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Early Childhood Education and Delinquency in Primary Schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the relationship between early childhood education and delinquency in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A survey research design was used in the design of the study. All pupils and teachers in all the primary schools in Akwa Ibo m State, Nigeria were the study population. The sample size of the study was 150 pupils and 50 teachers which were obtained from the simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a researchers made questionnaire titled; "Early Childhood Education, future Crime and Deliquescence". was used to obtain data from respondents. Cronbach alpha statistics were obtained to determine the reliability of the instrument, and it was obtained as .76. The data collected has been analysed by correlation statistics. The result of the study revealed that early childhood education was negatively correlated with delinquency rate of children in Akwa Ibom State. There is a weak negative correlation between the probability of future crime/delinquency and the factors. There is a negative correlation between the probability of future crime/delinquency. The study findings among others recommended policy makers to increase funding for early childhood education. School administrators are encouraged to adopt evidence-based early childhood education programs and training to support school improvement. Trainings of caregivers and teachers in child psychology and behaviour management should also be carried out.

Keywords: Early Childhood, Education, Future Crime, Delinquency, teachers and pupils.

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Introduction

Early childhood education includes the act of facilitating the learning, acquisition of knowledge and skills related to health, nutrition, responsiveness, security and safety issues, which are pivotal for intellectual skills, creativity and wellbeing of children. It is a phase of growth, development & learning that emphasizes on four domains of child development: physical, cognitive, language, and social-emotional development, over the first eight years of life (Joshi & Shukla, 2019). In the context of the challenges associated with the socio-economic situation in Akwa Ibom, early childhood education is adopted as a crime prevention strategy because it fosters learning spaces that encourage positive conduct among children and contribute to their resilience. As García, Heckman and Ziff (2019) claim, early childhood education decreases crime by ascribing the improvement of home environments to young children, especially those having the most problematic home settings and the least advantageous children.

The teachers are also a part who plays a dominant role in shaping the values of education of the young ones by role modelling, daily practices and interaction with parents in school, said Baig and Begum (2023). This is an essential element in the overall crime reduction strategy. If more investments are made in the young generation, they will be better equipped in terms of their critical thinking, social skills, and emotional intelligence, which will lead to more peaceful communities (García, Heckman and Ziff, (2019).

According to Mazumdar, (2022) delinquent behaviour or conduct, which is away from normal behaviour and is prohibited by laws, is often viewed as an aberration or as something that is not socially accepted. According to Kaganovska and Slinko (2021) delinquency is an integrated concept of the crime or unrighteousness which is defined by the social and legal sciences and is based on the norms of law. With the increasing incidences of juvenile delinquency and crime in Akwa Ibom State, it is a must to investigate the effect of early childhood education on juvenile delinquency rate in primary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

Quality ECE in Akwa Ibom state has been associated with high incidence of delinquency among primary school children which has led to the poor academic achievements, social development and livelihood of the primary school children in the state. Although early childhood education is an important factor in creating a child's educational base, many children in Akwa Ibom State do not have access to quality early childhood education, thereby worsening the problem of delinquency in early primary education. The study aims to examine the relationship between early childhood education and delinquency of primary pupils in Akwa Ibom State.

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to determine the relationship between early childhood education and the delinquency rate in primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically to:

1. Establish the relationship between early childhood education and the delinquency rate in primary schools
2. Examine the relationship between the likelihood of future crime and the delinquency rate in primary schools

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between early childhood education and the delinquency rate in primary schools
2. There is no significant relationship between the likelihood of future crime and the delinquency rate in primary schools

Literature Review

The Link between Early Child Education and Child Delinquency

Favorable teacher-student relations and democratic learning environments in schools, family education and moral education courses are effective in reducing the risk of juvenile delinquency (Zhang, 2023). Zazkia (2022) on the role of family education opined that family education has a significant influence on the prevention of juvenile delinquency, with a magnitude of 19.4%. In the long-term, ECE can help to lower the overall cost of education, while

helping to improve child well-being, by significantly reducing placement in special education systems, grade retention, and improving high school graduation rates (McCoy et al, 2017).

Pre-primary education in Nigeria has shown critical gains to children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, but falls short of the expectations needed to attain a desired position among nations (Ighalo, 2015). Ikiyei et al (2022) argued that the out of school children in Nigeria are a major contributor to the challenge of nation building stagnation and insecurity, and the various factors such as poverty, ignorance, insecurity, corruption and materialism are responsible for the exclusion of out of school children. While Ward, Williams, Ours, (2020), argued that delinquency and arrest in youth are associated with early school leaving, particularly when onset of such crimes and arrests occur at younger ages.

There remains a greater link between early childhood education and child delinquency as universal early childhood education and care (ECEC) has mixed effects on child development and later life outcomes, with high quality arrangements consistently generating positive child outcomes (Huizen, & Plantenga, 2018). Family education and school education, along with a supportive social environment, can help reduce the risk of juvenile delinquency Zhang (2023). This is because illiteracy and poverty oftentimes contribute to the increase in juvenile delinquency (Razi, 2015). Early childhood education and care for children under three years provides a foundation for healthy development and lifelong learning as opined by Mathers and Ereky-Stevens (2018). During formative years, targeted interventions can alter the trajectory of a child's life, promoting positive outcomes and reducing the likelihood of delinquency (Farrington, Gaffney, Lösel, & Ttofi, 2017; Reynolds, & Ou, 2016).

Biblical and Quranic Perspectives on Child Training

Two of the world's major religious texts, which is the Bible and the Quran, provide invaluable insights on child training, offering timeless wisdom and guidelines that resonate across generations. Akwa Ibom being a Christian State, with the bible, there is prioritizing of education from an early age that ensures groundwork for safer neighbourhoods and a brighter future for the children of Akwa Ibom State. This is because Proverbs 22 verse 6, states that

we should train up a child in the way he should go, so that when he is old, he will not depart from it. Ephesians 6:4, tells us that there is a possibility of provocation in a child, when it quotes that "Fathers, should not provoke your children to anger, but rather bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord". Parenting is a fundamental responsibility, requiring us to nurture and educate children. This duty transcends cultural and religious boundaries, acknowledging the importance of fostering moral values, compassion, and responsibility in our children for their well-being.

The Quran, also places a significant emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge. The initial word revealed to Prophet Muhammad was "Iqra," translated as "Read." This emphasis on literacy and education underscores the notion that the cultivation of the mind is as essential as the cultivation of the soul. Surah Al-Mulk (67:15), emphasizes this responsibility by reminding believers that they are placed on Earth to acquire knowledge and explore their surroundings: "It is He who made for you the earth subdued, so traverse in its tracks and partake of the sustenance He has provided." Education, in this case should be embraced within a spiritual framework, encouraging all, young and grown, to seek knowledge as a means to deepen their understanding of their faith and the larger world.

Environmental Influence on a Growing Child
Neglectful parenting & a criminal family

The definition of neglect is when a child's basic needs are not met and/or they are not protected; it is the frequency of this neglect and whether it harms the child; the child's age and vulnerability (Fallon, Trocmé and Wert, 2020). The Almajirai delinquency in Northern Nigeria is caused by parental neglect, polygamy, and suggestions to criminalize both of these factors, Gomment (2016) posited. Adults who suffered childhood neglect may have problems functioning in adulthood, such as poor cognitive performance, psychopathology, and reduced interpersonal functioning. According to Sciarrino, Hernandez and Davidtz (2018). Atilola, Omigbodun and Bella-Awusah (2014), argued that the declaration of 'beyond parental control' on adolescent boys in Nigeria was founded on a presumption of adequate parental care, which is questionable when

these boys were found to have more lifetime behavioural problems, child abuse/neglect and family disruption.

Emotional neglect occurs when the caregiver-child interaction is repeated and consistent with the child feeling unworthy, flawed, unloved, unwanted, or only useful if they do the needs of others, Mobayed (2016). Parent neglect, identified by Sokol, et al (2021) is the most common type of child maltreatment in substantiated child welfare investigations with 71% of cases, and includes child involvement in domestic violence and caregiver's substance issues. Kroese, Bernasco, Liefbroer, and Rouwendal (2020) for single-family parenting families argued that a child's exposure to a single-parent family is linked to an increase in delinquency among adolescents, irrespective of the type of single-family parenting house. Biological father absence before birth also has been associated with criminal behaviour in adulthood, as was biological father absence for those who were born prior to childhood and for those who were born during late adolescence, with arrest, as reported by TenEyck, Knox and Sayed (2021). A criminal parent is also a risk factor for delinquency and high-risk behaviours for youth, as confirmed by an investigation by Ruhland et al. (2020) youth with a criminal parent reported significantly more externalizing behaviours. Crime, tolerance of antisocial acts in the family and inherited socioeconomic issues and/or problems create a context in which future crime can be a viable solution to coping or survival.

Socially Disorganized / crime prone areas

Social disorganization is the loss of social control, leading to organizational chaos, imbalance of social order, and disregard for social norms. Maloku, (2021), as a theory, social disorganization, identifies factors like residential instability, poverty and racial heterogeneity as contributing factors to crime (Kubrin, & Wo, 2015). Ramey and Harrington, (2019), states that living in a high crime neighbourhood is associated with higher levels of internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems for preschool-aged boys and girls. Children raised in crime-prone areas are often exposed to violence, drugs, delinquency, and associations with gangs and other criminal behaviours. This exposure can lead to normalized aggression and other maladaptive behaviours. These

experiences negatively affect children's perceptions of their future. As they grow up, they may feel trapped in an unchanging environment, resulting in truancy and gangsterism. This mindset perpetuates cycles of poverty and crime.

Corrupt teachers / poor pay influence

Joseph, Andrew and Olayinka, (2021), states that corruption in Nigeria's education sector negatively affects the standard and quality of education, with causes including poverty, poor remuneration for educators, and moral decadence among students and educators. And education corruption in Nigeria significantly increases teacher absenteeism, highlighting the need for improved accountability and motivation in the education sector. Ugoani (2016). Teachers' actions in everyday classroom interactions significantly shape children's growth (Isenström, 2020). Many teachers exhibit an "I don't care" attitude towards children in class, ignoring certain behaviours that could be corrected, others keep a closed eye, because of the poor pay attached to the job. This negative teacher behaviour can lead to long-term psychological effects, such as depression and feelings of inferiority, in students (Louw & Beyers, 2023). Even teacher pay is significantly lower than non-teaching jobs, leading to career-changes and decreased teacher quality. Han, (2018). And school teachers and students agree that corruption exists in Nigeria, with poor income, unemployment, corrupt leadership, greed, selfishness, and bribery being key causes (Whawo, 2015).

Delinquency: Causes, Signs and Symptoms

Esiri and Ejechi (2021), explains Juvenile delinquency in Nigeria as that which involves child criminal behaviour like gangism, banditry, thuggery, drug sales, and abuse behaviours, sometimes developed from participation in child labour activities. Adegoke, (2015), argued that broken homes, poverty, and peer influence are the main sustainers of juvenile delinquency in Nigeria. By understanding the underlying factors, warning signs, and manifestations of delinquency, we can better address and prevent it. Frequent causes, indicators and characteristics associated with delinquent behaviour include inadequate communication, parental conflict and insufficient support from caregivers. Additional factors

may consist of exposure to drugs or alcohol within the familial environment, peer influence from associates engaged in delinquent conduct, and limited socioeconomic resources that may compel individuals to resort to criminal activities for survival. Furthermore, exposure to violent or rebellious themes in films, video games, or music may exacerbate these behaviours. In such contexts, it is common to observe accompanying signs, including abrupt changes in behaviour, elevated levels of aggression, a decline in academic performance or instances of truancy, consistent association with known delinquents or gang members, engagement in hazardous activities, and indicators of anxiety or depression.

Theoretical Explanation

Social Control Theory

Social control theory focuses on the forces that keep people from committing crime, such as bonds to society, attachment to parents, commitment to conventional goals, and belief in the moral validity of the law" (Costello, 2017). Similarly, Britt (2015) emphasized that effective social bonds (e.g., family, school, and community) should drive a decrease in criminal behaviors because of negative consequences for these bonds, which are expected to reduce the likelihood of the behaviors. Early childhood education supports children to develop positive relationships with adults and to learn what is appropriate and inappropriate in society and to have a sense of morality. This can decrease the probability of them engaging in delinquent behaviour later in life, as the schools teach the students to conform to social rules in different ways, including indoctrination, informal sanctions and formal sanctions (Marken, 2021).

Developmental and Life-Course Criminology

Longitudinal studies are the focus of developmental and life-course criminology. McGee, et al (2020). It is an area of study that focuses on the causes, size and uniqueness of offending behaviour in relation to developmental and lifelong factors. Mazerolle and McGee (2017). According to Kazemian, Farrington, & Piquero, (2018), developmental and life-course criminology studies the development of offending over a person's life, from onset to persistence and desistance, focusing on individual and psychological factors. Top-notch early childhood education

curricula offer a stable, nurturing setting for children, which can help lessen the impact of adverse childhood experiences and build resilience.

Results

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between early childhood education and delinquency in primary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 1: Correlation of the relationship between early childhood education and delinquency in primary schools (n=200)

Variable	Mean	SD	R	P-value
Early Childhood Education	32.29	4.92		
			-	0.25
Delinquency in Primary Schools	27.54	3.61	0.159	

Significant at the 0.05 level of significance

Result in Table 1 shows that there is low negative and no significant relationship between early childhood education and delinquency in primary schools in Akwa Ibom State, (r=-0.159; P=0.25). This means that there is no significant relationship between early childhood education and delinquency in primary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Hence the null hypothesis was retained at the 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis two: There is no significant relationship between the likelihood of future crime and delinquency in primary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 2: Correlation of the relationship between likelihood of future crime and delinquency in primary schools (n=150)

Variable	Mean	SD	R	P-value
Likelihood of future crime	31.35	5.98		
			-0.338	0.00
Delinquency in Primary schools	27.54	3.61		

Significant at the 0.05 level of significance

The results in table 2 indicate that low negative and significant relationship between the likelihood of future crime and delinquency (r=0.338 : P=0.00). Thus, the prediction of future crime and delinquency have a strong link. Therefore the null hypothesis can be

rejected at the 0.05 level of significance.

Discussion

The result of the study revealed that the early childhood education and delinquency in primary schools in Akwa Ibom State is negatively low and not significantly related. The findings of this study indicates that there are other factors that relate to delinquency other than the lack or availability of early childhood education. It can be observed that before the advent of western education children learnt from their parents and elderly ones. The parents' good moral standing would most likely be passed on to the children via incorporation. Other factors that can lead to delinquency in children are parental neglect and polygamy. The result of this study corroborates Adegoke, 2015 which found that broken homes, poverty and peer influence are the major perpetrators of Juvenile delinquency in Nigeria. The results of this study agree with McCoy et al (2017) that early childhood education is effective in reducing the number of children placed in special education and the number of children retained in elementary school, while improving the number of children who graduate from high school, demonstrating the value of early childhood education to save money in the education system and to enhance child well-being. The results from this study differ from those of Ward, Williams, Ours (2020) who found that, delinquency and arrest in youth were related to their early school leaving, especially when crimes and arrests are committed at a young age.

The study on the relationship between likelihood of future crime and delinquency in primary schools in Akwa Ibom State revealed that there is a low negative and significant relationship between the likelihood of future crime and delinquency. This study's findings agree with the results of Kroese, Bernasco, Liefbroer and Rouwendal (2020) who conducted a study on single-family parenting and concluded that adolescents in single-parent families have a higher risk of crime involvement, independent of the single-parent family context. Also the finding of this study is consistent with TenEyck, Knox and Sayed (2021) who found biological father absence before birth to be associated with criminal behaviour in adulthood, absence of a father in early childhood is associated with

early adulthood criminal behaviour, and absence of a father in late adolescence is associated with arrest.

The Findings of this study are also consistent with Ruhland et al (2020) who found that youth whose parent(s) had been presently or previously incarcerated were significantly more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviours, which in turn would increase their risk for delinquency and high-risk behaviour. A combination of exposure to crime, acceptance of illegal behavior in the family and inherited socioeconomic issues creates an atmosphere in which young people feel that they must engage in crime to cope or survive.

Conclusion

It was concluded that the study revealed that there was a low negative relationship, while there was no significant relationship between early childhood education and delinquency in Primary schools in Akwa Ibom state because other factors would have contributed to the delinquency in the primary school children. In addition, there was a low negative and significant relationship between the odds of future crime and delinquency in primary school children of Akwa Ibom State.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study it recommended that:

1. Policy makers should increase funding for early childhood education.
2. School administrators should implement evidence-based early childhood education programs and training to support their development.
3. There should also be training of caregivers and teachers on child psychology and behaviour management.
4. Future research should be carried out to investigate other factors that may contribute to the delinquency among primary school children in Akwa Ibom State
5. Educators and policymakers should review and refine policies, provide support services and promote community engagement to support delinquency prevention efforts.

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