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Average Distance Travelled To School by Primary and Secondary School Students in Nigeria and Its Effect on Attendance (Pp. 378-388)

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Abstract

This study investigated average distance travelled to school by students in primary and secondary schools in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States and effect on attendance. These are among the top ten densely populated and educationally advantaged States in Nigeria. Research evidences report high dropout rates in them. Samples of 36 primary, 21 secondary; 41 primary, 24 secondary; and 28 primary, 16 secondary schools from Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi respectively, were selected through simple random sampling. Data gathered through a questionnaire were analyzed to answer four research questions raised. Results revealed that students in 38.87, 36.59, and 28.57 percent of primary schools, and 23.81, 29.17, and 18.75 percent of secondary schools in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States respectively, travelled less than one kilometer to school. Others travelled up to five kilometers. Results on effect of distance travelled on attendance revealed that for primary and secondary schools, Anambra State recorded 77.78 and 71.43 percent, Enugu State 85.37 and 70.83 percent, and Ebonyi State 96.43 and 93.75 percent respectively. It was concluded that majority of these children

travelled more than the stipulated one kilometer maximum to school, indicating that many schools were located far away from children's homes, and this affected attendance adversely.

Keywords: School Location Attendance Dropout Attaining Goals

Introduction

Ideally, there must be some laid down guidelines and criteria that should inform the location of any school be it formal or informal. This is to make sure that schools are located in environments and atmospheres that are conducive for effective teaching and learning. Usually, the first thing that comes to the mind of parents and other adults about the choice of a school for their children and wards, especially at the primary level in Nigeria, is the closeness of the school to the home. This is perhaps a major reason why big companies and organizations as well as some universities in Nigeria usually locate their own primary and secondary schools right inside their housing complexes. Examples are the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) Schools in Warri, the Delta Steel Company Ovwian-Aladja Schools, and the University Demonstration Schools. The closeness of schools to the children's homes has become a useful consideration in the establishment of schools. Schools should however not be sited close to noisy environments such as markets, hospitals, highways, railway stations, refineries, industries, or close to hazardous environments like rivers, steep hilltops, high tension electric lines, or close to fearful or bizarre environments like mortuaries, burial grounds, and ritual shrines.

Most important in the consideration of school location are the population to be served and the distance the children would have to travel to get to school every day. This has become the concern of the educational planner who uses school densities as a rough index of school location and expansion as well as in the improvement of services provided. Therefore, the distance travelled to school in educational planning should be a *sine qua non* in the approval and location of schools. However, it piques the investigator that in spite of this, a staggering majority of Nigerian pupils and students are observed to walk long distances to and from school every day, especially in the rural areas (Arubayi, 2005; Duze, 2005).

Another source of worry is that distance travelled to school has some measure of relationship to ills like absenteeism, delinquency, truancy, lateness, indiscipline, and non-attendance to school. These ills, either singly or combined ultimately affect achievement at school. Also, when the distance

travelled to school is too far for the child, besides fatigue, there is the tendency for the child to lose interest at school and begin to be truant, and may drop out of school completely (Arubayi, 2005; Duze, 2005). Statistics in Nigeria today, show that more than fifty percent of primary school pupils and thirty percent of secondary school students, drop out of school yearly, and this is worse in some eastern states (AIT News Hour, 2008). It has also been observed that cases abound where children travel up to five kilometers to school on foot. Even when they could afford to travel by car, motorcycle or bicycle for such long distances, the stress of commuting to school weighed the children down, and the exigencies of the road left parents and guardians worried until their children returned home safely. Again, there are schools that are over-populated because of their location, and these are not without their peculiar problems associated with over-crowding in classrooms, inadequate provision of services, staff, and infrastructures, and poor attendance by pupils due to lack of seating places.

A distance of one kilometer to school on foot is considered by school head-teachers to be too long for children between the ages of six and seventeen. If students walk over one kilometer to school, the outcomes would not be in the best interest of both the child and the school because set goals and objectives may not be truly achieved. In implementing the compulsory free education programme, many States in Nigeria stipulated that schools should be located at not more than one kilometer from the residences of the communities to be served. This was one major reason why schools were opened in almost every hamlet in the country. But today, it does appear that many Nigerian children still travel long distances to and from school.

Arubayi (2005) compared distance travelled to school by pupils/students in Edo and Delta States and the effect on attendance. He concluded that the location of a sizeable number of primary and secondary schools in both Edo and Delta States were far away from the residences of the pupils/students and this had some effect on school attendance. There is a paucity of empirical evidence on distance travelled to school by pupils and students and its consequent effect on school attendance in many States in Nigeria, including Anambra, Enugu and Ebonyi States. Also, research evidence showed that long distances travelled to school are among the major reasons for high dropout rates in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria, and the South Eastern States of Nigeria have been observed as recording large numbers of school dropouts. (Arubayi, 2005; Duze 2005; Madumere, 1991; Onakpoma, 2008).

It was in this light that the researcher sought to investigate the distance travelled to school every day by pupils/students in primary/secondary schools and its consequent effect on school attendance in the old Anambra State of Nigeria now divided into three States – Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi. These three highly populated States are considered not only to be educationally advantaged but have registered alarming rates of school dropout in recent times. It is not known whether distance travelled by children to and from school every day affect attendance to school in these States. It is hoped that the study would help solve many of the problems associated with and arising from the location of schools in Nigeria without taking into proper consideration the parameters for location, approval, and expansion of schools. To guide the investigation, four research questions were formulated.

Research Questions

1. What is the average distance travelled to primary schools by pupils in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States?
2. What is the average distance travelled to secondary schools by students in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States?
3. What is the effect of distance travelled to primary schools in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States on school attendance?
4. What is the effect of distance travelled to secondary schools in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States on school attendance?

Methodology

This is a descriptive survey utilizing the ex post facto design. It looked at the facts as they had already occurred and therefore no independent variable was manipulated. Thus the distance covered to school by pupils and students and its effects on school attendance were investigated and explanations offered on possible cause and effect. The target population was all the primary and secondary schools in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States of Nigeria during the 2007/2008 school year. To cater for the differing numerical strengths and ascertain equal chances of representation, schools were selected from each States by stratified random sampling. Thus the study sample included 36, 41, and 28 primary schools in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States respectively and 21, 24, and 16 secondary schools in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States respectively. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire adopted from the one used by Arubayi (2005) which he indicated was adopted from a comprehensive instrument used by the World Bank and

UNICEF for a similar study. The instrument had several subsections but the subsection that dealt with environmental conveniences and access to school had two items. The first which specifically requests respondents to indicate the average distance a child had to travel to get to school had four response scales as follows: less than 1 km, 1-2 km, more than 2 km, and don't know. The second which sought the effect of distance travelled on school attendance also had four response scales of highly affected, moderately affected, slightly affected, and not affected. The researcher adopted this instrument with slight modifications on the first item to include four response scales of less than 1km, 1-2 km, more than 2 km, and more than 5 km. The instrument was adjudged to be valid and reliable since it was used for similar studies by the World Bank and UNICEF and Arubayi (2005). The respondents were the heads of the primary and secondary schools sampled. The instrument was administered to the schools in person with the help of well-briefed third parties, and retrieval was 100%. Data collected were analyzed using the simple percentage.

Results

The data collected were analyzed, using the simple percentage, and according to how they related to the research questions one to four and presented in Tables 1- 4 respectively.

Results in Table 1 showed the distance travelled to school by primary school pupils in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States. These revealed that pupils in 38.87, 36.59 and 28.57 of primary schools in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States respectively travelled less than one kilometer to school. Pupils in 43.90 percent of Enugu State schools travelled between one and two kilometers to school, while Anambra and Ebonyi States indicated 36.11 and 46.43 percent respectively. For journeys of more than two kilometers, Anambra State schools recorded the highest percentage of 19.44 from pupils' homes, followed by Enugu with 14.63, while Ebonyi recorded the lowest of 10.71percent. Pupils in 4.88% of Enugu State schools travelled above five kilometers to school, those in Anambra State 5.56 percent, and Ebonyi State 14.29 percent. This implies that in the primary schools only 34.68% of all schools investigated had pupils travelling less than one kilometer to school every day. Others were 42.15% of the schools with pupils travelling between 1-2 km; 14.93% more than 2km; and 8.24% more than 5km.

Results in Table 2 showed average distance travelled by students to secondary schools in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States. The results

revealed that students in 23.81, 29.17, and 18.75 percent of secondary schools in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States respectively travelled less than one kilometer to school. Also, 52.38, 54.17, and 43.75 percent of Anambra, Enugu and Ebonyi State secondary schools respectively, are located between one and two kilometers from some students' homes while a distance of more than two kilometers was covered by some students to school in 9.52, 8.33, and 25.00 percent of Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States secondary schools respectively. In Ebonyi State, 12.50 percent of the secondary schools are located at over five kilometers from some students' homes while it was 14.29 percent in Anambra State, and 8.33 percent in Enugu State. This implies that in the secondary schools, students in 23.91% of all the schools investigated travelled less than one kilometer to school every day, while in 50.10% of the schools, students travelled between 1-2 km; 14.28% travelled more than 2km; and 11.71% travelled more than 5km.

The result in Table 3 showed the effect of distance travelled to school by primary school pupils on school attendance. This revealed that in all the three States investigated distance covered by pupils in getting to school every day had substantial effect on school attendance. While a total average of 13.47% of primary schools investigated indicated no effect on school attendance by distance travelled, 86.53% were affected at various extents. In Ebonyi State for instance, only one school (3.57%) out of 28 schools recorded no effect, 5 schools (17.86%) were slightly affected, 14 (50.00%) moderately affected, and 8 (28.57%) highly affected. In Enugu State 6 (14.63%) of the 41 primary schools were not affected while 9 (21.95%) were highly affected. Eight (22.22%) out of 36 primary schools in Anambra State were not affected by distance travelled to school while 10 (27.78%) were highly affected.

Similarly, the result in Table 4 showed the effect of distance travelled to school by secondary school students on school attendance. This revealed that school attendance is affected by distance covered to school every day in the secondary schools sampled with an average of 78.68% indicating being affected at different degrees, and only 21.33% not affected. Ebonyi State was the most hit recording 37.50% for highly affected, 43.75% for moderately affected, 12.50% for slightly affected, and with only one school (6.25%) out of the 16 secondary schools indicating no effect. In Anambra State, 6 (28.57%) out of 21 schools were not affected while in Enugu State, 7 (29.17%) out of 24 schools were not affected. The rest were affected by distance travelled to school at various extents.

Discussion

The findings in this study as indicated by the results obtained have implications for school location. One is that primary and secondary schools are better located, close to pupils' domiciles,

in Anambra and Enugu States than in Ebonyi State. In Ebonyi State, schools are generally far away from children's homes with the stipulated 1km maximum distance as low as 28.57% for primary school pupils and 18.75% for secondary school students. This may be because Ebonyi State consists mostly of rural communities unlike Anambra and Enugu States that are highly urbanized. It is disquieting to find that despite efforts by government and private people at opening more schools in Nigeria, pupils and students still travelled as far as 5km to get to school every day in the three States, with an average record of 8.24% for primary and 11.71% for secondary schools, some covered more than 2km and up to 5km (14.93% for primary and 14.28% for secondary schools), while a staggering majority of children covered distances between 1-2km (42.15% for primary and 50.10% for secondary schools) in getting to school every day, most of them on foot. This indicated that a total average of 65.32% of primary schools and 76.09% of secondary schools in the three States investigated in this study were far away from the homes of the children. These findings tallied with Arubayi's (2005) conclusion in his study of Edo and Delta States that the locations of a sizeable number of primary and secondary schools were far away from the domiciles of the pupils and students. It appeared that adequate attention was not paid to the parameters of school location by the authorities concerned in the approval and location of schools.

Also found was that distance travelled to school affected attendance to school in all the States studied at both primary and secondary levels, though it was more pronounced at the primary level. At the primary level, 86.53% of all schools investigated indicated adverse effect at different extents while it was 78.67% for secondary level. Also, the effect was worse in the mostly rural communities of Ebonyi State than in the mostly urban communities of Anambra and Enugu States. This is understandable since there are better and faster means of transport in urban than rural areas, and a good number of urban parents and guardians own personal cars. This is why the phenomenon of "School Run" has become entrenched in the language and routine of employers and employees of labour in Nigeria. This is a situation where parents and guardians are excused from work-time to drop and pick their children and wards from school at beginning and close of the school-day.

Most of the children in the rural areas trek to school since the poverty level there is higher and therefore parents and guardians who do not have personal cars may not be able to afford paid transport. When the stress on both parents/guardians and children become unbearable the unpalatable option would be to remain at home and out of school.

Parents and guardians are known to make choices for their young children and wards when it comes to which school to attend, and foremost in consideration is closeness to the home. It is therefore believed that the parameter of nearness or closeness to homes for approval and location of schools is important since too far a distance to school could lead to complete dropout from the school system (Duze, 2005) besides affecting daily school attendance. The findings tend to reflect Africa Independent Television (AIT)'s (2008) statistics on school dropout in Nigeria which indicated a higher percentage (> 50%) for primary schools than for secondary schools (> 30%). This is quite disquieting since findings in this study also revealed that school attendance in 86.53% of all primary schools and 78.67% of all secondary schools investigated were affected in various degrees by distance travelled to school. The fear is that with this type of scenario, the attainment of the very important Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal basic education for all children would be jeopardized in Nigeria.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, it was concluded that a sizeable number of primary and secondary schools in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States of Nigeria are located far away from the homes of the children. Also, the distance travelled to school every day by both primary school pupils and secondary school students have substantial adverse effect on attendance to school.

Recommendations

The authorities in-charge of approval and location of new primary and secondary schools should as a matter of policy always take into consideration the maximum distance of one kilometer between school and residence of majority of the children in the community to be served, while more schools should be established in communities where the pupils/students population exceeds the minimum recommended. To ease the effect of distance travelled on school attendance, an organized transporting system to and from school should also be considered especially in the rural areas where almost every child treks long distances to and from school every day, even in adverse weather conditions. Also, re-adopting the boarding system in secondary

schools should be considered. These will help reduce dropout rates in the three eastern Nigeria states as well as help in effective achievement of the Education For All (EFA) goals by year 2015 and the Millennium Development (MDG) goals of 2020.

Table 1: Distance Travelled to Primary Schools by Pupils in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States

Distance Travelled	Anambra State		Enugu State		Ebonyi State		Average Distance Travelled (%)
	Number of schools	%	Number of schools	%	Number of schools	%	
<1km	14	38.87	15	36.59	8	28.57	34.68
1-2 km	13	36.11	18	43.90	13	46.43	42.15
> 2 km	7	19.44	6	14.63	3	10.71	14.93
> 5 km	2	5.56	2	4.88	4	14.29	8.24
Total	36	100	41	100	28	100	100

Table 2: Distance Travelled to Secondary Schools by Students in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi States

Distance travelled	Anambra State		Enugu State		Ebonyi State		Average Distance Travelled (%)
	Number of schools	%	Number of schools	%	Number of schools	%	
<1 km	5	23.81	7	29.17	3	18.75	23.91
1 - 2 km	11	52.38	13	54.17	7	43.75	50.10
> 2 km	2	9.52	2	8.33	4	25.00	14.28
> 5 km	3	14.29	2	8.33	2	12.50	11.71
Total	21	100	24	100	16	100	100

Table 3: Effect of Distance Travelled on School Attendance in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi Primary Schools

Effects	Anambra State		Enugu State		Ebonyi State		Average Effect (%)
	Number of schools	%	Number of schools	%	Number of schools	%	
Highly Affected	10	27.78	9	21.95	8	28.57	26.10
Moderately Affected	13	36.11	15	36.59	14	50.00	40.90
Slightly Affected	5	13.89	11	26.83	5	17.86	19.53
Not Affected	8	22.22	6	14.63	1	3.57	13.47
TOTAL	36	100	41	100	28	100	100

Table 4: Effect of Distance Travelled on School Attendance in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi Secondary Schools

Effects	Anambra State		Enugu State		Ebonyi State		Average Effect (%)
	Number of schools	%	Number of schools	%	Number of schools	%	
Highly Affected	4	19.05	4	16.67	6	37.50	24.41
Moderately Affected	7	33.33	7	29.17	7	43.75	35.42
Slightly Affected	4	19.05	6	25.00	2	12.50	18.85
Not Affected	6	28.57	7	29.17	1	6.25	21.33
TOTAL	21	100	24	100	16	100	100

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