INTERPLAY OF FAMILIAL CAPITAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXTS ON SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITION AND COMPLETION IN GHANA AND NIGERIA

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Abstract
*The introduction of free education up to the Junior Secondary School level in Nigeria and Ghana's Free Senior High School (FSHS) notwithstanding, both countries continue to face challenges of students' dwindling enrolment and completion rates at the secondary school level. Previous studies on enrolment and completion rates largely focused on elementary education, with scant attention paid to secondary school students' enrolment, let alone comparative phenomena in Ghana and Nigeria. This study, therefore, examined family-related factors influencing secondary school students' enrolment and completion rates in Ghana and Nigeria. Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was adopted as a framework, while comparative survey design methodology was used. Southwestern Nigeria was randomly selected from the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, while the Ashanti region was randomly selected from Ghana's regions. Ekiti and Oyo States in Nigeria and Mampong and Sekyere Districts in Ghana were purposively selected. Thirty-two public secondary schools were randomly selected from the States and the Regions. The instruments were: Teachers Family-Related Factors (**α**=0.82), Teachers Environmental (**α**=0.90), Student Family-Related Factors (**α**=0.79), Student Environmental (**α**=0.80) questionnaires. School records were equally consulted (2011-2021). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, PPMC and Analysis of variance at P≤0.05. Family-related factors significantly influenced secondary school enrolment in Ghana, while environmental factors significantly influenced secondary school enrolment in Nigeria. Family-related and environmental factors comparatively influenced secondary school enrolment and completion rates in Nigeria and Ghana. Improved enrolment and completion rates require collaborative efforts among governments, communities, and parents. Such collaboration can enhance funding, improve security, leverage local resources, and foster supportive home environments.*

Keywords: Educational barrier; Enrolment and completion; family-related factors; Nigeria and Ghana; Secondary school students

Introduction

Students' transition from the basic education to the secondary level marks a significant stage in the educational progression of young people worldwide, with particular

reference to sub-Saharan Africa. Taking Ghana and Nigeria as examples, this trajectory could be influenced by an interplay of some variables, such as parental involvement and kinship networks. These have different degree shape in students' opportunities and outcomes. For instance, the historical development of educational access in Nigeria, focusing on the Universal Basic Education (UBE) framework, which includes the junior secondary level of education, has been extensively documented (Kayode-Olawoyin and Lawal, 2021), stressing challenges and policy shifts that continue to determine enrolment and completion outcomes.

A major key determinant of educational success and transition, especially in relation to enrolment and completion, is parental involvement in a child's education. This comprises activities such as constant monitoring of the child's academic progress, provision of learning support at home, attendance at school meetings, especially the parent-teacher association, as well as developing and fostering positive attitudes toward education. Research in Ghana and Nigeria consistently affirmed that when parents are actively involved in students' education, the outcome would always yield better academic performance as students are more likely to transition to secondary school (Adeyeye, 2023; Kwarteng et al., 2022; Donkor, 2023). Parental involvement serves as a link between family economic status and academic outcomes, proving that a low-income family that actively engages can partially overcome economic challenges (Wolf & McCoy, 2017; Kwarteng et al., 2022; and Tazouti & Jarlégan, 2019). Cultural, economic, and educational factors together help shape the nature and extent of parental involvement. Donkor (2023 argued that in a setting where parents do not have adequate formal education or are faced with excruciating economic challenges, their efforts to provide support for their children's schooling may be seriously constrained. On the other hand, studies reveal that when regular communication exists between the parents and the teachers, smoother transitions to higher levels of education could be possible as students are more likely to remain engaged and motivated. Kwarteng et al. (2022 and Jeynes (2007).

Kinship networks remain a significant player in children's educational outcomes in many African societies. This was corroborated by Egunyomi & Ekpenyong (2008) as the authors argued that effective communication channels within families and communities significantly influence educational decision-making, particularly in contexts where

collective responsibility shapes schooling outcomes. Cebotari & Mazzucato (2016, Itasanmi, Akintolu, & Oni (2020 and Butler (2022 argued that these networks can partially substitute for additional financial, emotional, and social support, especially in some situations in which the parents are absent as a result of migration, divorce, or economic necessity. Using Ghana and Nigeria as case studies, children beneficiaries of stable care-giving arrangements within their immediate kinship networks are more likely to maintain stable school attendance and performance, which are crucial for secondary school enrolment and completion rates (Cebotari & Mazzucato, 2016 and Adeyeye, 2023).

This is not to say that the impact of kinship support is always uniformly positive, as the absence of the parents owing to migration can sometimes lead to decreased school performance, especially if the caregiving arrangement is unstable or lacks adequate resources (Cebotari & Mazzucato, 2016; Mao et. al., 2020). Conversely, the negative impact of parental absence can be alleviated by strong kinship networks and remittances, which would help support educational continuity (Cebotari & Mazzucato, 2016 and Mao et. al., 2020). The relative weight of family economic status, parental involvement, and kinship networks can be shaped by a well pronounced social, cultural, and policy contexts, such as government policies aimed at reducing educational costs and promoting parental engagement. This can foster families and kinship networks for enhanced school enrolment and completion rates (Oduro-Ofori et al., 2023 and Kwarteng et al., 2022).

Apart from the above noted family related challenges are environmental problems that can come in forms of security threats, school conditions and natural hazards. For instance, security threats, such as armed conflict, terrorism and violence, do have a profound impact on educational access and attainment. In the case of Nigeria, widespread banditry and heinous activities of terror gangs have led to school closures, displacement of learners and their teachers, and vandalism of educational infrastructure. Evidence from empirical studies revealed that conflict brings a significant reduction in school enrolment and completion rates, with children mostly affected since they are no longer of mandatory school age (Bertoni et al., 2019). The psychological trauma associated with exposure to violence further undermines students' ability to learn and persist in school. Both the physical and social environment of the school are also important in shaping educational outcomes. Studied by Tamambang et al. (2024 proved that when schools are well-equipped

with sufficient infrastructure and helpful learning environments, the result will be higher enrolment and completion rates. In the same vein, poor school conditions, which may be in the form of inadequate teaching materials, overcrowding, among others, can discourage enrolment, leading to low completion rates. In addition to these are natural hazards which may be as relate of climate change and manifest in forms of floods and other disasters interrupt class activities and other educational processes by destroying the limited hard-earned infrastructure, displacing families, and thereby diverting community and household resources away from education. Comparative studies from different countries revealed that this negatively impacts secondary school attainment as the effect results either in death occurring through natural hazards or damages on infrastructure (Onigbinde, 2023). In the case of Ghana and Nigeria, natural hazards can lead to short- and long- term losses in educational attainment, owing to the way families prioritise survival and recovery over schooling.

The study was anchored on Ecological Systems Theory propounded by Urie Bronfenbrenner. This theory made it possible to analyse the interplay between family-related factors, school environmental safety, and public secondary education enrolment and completion rates in different regions of Ghana and Nigeria. The theory allows for a comprehensive understanding of the complex factors that contribute to educational outcomes and can inform interventions and policies to improve enrolment and educational quality. Further to this, the exosystem level noted byBronfenbrenner's theory gives the best explanation for this study's focus on how institutional forces shape secondary education outcomes. Three exosystem elements were directly examined: Policy structures (Ghana's Free Senior High School and Nigeria's Free Junior Secondary School) influencing school accessibility, community safety networks affecting attendance patterns, and resource allocation systems creating regional disparities. This is in line with the methodology using case selection of schools under different policy regimes, safety audits in school environments and comparative analysis of regional completion rates. This justifies comparing systemic rather than individual factors, which is the core of the Nigeria-Ghana analysis of the study. Understanding the interplay of familial capital and environmental contexts is essential for designing effective interventions to improve secondary school transition rates in these two countries.

The study was guided by the following hypotheses

Hypothesis 1a: There is no significant relationship between parental involvement in a child's education and secondary school enrolment in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Hypothesis 1b: There is no significant relationship between parental involvement in a child's education and secondary school completion in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2a: There is no significant relationship between kinship network and secondary school enrolment in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2b: There is no significant relationship between kinship network communication and secondary school completion in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3a: There is no significant relationship between school environmental condition and secondary school enrolment in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3b: There is no significant relationship between school environmental condition and secondary school completion in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Hypothesis 4a: There is no significant relationship between school security and threat and secondary school enrolment in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Hypothesis 4b: There is no significant relationship between school security and threat and secondary school completion in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Hypothesis 5a: There is no significant relationship between school natural and external hazards and secondary school enrolment in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Hypothesis 5b: There is no significant relationship between school natural and external hazards and secondary school completion in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Methodology

The study employed a comparative survey design. Southwestern Nigeria was randomly selected from the existing six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, while the Ashanti region was randomly selected from all Ghana regions. Ekiti and Oyo States in Nigeria and Mampong and Sekyere Districts in Ghana were purposively selected based on reported issues of enrolment and completion challenges. Thirty-two public secondary schools (Ghana- 16, Nigeria- 16) were randomly selected from the States and the Regions. In the

selected schools, (714; 1112) students in the ninth year of basic education were randomly selected. 40% of teachers in the schools were also selected (128; 138). The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test. The instruments used are: Teachers' Family-Related Factors (**α**=0.82), Teachers' Environmental (**α**=0.90), Student Family-Related Factors (**α**=0.79), Student Environmental (**α**=0.80) questionnaires. School records were equally consulted (2011-2021). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation and Analysis of variance at P≤0.05.

Results

Hypothesis 1a: There is no significant relationship between parental economic status and secondary school enrolment in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

To test this two-in-one hypothesis, the correlation matrix from the multiple regressions on secondary school enrolment in Ghana and Nigeria is presented. Table 1.1a and Table 1.1b present the two correlation matrices.

Table 1.1a Correlation Matrix on Family-Related, Environmental and Secondary School Enrolment in Ghana

Variable	Enrol	PI	K	SC	ST	NH
Enrol	1.000					
PI	-.069	1.000				
K	.506*	.524*	1.000			
SC	.808*	-.170	.061	1.000		
ST	.254	-.381	-.015	.320	1.000	
NH	-.726*	-.438*	-.007	.716*	.167	1.000

Note * implies significant at the 0.05 level of significance

Note: Enrol is Enrolment; PI is Parental Involvement; K is Kinship; SC is School Condition; ST is Security Threat; NH is Natural Hazard.

Table 1.1b Correlation Matrix on Family-Related, Environmental and Secondary School Enrolment in Nigeria

Variable	Enrol	PI	K	SC	ST	NH
Enrol	1.000					
PI	.802*	1.000				

K	.497*	.307	1.000			
SC	.674*	.416	.928*	1.000		
ST	-.858*	.705*	.814*	.822*	1.000	
NH	-.512*	.111	.737*	.800*	.643*	1.000

Note * implies significant at the 0.05 level of significance

Note: Enrol is Enrolment; PI is Parental Involvement; K is Kinship; SC is School Condition; ST is Security Threat; NH is Natural Hazard.

Table 2.1a Correlation Matrix on Family-Related, Environmental and Secondary School Completion in Ghana

Variable	Comp	PI	K	SC	ST	NH
Comp	1.000					
PI	.757*	1.000				
K	.450*	.524*	1.000			
SC	-.053	-.170	.061	1.000		
ST	.012	-.381	-.015	.320	1.000	
NH	-.283	-.438*	-.007	.716*	.167	1.000

*Note * implies significant at the 0.05 level of significance*

Note: Comp is Completion; PI is Parental Involvement; K is Kinship; SC is School Condition; ST is SecurityThreat; NH is Natural Hazard.

Table 2.1b Correlation Matrix on Family-Related, Environmental and Secondary School Completion in Nigeria

Variable	**Comp**	**PI**	**K**	**SC**	**ST**	**NH**
Comp	1.000					
PI	.853*	1.000				
K	.496*	.307	1.000			
SC	.646*	.416	.928*	1.000		
ST	-.882*	.705*	.814*	.822*	1.000	
NH	-.475*	.111	.737*	.800*	.643*	1.000

*Note * implies significant at the 0.05 level of significance*

Note: Comp is Completion; PI is Parental Involvement; K is Kinship; SC is School Condition; ST is Security Threat; NH is Natural Hazard.

Hypothesis 1a: There is no significant relationship between parental involvement in a child's education and secondary school enrolment in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Table 1.1a shows that there is no significant relationship between parental involvement and secondary school students' enrolment in Ghana ($r = -0.07$; $p>0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 1ai is not rejected. However, Table 1.1b shows that there is a significant positive relationship between parental involvement and secondary school students' enrolment in Nigeria ($r = 0.80$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 1aii is rejected.

Hypothesis 1b: There is no significant relationship between parental involvement in a child's education and secondary school completion in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Table 2.1a shows that there is a significant positive relationship between parental involvement and secondary school students' completion in Ghana ($r = 0.76$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 1bi is rejected. Also, Table 2.1b shows that there is a significant positive relationship between parental involvement and secondary school students' completion in Nigeria ($r = 0.85$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 1bii is rejected.

Hypothesis 2a: There is no significant relationship between kinship network and secondary school enrolment in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Table 1.1a shows that there is a significant positive relationship between kinship and secondary school students' enrolment in Ghana ($r = 0.51$; $p>0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 2ai is rejected. Also, Table 1.1b shows that there is a significant positive relationship between kinship and secondary school students' enrolment in Nigeria ($r = 0.50$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 2aii is rejected.

Hypothesis 2b: There is no significant relationship between kinship network and secondary school completion in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Table 2.1a shows that there is a significant positive relationship between kinship and secondary school students' completion in Ghana ($r = 0.45$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 2bi is rejected. Also, Table 2.1b shows that there is a significant positive relationship between kinship and secondary school students' completion in Nigeria ($r = 0.50$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 2bii is rejected.

Hypothesis 3a: There is no significant relationship between school environmental condition and secondary school enrolment in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Table 1.1a shows that there is a significant positive relationship between school condition and secondary school students' enrolment in Ghana ($r = 0.81$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 3ai is rejected. Also, Table 1.1b shows that there is a significant positive relationship between school condition and secondary school students' enrolment in Nigeria ($r = 0.67$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 3aii is rejected.

Hypothesis 3b: There is no significant relationship between school environmental condition and secondary school completion in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Table 2.1a shows that there is no significant relationship between school condition and secondary school students' completion in Ghana ($r = -0.05$; $p>0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 3bi is not rejected. However, Table 2.1b shows that there is a significant positive relationship between school condition and secondary school students' completion in Nigeria ($r = 0.65$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 3bii is rejected.

Hypothesis 4a: There is no significant relationship between school security and threat and secondary school enrolment in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Table 1.1a shows that there is no significant relationship between school security and threat and secondary school students' enrolment in Ghana ($r = 0.25$; $p>0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 4ai is not rejected. However, Table 1.1b shows that there is a significant negative relationship between school security threat and secondary school students' enrolment in Nigeria ($r = -0.86$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 4aii is rejected.

Hypothesis 4b: There is no significant relationship between school security threat and secondary school completion in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Table 2.1a shows that there is no significant relationship between school security and threat and secondary school students' completion in Ghana ($r = 0.01$; $p>0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 4bi is not rejected. However, Table 2.1b shows that there is a significant negative relationship between school security threat and secondary school students' completion in Nigeria ($r = -0.88$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 4bii is rejected.

Hypothesis 5a: There is no significant relationship between school natural hazards and secondary school enrolment in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Table 1.1a shows that there is a significant negative relationship between natural hazards and secondary school students' enrolment in Ghana ($r = -0.73$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 5ai is rejected. Also, Table 1.1b shows that there is a significant negative relationship between natural hazards and secondary school students' enrolment in Nigeria ($r = -0.51$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 5aii is rejected.

Hypothesis 5b: There is no significant relationship between school natural hazards and secondary school completion in: (i) Ghana, (ii) Nigeria.

Table 2.1a shows that there is no significant relationship between natural hazards and secondary school students' completion in Ghana ($r = -0.28$; $p>0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 5bi is not rejected. However, Table 2.1b shows that there is a significant negative relationship between natural hazards and secondary school students' completion in Nigeria ($r = -0.48$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 5bii is rejected.

Discussion

This paper demonstrates that there are evident cross-national differences in the factors influencing secondary school enrolment and completion in Ghana and Nigeria. Although the two nations exhibit the significance of school conditions, family-related factors, and environmental contexts, the comparative nature and orientation of the effects are significantly different. The educational performance of Ghana seems to be more influenced by the policy-based structural provisions, especially the Free Senior High School (FSHS) policy. Conversely, the performance of Nigeria is more responsive to the family involvement and other issues associated with security. These disparities signify the mediating effect of the ecological factors on educational engagement and continuance by national policy environments.

Results of parental participation suggest a great difference between Ghana and Nigeria. Parental involvement in Ghana has no significant linkage with the enrolment in secondary schools, which makes the null hypothesis acceptable. This is in line with Duah et al. (2023) since they posit that the FSHS policy has caused a decrease in the salience of parental decision-making in the enrolment process by eliminating significant obstacles to finance. Conversely, parental involvement and enrolment are strongly related in Nigeria, which is consistent with previous research (Jaiyeoba and Atanda, 2003; Ejieh, 2005), which

highlighted the persistence of family involvement in access to education. Nevertheless, parental involvement correlates positively and significantly with completion in both countries, which highlights the fact that government policy can be used to reach access, but continued parental support is a key element of educational persistence in both countries. This result also agrees with what Sheldon (2007) says, that parental engagement has different impacts at different stages of schooling and has important policy implications in reinforcing the family-school collaborations in both situations.

The analysis also illustrates that kinship networks are important in affecting enrolment and completion outcome although there are contextual differences. Ghana, as well as Nigeria, displays positive values in between kinship support and enrolment, but in Ghana, the relationship is stronger than in Nigeria. These results resonate with Fentiman et al. (1999), who emphasised the role of extended family systems in accessing schools in rural Ghana, and Mbiti (2016), who mentioned comparable communal-help systems in Nigeria. Both countries show positive and significant relationships in the completion outcomes, with slightly stronger relationships in Nigeria. This indicates that kinship networks can provide long-term assistance during the schooling trajectory, especially where institutional assistance is less than strong. The long-term relevance of the extended family responsibility in educational continuity is further supported by evidence from Sanni (2015) and Bello et al. (2017) in the case of the two countries.

The conditions of the schools come out as an important determinant of enrolment in Ghana and Nigeria, with stronger correlations in Ghana. Better physical infrastructure seems to be a stimulus to the first enrolment choices, which aligns with the results of Branham (2004) under school infrastructure on attendance in developing settings. Nevertheless, although the school conditions play quite a role in determining the rates of completion in Nigeria, the same is not the case in Ghana. This implies that, even though infrastructural enhancement in both nations facilitates access, it is especially relevant in fostering student enrolment to completion in Nigeria. Ekpenyong & Olutayo (2021) submitted that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed structural weaknesses in educational funding and infrastructure, particularly in developing contexts, thereby amplifying disparities in access and completion. These findings align with Duah et al. (2023) in Ghana

and Asiyai (2014) in Nigeria, where both authors note the importance of the learning environment to the education outcomes.

The effects of the security threats in the two countries vary significantly. Security problems in Ghana are found to have no substantial connection with enrolment as well as with completion, implying a fairly secure and stable educational climate. Conversely, Nigeria shows a great deal of negative correlation between security threats and enrolment and completion, which means that issues such as kidnapping and terrorism have significant negative impacts on access and continuation of education. Patterns of environmental disruptions also cut across. Although the impact of the natural hazards on enrolment is negative in both nations, it is more pronounced in Ghana, which is consistent with the evidence of climate sensitivity (Balana et al., 2020). Nevertheless, only natural hazards in Nigeria have a negative relationship with completion rates, which is why Ghana can have better retention systems that can withstand the environmental shocks of enrolled students. This fact confirms the findings of UNICEF (2020), which points to increased susceptibility of Nigeria to frequent crises.

Finally, the results may be viewed as an empirical validation of the ecological theory by Bronfenbrenner, as it illustrates that the combination of factors, such as family structures, institutional conditions, policy frameworks, and larger environmental contexts, affects the enrolment and completion rates in secondary schools. The cross-national discrepancies given highlight the value of contextualising educational attainments in their local ecological and policy contexts. Transformational education anchored in shared social values enhances learners' resilience and persistence, especially in contexts marked by economic and environmental uncertainty Ekpenyong, 2021). Therefore, poor multi-layered conditions, which extend to family responsibilities, security and environmental threat, influence the educational path of the students in both Ghana and Nigeria, and it is important to note that integrated and context-specific policy responses are necessary.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study revealed persistent challenges in secondary education in Ghana and Nigeria despite progressive policy interventions. While both countries engaged in proactive efforts to expand access to secondary school education, championing initiatives

such as the introduction of free education up to the Junior Secondary School level in Nigeria and Ghana's Free Senior High School (FSHS), both countries continue to face challenges of students' dwindling enrolment and completion rates at the secondary school level. The findings highlight that family-related and environmental factors comparatively influenced secondary school enrolment and completion rates in Nigeria and Ghana. Without multi-sectoral efforts geared towards addressing these interconnected but surmountable barriers, it will be difficult to achieve inclusive and equitable secondary education outlined in SDG 4 in both countries, thereby perpetuating undesirable cycles of educational inequality that limit national development potential. This affirmed the position of Ekpenyong & Kayode (2022) that sustainable education systems, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4, require integrated responses that simultaneously address family support, environmental stability, and institutional resilience. Governments, communities, and parents should collaborate to increase funding, improve security, leverage local resources, and foster supportive home environments to boost school enrolment and completion rates of secondary school education.

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