Rural and Urban Differential in Student's Academic Performance among Secondary School Students In Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the difference between the academic performance of students from rural environment and students from urban environment. A descriptive research design of survey type was adopted for the study. The population for this study comprised all public secondary school students in Ondo State. The sample consisted of 240 students from six randomly selected schools. A questionnaire tagged 'Academic Performance Questionnaire' was used to collect data. Expert judgements were used to ensure face and content validity. Test-retest method was used to determine the reliability and a reliability coefficient of 0.72 was obtained. Data collected were analysed by using t-test. The result revealed that there is no significant difference in the academic performance of students from rural environment. It can be concluded from the result that, all else equal, rural students do not suffer disadvantage in their academic performance simply as the result of their residence in rural areas or their attendance at rural schools. It was recommended, among others that rural deficit model should be further examined as educators take a new and more objective look at the performance of the many different types of rural students. Also, parents and students should not feel that they must attend metropolitan schools in order to achieve success.

Keywords: *Rural, urban, academic performance, difference, students.*

1. Introduction

Many schools in the area of education in recent past seemed to have shifted studies from the measures of individual to the measure of the environment. The reason that could be adduced for this trend ranges from the accurate prediction which measures of environment could bring to learning in order to possibly manipulate the environment so as to bring about optimal conditions for learning.

For quite some time, a general perception of the comparative inferiority of rural schools has prevailed. This view implies the existence of rural-urban differences in students' academic performance. The general perception of rural-urban differences also extends to many other socially desirable outcomes, such as aptitude, intelligence and aspiration (De Young and Lawrence, 1995; Herzog and Pittman, 1995). Until recently, there has been little empirical evidence to challenge this view. Now, however, a growing body of work has begun to examine how well students perform in and after graduation from rural schools. Although the results are far from conclusive, they do suggest that some generally held beliefs about rural student achievement need review, if not revision. This concern about potential rural – urban differences in education outcomes is not limited to one country, but rather it appears to be a global issue.

The major reasons for the conjecture that students in rural areas receive an inferior education compared to their urban counterparts can be described as a deficit model of rural community and lifestyle. Although one may not be able to pinpoint the origin of this model, Herzeg and Pittman (1995) provided insightful discussion about the major components that characterize the deficit model. In addition to the problem of societal bias and prejudice against ruralness, Herzog and Pittman painted a somewhat bleak picture of major societal trends that have not been kind to rural communities and schools. They described demographic and economic trends as potentially damaging to rural schools migration out of the rural communities by young people and economic decline would not be expected to improve the quality of rural

schooling.

Not surprisingly, like many other issues in education, the research comparing rural students with their metropolitan counterparts in educational outcomes in general, and in academic achievement in particular, has yielded inconsistent findings (Khattri, Riley and Kane, 1997).

A comparison of the performance on standardized tests of students from small, usually rural, schools with those from larger, often urban, schools has not produced definite results. Several studies have not found any significant differences between the two groups. Monk and Haller (1986) found that students from smaller (often rural) schools achieved as well as students from larger schools. Kleinfeld (1985) did not find that high school size determine the quality of a student's education, experience or achievement on standardized tests. Ward and Murray (1985) looked at factors affecting academic performance of selected high school students and found that those attending schools in rural areas performed as well as those in urban areas. Also, Alapaugh (1992), Snyder and West (1992) and Haller, Monk and Tien (1993) in their studies, failed to find any statistically significant differences between the two groups of students.

Other scholars have found, however that rural-urban differences do exist. Downey (1980) found that the ACT scores of rural students where two points lower than scores of urban students in each of the categories of ACT in Kansas. Another examination of student performance in Hawai public schools made by McCleery (1979) found sub-standard achievement to be a pattern in rural areas. In Nigeria, Adewale (2002) studied the effect of parasitic infections on school performance among school age children in Ilorin. He found that in rural community where nutritional status is relatively low and health problems are prevalent, children academic performance is greatly hindered.

In other studies, however, students from rural schools were found to have performed better than those from metropolitan areas (Alspaugh, 1992; Alspaugh and Harting, 1995; Haller, Monk and Tien, 1993).

Some factors could be responsible for the potential rural-urban differences. One of them could be availability of resources like books, computers, art and science supplies and course offerings. The availability of fewer resources in many rural schools than those in urban areas are often related to more limited curricula for these rural schools (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995; Hall and Barker, 1995). Barker (1985) studied high schools and reported that smaller and rural high schools had significantly fewer art, data processing, calculus, psychology, sociology and advanced placement offerings. In Nigeria, rural schools may not have facilities to study subjects like Computer Science, Fine-Art, Music and French Language.

Another possible influence on hypothesized gaps in educational achievement between rural and urban populations is a long history of emigration by more educated people to urban areas in search of better job opportunities (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995; Herzog and Pittman, 1995). Population loss contributes to the educational trend of school consolidation, although recent findings suggest that larger schools do not necessarily improve student performance (1991; Haller et al, 1993; Plecki). Herzog and Pittmen (1995) pointed out that school consolidation, partially supported by the conventional wisdom that bigger must mean better, has been the single most frequently implemented educational trend in the 20th century. Rural schools and their students may be the real casualties of this trend, as fewer students per school usually means less state funding allocated towards those schools, which in turn means fewer teachers, a sparser variety of course offerings, and less state-of-the art equipment and supplies.

Another factor could be that rural communities possess a much more limited view of existing occupational roles for rural youth, who then understandably restrict themselves when going on the job market and on to higher education (Downey, 1980). Brown (1985) attributed this to low family expectations of rural students' career options. Such conclusions may be for the most part, supposition because opportunities presented on television may inform and intrigue.

According to Kleinfeld (1985), schools that achieve the best results do exhibit a strong teacher/administration/community partnership and school-community agreement on educational programmes. She also reported that there is a direct relationship between quality educational programmes and the ability of the staff to work toward an educational partnership with the community. Smaller communities do tend to generate more community support for the school with the school becoming a centre for community activity. This, in turn, theoretically provides the students with a greater feeling of belonging to something in which they can participate, and thus enable them to develop a better self-concept.

2. Statement of the Problem

Education is generally regarded as a major indicator of a community's social well-being, standard of living and social justice. In an effort to define and measure levels of living on an international scale, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (1966 – 1970) recognized eight variables, in addition to education, as social indicators. In his

study on social well-being in the United States, Smith (1973) recognized seven sets of variables: education, income and employment, the living environment, health, social order, social belonging and recreation and leisure. The general recurrence of education on the list of major indicators of social justice could be said to confirm that education is a powerful instrument of developing intellectual abilities of shaping cultural attitudes and acquiring knowledge and skills. Both directly and indirectly, education is therefore, important for acquiring social well-being because of its close association with other factors of social well-being.

In Nigeria as a whole, education is highly rated in the National Development Plans. Nigeria's philosophy of education, therefore is based on the integration of the individual into sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981). Like all other states in Nigeria, Ondo State believes in the objective of building a justice and egalitarian society and shares the desire that each part of the whole should progress economically, educationally and socially as other parts. It is justified that one examines the academic performance of the secondary school students as an insight into the issue of equality of educational opportunities.

3. Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant difference between academic performance of students from rural environment and students from urban environment.

4. Methodology

The researchers used descriptive research design of survey type. The plan of study involved the use of questionnaire to collect data in order to test the hypothesis generated in the study. The target population for this study was made up of public secondary school students in Ondo State Nigeria who were in Senior Secondary School One. This class of students was chosen because the students faced a uniform examination throughout the whole state at the end of previous session, that is at the end of their Junior Secondary School Three. Their results in this examination were used to measure academic performance.

Stratified random sampling was used to draw out the sample. Three schools were randomly chosen from urban areas and three schools were also randomly chosen from rural areas. In each school, 40 students of both sexes were selected, making a total of 240 students.

A self-designed questionnaire called Academic Performance Questionnaire (APQ) was used for the study. Part A was designed to collect information on background characteristics of respondents. Part B consisted 27 items on environmental and psychological factors.

The methods used in validating the instrument were face and content validity. Expert judgements were used to determine both. A test-retest reliability test was also carried out on 20 Senior Secondary School One students who were not part of the sample. The scores obtained from two administrations of the questionnaire at two weeks interval were correlated by using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. A reliability coefficient of 0.72 was obtained. The instrument was found to be suitable for data collection.

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed by the researchers and school counsellors to a sample of 240 students in six schools. Researchers' presence during administration enhanced better understanding of the items in the instrument. Copies of the questionnaire were collected back immediately after completion by the researchers. The results of the external and uniform Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination were collected from the principals of the schools. The data generated were analysed using t-test for the hypothesis. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

5. Testing of Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant difference between academic performance of students from rural environment and students from urban environment.

In testing this hypothesis, the mean total score and standard error obtained on academic performance of students from rural environment and those from urban environment were subjected to t-test analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1: The t-test showing academic performance of students from rural and urban environment.

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	tcal	ttable
Urban	120	2.6417	1.49097			
Rural	120	2.4819	1.33347	238	0.875	1.960

P > 0.05

Table 1 shows that the mean score of respondents from urban environment is 2.6417 with standard deviation of 1.49097 while the mean score of respondents from rural environment is 2.4819 with standard deviation of 1.33347. The t-calculated is 0.875 while the table value is 1.960. The t-table is greater than the t-calculated. The null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference between academic performance of students from rural environment and students from urban environment.

The probable explanation for this result is that government is now trying to provide the rural schools with needed resources. Another reason could be availability of television and films in rural environment. Parents and students are exposed to life in the cities through watching of television and films. They now know the importance of having good education, unlike before, when they only knew what happened around them in the rural setting. Also, much of the distractions in big cities are not present in rural environment.

This research finding conform to other research findings of Kleinfeld (1985), Ward and Murray (1985) and Monk and Haller (1986) that students from rural schools achieved as well as students from urban schools. In a similar vein, Alspaugh (1992), Snyder and West (1992), and Haller, Monk and Tien (1993) failed to find any statistically significant differences between the two groups of students. Conversely, Obemeata (1970) and Odebunmi (1983) found that the urban secondary school students, having attended large schools were in more favourable situation than the other Nigerian children from rural environment. Also, McCleery (1979) and Downey (1980) found sub-standard achievement to be a pattern in rural areas.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Evidence from the study has led the researchers to conclude that secondary school students from rural environment perform as well as students from urban environment. All else equal, rural students do not suffer disadvantage simply as the result of their residence in rural areas or their attendance at rural schools.

The old rural deficit model could be discarded as educators take a new, more objective look at the performance of the many different types of rural students. A rural deficit model could be replaced by a rural strength model. Such a model is suggested by the fact that rural students do wish to attend higher institutions and make good grades. If Barker's (1985) curriculum comparisons hold up generally, rural high school students have less access to educational information. It could be argued that these students are therefore, in terms of their overall progress, achieving more, not less. Rural students should be rest assured that they can make it academically in their rural environment, if they are serious with their studies. Parents and students should not feel that one must attend metropolitan school in order to achieve success.

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