SOCIAL AND PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN A NIGERIAN CITY

R. Olukayode JEGEDE

1. Introduction

In Nigeria and probably in many other developed countries, education is increasingly recognized as indispensable to upward social mobility on the individual level and to national development on a collective basis. Secondary education is undoubtedly an important step in the educational process but in all 19 states of Nigeria it is within the reach of only a minority of primary school leavers who have to pass a highly competitive entrance examination.

As of now there is relatively little information on the social and personality characteristics of secondary school students in Nigeria; yet this segment of the population is of special importance not only because of the significance of secondary education per se but also because the students are adolescents—during part or all of the years they spend in secondary school.

The purpose of this report is to present data on the social and personality characteristics of secondary school students at Ibadan. The data were collected at the initial phase of a longitudinal study of personality development in childhood and adolescence.
2. Method

2.1. Subjects

At the beginning of 1977 the secondary schools in Ibadan, numbering 36 in all; were grouped into two categories which we will call elite and non-elite respectively. The elite group is so-called because the schools are usually attended by children of the educated elite and are generally of higher quality as witnessed by the generally better academic performance in the West African School Certificate Examination.

Four schools were selected from the elite group of schools, two boys' schools; and the other two girls'. Four non-elite schools were also selected so as to ensure adequate representation of girls and boys: three were co-educational schools, and the fourth a boys' school. A stratified random sampling method was used for school selection. One arm of each of classes 1 to 5 was randomly chosen in each school.

2.2. Instruments

The instruments were Piers-Harris self-concept scale (PIERS 1969) and a questionnaire consisting of 47 items covering the students’ Social background, family, health, occupational goals, and friendship patterns. The questionnaire was adapted from a similar questionnaire used in a study of university students (JEGEDE 1980) and tested in a pilot Study to ensure its meaning-fulness. It included 4 items selected from Rosenberg’s self-concept stability scale (ROSENBERG 1972). The items deal with how sure a subject feels about himself, and how often his feelings change about the kind of person he is. The other two items are on how often the feelings of the respondents change with respect to how he likes himself and how happy he is with the kind of person he is. The 4 items are scored 1-3 in such a manner, that low scores represent changeable, unstable feelings about oneself. Scores on the items are added yielding a range of 4 to 12.
2.3. Procedure

During preliminary meetings between the research assistants and the heads of the schools mutually agreeable dates were chosen for visiting the schools to carry out the study. On the appointed day the research assistants administered the questionnaires to the students in class. Each student filled out the questionnaire himself. On completion of the questionnaire students were weighed and their heights measured. 

Girls were asked to write down whether or not they had started their menstruation, and if so at what age.

Analysis of the data was carried out using version H of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (NIE et al. 1975).

3. Results

3.1. General characters of subjects

There were 1380 subjects altogether consisting of 525 girls (38%) and 855 boys (62%). The mean age was 14.75 (SD 2.09) for the entire population; for girls it was 14.51 (SD 2.08) and 14.91 (SD 2.09) for boys. Table 1 shows the age distribution of the subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY</th>
<th>RELATIVE FREQUENCY (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,375</td>
<td>99.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are 5 missing cases.
Six hundred and seventy three students attended elite schools and 680 students non-elite schools; twenty seven subjects (2.0%) belonged to a missing category as their schools were incorrectly coded. The were 180, 151, 159, and 183 students in the 4 elite schools respectively. The four non-elite schools had 160, 177, 165, and 178 students, respectively.

Two hundred and ninety-two (21.2%) subjects were in class one, 301 (21.8%) in class 2, and 285 (20.7%) in class 3. There were 267 students (19.3%) in class 4, and 224 students (16.2%) in class 5. Eleven subjects (0.8%) did not provide information about their class.

In regard to the sibling position of the students, 398 (28.84%) were first born; 370 (26.81%) second born, 252 (18.26%) third born, and 356 (25.80%) had higher sibling positions. Four students (0.3%) gave no information on their sibling rank.

Table 2 shows the subjects’ religions tabulated against the type of school attended. It is clear from the table that the Christians were much more likely to attend an elite school than a non-elite school, the reverse being the case for Moslems. Children who subscribed to religions other than Islam and Christianity showed no differential tendency to attend one type of school.

### 3.2. Family characteristics

Table 3 shows the education of parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>271 (19.6%)</td>
<td>126 (9.1%)</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>221 (16.0%)</td>
<td>170 (12.3%)</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>377 (27.3%)</td>
<td>302 (21.9%)</td>
<td>679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>295 (21.4%)</td>
<td>586 (42.5%)</td>
<td>881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing cases</td>
<td>216 (15.6%)</td>
<td>196 (14.2%)</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1380 (99.91%)</td>
<td>1380 (100%)</td>
<td>2760</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
O. Jegede – Social & personality characteristics of students (Nigeria)

TABLE IV

distribution of parental occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>FATHER</th>
<th>MOTHER</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator/Teacher</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary teacher/secretary</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns business</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk/Typist</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradesman</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer/Labourer</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t known</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1 380</td>
<td>1 380</td>
<td>2 760</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 3 and 4 describe education and occupation of the Students’ parents.

Nine hundred and three students (65.4%) came from monogamous homes; and 269 (19.5%), 109 (7.9%) from homes with two, three or more wives respectively. Eighteen students (1.3%) did not state the number of wives their fathers had.

Of the 1380 subjects, 1 254 (90.9 per cent) reported that their fathers were alive and 122 (8.8%) stated that their fathers were deceased. Four subjects (0.2%) failed to answer the relevant question. The corresponding data on mothers were 1 339 (97.0%), 37 (2.7%) and 4 (0.2%), respectively.

Eight hundred and seven students (58.5%) stated that their fathers were stricter than their mothers, and 378 students (27.4%) described their mothers as being stricter. The remaining students did not answer this question.

In answer to the question as to whether the students were the first among their parents’ children to attend secondary schools, 385 (27.9%) answered in the affirmative, and 975 (70.7%) gave a negative answer. The remaining 20 students did not answer the question.

Nine hundred and three students (65.4%) came from monogamous homes. Most of the remaining students belonged to families in which there were respectively, 2 wives (269 students), 3 wives (109 students) and more than 3 wives (81 students).
Pearson correlation analysis showed the following coefficients between the pairs of variables listed below, all being significant ($P < .01$):

- Father’s education and mother’s education: 0.75
- Father’s education and number of wives: 0.30
- Father’s education and quality of school attended by students: 0.44
- Mother’s educational and quality of school attended by students: 0.50

The less educated father’s tended to have more than one wife. Well educated fathers and mothers tended to send their children to elite schools.

Seven hundred and forty five students (54.2%) described their families as happier than most other families; 485 (35.1%) stated that their families were as happy as other families; and 117 (8.5%) felt that their families were as happy than most other families.

The subjects gave the following answers to questions on the extended family; six hundred and twenty four students (45.2%) Reported that their grandparents lived with them during their last two years in primary school. The remaining subjects stated their grandparents did not live with them. In answer to the question whether grandparents or other elderly relatives were currently living with the subjects’ parents 344 (24.9%) and 416 students (30.1%) respectively answered Yes and No.

3.3. Health

Most subjects, 1109 in all, rated their current health (health during the last 4 weeks) excellent or good, 212 fair, 43 poor. About 90 per cent of the students reported they slept well, and the remaining students had trouble sleeping. Fifty one per cent of the students had headaches often but 48% did not. There was a significant relation-between how well the students slept and whether they had headaches. Subjects who had sleeping difficulty tended to have headaches often ($\chi^2 = 25.18$, df = 1, $P < .01$).
In answer to the question whether or not the subjects had problems they would like to discuss with a doctor 640 (46.4\%) answered Yes, and 728 (52.8\%) No. There was a significant association between whether subjects had headaches often and whether they had problems to discuss with a doctor ($\chi^2 = 63.94$, df = 1, p < .01).

3.4. Miscellaneous characteristics

It was the ambition of 69.3\% of the students wanted to become professionals like doctors, lawyers, and engineers. About 15\% wanted to become teachers, 8.7\% liked to trade and 7.2\% preferred a miscellaneous group of occupations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE V</th>
<th>Friendship patterns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N° OF FRIENDS</td>
<td>Categories of opposite sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk/Typist</td>
<td>1343</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows how many students had 0, 1-2, or more than 2 friends in each of the following three categories same sex, opposite sex and same class as the students.

The mean self-concept of the students as measured by the Piers-Harris self-concept scale was 58.19 (SD 10.06). Mean self-concept score was 59.47 (SD 10.01) for males and 56.81 (9.96) for females (F = 17.40, df = 1, p < .01). First-born subjects tended to have lower self-concept than the later born (F = 2.10, df = 3, .05 < p < .09). The mean self-concept score for first-born (N = 398); second-born (N = 370); third-born (N = 252); and students with sibling ranks higher than 3 (N = 356) were 57.25 (SD 10.45) 58.77 (SD 9.47) 59.03 (SD 9.61) and 58.11 (SD 10.30), respectively. The less happy the students perceived their families in relation to other families, the lower their self-concept, Pearson’s correlation coefficient being .19 (p < .01).
The means score on Rosenberg’s self-concept stability scale was 9.68 (SD 1.78) and the median 9.73. There was a significant \( p < .01 \) association between self-concept stability and mean self-concept score: a progressive increase occurred in the latter for each self-concept stability score from 4 to 12 (\( F = 19.43, \text{df} = 8, p < .01 \)). There was no significant relation between age and self-concept stability (\( F = 1.12, \text{df} = 10, p > .30 \)).

4. Discussion

4.1. General characteristics

First, we will comment on the age distribution of the students. The fact that 22% were aged 17 or more is due to the tendency of parents with little or no formal education to send their children to school late vis-a-vis educated parents. As a rule, children of parents in the latter category usually attend pre-school day care centres from as early as two year of age so that by the time they are 2 or 6 years old they are in the first year of primary school. On the other hand children coming from less educated families are usually unable to attend day care centres mostly for financial reasons, and may start school at 6 years of age or even much later. Consequently, they qualify for secondary school admission later than children from the upper social classes. It should be expected, then, that children who start secondary school later rather than early (that is at ages 12 or more as opposed to 10 to 12) are likely to remain in secondary school until their late ten years. Previous studies have shown that children who go to fee paying private primary school are generally younger than those in the non-fee paying public schools (JEGEDE in press).

As for the religious affiliation of the students, it is obvious from Table 2 that a Christian (especially a Protestant) is more likely to attend an elite school than a moslem. A somewhat related observation, the preponderance of Christians in the sample, is noteworthy in view of the fact that in the city of Ib-
dan Christian are generally believed to be considerably fewer than Moslems although reliable data are hard to come by. There is evidence that Christians tend to patronize western type educational facilities more often than Moslems so that the former emerge, quantitatively at least, better educated (JEGEDE 1980). One reason for this may be due to the historical fact /p. 91/ that schools modelled on educational pattern of England were introduced into Nigerian by christian missionaries. Although the schools have always been open to all members of the population, Christians tend to patronize them more often. It is only in recent years that islamic schools are being established by Islamic organizations.

It is essential that the educational gap between Moslems (practitioners of Islam) and Christians be bridged if national unity and national development, both of which Nigerian leaders aspire to are to be achieved. This issue assumes considerable importance if we recall that (a) Christians and Moslems probably constitute the majority of the population and (b) the educational imbalance between the two groups is not just a feature of Ibadan but of Nigeria as a whole (JEGEDE 1980).

4.2. Family characteristics

The educational attainment of the students’ parents deserves comment (Table 3). The finding that over 60% of parents had some education suggests that the parents of the subjects were better educated than the general adult population the majority of whom is widely believed to be illiterate. It appears, and this is not surprising, that educated parents tend to send their children to school.

Table 3 also shows that more mothers than fathers are illiterate or have had either primary or secondary education. On the other hand, twice as many fathers as mothers are university graduates. This is a reflection of the general tendency (until recently) for parents to preferentially educate their sons and, as an extension of this tendency, to educate sons to a higher level. Fortunately this habit is dying out.
This significant correlation between mother’s education and father’s education is to be expected because an educated individually usually chooses for a spouse somebody who has some education, preferably close to his/her level.

The negative correlation of 0.30 (p < 0.01) between father’s education and number of wives can be explained by the tendency for less educated persons and moslems to practise polygyny. It will be recalled that Moslems are more likely than Christians to have had little or no formal schooling.

/p. 92/ The moderately strong correlation between school quality on one hand and either father’s education or mother’s education on the other hand is a function of the fact that the children of well educated parents tend to gain admission to the best secondary schools by virtue of the relatively good primary schools they attend.

The occupations of the subjects’ parents, as illustrated in Table 4, follow closely the same pattern as their educational achievement. This is because education is by far the most important single determinant of a person’s occupation in Nigeria. It is appropriate to mention that the distribution of both the educational achievement and occupations of the subjects’ parents is different from that of the general population which is characterized by mass illiteracy and low-level occupations such as farming and small-scale trading.

The association between how happy the students perceived their families compared with other families and self-concept is probably due to the fact that subjects who regard their families as unhappy are relatively unhappy themselves which in turn adversely affects their self-concept. ROSENBERG (1972) found that depressed subjects tended to have low self-concept.

In traditional Africa the extended family played a crucial role in all aspects of daily living ranging from child rearing to provision of social security, but in recent years the situation is rapidly changing especially in Nigeria where rapid geographic mobility, urbanization and industrialization interact to diminish the influence of members of the extended family. In particular elderly female relatives (grand mothers, aunts, and others) were de-
pended upon for assisting young mother in caring for their children. It is interesting that 45.2% of the students reported that grandmothers lived with them during their last two years in primary schools while only 24.9% could report that grandmothers were currently living with them.

One important implication of the above situation is that elderly relatives are less available to help in passing of the traditions of the society to the growing generation of children. Second, young mothers, and they are usually employed, find it difficult to adequately care for their young children so that unsatisfactory mother-substitutes are often provided. This issue has been discussed in another report (in press).

4.3. Health

Certain health related findings are of interest: Prince (1960, 1962) described an illness, which he called brain fog syndrome associated with study among students. Several reports have confirmed and added to Prince’s early observations (Anumonye 1973; Morakinyo 1980). Sleeping difficulty and headaches are among the symptoms of the brain fog syndrome. The finding that many of the students of the study suffered from sleeping difficulty and/or headaches is remarkable, especially if we recall that students were preparing for their promotion examination, only 4 - 6 weeks away, at the time of the study.

4.4. Miscellaneous characteristics

As seen in Table 5 the subjects tend to have opposite-sex friends more frequently than same-sex friends, which may be a reflection of the fact that many students (over 45% are 10-14 years old) are in early adolescence when interest in persons of the same sex is more intense than in the opposite sex (Group for the advancement of Psychiatry 1968; Miller 1974). In addition, there is social disapproval of close relationships between male and female secondary school students.

The mean score on the Piers-Harris self-concept scale is similar to the mean of the 51.84 (SD 13.87) for the normative
sample (PIERS 1969). Although a little higher. What is perhaps
more interesting, however, is the relation between self-concept
and how happy the subjects perceive their families which has
been discussed above, and the relation between self-concept
and birth order. The tendency for first-born subjects to have
lower self-concept than the later-born may be due to pressures
on them arising from parental expectations (and the could be
very strong in Nigeria) for them to be a shining example to
their siblings both in behaviour and academic performance. .
The pressure may be more on students whose parents have
little or no formal education and are engaged in low income
occupations. Such parents regard their children especially earlier
born ones as a means of social security in old age.

The observation that the higher the self-concept the higher
the self-concept stability, and vice versa, is consistent with the
finding of Rosenberg (1972) who found that subjects with low
self-concept were more likely to have an unstable self-
concept (that is low self-concept stability score) than subjects
with high self-concept score. As in Rosenberg’s study, there is no
overlap between the items on self-concept scale and the stability
scale, suggesting that the association between the two variables
may be real. It appears that self-concept affects stability so that
subjects with low self-concept tend to have a changeable, that is
unstable, ideas about themselves as Rosenberg (1972) has sug-
gested. There is the alternate possibility that subjects with unsta-
able ideas about themselves tend to have low self-concept. A de-
tailed discussion of self-concept development and its correlates
will appear in another report (in preparation).

5. Conclusion

This study was conducted just before secondary schools in
Ibadan and other parts of the state were compulsorily taken
over by the state government as a result of which fees are no
longer paid in all schools in the state. This event has to some
extent blurred the distinction between elite and non-elite
schools although it appears that the former fee-paying schools continue to be superior in allocation of resources notably teachers and funds. This may be due to the relative closeness of the socioeconomically well placed parents to the power structure so that they are able to influence, to the advantage of their children, the differential allocation of resources.

As noted earlier on, the educational imbalance between the two major religious groups deserve to be eliminated in the interest of national development and stability. The Universal Primary Education scheme introduced towards the end of 1976 for the purpose of bringing primary education within the reach of every school-age child should, if vigorously pursued, help to achieve this desirable goal. It is worth mentioning that at least one state government in one of the educationally backward areas of the country has made primary education compulsory, and stiff penalties await parents who fail to comply with the law.

The association between self-concept and happiness of families as perceived by the subjects may have practical implications especially if factors associated with rating of families are relatively unhappy are identified.

The common occurrence of symptoms associated with studying in students in Nigeria and many other African countries makes a case for de-emphasizing pass-or-fail examinations, with all the dire consequences of failure especially in students who are looked up to by their parents to rescue them from poverty, by substituting continuous assessment.

Okulayode Jegede, MD,
Senior Lecturer and Consultant Psychiatrist,
Department of Psychiatry,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

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RÉSUMÉ :

CARACTERISTIQUES SOCIALES ET DE PERSONNALITÉ D’ÉLÈVES DU SECONDaire DANS UNE VILLE NIGÉRIANE (Ibadan) .

1380 male and female secondary school students were studied in 1977 in Ibadan Nigeria. The students, consisting of 52 girls and 855 boys, came from eight secondary schools which were selected by stratified random sampling from the 36 schools in the city. The questionnaires used in the study were the Piers-Harris Self-concept Scale and a 47-item general questionnaire, designed by the author. The mean age of the sample was 14.75 (SD 2.09). About half of the subjects attended the top rated schools, and the rest School of lower quality. Over half of the students were Christians, and less than one quarter Moslems. Christians were more likely to attend elite schools. Most of the subjects’ parents had some education, which made them atypical for the adult population, the majority of whom is illiterate. Mothers had a lower education than fathers. About one third of the students came from polygynous homes and about two thirds from monogamous homes. The mean self-concept of the sample as measured by the Piers-Harris self-concept scale was 58.19 (SD 10.06). Males had a higher self-concept score than females (p < .01). First-born child tended to have a lower self-concept score than later-born children. The results are discussed with emphasis on their social, educational and developmental implications.

Key words: • Secondary school children • Social and personality characteristics • Ibadan (Nigeria)