

## Some Biographical Variables and School Behaviour among Secondary School Students in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State

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### Abstract

Non-conforming school behavior seems to be on the increase among adolescents of the violent conflict-endemic Niger Delta region, where majority of homes have been described as the poorest of the poor. The study therefore sought to ascertain the level of influence of some biographical variables on the school behaviour of secondary school students in Nembe L.G.A. of Bayelsa State. The research design was ex-post facto, guided by three hypotheses and data collected using questionnaire, administered on 240 sampled student-respondents. Data analysis was carried out using Independent t-test and the results indicated (1) statistically significant age-based difference (2) no statistically significant gender-based difference, and (3) statistically significant difference in school behaviour based on parental socioeconomic status. Capacity building and economic empowerment of rural parents, especially the mothers, have been strongly recommended, to enable them provide adequately for their children who could then be more scholastically focused and behave responsibly.

**Keywords:** School behaviour, delinquency, school adjustment, adolescent

### INTRODUCTION

The school is known to be one of the major agents of socialization where young ones are sent by parents and guardians to acquire skills and knowledge in order to develop their potentials and become productive members of the society. In addition, they also acquire the skill to interact and relate with their peers, seniors and those in authority over them. In the school setting, there are rules and regulations of behavior and conduct regarding the acquisition of the skills and knowledge as well as the relationships and interaction among the students and between the students and those who have authority over them. Desirable school a behaviour therefore, consists of actions or conduct that is in line with the stipulated rules and regulations while behavior that is contrary tantamounts to maladjustment.

Hence, school behaviour refers to students' actions or inactions with regards to stipulated school conduct such as, regular school attendance, punctuality, completion of homework/assignments, good conduct in test and exams, appropriate dressing, respect for seniors and teachers, peaceful resolution of conflicts, team spirit, non-violence, among others. However, environmental factors and some biographical variables, including home background sometimes propel students towards school maladjustment that is often manifested in the form of absenteeism, truancy, exams/test malpractice, indecent dressing, disrespect for school authority, bullying, fighting, vandalism, stealing, lying, refusal to do homework/assignment, among others (Animasahun & Aremu, 2015).

The age of the individual plays a very important role in school learning and behaviour. Some psychologists have argued that 0-8 years period of life appears to be the best in terms of both learning and behavior (Isangedighi, 2007). This is the period they appear to be most submissive and obedient to school rules and regulations. However, as they grow into adolescence, they tend to behave in ways that are considered unacceptable. Youngsters between the ages of 8 – 14 begin to confide less in parents and more in their peers who influence their decision making and what behavior to adopt (Asiyai, 2012). According to Eke (2004), offending and bad behavior rates tend to peak in late adolescence and then drop off in early adulthood. The study of Animasahun and Aremu (2015) also found that there is a significant relationship between age and maladjusted school behavior. According to them, increase in age of participants is often times reflected in increase in rate of delinquency. The inference is that, as adolescents grow older, they tend to have more courage to try out new things, more criminal and unacceptable behavior and increase in rebellious nature.

Sex of students seems to be a crucial factor in school behaviour. A number of researches have indicated that males are more likely to participate in delinquent acts compared to females and that the males have higher tendencies than females to offend at every age (Parker & Asher, 2001; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006; Chisney-Lind, 1997). Since children spend more time at home than in school, it is considered that the home background variables, especially, the socioeconomic status (SES) of parents could either be a motivating or an inhibiting factor to their learning and behavior at school. Parental SES is known to have bearing on their attitude to children's schooling and in fact parents have been found to be responsible for their children going late to school (Isangedighi, 2007).

Although maladjusted school behavior is less exclusively a phenomenon of lower SES, some characteristics of lower-class culture might promote delinquency and maladjustment (Flannery et al, 2003). A community with high crime and violence rate lets the adolescent observe many models who engage in criminal activities. These communities may be characterized by poverty, unemployment and feeling of alienation towards the middle class (Sabol, Coulton & Korbin, 2004). Furthermore, quality schooling, educational funding and organized neighborhood activities may be lacking in these communities, Sabol et al continued.

Being tough and masculine are therefore, seen as high-status traits for lower SES youngsters, especially boys, and these traits are often measured by the adolescent's success in performing and getting away with maladjusted acts (Flannery et al, 2003). Lower SES parents seem to be less skilled in discouraging maladjusted behavior and less able to monitor, supervise and instill consistent and appropriate discipline in their adolescent children (Bor, McGee & Fagan, 2004). According to Coley, Morris & Hernandez (2004) parental monitoring of adolescents is especially important in determining whether an adolescent becomes socially maladjusted.

Parents of lower SES often find it difficult to provide financial and material aid for their children's education, hence such children are often sent out of school for their failure to pay school fees, lack of writing materials, school uniforms and others (Denga, 2002). This could cause such children to lose focus, develop low self-esteem and indulge in irresponsible behavior. Children living in poverty therefore, lack many advantages; their nutrition and health may be less adequate, often living in crowded conditions and attending inadequate schools and may have fewer places to do their homework (Prater, 2002; Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2006). Due to their disadvantage, as they grow older, their interest and performance in school may

lag; they may become bored and angry which may result in their lashing out at their parents, school and society at large (Biddle, 2001).

Erik Erikson (1968) in his theory of psychosocial development argues that adolescents strive to discover their particular strengths and weaknesses and the roles they can best play in their future lives. They therefore try on different roles or choices to see how they fit their capabilities and views about themselves. Erikson calls this the Identity Vs Role confusion stage. According to him, adolescents, whose development has restricted them from acceptable social roles, may choose negative identity. Such adolescents with negative identity may find support for their maladjusted image among peers, reinforcing the negative identity. For Erickson, delinquency or school maladjustment therefore, is an attempt to establish an identity, although a negative one.

The social cognitive learning of Bandura (1986) proposes that people cognitively represent the behavior of others and then sometimes adopt this behavior themselves. For example, a boy might observe his father's aggressive and hostile interchanges with others; when observed with his peers, the boy's style of interaction is highly aggressive, showing the same characteristics as his father's behavior. To the social cognitive theorists, people acquire a wide range of such behaviors, thoughts and feelings through observing others behavior and that these observations form important part of life-span development.

Baumrind (1971) identified four types of parenting styles and suggests that parents should be neither punitive nor aloof: (1) Authoritarian parenting is a restrictive and punitive style where parents place firm limit and control on the child and allow little verbal exchange. This type of parenting is often associated with children who are socially incompetent and maladjusted. (2) Authoritative parents tend to direct their children's activities in a rational and intelligent way, are supportive, loving, committed, encourage verbal give-and-take and discuss the rules and policies with their children. Children of such parents tend to be socially competent and adjusted. (3) Permissive parents are less controlling and behave with non-punishing and accepting attitude towards their children's impulses, desires and actions. They make few demands and tend to use reason rather than direct power. Such children are often socially incompetent, and especially lacking in self-control. (4) Neglectful parents are very uninvolved in their children's lives. This style is also associated with socially incompetent children, especially, a lack of self control.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory proposed that personality has three structures – the id, the ego and the superego. The id, he said, consist of instincts – biological drives – sex and aggression that are the source of all psychic and mental energy. It operates on the pleasure principle to satisfy drives and avoid pain, without concern for moral restrictions or society's regulation. The id is more like a spoiled child who operates in a totally selfish pleasure-seeking way without regard to reason, logic or morality. As children experience the demands and constraints of reality, the ego emerges. This is the executive branch of the personality because it uses reasoning to make decisions to satisfy desires or wishes only when a socially acceptable outlet is available. However, both the id and the ego do not take into account whether something is right or wrong. The superego therefore develops out of the ego during early childhood, with the goal of applying moral values and standards of parents or caregivers and society in satisfying wishes and desires. It is the conscience or the moral compass that evolves as a result of socialization. The ego, however, has to be strong enough to resolve conflicts that may arise because of different goals of the id and superego.

The area of this study, Nembe Local Government Areas is nestled in the Niger Delta, presently, in a state of human insecurity, ecological disaster, environmental change, impoverishment and violent conflicts (Obi, 2000). Since the 1990s the area has witnessed violent, intra and inter communal clashes or clashes between oil-bearing communities and state and as result the safety, value and social control for orderly individual conduct and group behavior have snapped and society is worse for it (Odoemene, 2011). The legendary respect for elders in African societies has also been largely truncated in these communities because the youths see the elders as corrupt, inept, and in collusion with government and petro-business forces (Jike, 2004). The devastation and degradation of the environment have grossly impaired the productive capacity of the people such that the region has been aptly referred to as the home of some of Africa's poorest of the poor and the theatre of the continents' worst environmental destruction (Robinson, 2006'; Omotola, 2006).

Some of the social consequences of the environmental changes and the resultant insurgency in the Niger Delta include, insecurity of lives and property, poverty, violence, crime, despondency, underdevelopment and erosion of societal social and moral values. One of the most unfortunate consequences is the seeming impact on the children, some of whom were born through violence, lived in the midst of the violence and witnessed the lawlessness and depravity around them. Some of them are born to teenage single, barely literate, poor mothers, who themselves may have dropped out of school (Uche, 2013). They can hardly provide the school needs for their children, neither can they supervise, discipline or earn the respect of those adolescent children.

There are also parents who are migrant fishermen/women who have to take their little children along and sometimes leave the older ones behind, unsupervised, left to roam around, skip school and get into trouble. Some fathers tend to adopt harsh disciplinary measures, like excessive flogging that makes the youngsters to be hardened. Yet, there are others who allow their children to run wild, allow them to do whatever they want. Such parents, perhaps, hope on the school to discipline their children for them. In addition, the difficult riverine terrain, the lack of social amenities and infrastructure along with the insecurity of lives and property posed by lawless militants, discourage teachers from living and working there permanently (Ihayere, Ogeleka & Ataine, 2014). The teachers themselves are therefore absent most of the time, busy pursuing other things in the big cities and towns.

It is the observation that, among the secondary school students in this rural communities, there is a low level of desirable school behaviour and outright maladjustment in the form of absenteeism, truancy, lateness, bullying, inappropriate dressing, unruly behavior, disrespect for seniors and teachers, violence, vandalism, exam malpractice, among others. The problem of this study can therefore be summarized thus: To what extent do age, gender and family socioeconomic status (SES) influence school behaviour of secondary school students in Nembe LGA of Bayelsa State?

The purpose of the study is therefore to determine the influence of some biographical variables such as age, gender and parental SES on school behaviour of secondary school students in Nembe LGA of Bayelsa State. Three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and to achieve the purpose:

1. School behaviour of secondary school students does not significantly differ on the basis of their age.

2. Gender of secondary school students does not make any significant difference in their school behaviour.
3. Parental socioeconomic status does not significantly influence school behaviour of secondary school students.

### METHODOLOGY

The research design is the ex-post facto and the population comprised all junior and secondary school students in Nembe LGA which is made up of 13 wards. Through stratified/simple random sampling, 4 wards were selected, from each of these wards, 2 schools – 1 junior secondary in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) schools and 1 senior secondary were selected, then from each of these 8 schools, 30 students were selected, yielding a sample size of 240. The age of respondents ranged from 11 – 19.

The instrument for data collection consisted of a self-constructed 2-part questionnaire. Part 1, Biographical Variables Scale (BVS), sought biographical information such as age, gender, class in school, provision of school materials, parental occupation, parental level of education, school fees payment ability, family type and others. Part 2, School Adjustment Scale (SAS), consisted of 20 items that focused on maladjusted school behaviours such as lateness, absenteeism, truancy, examination malpractice, inappropriate dressing, disrespect for seniors, bullying, vandalism and others. Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of committing a particular undesirable behavior on a scale that ranged from Never (1), Once or twice (2), Several times (3) to Very often (4). The instrument was scrutinized and revised by other experts in Counseling/Psychology, in order to establish its validity and through the Split-Half procedure, reliability estimates of 0.83 and 0.69 were established respectively for the two parts.

Through the cooperation of the school principals and teachers, the researcher and three assistants administered the instrument on the student-respondents after assurance of its purpose and confidentiality as well as instructions on how to fill it out and the need for honest responses. The results of analysis of the accruing data are shown on the following tables.

### RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: School behavior of secondary school students do not significantly differ on the basis of their age. Independent t-test was used to analyze the data and the result is presented on table 1.

**Table 1: Independent t-test comparisons of school behaviour of younger and older secondary school students (N = 240)**

Age	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	$t_{obs}$
Younger (11 – 14)	115	61.39	5.28	3.374
Older (15 – 19)	125	63.87	6.12	

**P < 0.05; df = 238; t crit = 1.96**

Results on table 1 indicate observed t-value of 3.374 which is higher than the tcrit (1.96) at 238 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. This implies a significant difference in school

behaviour between younger and older secondary school students. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: Gender of secondary school students does not make any significant difference in their school behaviour. Independent t-test was used to analyze the data and the result is on table 2.

**Table 2: Independent t-test comparisons of school behaviour of male and female secondary school students (N = 240)**

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	$t_{obs}$
Male	118	64.18	6.38	0.396
Female	122	63.82	6.82	

**P > 0.05; df = 238; tcrit = 1.96**

Result on Table 2 shows observed t-value of 0.396 which is lower than the tcrit (1.96) at 238 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is no statistically significant difference in school behaviour between male and female secondary school students. The null hypothesis is therefore, retained.

Hypothesis 3: Parental socioeconomic status does significantly influence school behavior of secondary school students. Independent t – test was used to analyze the data and the result is presented on table 3.

**Table 3: Independent t-test comparison of school behavior of secondary school students from high and low parental SES. (N= 240)**

Parental Socio-economic status	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-value
High	109	67.11	5.48	5.67*
Low	131	62.77	6.38	

**\*Significant at .05 level, critical t=1.96, df=238.**

The result in Table 3 revealed that the calculated t-values of 5.67 is higher than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 238 of degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was therefore, rejected. This implies that parental socio-economic status makes a significant difference in school behaviour of secondary school students.

## DISCUSSION

One of the indications from the results of the study is that of a significant difference between younger and older secondary school students in their school behaviour. Older students are shown to be more maladjusted than their younger counterparts. This corroborates Isangedighi (2007) assertion that younger children tend to be more submissive and obedient to school rules and regulations but as they grow older they tend to behave in ways that are considered

unacceptable. Animasahun and Aremu (2015) also agreed that as adolescents grow older, they become bolder to attempt more unacceptable and criminal behaviour and increase in their rebellious nature. Moreso, according to Eke (2004), offending and bad behaviour rates have the tendency to peak in late adolescence and then taper off in early adulthood. Late adolescence tend to be more 'stormy' and characterized by restlessness and when this is coupled with permissive and or neglecting parenting by young, illiterate single mothers in an environment of militancy, violence and lawlessness, unruly and maladjusted behaviour is not far-fetched (Uche & Maliki, 2011). According to Baumrind (1971), permissive and neglectful parenting styles often result in children who lack self-control and social competence.

It was also found that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female students in their school behaviour, both gender scoring high on the maladjustment scale ( $X = 64.18$  for males and  $X = 63.82$  for females). This seems to run contrary to the assertion that males are more likely to participate in delinquent acts than females and that the females have lower tendencies to offend than males at every age (Synder & Sickmund, 2006; Chisney-Lind, 1997; Parker & Asher, 2001). The fact that both male and female score so high on the maladjustment scale could be one of the consequences of environmental changes and the resultant insurgences, violence, crime, poverty and erosion of societal social and moral values (Odoemene, 2011). The legendary respect for elders and constituted authority in the African traditional society has been largely truncated (Jike, 2004).

Some of these children were born through violence, lived in the midst of violence and witnessed lawlessness and depravity, first hand, and as such their behavior seem to have been modelled through these experiences. A large number of the parents are migrant fishermen who leave behind their teenage children to roam wild, skip school and get into trouble, while some fathers resort to excessive flogging which makes youngsters (both boys and girls) to be hardened (Uche, 2013). In addition, the tension and insecurity cause teachers to abandon their duty post as such, not only that the students are left unsupervised but they learn irresponsible behaviour vicariously from their teachers. This is supported by Bandura [1986] theory which asserts that people acquire wide range of behaviour through observing the behaviour of others and that overtime, this forms important part of their life-span development. Freud also asserted that the superego which is the conscience or moral compass evolves as a result of socialization. Hence, in a faulty socialization such as this context, the chances are very high that the moral compass would be defective, for both boys and girls.

Furthermore, parental socioeconomic status (SES) was found to have a significant influence on students' school behaviour. It is pertinent to note that respondents were predominantly of low SES which is not surprising since the region has been described as the home of Africa's poorest of the poor (Robinson, 2006; Omotola, 2006). Implicitly, low SES tend to engender maladjusted school behaviour. This conforms with Flannery et al (2003) assertion that even though maladjustment in school is not exclusively a lower SES phenomenon, certain elements of lower-class culture promote delinquency. Communities characterized by poverty, unemployment, high crime rate, violence and feelings of alienation, enable adolescents observe many models who engage in criminal activities (Sabol, Coulton & Korbin, 2004). Moreover, the frequent failure of lower SES parents to provide school materials and fees often result in adolescents being sent out of school which in turn cause them to lose focus, develop low self-esteem and indulge in irresponsible behaviour (Denga, 2002). Biddle (2001) further corroborated that the economic disadvantages suffered by children of low SES often bring about lack of interest in school, low performance, boredom, anger and ultimately lashing out at their parents, school and the society at large.

Furthermore, Bor, McGee & Fagan (2004) agreed that lower SES parents are less skilled in supervising, monitoring, instilling appropriate discipline and discouraging maladjusted behavior in their adolescent children. According to Flannery et al (2003), being tough is seen as high status trait for lower SES children and that for them, this is often measured by their success in performing and getting away with maladjusted acts. It is also Erikson's (1968) assertion that adolescents whose development have restricted them from acceptable social roles may choose negative maladjusted identity which is often reinforced by their peers. In essence, to Erikson, school maladjustment is mainly an attempt to establish an identity, albeit, a negative one.

### CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that biographical variables, especially parental low socioeconomic status rooted in environmental factors, gender and age influence the school behaviour of secondary school students. The disadvantages and deprivations experienced by these students cause them to lose focus, develop low self-esteem and propel them towards maladjusted school behaviour such as absenteeism, truancy, examination malpractice, failure to complete homework, disrespect for authority, bullying, vandalism and the like. Some theories have suggested contributing factors to include, acquired aggressive behaviour through observing other peoples' behaviour, permissive or neglected parenting style, faulty socialization and an attempt to establish some form of identity, albeit, negative.

### RECOMMENDATION

Although maladjusted school behaviour is not limited to any particular SES, in this context, some characteristics of lower-class, such as, abject poverty, unemployment, underemployment, low quality schooling, lack of materials and facilities, among others, seem to be the prompting factors of the behaviour. The following recommendations are therefore proffered.

- Poverty alleviation programme of the federal and state government should be executed with vigor and sincerity.
- Capacity building and economic empowerment programmes of rural dwellers, especially the women, need to be vigorously pursued. This will enable them meet their children's school needs, earn the respect of the children, and ultimately help them to remain focused in school and stay out of trouble.
- Government need to deal decisively with the protracted insurgency and lawlessness in the area in order to eliminate the negative unruly behaviour that is being emulated by the young ones.
- Incentives need to be created for teachers to settle down in the area in order to adequately supervise and monitor their students and serves as role models to them.
- Guidance counsellors need to seriously engage these students towards reorientation of values, respect for constituted authority, rules and regulations, need for constructive behaviour, focus on school performance and development of their potentials to the fullest.

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