

Impact of Family Socio-Economic Status on Students' Motivation to Learn: The Case of Secondary School in the Limbe Municipality, South West Region of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

The main research objective was to determine the effects of family socio economic status on the academic achievement of secondary school students' in some selected secondary schools in the Limbe Municipality. From this research objective emerged four specific objectives. From the research objective a general research hypothesis was formulated from which four working hypotheses were drawn. The survey research design was used. A questionnaire and an interview guide were used for the collection of data and the simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents. A sample of 297 respondents comprising secondary school students was selected and administered questionnaires while 50 parents whose children attend either of the selected schools were interviewed. Data was presented using frequency tables, charts, code-grounding-quotation tables and conceptual diagram. The study revealed that family socio-economic status has an impact on students' motivation to learn. In order to improve students' academic performance and reactions to life situations irrespective of their family backgrounds, the government and counsellors were advised to provide the necessary psychological support for students from different family backgrounds so as to overcome their emotional problems and improve academic achievement.

KEYWORDS: Family background, family socio-economic status, motivation to learn, students

INTRODUCTION

Family background is a collective terminology comprising of social class/status, economic status, family size, family structure, parental level of education, occupation, culture, gender, and other factors pertaining to family life. Family background plays a very important role in children's education as the family is supposed to provide the children with all that is needed to succeed in school. The African family as far back as recorded history takes us, has by common consent been recognized as the basic social institution for the procreation and development of human beings. The family is regarded as the principal and pioneer setting in which personality, values, skills and discipline required for effective functioning in the larger society are formed. The African family structure is the frame work within which the family functions as far as educating, socializing, and providing emotional support for its members are concerned. The primary role of the African family is to develop human potential, that is, by creating new human life and has the major responsibility for developing and shaping a nurturing environment for the family that will provide a climate conducive for commitment, growth and self realization (Cohen, 2002). In Africa, it is at the family level that society feels more deeply, the pain of change and underdevelopment. Child upbringing and development in

such families are adversely affected since most of them suffer from poor housing conditions, poor health services, shortage of food, lack of clean water and sanitation, nutritional deficiency, unemployment and poor living conditions.

Education has become, in our world, a very important tool for development. The United Nations Organization (UNO) through its agencies like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has put forward charters stressing the inevitable nature of education in human life. Education brings more advantage to society in the moral, intellectual, physical, and financial domains. Hence, the slogans "Education for All" (EFA) and "Universal Primary Education by the year 2015". These slogans stem from some measures that have been taken by the International Community to promote education. The EFA initiative has increased the demand for education at the basic level. Increased demand for basic education over time has increased demand for secondary and higher education. For example, the demand for secondary education in most part of the world especially in African countries like Cameroon is expected to increase from 1.674.000 in the year 2004 to 22.344.000 in 2015 at the first cycle of the

How to cite this paper: Alvine Joso Bih Otto | Fonyuy Patrick Shey "Impact of Family Socio-Economic Status on Students' Motivation to Learn: The Case of Secondary School in the Limbe Municipality, South West Region of Cameroon"

Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-4 | Issue-4, June 2020, pp.210-217, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd30959.pdf

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IJTSRD30959



secondary level (Sector-Wide Approach, 2005). To meet this demand will require more participation by other stakeholders, and particularly parents who would be required to send their children to school. This will be difficult to achieve as some parents/families find it difficult to sponsor their children through school due to certain family background factors.

In light with the concept of "Education for All" (EFA) put forward by UNESCO (2004), certain goals concerning education were made some of which included:

- Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- Ensuring that by 2015 all children in difficult circumstances (like those whose families can't afford to send them to school) and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skill programmes.
- Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2015, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

These goals show how important education is to the world and to the individual in particular. One of the current interests in social science studies today is the impact of family background on students' educational attainment. This study is supported by Bowlby's (1988) ethological theory of infant-parent attachment, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, Vygotsky's (1978) Socio-cultural theory, and the theory of achievement motivation by Murray and McClelland (1938, 1961).

Literature

The Effects of Family Factors on Students' Academic Achievement

If we consider a family as a group of individuals related to one another by blood ties, marriage or adoption, who form an economic unit, with the adult members responsible for raising the children, then interactions among family members are more likely to be based on emotions and concern for one another, cooperation and possibly, flow of authority. All these help to establish a socially convenient atmosphere that can enhance academic achievement. The family is a basic group in the community. The basis for school success should possibly be found in the family system. Below, some family factors that are most likely to have the greatest impact on students' educational attainment will therefore be examined.

Family Socio-economic Status (SES) and Students' Motivation to Learn

Socio-economic status is a term that describes variations among people based on income, family background and relative prestige in society (Sadker & Sadker, 1991). It also refers to grouping of people according to their occupation, level of education and income (Dehart, Sroufe & Cooper, 2000). In the Western world, more paying prestigious jobs such as medicine and engineering are more likely to be done by the upper or middle class people- the majority of which

are white. On the other hand, the less prestigious or menial jobs that are less paying are likely to be done by the lower class or the working class people (Bowes, Gleeson & Smith, 1990). By implication, the working classes are the low income earners while the middle and upper or high class are the high income earners. Because the high and middle class are rich, and can pay for educational facilities, they tend to be the more educated in society while the working class, who cannot afford to pay for better schools remain at the lower side of the educational ladder.

Several researchers have investigated how SES of parents' influence children's academic achievement and found that parents' income, occupation, and level of education are related as far as educational attainment is concerned. They affect children's education directly or indirectly (Dehart, Sroufe & Cooper, 2000). Children may be directly affected when members of low income families are not able to acquire basic needs such as good housing and health care, Dehart and others asserts. Children may also be affected indirectly through their parents' behaviour. A low income parent is likely to be stressed by hardships of poverty or job loss to the extent that the quality of childcare may be reduced. The effects of parental childcare can possibly be reflected in students' motivation to learn as such their academic achievements.

A review of research literature on families and school motivation by Grolnick, Friendly, and Bellas, (2009) found that families can have a strong influence on a variety of school outcomes, including the development and maintenance of positive motivation to learn. "When parents believe in children's competence and have high expectations for them, provide the resources that children need to feel connected to others, and facilitate a sense of autonomy by supporting children's initiations and problem-solving, children's motivation to learn is most likely to thrive," the authors conclude. Heckman (2011), drawing on his own studies and the work of others, has written extensively about gaps between socio-economically disadvantaged and advantaged students in both cognitive skills and what he calls non-cognitive or "soft skills"—traits that include motivation, the ability to work with others, the ability to focus on tasks, self-regulation, self-esteem, and the ability to defer gratification (Heckman, 2011). Indeed, he maintains, these soft skills are critical to success in school and later life, and their importance is often underrated (Heckman, 2008). Heckman notes that family factors can influence children from as early as when they are in the womb. By the time they enter school; children from socio-economically disadvantaged families possess lower levels of cognitive and non-cognitive skills and lag far behind their more advantaged peers. Even worse, these gaps have been shown to persist as children age (Heckman 2008; 2011). Nielson (1987), found that in a study conducted by Grant and Snyder, (1984) based on college freshmen who graduated in 1980, 14% were from the low income group while 60% were from the high income group. Plisko (1984) also states that only 38% of the 1980 graduates from low income families participated in post-secondary education unlike 80% of graduates from the high income families.

Statement of problem

Traditionally, family background variable such as socio-economic status, have been seen as predictors of children's

educational attainment. Increasingly, research has suggested that, rather than having a direct association with children's academic achievement, socio-economic status, and parents' level of education is part of a larger constellation of psychological and sociological variables influencing children's school outcomes.

One way to improve education in Cameroon is to see to it that both the home and the school work in close collaboration in assisting students to achieve high. The researcher has observed that most students today perform poorly in school not because their teachers do not do their job well but probably because of certain family background factors affecting these students. The consequences of such familial factors can either be negative leading to failure, repetition, and at times dropouts, or positive leading to success and high achievement. If students' educational attainment has to be increased, related barriers and their impacts need to be known and addressed.

There are countless number of secondary schools in our communities today, but what is very clear is that many children still stay back at home without attending school. This is coupled to the fact that the families of these children find it difficult to send their children to school because of family factors like low socio-economic status, large family size, family structure and parental level of education. For those who go to school, some don't perform well and many end up as drop outs. It is against this backdrop that a study was proposed on the impact of family background factors on students' educational attainment.

Methodology

Research design

This study used the survey research design with the aim of identifying the effects of family socio-economic status, family structure, family size, and parental level of education on the academic achievement of secondary school students within the Limbe municipality, with specific reference to form three students.

Participants

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 297 form three (3) students who were purposively selected using the simple random sampling approach. A sample of 297 was chosen for this study because according to Amin (2005) the sample size required for a given population of 1300-1500 is 297-306.

Sampling technique

The simple random sampling technique was used so as to give each participant equal chances of being selected. Since form three is being divided into four different streams of A, B, C, and D, and since the researcher wanted to work with a portion from each of these streams, she randomly selected few students from each of the classes to make up the sample size. These students were sampled from six (6) different secondary schools in the Limbe Sub-Division.

Procedure

The simple random sampling technique was used to choose the schools from which data was collected. This made use of the balloting technique in which the names of the schools were written on small pieces of papers and separated according to the different school types. The researcher then asked a friend to pick two of these little papers from the different groups thereby giving rise to the selected schools. The schools that were selected included the following: Government High School Limbe (G.H.S), Government Bilingual High School Limbe (G.B.H.S), National Comprehensive High School Limbe (N.C.H.S), Kulu Memorial Comprehensive High School, Mbonjo, Limbe (K.M.C.H.S.), Saker Baptist College Limbe (S. B. C), and Presbyterian Youth Center (P.Y.C). Saker Baptist College which is a single sex school (females only) was chosen by the researcher because of lack of confessional schools made up of both sexes in the Limbe Sub-Division and the researcher needed to work with an equal proportion of 2 public schools, 2 lay-private schools and 2 confessional schools.

Form three was purposively selected for the study as it is a transitional class in our school system where the Cameroon Certificate of Education (GCE) syllabus starts. Students in this class are in their peak period of puberty where they experience many changes and challenges. Students of this age group (12-15years) are faced with a lot of biological, intellectual, emotional as well as social problems as such need a lot of care and assistance from their family members especially their parents/guardians to help them adjust to life situations. The researcher therefore, thought that the influence of family background could easily be investigated in such a class. 54 students were then selected from G.H.S Limbe, 60 from G.B.H.S Limbe, 39 each from P.Y.C and S.B.C Limbe, 60 from N.C.H.S and 46 from K.M.C.H.S Limbe respectively. Out of the 297 respondents, 116 were males and 184 females. The number of females sampled was more than that of males because in all the schools and classes that the researcher selected female students dominated all the classes, that is, the female population was more than that of the male. It was also because a single sex (Saker Baptist College) with only female students present was used. The disparity in the number of students selected in each school can be attributed to the fact that the population in these schools differ. This is represented in the table below.

Table 1: Distribution of Student Sample.

Name of School	Number of Students		Total Population
	Male	Female	
Government High School Limbe	27	27	54
Government Bilingual High School Limbe	24	36	60
Presbyterian Youth Centre	18	21	39
Saker Baptist College	0	39	39
National Comprehensive High School	26	33	59
Kulu Memorial Comprehensive High School	19	27	46
Total	114	183	297

Table 1 above shows the distribution of student sample by school.

Table 2: Distribution of Parent Sample

Name of Quarters	Number of Parents		Total
	Male	Female	
Mile One	4	6	10
Mile Two	6	4	10
New Town	7	3	10
Down Beach	5	5	10
Middle Farms	5	5	10
Total	25	25	50

Table 2 above shows the distribution of student sample by school.

Method of data processing and analysis

Open-ended questions were analyzed using the process of thematic analysis whereby concepts or ideas were grouped under umbrella terms or key words with the support of Atlas Ti 5.2 (Atlas Ti GMBH 2006)). As for the quantitative data, a pre-designed EpiData Version 3.1 (EpiData Association, Odense Denmark, 2008) database which had in-built consistency and validation checks was used to enter the data. For further consistency, data range and validation checks were also performed in SPSS version 21.0 (IBM Inc., 2012) to identify invalid codes. Data was made essentially of categorical variables and they were analyzed using frequencies, proportions and Multiple Response Analysis for the grounding of concepts that emerged from open-ended questions. Chi-Square test of equality of proportion was used to compare proportions for significant difference. Data was presented using frequency tables, charts, code-grounding-quotation tables. All statistics were discussed at the 95% Confidence Level (CL).

The formula for the computation of the chi-square statistics is as follows;

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(F_o - F_e)^2}{F_e}$$

Where: O = Observed frequency

E = Expected frequency

Σ = Sum of

The formula for computing the expected frequency (E) was as follows:

$$E = \frac{TR \cdot TC}{N}$$

Where: TR= Total frequency of rows

TC= Total number of columns

N= Number of observation

The degree of freedom (df) was determined for the chi-square using the formula below:

$$df = (r-1)(c-1)$$

Where: r = Number of rows

c = Number of columns

The chi-square critical value was known using the df (degree of freedom) and the level of significance adopted was 0.05 level of significance. The chi-square calculated value was comprised of the table value and the null hypothesis (Ho) is then rejected or retained following the decision rule, which states that;

- The Ho is rejected if the obtained chi-square (calculated value) is greater than the chi-square critical value.
- The Ho is accepted (retained) if the obtained chi-square is less than the chi-square critical value.

Instrument

The instruments used for data collection in this study were an interview guide for parents and the questionnaire for students. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher, scrutinized and approved by the research supervisor. The main objective of both the questionnaire and the interview guide was to measure how family background impacts on students' educational attainment.

The questionnaire was divided into five (5) different sections of A, B, C, D, and E. Section A consisted of 3 closed-ended items aimed at capturing the demographic characteristics of the respondents which included gender, age and school type. Respondents were expected to tick the appropriate option from the alternatives provided. The rest of the sections contained items pertaining to the variables of the study. Section B, C, D, and E were each made up of 10 items relating to the four research questions of the study. A four-point Likert scale with response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) was provided under each item and respondents were instructed to place a bold tick against the boxes that best corresponded with their opinion.

The interview guide for parents was also divided into five (5) different sections of A, B, C, D, and E. Section A handled information relating to the sex and age range of the respondents. The rest of the sections handled questions relating to the research questions. A series of closed ended items of "Yes" or "No" were given for the respondents to place a tick against the box that best suited their opinion about the statements. The "Yes" "No" items were followed by a series of open ended

questions which gave more room for respondents to better express themselves on how they feel about the phenomenon under study. All the other sections B, C, D, and E carried equal number of items, that is, four (4) items each. Item 1 of section B was divided into sub items of a-f which handled question concerning the occupation of the respondents. A total of 18 items were found on the interview guide.

Results

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Table 3: Students' Motivation to Learn

S/N	Conceptual indicators	Agree	Disagree	N
1	My parents provide all my school needs such as books, uniforms, transport fee	277(93.3%)	20(6.7%)	297
2	My parents make sure I feed well both in school and at home	278(93.6%)	19(6.4%)	297
3	I sometimes lack some basic school needs*	176(59.9%)	119(40.1%)	297
4	It takes my parents a long time to provide the school needs I request for*	127(42.6%)	170(57.2%)	297
5	I sometimes feel like dropping out of school because of lack of school needs*	37(12.5%)	260(87.5%)	297
6	My parents always encourage me to learn by helping me out with my homework	246(82.8%)	51(17.2%)	297
7	My parents always take me out on picnics/amusement parks to enhance my learn	148(49.8%)	149(50.2%)	297
8	I am being provided with gifts every time I perform well in school	215(72.4%)	82(27.6%)	297
9	I am being punished every time I perform poorly in school	140(47.1%)	157(52.9%)	297
MRS		1853(69.3%)	818(30.7%)	2673(100%)

*Reverse coding

χ^2 -test; $\chi^2=259.57$, $df=1$, $P < 0.001$

The Multiple Response Set (MRS) shows that 69.3% of students agreed that their parents motivate them to learn in one way or another. There is statistically enough evidence to show that the majority of parents motivate their children to learn (χ^2 -test; $\chi^2=259.57$, $df=1$, $P < 0.001$). The most expressed motivations were provision of food 278 (93.6%) and school needs 277 (93.3%). Also 246(82.8%) parents encourage their children to learn by helping them out in their homework and also by providing them with gifts 215(72.4%) to encourage learning. Fewer parents, 148 (49.8%) do take their children out for picnics/amusement parks to enhance their learning or punish them 140 (47.1%).

Table 4: Association between Motivation to Learn and Parent's Occupation

Occupation of parents	Stats	Motivation to Learn (MRS)		Total
		Disagree	Agree	
Agriculture	N	168	210	378
	%	44.4%	55.6%	
Business	N	333	477	810
	%	41.1%	58.9%	
Arts and craft	N	130	149	279
	%	46.6%	53.4%	
Civil servants	N	345	654	999
	%	34.5%	65.5%	
Retired	N	41	76	117
	%	35.0%	65.0%	
Unemployed	N	26	64	90
	%	28.9%	71.1%	
Total	Count	1043	1630	2673

χ^2 -test; $\chi^2=26.00$, $df=5$, $P < 0.001$

After a cross-tabulation of students' motivation to learn in relation to their parents' occupation, it was realized that the children of unemployed parents were more motivated to learn than those whose parents had an occupation as they had the highest rate 64 (71.1%) of those who agreed that they were motivated and this difference was statistically significant (χ^2 -test; $\chi^2=26.00$, $df=5$, $P < 0.001$). This could be explained based on the fact that some children even though they come from homes where their parents have little or nothing doing, they still put in all the effort to learn given their background. Children whose parents were into arts and crafts were least motivated to learn 149 (53.4%).

Table 5: Association between Socio-Economic Characteristics and Students' Motivation to Learn

Socio-economic Characteristics		Does your child (ren) attend school regularly		N	χ^2 -test
		Yes	No		
Sex	Male	19 (76.0%)	6 (24.0%)	25	$\chi^2=0.000$ P=1.000
	Female	19 (76.0%)	6 (24.0%)	25	
Age range	<37	8(72.7%)	3(27.3%)	11	$\chi^2=0.758$ P=0.685
	38-48	24(80.0%)	6(20.0%)	30	
	49+	6(66.7%)	3(33.3%)	9	
Number of people living in one house.	1-3	12(85.7%)	2(14.3%)	14	$\chi^2=5.534$ P=0.063
	4-6	15(88.2%)	2(11.8%)	17	
	7+	11(57.9%)	8(42.1%)	19	
Occupation of parents/guardian.	Agriculture	4(57.1%)	3(42.9%)	7	$\chi^2=5.746$ P=0.332
	Business	10(76.9%)	3(23.1%)	13	
	Arts and crafts	9(90.0%)	1(10.0%)	10	
	Civil servants	12(80.0%)	3(20.0%)	15	
	Retired	0(0%)	1(100%)	1	
	Unemployed	3(75%)	1(25%)	4	
Level of income	<20,000frs	1(50%)	1(50%)	2	$\chi^2=8.503$ P=0.075
	20000-50000	11(57.9%)	8(42.1%)	19	
	50,001-80,000	13(81.3%)	3(18.8%)	16	
	80001-120000	6(100%)	0(0%)	6	
	>120000	7(100%)	0(0%)	7	
Marital status	Monogamous	17(100%)	0(0%)	17	$\chi^2=9.117$ P=0.58
	Polygamous	2(50%)	2(50%)	4	
	Divorced	3(60%)	2(40%)	5	
	Widow/widower	6(60%)	4(40%)	10	
	Single parent	10(71.4%)	4(28.6%)	14	

It was realized that the sex of parents did not determine the children's school attendance. The findings suggested that children leaving with older parents 49+ (66.7%) attend school less, also that children from largest household had the lowest attendance 7+ (57.1%), that children of retired and unemployed had lower attendance. It further explains that children from low income households had lower attendance 1 (50%), and that children from monogamous homes had the highest attendance though these difference were not statistically significant (χ^2 -test= 9.117 P>0.05).

Putting the findings of table 13 with that of table 14 together, it can be resolved that a child can be motivated to learn, but the parents might not necessarily have the means to send him/her to school or see him/her through school.

The null hypothesis which states that parents' socio-economic status has noeffect on children's motivation to learn was then rejected.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that family socio-economic status has an impact on students' motivation to learn. Out of the 10 items that were designed to answer this question, a majority of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that their parents' motivate them to learn in one way or the other. The issue of parents providing school needs and making sure that children were well fed was strongly agreed by students. An overwhelming majority were of the opinion that parents provide them with gifts to encourage learning. These findings are supported by the conceptual data of Coleman's (1966) comprehensive studies which revealed that the socio-economic status of parents is a significant determinant of children's academic achievement. Coleman (1966) observed that, the home environment which is generally affected by the family's socio-economic status helps mould the cognitive skills valuable in schools. He emphasized on the timely provision of children's needs ranging from material to financial. When children are provided with these needs and are encouraged in every step of the way, they tend to be motivated to achieve high. Students, who are provided with all their school needs regularly, perform better than those who are provided with

little or no school needs. It is very obvious that if a child is in class without the necessary writing materials, he/she will find it difficult to learn.

In support of this findings also, Grolnick, Friendly, and Bellas, (2009) found that families can have a strong influence on a variety of school outcomes, including the development and maintenance of positive motivation to learn. "When parents believe in children's competence and have high expectations for them, provide the resources that children need to learn and feel connected to others, and facilitate a sense of autonomy by supporting children's initiations and problem-solving, children's motivation to learn is most likely to thrive," Grolnick, Friendly, and Bellas, (2009).

The study also revealed that students supported the statement that their parents' encourage them to learn by helping them out with their homework. This supports the view of Vygotsky cited in Greenfield & Smith, 1976. According to this view, children seem to perform well when they work with a skilful tutor who can lead them. When children come back from school, their parents assist them

with their homework. Any concept that is above them is explained by the parents there by facilitating the child's abilities to learn faster. This is what Vygotsky (1978) calls scaffolding which refers to the support and guidance adults give to a child attempting to solve problems. That is, it is the assistance given from a more knowledgeable individual to a less knowledgeable individual to enable him/her reach the zone of proximal development (Greenfield & Smith, 1976). Through scaffolding, children are provided with help to structure problems and give answers. By asking questions, adults direct children's attention to important aspects of the problem. By so doing, parents and children are thus actively involved in solving problems. The parents do not solve their children's problems while they passively observe and spontaneously extract the information. Rather, in scaffolding, parents/teachers guide children through the process of solving the problem with children participating at a comfortable but slightly challenging level. All this helps the child to reach the zone of proximal development easily. Through all these, appears the idea of discussion, collaboration, guidance and assistance, which in classroom events engage students in active learning.

The study further revealed that the children of the unemployed parents were more motivated to learn than those whose parents had an occupation as they had the highest rate of those who agreed that they were motivated to learn when parents' occupation was compared with students' motivation to learn. This finding goes contrary to the ideas of Hess and Shipman (1965); Scar et al. (1983) who are of the opinion that children from the lower class background are often slow learners Hess and Shipman (1965); Scar et al. (1983), comparing the relative intelligence of children from low status and high status homes, realized that those from high status homes scored higher on IQ (intelligent quotient) tests than did children from low status homes. They also observed that in poverty-stricken homes (low socio-economic homes), parents lack good child care techniques which can motivate the children to learn. The findings from the present study however shows that children from low socio-economic backgrounds are motivated to learn and as such can perform better and also score high in IQ tests. The finding therefore agrees with Harwood et al. (2002) cited in Santrock (2004) who were of the view that some lower-class children aspire to and achieve high-level educational and occupational goals despite the limitations imposed on them by their social-class origins. This suggests that not only do some lower-status families allocate their limited resources disproportionately to higher education, but they also socialize their children to high levels of aspiration and achievement. As impoverished as minority families would be, some ethnic minority families still manage to raise competent children, Harwood and others reiterate.

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