despite the general view of higher education especially university education which is the bedrock or citadel of learning and most admirable for most people (see also Aluede, Idogbo and Imonikhe 2012), this study affirmed that the low socio-economic background of many young people in this setting act as a major barrier to their enrolment and retention in the university education system. Additionally, existing studies have demonstrated that the differences in the cost of attending higher educational institutions varies from federal, state and private universities particularly when considering many Nigerian families are of poor socio-economic status (Esomonu and Adirika, 2012). In the same vain, other studies across Africa have found that the working and lower class young people are more likely to attend government schools than attending private universities compared to their peers from families with greater access to economic resources (Goldrick-Rab and Fabian 2009).

Even though a number of young people from this study could not make informed decisions to attend their desired choice of higher educational institution, a further probe on the extent to which poverty have affected them revealed that a considerable number of them had to combine schooling with income generating activities. This is particularly true since a number (60.8%) of respondents from the survey show that in-school young people had at one point in time engaged in various types of income generating activities for their survival. Participants' accounts in the FGDs and IDIs illustrate how young people were economically constrained and had to negotiate access to higher education through their involvement in economic activities and other sources that could generate monetary rewards for them. The following responses are representative of most participants.

... many times we do businesses that fetch us money while on campus ... some do different part-time works like barbing, photography, plating of hairs, *okada* rider, tailoring and so forth ... so we don't wait for our parents to fix everything from their little incomes ... (FGD, in-school: female).

Unm ... as a young boy I'm very responsible and committed to anything I want to achieve ... since I decided I wanted to go to school I started *okada* business (motor cycle) for transportation on commercial basis ... even though it's a risky business ... it helps me to raise some money before I got the admission that got me here ... (IDI, in-school: male, aged 26).

... I plate hairs for other students and they pay me in return ... I use this money to settle my hands out and other small expenses ... (IDI, in-school: female, aged 25).

Yeah ... I decided to go into modeling about 2 years ago ... I model for some companies and they pay me very well ... the only problem I have is timing of their events because sometimes they want me to come when I should be in school ... it clashes a lot with my lectures and sometimes my exams ... many times I also work with advertising agencies to showcase some products for different companies ... that's how I make some money ... (IDI, in-school: female, aged 25).

As observed in the above excerpts, young people in this setting were engaged in different economic activities to support their schooling and material needs. Such accounts, especially

those of young people that engage in businesses that conflict with their lecture hours, and other ad hoc jobs they embark upon demonstrate the level at which the participants were economically disadvantaged or affected by the poor economic status of their parents. Moreover, the cases of young females engaged in activities such as modeling and tailoring often clash with their lecture hours further provide an understanding of the impact of poverty on the educational achievement level of respondents. Importantly, one could then argue that such local economic realities appear to have significant implications on their psychological wellbeing. For instance, a particular young male on campus was involved in a road accident whilst undertaking his transport business (mini cab) while another male described his *Okada* (motor cycle) business as ‘a risky one’.

In one FGD with male participants, a number of them recounted that some of their female colleagues would often negotiate contact with men they view as rich or relatively buoyant with whom they would start a ‘dating’ relationship. Also in some of the IDIs with females, some on campus females made reference to their male partners being a source of additional income that supplements their economic survival. In a similar vein, other researchers have reported cases of women transacting sex because of their poor economic status. For instance, Bene and Heck (2008), in an in-depth analysis of sub-Saharan African fishing communities, observe that transactional sex between fishermen and fish sellers is a well-recognized practice. In particular, widows and economically disadvantaged young women were commonly found to engage in such transactions as a means of survival, because they did not have enough money to start a fish business conventionally. In many such African communities, according to Allison and Seeley (2004), Kissling et al. (2005) and Seeley and Allison (2005), it appears that this pattern of sexual practices has remained a means of livelihood for women of low economic status, despite the stigma of being seen by others as prostitutes. An important implication of such pattern of relationship is that apart from the existing gender power relations in sexual relationships, women who are tied or committed to their relationships for financial gain are often not in a position to fully negotiate their sexual desires, feelings and safety (Wojcicki 2002; Kaufman and Stavrou 2004; Langen 2005). Moreover, considering Connell’s (1995) arguments, a ‘pure relationship’<sup>1</sup> cannot be easily achieved within economically motivated relationships. As such, he further argues that such relationships often widen the gender gap between women and men.

## CONCLUSION

This article has dealt with the analyses of the young people’s accounts which reveal some major

ways in which their access to higher education was mediated within their socio-cultural domains. First, one of the prominent themes that emerged from the narratives of the young people is that their access to higher education was dominantly constrained by poor economic conditions of their backgrounds. The analysis of their accounts reveals the complex and subtle contexts in which young people of all ages (both female and male) were involved in all manners in income-generating activity to negotiate their access to higher education.

Clearly, socio-cultural and economic factors including social norms, religion, as well as gender-based expectations remained a major influence on young people's access to higher education in the research locality. The explanatory framework of Bourdieu was found relevant in analyzing the limitations experienced by young people in gaining access to higher education. Essentially, the young people's narratives confirmed Bourdieu's theoretical arguments which emphasized the conditions for cultural capital to be transmitted from one generation to the next or social reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979). This provides an understanding of the roles that parents play in their children's educational attainment. It also provides understanding of the fact that parents with greater cultural capital are more involved in supporting their children's educational attainment that lead them to achieve other forms of capital.

Looking at the relevance of Bourdieu's arguments (1980; 1986) to the responses from young people in this study, it appears that a majority were also found to be highly disconnected from resources that would move them up to a higher social hierarchy and valuable connections to accumulate capital resources for a brighter future. Thus, given the significance of economic difficulties among young people in the studied communities, it will be of great importance to policy makers and other stakeholders to gear efforts towards a reallocation of resources into the educational sector to introduce free education in higher educational institutions or at least a remarkable subsidy to enable candidates from low-income backgrounds to have access to higher education. Also, considering the importance of a university education to develop a competent workforce and contribute to national development through high level training, private Universities should also lower fees to be affordable to young people from low income earners, thereby making the government to pay for subsidy to the private higher educational institutions.

## NOTE

1. A term which Connell used to describe relationships where a considerable level of sexual and emotional equality exists (Connell 1995).

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