

## **Early Marriage As Socio-Cultural Practices And Secondary School Students Performance In Social Studies In Cross River State, Nigeria.**

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**Abstract:** The main purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of early marriage as Socio-Cultural practices on secondary school students academic performance in Social Studies in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study was guided by one (1) research question from which was transformed into one (1) null hypothesis, tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study used ex-post facto design with a sample size of 2000 Social Studies students drawn from the three education zone. Simple random sampling and stratified sampling techniques were adopted. An instrument tagged Socio-Cultural Practices Questionnaire (SCPQ) and Social Studies Performance Tests (SSPT) were used to collect data. Cronbach Alpha reliability was used. To ascertain the reliability estimate simple regression was used to analyzed the data collected. The findings revealed that the null hypothesis was rejected which implies that early marriage as Socio-Cultural practices significantly influence secondary school students academic performance in Social Studies in Cross River State, Nigeria. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended among others that, the State House of Assemble should enshrine in it by law, rules that would stop early or forced marriages in the state to promote school enrolment in secondary schools.

**Keywords:** Early Marriage, Socio-cultural Practices, Secondary School, Students Performance, Social Studies

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Date of Submission: 03-08-2019

Date of Acceptance: 19-08-2019

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### **I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

There had been a public outcry for some time now to the fact that the standard of education is falling and that the level of students performance at internal as well as, external examination is very low. Criticisms orchestrated in public speeches by concerned parents, stakeholders, teachers and government officials blame the poor performance on teachers while the teachers became the government and parents. In the fear for failure, student resort to alternative short cut to succeed in examination as a cover up to poor performance.

Data collected by the researchers from Examination and Records, Secondary School Management Board, Ministry of Education, Calabar (2019) showed low academic performance of students in Cross River State. For instance, in 2016, only 25.94 percents of the students credited Mathematics, English language and Social Studies. In Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination. Also, in 2017, the performance was also bad across the eighteen (18) Local Government as observed by the researchers, the percentage of the candidate that bad credit passes in Social Studies, Mathematics and English language between 2016 - 2019 shows 25.94 percent in 2016, 15.06 percent in 2017, 22.54 percent in 2018 and 13.98 percent in 2019. The result also showed that those that had credit passes in five (5) subjects and above including Social Studies, Mathematics and English language between 2016 - 2019 are; 8.35 percent in 2016, 13.32 percent in 2017, 10.52 percent in 2018, and 1.08 percent in 2019. This pictured a mass failure syndrome of students academic performance in both compulsory and Social Studies subject in Cross River State Public school external examinations.

This abysmal performance of students at school portends a great danger on the educational system in the state and to the nation at large if left unchecked. In an attempt to seek and proffer solutions to this trend of event, the researchers intend to look into the socio-cultural practice, variables as an alternate blame to the teacher and government. This is in the optimism that early marriage is capable of imposing significant influence on students academic performance either positively or negatively.

Socio-cultural practices are large scale forces within cultures and societies, lifestyles and values that characterize a society, capable of affecting the thoughts, feeling and behaviours of individuals. According to Denga (2016), cultural practices are relevant because it maintain and develop knowledge base that supports operational decisions making to enhance operational effectiveness, preserve and share knowledge.

Socio-cultural factors are also derived from the customs, traditional and beliefs of individual(s) culture, which are key determinants to whether or not such cultural concept and elements like norms and values influence the quality of a person's performance. These cultural elements to some extent affect the pace of students performance to achieve the set objectives. The influence of cultural practices according to. Unimke (2015) requires government appraisal, to consolidate students learning towards quality delivery sometime, these negative or positive impact which affects the quality of instruction in the class. The consequence could be poor or good academic performance due to the influence of cultural practices such as early/forced marriages religious affiliation, family, structure and marital status which students and teachers are part of the culture where these practices are carried out.

The various cultural belief which constitute socio-cultural practices are part of the curriculum contents to be taught in schools, to acquaint the learners with the variety of cultural heritage in the state. This is because, culture has been in existence in every society before the advents of the colonial master's with contents, instructional aids and methodology of imparting skills, ideas and knowledge to the members of the society (Bolarins, 2019). Therefore, socio-cultural practices always serves as reference point to the implementation of Social Studies curriculum content. This is because, once in a while, government collects the students/teachers bio-data to access their Socio-Cultural practices.

However, the society is bothered because Social Studies is one of the most important subjects of Social Science at the upper basic education level, that prepares a Social Science student's for the future particular profession. Besides, it plays an important role in the day-to-day activities of man. Students who will pick up a career in Social Science related areas like Economics, Political Science and Geography must have background knowledge in Social Studies at the Junior Secondary school level and must have passed the subject at least at credit level in the Junior Secondary School Examination (JSSCE). This is because Social Studies enable learners to understand the world and, what happens around them. It helps them to solve simple problems they encounter daily.

Unfortunately, despite its enormous roles, it is disheartening to know that the subject is affected by a continuous low performance by students. This has elicited a lot of curiosity and instigated research to ascertain the causes of repeated low performance. Some researchers have said that factors like lack of infrastructural materials, quality teachers, inadequate funding and poor infrastructural facilities are responsible, but this study assumed that socio-cultural practices of the people, may be the cause of students attitudes toward learning and general performance. Regrettably, the "Boko Haram" crises in Nigeria are a product of cultural belief, where Islamic doctrine preach against western education.

Culture, according to Abasiokong (2010), is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society. It is the pattern of behaviours of a society that are transmitted from one generation to another. It is the people's way of life which are passed on to future members of the society (Utulu, 2014). Culture generally means the totality of a people's way of life, which is expressed in their history, language, art, philosophy, religion, politics, economics, music, food and dressing. It involves knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, arrangements and skills that are available to members of the society. According to Fanon (2017), culture is seen as a combination of motor and mental behaviour pattern arising from the encounter of man with nature and with his fellow man. It is a configuration of learned behaviour shared by members of a particular society. Every society or organization like Cross River State, in particular, have a well defined institutional arrangement through which its goals and aspirations are satisfied. These goals and behaviour which relate to belief pattern of the people are therefore rooted in their culture and value system. Such culture and values either affect or dictate for the members of the society the guidelines for selection of the best option in the midst of many alternative choices of action that tend to distinguish the performance of learners. Inevitably, these cultural patterns and value systems are the functional pre-requisite which constitute the bedrock upon which members of the society depend for their survival and identity, as well as value orientation through services rendered to one another in economics, politics, religion and informal education.

Early/forced marriage, according to United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2010), refers to the imposition of marriage partner upon a child, either a boy or a girl child, whose childhood is cut short and their fundamental rights are tampered with.. Early marriage is common in Africa, especially in Nigeria, among the Hausa/Fulani's in the north. The cultural practices of early marriage are also found in many communities in Nigeria, Cross River State inclusive, there is always a strong pressure on families to conform with cultural practices of forcing their children to marry at early age as against going to school.

## **II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The problem of poor performance of students in Social Studies at the upper basic level of secondary education has long been a source of worry to the members of the public, especially the education stakeholders. It is generally observed that students' academic performance in Social Studies is not encouraging. Despite

concerted efforts made at various levels of government to curb the situation, it has not translated to expected education development, and in particular the high academic performance of students.

Many factors such as poor teaching method, limited number of trained teachers, lack of instructional materials, inadequate funding, non availability of suitable practical equipment among others are believed to be responsible for this ugly trend. The researchers sees socio-cultural tenets of the people influence the attitude of learners toward learning. This is in line with Vygotsky socio-cultural theory, that tradition and custom affect children's education. When one goes to the communities and many homes in Cross River State, one sees some young persons of school age have already become mothers at their tender age. Many young girls have given birth to children already, some are legally married, others got child/children out of wedlock.

In Cross River State, there is a rise in the number of children who litter the streets in search of a livelihood since parents cannot provide for their needs. Some of these children hawk goods in order to contribute to the economy of the family, often, to the detriment of schooling. Also, most Fridays, some children are not allowed to go to school by parents so that they can help on the farm. It is an established knowledge that Muslim parents always make sure that children do not stay in school beyond 12 noon on Fridays which is their day of worship. These cultural practices have been assumed to be responsible for the poor academic performance of students in Social Studies in Cross River State. Does socio-cultural practice such as early marriage, beliefs influence the academic performance of students in Social Studies?

### **Purpose of the study**

This study sought to investigate the influence of socio-cultural practices on secondary school students' performance in Social Studies in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study specifically seeks to examine if: Early marriage influence secondary school students' academic performance in Social Studies.

### **Research questions**

To give direction to the study, the following research question was established: To what extends does early marriage influence secondary school student's academic performance in Social Studies?

### **Statement of hypothesis**

In line with the research question, the following hypothesis was stated to direct or guild the study: There is no significant influence of early marriage on students' academic performance in Social Studies.

## **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Early Marriage and academic performance**

Marriage is the beginning of a legitimate family. In all societies of the world, certain rules are established in order to specify unions that can be called marriage and those that cannot. Whatever the society stipulates as right become legitimate and therefore desirable and appropriate. In some situations, however, certain persons may challenge the existing marriage norms by going into unions or alliances that are contrary to nature rules and laws; also people could kick against some marital applications that may tamper with the practice among popular ethnic groups across the country. By classical definition, marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that the children to the woman are recognized, legitimate offspring of both partners' Okokon (2012).

Throughout the world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and milestone in adult social life. According to Nmom (2017), marriage is an institution admitting men and women to family life, that is living in a cardinal personal relationship of husband and wife for the primary purpose of getting and rearing of children. On the other hand, Ahua (2017) refers marriage as the customs, rules and obligation that established a special relationship between a sexually cohabiting adult male and female, between them and the kin groups of husband and wife. In marital union, the couples cooperate to produce economically and provide welfare to their members. Common marriage types, forms and ceremonies include, Christian marriage, Islamic marriage, traditional marriage and civil or court marriage, others include monogamy, polygamy, polygyny, polyandry, gift and bride capture. Unfortunately one of the marital practices or doctrine assumed popularly showcase in Nigeria and in most ethnic groups in Cross River State, is force/early marriage, characterized by mate selection by most parents which is a challenge to our learner who are victims of this marriage conception (United Nation International Children Education Fund, 2010).

Early/Force marriage refers to the engagement of young ones in marriage most time against their will. In early marriage, young ones are threatened of their youth and are required to take on marital roles for which they are not psychologically or physically prepared. Majority at times do not have advance knowledge of the would-be partner. Many are compelled into marriage with no personal decision. Premature marriage deprived these minors of the opportunity for personal development as well as rights to full reproductive health wellbeing and education. Akpochafo (2018)

Reports by Utulu (2016) on early marriage/influence on girl child education showed that 322 or 75% of respondents agreed that most girls in Oju/Obi Local Government Areas in Benue State, marry before the ages of eighteen (18) while 64 or 16% disagreed. The same researcher carried out a study on forced marriage, the result reveals that 565 of respondents agreed that forced marriage is still in practice in Oju/Obi, while 164 or 40% disagreed. The researcher examined some cultural practices like early and forced marriage ascribed roles of women in society, and men's prejudice/stereotyped attitudes toward marriage. Six research questions and 6 null hypotheses were posited to guide the study. Descriptive survey design was sought. The subject was made up of 300 girls and 150 teachers randomly sampled from 15 secondary schools in the study area. Structured questionnaires were used to elicit desire responses. Descriptive and inferential statistic of percentage and chi-square were respectively used for data collection and analyse. The result shows that culture has considerable influence on girl child education, hence the entire null hypotheses test at 0.05 level of significant at 12 degree of freedom were rejected. The researcher recommended that regular sensitization workshop by experts be organised for girl child intermittently on the danger of early marriage and creation of attractive privilege for girls child such as free school fees, textbooks for all girls less than eighteen years.

In another related view by Ladebo (2019), is that many communities in Nigeria and worldwide, the practice of child marriage or forced marriage or early marriage is very common. Children, particularly the girls in their preteen or early teens are married off by their parents or guardians against the desires of the victims. According to Akpochofo, the age at which one gets married has implication for health, personal development and access to education. All over the world, the average age of first marriage is being put at about twenty years but many communities allow children to marry as early as twelve or fifteen years. Some even allow girls to marry at ten. Adekeye (2016), argues that the practice of early marriage means that girls are withdrawn from school to marry.

Early marriage inevitably deprived children of school age the right to education, the need for personal development in preparation for adulthood, and effective contribution to the future well-being of families and the society at large. In accordance with the above assertion, Utulu (2016) agreed that a girl or boy child who is betrothed or forced into marriage is exposed to early marriage with its attendant risks which include denied access to good education among others. While marriage doesn't have to mean that a girls or boy's education finishes, the attitude of parents, school and spouses of most married women in many societies mean that it often does. According to Mathur (2013), early marriage generally stands against the objective of the millennium development goals (MDGs), because it threatens the achievement of the first six goals respectively, which include achieving universal primary education, therefore, later marriages are considered the best, because the goal advocates the need for every child to be given opportunity to receive basic education to its completion stage.

#### **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research design that was adopted for this study is ex-post facto design. This is because; the design basically studies the variables retrospectively the possible cause and effect relationships but not involving any manipulation. The research design start by observing some effects and then attempts to established some causal connections and attempts to find any possible factors. According to Kerlinger (1986), defines ex-post facto design as a systematic empirical inquiry in which the researcher does not have direct control over the independent variables because their manifestation have already occurred or because they are inherently not manipulated.

The area of this study was the entire Cross River State which comprised of three Education zones of Ogoja, Ikom and Calabar. Cross River State is one of the 36 states in Nigeria. It is located in the South-South geopolitical zone (Southern) part of the country. The state comprised of Eighteen (18) Local Government Areas.

Cross River State evolved from the then South-Eastern state, which was one of the first twelve states created by the General Yakubu Gowon led Administration in 1967, which was renamed Cross River State in 1976. It was the first capital of what was then the southern protectorate, Nigeria. Present Cross River State is bounded to the North by Benue State, to the south by the Bight of Bonny, share a common boundary with the Republic of Cameroon in the East, to the West, it is bounded by Akwa-Ibom, Abia and Ebonyi States. Geographically, the state lies between longitudes 7<sup>o</sup>15'E and 9<sup>o</sup> 30'E of the Greenwich meridian and Latitude 4<sup>o</sup>5N to 7<sup>o</sup>N of the Equator.

The state is the epicentre of conservation and tourism in Nigeria. Cross River State is popularly known as a promoter of cultural activities and a tourist attraction, a major hub of the state Government carnival policy for peaceful co-existence among members of the society, talents discovery and art exhibition. Calabar is a great capital, world famous as Nigeria's first capital, home of the first international carnival in sub-Saharan Africa, home of Tinapa and the first Monorail in Nigeria, and now the first solar-powered industrial park in Nigeria (Giant strides, 2017). Twenty-one thousand and twenty-two (21,022) JSS 3 students constituted the target student population, comprising 10,348 male students and 10,674 female students. The education zones have a

total enrolment of 114,474 with JSS 3 students totalling 21,022 From the 267 public secondary school in Cross River State (Secondary Education Board, Calabar 2017).

The researcher employed stratified random sampling technique in the selection for subjects for this study. The Cross River State Education Zones was stratified into three based on the education zones (Ogoja, Ikom and Calabar respectively). The stratified random system was done to give equal opportunity to all the targeted population for the study to be represented, despite the disparities in terms of enrolment, numbers of schools, and cultural diversity. The second stage of stratification was based on school, where forty secondary schools representing 15% of the total of 267 secondary schools in Cross River State was drawn. Also, the stratification was based on students' gender, where 2000 students (9.5%) were drawn as the sample for the study. Further breakdown on the figure showed that 1160 were male, while 840 were female. In order to select the respondents without bias, all the JSS 3 secondary school students in each of the school sampled were assembled and asked to pick from a basket with pieces of squeezed up paper with "yes" or "no" option. The students were required to pick any one who picked "yes" was chosen as a sample. Following the procedure for the selection of the population of the study. The following yes or no below were picked respectively from the entire schools used in the three education zones. From the forty schools visited, out of the 6,238 JSS 3 students that participated, 2000 (32%) of students picked yes, and 4,238 students picked no; in line with Creswell (2014) that in a large homogenous population a sample of at least 10% could represent the entire population, therefore, 2000 constitute the total sample used for the study. In the stratified technique employed special consideration were given to the variables, such as educational zone, students, gender and different cultural interest are represented. The stratification covers the following cultural groups found within the various school locations: see table 4 on the figure for sampling technique.

The sample consist of two thousand (2000) students, with 1160 male and 840 female, representing 9.5% of the target population and 32% of the 6,238 students, being the Junior Secondary school JSS 3 social studies students drawn from 40 schools out of the 267 school spread across cultural groups identified in the state (in the three education zones). See table 4 for a breakdown of population, schools and sample of upper basic (JSS 3) students' used for the study in each of the education zone.

Two instruments were used for data collection in this study. These instruments include; a structured questionnaire titled: Socio-Cultural Practice Questionnaire (SCPQ) and a Social Studies Performance Test (SSPT). The questionnaire has two sections (A&B). Section A requires information on the personal data of students such as: name of school, sex, family type and parents marital status, these will enable the researcher to analysis hypothesis two and four. While section B is made up of 20 items drawn from the selected socio-cultural variables, represented with 5 items on a four likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4; Agreed (A) =3; Disagreed (D) =2; and strongly disagreed (SD)=1. These were all for positively worded statement. The scoring is reversed for all negatively worded statements, that is Strongly Agreed attracts 1 point, agreed 2 points, disagreed 3 points, while strongly disagreed attracts 4points. Second instrument, the Social Studies Performance (SSPT) consist of forty (40) Social Studies questions drawn from a standardized junior secondary school external examination, conducted by the Cross River Ministry of education in the previous years. These questions were well scrutinized by Social Studies experts before application in the field for data collection. Out of the 2000 questionnaire administered on 1940 were returned and used for the analysis. Others were invalidated due to one flaw or another.

### **Presentation of results**

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant influence of early marriage on the academic performance of students in social studies in Cross River State.

Independent Variable: Early Marriage

Independent Variable: Simple Regression

Statistical Tool: Simple Regression Analysis

The Variables in null hypothesis 1 early marriage (independent variable) and academic performance in Social Studies (dependent variable). The null hypothesis was tested using data from the 1940 respondents. The simple regression analysis was used in the data analysis and the result was given in Table 1. This table showed the result of the simple regression analysis of the influence of early marriage on the academic performance of JSS 3 students in Social Studies in Cross River State. The standardized Beta ( $\beta$ ) gives -.112 which implies that there is a weak negative influence of early marriage on academic performance of JSS 3 students in Social Studies. This implies that if there is an increase in the early marriage among the students in the state, there will be a corresponding decrease in the academic performance in Social Studies among the students in the state. So, early marriage is a threat to better academic performance of students in Social Studies in the Cross River State. The regression model produced an  $R^2$  of .013. This indicated that early marriage accounted for 1.3% of what determines academic performance of the JSS3 students in social studies in the state. The F-value of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) obtained from the regression table is  $F = 24.68$  to 2 decimal places and the p-value =.000

(or  $p < .05$ ) at the degree of freedom (df) 1 and 1939. The implication of this result is that, the null hypothesis is rejected and the finding drawn from the result is that there is significant influence of early marriage on academic performance of JSS3 students in Social Studies in Cross River State. Therefore, even though the relative influence of early marriage on academic performance in Social Studies is low, its effect is significant.

**TABLE 1**

Simple regression result of the influence of early marriage on the academic performance of JSS 3 students in social studies in Cross River State

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	$\beta$	N
.112 <sup>a</sup>	.013	.012	6.140	-.112	1940

  

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-ratio	p-value
Regression	930.48	1	930.483	24.682	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	73060.97	1938	37.699		
Total	73991.46	1939			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance in Social Studies

b. Predictors: (Constant), Early marriage

## V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section is centred on the discussion of the findings based on each of the hypothesis drowned for the study.

Early marriage and students' academic performance The findings as obtained from the result of the simple regression analysis of the influence of early marriage on the academic performance of students in Social Studies in Cross River State, shows that forced marriage or early marriage as tagged in this work has a weak negative influence on the academic performance of JSS3 students in Social Studies. The findings is in tandem with Utulu (2016) whose study revealed that students identified sexual harassment (abuse) as being among the stressors hindering academic performance of students. According to Ladebo 2019 victims of child sexual abuse occasioned by early marriage demonstrate low grades and other psychological and health effects, with great implication on education. This is because someone who has been sexually harassed often suffer from depression, anxiety, panic attacks, sleeplessness and or nightmare, shame and guilt and difficulty in concentrating in academic works. This view is equally supported by Nmom (2017), states that one of the cultural practices popularly showcase in Nigeria and in most ethnic groups in Cross River State is early marriage, characterized by mate selection or imposition of life partners by parents on children, which is a challenge to learners.

The result equally agreed with the United Nation International Children Education Fund (UNICEF) (2010) which states that early marriage act is a violation of child right to education, stated in section 15 of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria. According to its report, most children are deprived of educational right because of early involvement in marriage making them ineffective in learning. This finding is also in line with Adeleke (2016) who said that, the age at which one get married has implication for health, personal development and access to education and better performance. The author added that the practice of early marriage means withdrawal of child from school to marry which may leads to low completion rate

## VI. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study strongly agreed that socio-cultural practices are prevailing and prevalence tendencies which influence secondary school students academic performance in JSS3 social studies in Cross River State. Comparatively, related literature and the analysis of this study stated clearly that early or forced marriage as the case may be characterized by mate selection, bride capture and other forms of traditional marriage practices does not provide a healthy ground for students to achieve reasonably in academics. Despite the contrary views registered for and against socio-cultural influence on students academic performance, it is

very clear that cultural tenets studied in this work have implication on secondary school social studies learners therefore need a modification, so as to make room for soft landing in our classroom and for general development of education in Cross River State, and Nigeria at large. In accordance with the findings of this study, the researcher recommended that, all the local government council in the state should make bye-law with a strict rules and principle that would forbid parents from imposing marriage on the children or wards at the tender age.

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UNIMNA " Early Marriage As Socio-Cultural Practices And Secondary School Students Performance In Social Studies In Cross Rive State, Nigeria." IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). vol. 24 no. 08, 2019, pp. 22-28.