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**FEATURE**

**Educational Backgrounds and Youth  
Criminality in Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** Mismanagement and recurring strikes in the Nigerian educational sector have institutionalized a legacy of intellectual poverty and criminality among youth. Unchecked persistent strikes have led to progressive deterioration in infrastructure and academic quality, leading to criminal activities among the youth. This study utilizes the concept of alternative educational backgrounds to interpret the density of crimes among youth in Nigeria. The research draws empirical evidence from Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and supports it with a field survey. The collated data were subjected to both descriptive and regression analyses. The statistical results show that neglect of education is significantly correlated with criminal and mendicant (area-boyism) behavior among youth. This paper recommends that for the nation's education to have an impact in reducing crime there is a need to inject vibrancy into the educational system in order to encourage and enhance educational quality/quantity.

**Keywords:** Crime, Education, Violence, Youth

**JEL Codes:** J52; H52; I28

Mismanagement and incessant academic strikes in Nigeria's post-independence educational sector have bred and institutionalized a legacy of a propensity to crime for a large proportion of its youth. The snowball effect is reflected in armed robbery, advanced fee fraud, cultism, political thuggery, theft, area 'boyism' (street boys/men that typically are a menace around major parks in urban areas) and other social vices prevalent among youths. Although the nation has abundant natural resources (human and material—especially minerals), it is painfully understandable that these resources produce a paradox.

*April 2009, Vol. 12, No. 1*

The complexity of this resource-curse paradox has been observed by Oni (2008), and Artadi and Sala-i-martin (2003), where resources inhibit further economic progress and militate against intellectual development. These social problems contribute to neglect and decay in the nation's educational sector.

The Nigerian educational sector, unfortunately, seems ignored by the government, and inadequate, because the system seems to exclude the majority of the citizenry from quality education. This has led to some predictable results in the sense that educational progress and efficiency, especially at the higher levels, are grossly constrained by educational administrators (Obi, 2008) and government agencies (Lasisi, 2008). Inefficiency and corruption among government educational administrators (Aiyetan, 2004) and strikes of university staff have led to progressive deterioration in both infrastructure (The Punch, 2008) and academic quality. Strikes and neglect have resulted in mass production of under-prepared graduates (Osabuohien & Ogunrinola, 2007) and at times, the untimely drop-out of undergraduates who then specialize in criminal activities.

Most of the nation's proudly acclaimed universities are no longer comparable to other African universities (The Punch, 2008), let alone universities from the West. The once respected glory of these institutions is almost fading away; they have frequently been closed in reaction to student unrest, and at times professors were jailed (Fajana, 2000; Fashina, 2001). The result has been brain-drain, mass drop-out, and a low level of intellectual freedom (Adekeye, 2008), which were uncommon in the early universities in Nigeria. The politically favoured, who were aware of the educational decay, proactively diverted their children elsewhere to acquire Western education. This left the educational problems unabated (Yesufu, 2000), and the conditions worsened.

Migration of skill-deficient undergraduates from university campuses into the cities has increased and the unemployed have become a reserve army-of-robbers (Obe & Isine, 2008). A significant segment of undergraduates become informal vendors and/or hawkers (Ejieh, 2006) during the day. Their female counterparts have not been left unaffected, as prostitution has increased, and HIV/AIDS has expanded in proportion, affecting the health quality of the human capital (National Bureau of Statistics-NBS, 2006).

Education constitutes a fundamental pillar for any nation's meaningful and sustainable economic development (Obikoya, 2002). Education also plays a pivotal role in emancipating and empowering people to achieve economic and social freedom (Yesufu, 2000). It helps in transforming human capital into the engine of economic revolution through resource mobilization from sectors of low utilization to economic productivity. Educated individuals have been identified as the indispensable catalyst for economic growth (Schultz, 1960;

Becker, 1962; 1964) and technological transformation (Cruikshank, 2006), revolutionizing production methods which cumulate in economic efficiency (Benhabib & Spiegel, 1994). However, when the human element is untrained, half-trained, and or left illiterate, it easily becomes a social conduit for criminal activities that are difficult for the nation to handle.

Nigeria is the most populous black nation on earth with a total population of 150 million citizens as of the 2006 Census (National Bureau of Statistics-NBS, 2006). It is fortified with various resources—natural, physical, and material—which, if harnessed could lubricate and engineer the nation's economic growth. However, the untapped human resources and the decay in the educational sector skills have resulted in a high propensity to criminal behaviour and violence, especially among the youth (Anayochukwu, 2008). One report from the Nigerian Tribune (2008) shows a violent incident that involved some young people over the inauguration of a traditional leader in one area of Ogun State.

These incidents of youth crime have created some scenes at local and international levels. The unwelcoming aspect of the episode is that the number of recruits, the density of active crime participants, and the sophistication of operations (Oni, 2008; Obi, 2008; Punch, 2008) create an atmosphere of apprehensiveness among the populace (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2006). The main thrust of this paper therefore, is to determine the relationship of educational background/neglect to crime among youth in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Framework and Literature Review**

Studies (e.g. Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1960, 2000) have revealed that educated and healthy people have the ability to contribute significantly to economic growth. Also, investments in education and health facilities were found to be positively related to economic growth (Strauss & Thomas, 1998). The relationship between per capita output and health can be explained in a number of ways. One such explanation is that the improvement in education and health is associated with improved technical and institutional progress, which increases life expectancy and reduces infant mortality. In line with this, improvement in education has generally been expected to improve the quality of human life and to change human values for the better.

The conventional assumption is that crime ought to decrease with the increased internalization of educational values among educated people. It has been documented (Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985; Freeman, 1991) that criminals tend to be less educated than non-criminals. This was further buttressed by Freeman (1996) whose study in the US identified that two-thirds of the incarcerated men had not graduated from high school. However, the sophistication in criminal operations according to Daily Sun (2008) and dexterity (Obi, 2008) of youth crimes in the Nigerian context seems to

contradict the empirical evidence in United States. To bridge the apparent differences requires a critical x-ray of existing literature and ethnographic observation of the Nigerian context in order to validate this contention.

Existing theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that education makes people productive catalysts for societal development (Drucker, 1954; Yesufu, 2000; Obikoya, 2002). This concept is also credited to Usher (1997) who asserts that education enthrones and cascades ethical values into the people; this promotes the spirit of community oneness and collective responsibility. Osabuohien (2005) acknowledged that education enhances political and health seeking behaviours among people. Similarly, Lochner and Moretti (2004) demonstrate that years invested in education generate incentives greater than the private returns enjoyed by the individual. This position was earlier observed by Witte and Tauchen (1994) that time spent in schooling, irrespective of educational attainment, significantly decreases the time available for individuals to participate in criminal activities.

Credence was added to the conclusion of Witte and Tauchen (1994) by Jacob and Lefgren (2003) who examined the short-term effect of school on juvenile crime. The conclusion demonstrates that property crime during student-in-school-session decreases by 14%, however, violent crime increases among juveniles by 28% during the same time period. Fajnzylber, Lederman and Loayza (2002a) utilized aggregated time-series data for developing and developed nations from 1970-1994 to analyze the determinants of degrees of criminality. The results show that the average educational attainment in a country does not have a statistically significant relationship to the number of homicides and robberies; rather, the relationship is with the probability/possibility of apprehension.

The misdirection of Nigerian educational priorities and commitments (Ejieh, 2006) (gauged by frequency of academic strikes and government allocation to infrastructure and scholars' compensation) has led to the frequency of sophisticated crimes commonly observed. Although empirical studies (Becker, 1964; Barro, 1991; 1999; Bils & Klenow, 2000) have connected human capital to economic growth, an evaluation of the impact of neglect and hiccups in the educational gestation period are essential towards substantiating this claim. The probability of crime proliferation during disruptions initiated by academic strikes is hypothesized to be high compared to uninterrupted academic sessions. This assertion was documented by (Fajnzylber, Lederman and Loayza 2002b) that uninterrupted academic session limits the tendency to engage in crime, but the session's stoppage due to strikes increase the frequency and density of participants. Hence, the lack of commitment to education, and particularly its correlation with youth crimes, should be analyzed and underscored within the Nigerian framework.

England crime statistics indicate lower crime rates within cities with higher educational levels, higher per capita income, and families with higher socio-economic status (Home Office Communication Directorate, 2003). This empirical evidence is similar to ethnographic observation in Nigeria where areas of high social-economic status individuals are relatively excluded (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2006) from common armed robbers' targets. Also, findings from the work of Hansen and Machin (2002) show some profound evidence that changes in minimum wages affect crime rates. Hansen and Machin utilized the institutionalization of a national minimum wage in the UK as a quasi-experiment to trend and de-trend crime before and after the introduction of the policy. In a radical yet similar approach to social economic factors, one recent study examined how changes in benefits affect unemployment and how their corresponding effects can predict crime (Machin & Meghir, 2004; Machin & Marie, 2004).

Like the British studies, the United States has also studied education and criminality. The work of Lochner and Moretti (2004) used instrumental variable techniques to estimate the effect of high school graduation on participation in criminal activities in the US. The study discovered that the most significant consequence of increased graduation is a reduction in violent crime, assaults and motor vehicle thefts. Also, Feinstein (2002) identifies five areas where education exerted effect on individuals' criminal behaviour: parenting, income, pleasure, patience, and risk aversion. From this study, it is intellectually accurate to assert that education increases the economic benefit of legal work which perceptually increases the opportunity cost of incarceration. Hence, substantial investment in the nation's human capital development will directly deflate the crime rates. The position supported by Yesufu (2000) and also given credence by Lochner (2004), is that education increases the apprehension cost associated with incarceration, since it increases the value of any time spent in prison. From the views surveyed in the literature, this study examines the nature of relationship between the low priority placed on education and youth criminality in Nigeria.

### **Research Method and Model Formulation**

It is the intention of this study to utilize the concept of alternative educational backgrounds to interpret the intensity of criminal activities in Nigeria among the youth. This approach connects poor education to youth crimes and substantiates this with empirical literature on alternative backgrounds initiated by the government as the point of divergence. The research analyzes both secondary data from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) as well as a field survey from Ogun State. Based on the research focus and the literature consulted, multifaceted descriptive-correlational statistics were utilized to analyze both the field survey and the NBS data.

From the literature reviewed, we examined three categorical variables; increases crime (UIC), creates mendicant (UCM), and vulnerability to violence (UVV). The face and content validity of the questionnaire were examined by content experts to establish the consistency and dependability of the constructed instrument. Section A of the questionnaire captured the bio-data of respondents, and section B looked at the categorical variables. The field survey took about two months and about seven hundred questionnaires were distributed within the metropolis of Ota in Ogun State. A purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the respondents. This involves administering questionnaires to youth that work and reside in Ota area of Ogun State.

Out of the distributed numbers, six hundred and fifty-six (656) were accurately filled and found usable for the study. The existence of possible linear relationships between the three variables mentioned, viz: UIC, UCM and UVV and education was assumed, as informed by literature. Thus, the authors specified a model where education was the independent variable, in order to examine the influence of education on them. This was captured functionally in equation 1 below:

Where:

**Y<sub>i</sub>** = the representation of the three dependent variables: increase in crime rate (UIC), youth mendicant (UCM), and vulnerability to violence (UVV).

Educ = Educational attainment of respondents

$e$  = error or stochastic term capturing other variables not included in the model.

Equation 1 above can be further expressed in explicit form as:

Where  $\phi_0$  and  $\phi_1$  are the parameters to be estimated.

$\phi_0$  is the constant term while  $\phi_1$  the coefficient that measures the nature of relationship between the respective dependent variables (UIC; UCM; UVV) and the independent variable (Education). In other words, it shows how the dependent variables and the independent variable (Education) interact. Theoretically, the authors expect crime rate, propensity to violence, and mendicant behaviour to decrease as youth become more educated. This is with the understanding that people tend to know more about the issues around them and have a greater ability to positively achieve their life aspirations (Witte & Tauchen, 1994; Lochner & Moretti, 2004; Osabuohien, 2005). Thus, the assumption is that  $\phi_0$  and  $\phi_1 < 0$ , and  $e$  is the error term ( $0, \sigma^2$ ).

**Presentation of Data and Analysis**

The analysis of the research was done in two parts: first the researchers present secondary data sourced from NBS on crime rates and the percentage of youth involved in it. Secondly, a survey was carried out to complement the secondary data and provide grassroots conceptualizations of the issues. The survey was done in the Ota region of Ogun State, which is fast developing into a city. The reason for the choice of this location lies in the fact that it enjoys the population spillover from the densely populated Lagos State and it provides abode to a number of people who work in Lagos. It used to be a peaceful town but in the last few years, it has witnessed sophisticated robbery attacks and violent unrest that has claimed many lives. Among others, one recent event was a robbery that occurred January 31, 2008 in which three (3) commercial banks and a microfinance bank in the neighbourhood were robbed by armed youth numbering well over 27. The scene was very bloody, and two security guards were shot dead (Adeyemi, Olufowobi, & Oni, 2008).

The data obtained from the survey was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while the data from the NBS and CBN statistical bulletins were analyzed in excel and presented in Table 1 and Figure 1 respectively. Table 1 shows that the total crime rate peaked in 2003, declined in 2004 and later increased again in 2005. It is obvious from the table below that over 92% of the total crimes committed in Nigeria were caused by youth. The youth in the age bracket of 16 to 50 are conceptualized as active persons who take personal responsibility for personal acts, and they constitute 65% (NBS, 2006) of the total population. Although not all youth involve themselves in crime, the uneducated have the tendency to indulging themselves in crime.

In 2003, for example, the total number of youth involved in crime was over 97%, but dropped slightly in 2004 and picked up again in 2005 as presented in Table 1. The trend follows the meager federal budget allotted for education, which has never reached 9%. The percentage change in education budget has a corresponding change in unemployment and youth crime rate. The increase in graduates did not produce a decrease in crime, as expected based on the literature. However, the figures below suggest that education might not have been functional enough to induce employment, and values, hence reducing the crime rate. Nevertheless, the drop in the educational budget in 2002 could account for the increase in crime and the number of youth involved. This resulted in university strikes which caused stoppage in schooling, which increased the time available for crime. This concept is made pictorial in Figure 1, which shows the fluctuation of the variables over the years under study.

Table 1

*Youth Crime Rate and Educational Output in Nigeria (2001-2005)*

Years	Total crime	Youth (16-50)	Youth % Total	Unemployment Rate	Trade Dispute	Total Graduates	Education Budget (%)
2001	160143	152320	95.11	3.60	51.00	47791	7.00
2002	156638	151430	96.68	3.80	50.00	58305	6.10
2003	347791	339262	97.55	3.60	49.00	70361	4.75
2004	143140	133845	93.51	3.80	152.00	50419	4.84
2005	149422	140910	94.30	4.00	100.50	26042	8.30

Note. Computed from National Bureau of Statistics (2005), and CBN Statistical Bulletin (2005).

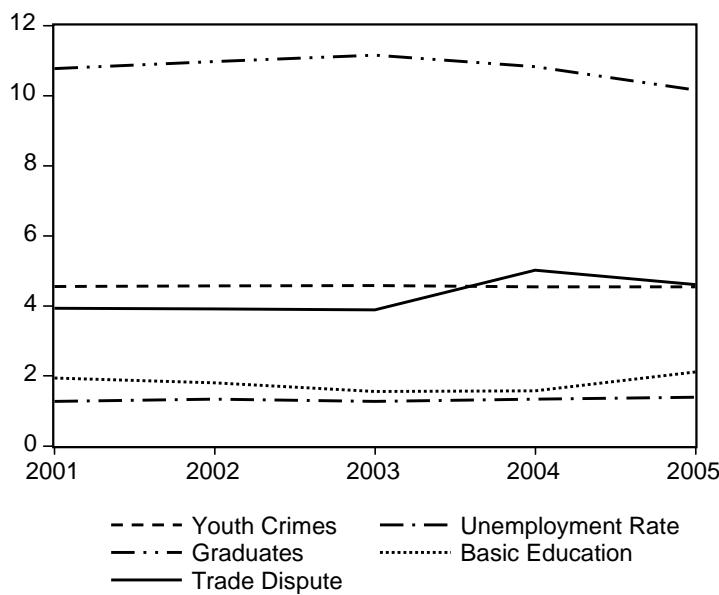


Figure 1. Youth crimes, graduates, trade dispute, unemployment rate, basic education (logarithmic values).

### **Results from the Field Survey**

Towards understanding the role of education in relation to criminal activities, a profile of the 656 respondents is provided and explained below. The survey had a response rate of 90% ( $n = 656$ ). Of this total, a large proportion was male with 488 respondents vis-à-vis the female 168. The age distributions of the respondents consists; 18-21 years (224) mainly male; 22-26 years had 264 males and 36 females; 27-30 with 72 females; and 31-36 had 60 females respectively. The educational attainment of the respondents was decomposed into; no education, secondary, post-secondary, and postgraduate. The composition reflects that out of the respondents, 28 mainly male with no formal education, followed by 444 respondents with secondary education, 408 male and 36 females, post-secondary had a total of 172 compose of 52 male and 120 females, and the postgraduate had 12 female respectively.

Before analyzing the respondents' profile, it is vital to recognize that the sample size and the average response rate were statistically robust for generalization within the areas covered in the study. From the respondents' profile in Tables 2 and 3, 444 had secondary education and 184 had post-secondary education. This aggregate difference between secondary education and post-secondary speaks volumes of the de-motivation in demand for skills and knowledge acquisition at the university and other tertiary institutions and the tendency to participate in crime. It further describes the depth of low educational priority/lower preference accorded investment in education in Nigeria by the Government. It restates the reason why there is consistent relationship between educational decay and crime escalation.

Table 2  
*Age and Sex of Respondents*

Sex		Age				Total
		18-21	22-26	27-30	31-35	
Male	224	264	---	---	488	
Female	---	36	72	60	168	
Total	224	300	72	60	656	

Table 3  
*Educational Qualification and Sex of Respondents*

		Highest Educational Qualification				Total
Sex	Male	No education	Secondary	Post-secondary	Post-graduate	
	Female		36	120	12	168
Total		28	444	172	12	656

Note. Computations by the authors based on the Field Survey

Table 4 presents the results from regression estimation which demonstrates that in the presence of lack of/low education, human propensity to criminal behaviour increases. The results on the table at aggregate level emphasize the role of missed educational opportunity, as it seems to be a high contributor to “area-boyism” and crime indulgence, which were both statistically significant at 1%. This positive and significant relation is contrary to the a priori expectation. With regards to theoretical and economic explanations, it is explicit that mendicants (area boyism) and crime indulgence are by-products of missed educational opportunity.

In other words, the density of crime rate (UCM) and mendicant (UIC) behavior increases among people with poor secondary education. This implies that lack of, or poor-quality education could contribute significantly to the crime and mendicant behaviour among the youth. This fact underscores the low functional level of the nation’s post-primary educational system. The persistent and consistent strike actions at the tertiary level which has led to youth frustration could be another reason discouraging post-secondary education. It has even been reported that some of the armed robbery suspects are students or recently expelled students from tertiary institutions (Adeyemi, Olufowobi & Oni, 2008).

The pro-violent (UVV) behaviour indicates that there is a negative relationship between educational attainment and propensity to engage in violence (not necessary crime). However, the relationship is not significant. This means that what causes youth to engage in violence is not significantly explained by education but other hidden factors which may be one’s personal disposition to life, environmental, and peer group influence (which were not captured in the model).

Table 4  
*Regression Results: Education*

Dependent variable	R <sup>2</sup> (%)	R	Con-stant	Coef-ficients	F	t	Sig.	Observa-tions
Area-boyism (UCM)	26	0.51	0.18	0.98	7.3	2.70	0.007*	656
Crime-indulgence (UIC)	52	0.72	0.27	1.25	36.11	6.09	0.001*	656
Pro-violence (UVV)	11	0.33	0.07	0.54	4.458	-0.77	0.499	656

Education (predictor). \* means significant at 1%

Note. Computations by the authors based on the Field Survey

The coefficients of determinations (R<sup>2</sup>) in the regression indicate that 26 and 52 percent of the variance in area-boyism and crime indulgence is explained by education. Holding each categorical variable constant, the coefficient of mendicants and crime indulgence values explain the effect of education. In both cases, these results provide explanation of the crime level when there is low priority placed on education/low educational background. This has been presented in Table 1 where the percentage of the government budget spent on education was well below 9%. The F-ratio in the table indicates that the model has a good-fit and does not suffer specification bias and as such the results are reliable.

### ***Implications***

Specifically, the existing educational paradigm creates de-motivation which predisposes the low educational background and thus, escalating crime rate. The poor educational background breeds diverse, often severe, criminal behaviors that are intended, somehow to attack the society that initiated and promoted their frustrating educational conditions. The regression results offer new contributions to the existing literature on education and youth criminality especially in Nigeria. The NBS data and empirical results illustrate the significance of utilizing educational background as bedrock for understanding youth crimes in Nigeria. Further, the field survey statistical results also support the assumption that neglect in youth education has helped build a factory for ‘manufacturing’ criminals.

Table 4 shows that the probability of education breeding violent behavior (UVV) was not significant either at 1% and 5%. The result upholds the fact that not all illiterates have the propensity to engage in violence; rather, violence or attempted violence is a human disposition which is not restricted to criminals alone. From the differences in physical behaviors, vulnerability to violence is not necessarily predisposed by education, but rather, by differences in psychosocial qualities which are often conditioned by events. This finding demonstrates that education is not a progenitor of individual propensity to violence, but this specific sample considered violence as self-factor. The educational attainment of the sample could substantially explain the differences in the statistical output. However, the mendicant (area-boyism) and crime indulgence are the output of low educational background.

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria's educational sector has experienced a great measure of neglect and mismanagement, which has often been manifested in budget allocation to education and strikes. This has contributed in criminality among youth. The incidences of high school drop-out and criminality among the youth are also part of the aftermath of the low functional form of educational system. The study employs the concept of educational background to interpret the density of crimes among youth in Nigeria.

This research draws empirical data from Nigeria Bureau of Statistics and supports it with a field survey in Ogun state. The data were subjected to both descriptive and regression analyses. This study illustrates that the budget allocated for education did not encourage enough participation in education to significantly reduce mendicant behavior and crime indulgence. This paper offers new contributions to the existing literature on education and youth criminality in Nigeria. The poorer one's educational background and the weaker a person's interest in education, the higher the possibility of being a mendicant and/or exhibiting criminal behavior. This paper, therefore, calls for the revitalization of Nigeria's educational system and encouraging the youth to place priority on educational pursuits.

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