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Impact of Migration on Early Learners' Academic Attainment and Health Care in a Mountain Learning Ecology in Idanre Hills, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT The state of education in mountain communities is of global concern consequent on early learners in an alpine learning ecology being at serious risk of not learning to read as measured by international benchmarks, which is a hindrance to the achievement of quality education, and reduced inequality goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper presents the voices of early learners in a mountain learning ecology in Nigeria on the impacts of migration on their schooling and health care. The sample of the study consists of twenty-eight school-aged children and three teachers purposely selected in an alpine learning ecology in Nigeria. The study adopted a mixed method approach because it possesses both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data, while the general trend from responses to key informant interviews were identified and examined. Results showed that migration of parents have an influence on the educational performance and health care of their children in mountain learning ecologies. The study argues for the inclusion of education and health care of school children in global mountain research initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

In different nations of the world, alpine communities are recognized to be (vulnerable) at risk to 'knocks' of hegiras of seasonal movement of people in their quest to live or work in favourable geographical locations. The migration of human beings from one geographical location to another dates back to antiquity. External shocks like disaster, wars, eviction, and recently climate variability have necessitated the movement of people at different stages of history. Unfortunately, none of these 'shocks' accounted for the 'exodus' from the mountain territories. While previous research has declared that disasters, war, trauma, eviction, and search for refuge were responsible for the mass departure of people from one geographical location to move to another, unfortunately these are not peculiar to the migration streams emerging from mountain communities across the world. Hlalele (2016) declared that mountain residents are not only amongst the world's most disadvantaged but are confronted with harsh climatic and environmental conditions and country distances that hampers development. The situation is not any different in Nigeria, where mountain communities are far-flung from citadels of commerce and power, thus having little or no influence on governmental policies and decisions that affect their communities. The inadequate access to basic services such as education and health coupled with the complex and fragile ecosystems with marked topography (FAO 2011), have driven mountain residents in a large number to cities that are centers of commerce and power in the developing nations.

There is paucity of published study on the effect of migration on children's educational performance in mountain communities in Nigeria. Chen et al. (2014) found that there is no significant effect of migration on school performance. These scholars surprisingly found that children's educational performance improved in migrant households in which the father out-migrated. Unfortunately, the findings of these re-

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searchers cannot be generalized to mountain communities in Nigeria because the study is not only limited to rural China, but also was carried out in lowlands, which does not unveil the realities confronting the teeming children that are left behind in mountain communities in Nigeria.

Van Blerk and Ansell (2006) made a closer attempt to study children's experiences of migration in alpine communities in Africa. These scholars reported that migration had consequences for many areas of children's existence, with the characteristics of these consequences shaped in the context within which the migration took place. It may not be out of place to state that this study gave insight into the difficulties or consequences associated with migration on school children's educational performance and health care in mountain communities in Nigeria, consequent on the selection of Lesotho and Malawi as study sites by Van Blerk and Ansell (2006). Unfortunately, these scholars limited their study to the effect of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome on southern Africa.

Theron (2016) utilized deductive and inductive analyses of a narrative and visual data set generated in the qualitative phase of an explanatory mixed methods study to air the voices of one hundred and eighty-one rural, black, South African adolescents in Thabo Mofutsanyana district on the contextual, and cultural realities that characterized their positive adjustment to disadvantaged life-worlds. The study revealed that the mechanisms and the structure of the mechanisms polled by the study sample are configured by the contextual realities of absent men, common place suffering and a societal reality of burly women, human, and non-material care and ascribed value to education. The study conducted by Theron (2016) gave insights into the difficulties experienced by an average Afromontane child because it utilized adolescents resident in the lowlands of Thabo Mofutsanya district with demographical details similar to Oke Idanre communities. Consequent on the need to extend research beyond children's stable relationship to ecosystems and include children's transitory topographies in discourse of their life experiences (Van Blerk and Ansell 2016), hence, this study, investigated the impacts of migration on children's educational performance and health care in a mountain learning ecology in Idanre, Nigeria.

Consequently, three research questions shaped this study:

- ***Research Question 1:*** Does migration have an impact on the educational performance of children in mountain learning ecologies in Idanre Hill?
- ***Research Question 2****:* Does migration have an impact on the health care of children in mountain learning ecologies in Idanre Hill?
- ***Research Question 3***: What are the coping mechanisms evolved by stakeholders in the mountains learning ecologies to mitigate the impacts of migration on children's educational performance?

A Compendious Review of the Applicable Literature on Migration and Educational Performance

The realities of the 21st century have shown that migration is a tremendous phenomenon. Phan (2016) recounted the haunting image of a three-year-old boy of Syrian origin named Alan Kurdi whose remains were found in the summer of 2015 on a bench in Turkey. This incident drew global attention to the unfortunate situation of migrants and refugees. Research has shown that virtually every nation of the world is secretly affected by migration (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes 2009; Phan 2016) with mountain communities in these countries not exempted. From the reports of these scholars, migration is as old as human beings exist and it could connote movement of people through the seas, air, or land due to diverse factors that are aimed at changing their living conditions or other life circumstances of life. The most important factor that any educational researcher should bear in mind is that movement of persons is at the 'heart' of migration, either in lowlands or mountains terrains.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2012) defined migration as a process of moving, either across an international border, or within a state. To this organization, migration involves any type of transition of people, whatever the distance, composition and genesis. It includes refugees, displaced persons, deracinated people, and economic newcomers. This definition shows that migration is a ubiquitous concept that qualifies movement from one country to another, within a country, and within geographical locations. In

this study, migration refers to the movement of people from the mountain communities of 'Idanre Hill' to the urban centers in search of better economic opportunities. Migration is a burning and perpetual concern for different organizations namely, church (Phan 2016), gender movements (Hoang 2016), educational researchers (Ige and Hlalele 2017), and peace researchers (Ostby 2016), with scholars like Ostby (2016) and the United Nations reporting that a greater part of the world's population currently resides in cities, with projections that by 2050, overall population growth will be absorbed by cities, especially in Africa and Asia where development challenges remain.

The six major mobility outcomes by Geddes et al. (2012) have been found relevant to migration in Afromontane communities. These six major mobility outcomes proposed by Geddes et al. (2012) include migration within states, migration between states, displacement between states, displacement within states, choosing not to move, and being unable to move and being trapped. It could be inferred from the outcomes highlighted by Geddes et al. (2012) that active people that remained in mountain communities might have chosen not to move because they had adjusted positively amidst economically disadvantaged rural life-worlds. Theron (2016) declared that youth in parts of these mountain communities (lowlands) were associated with techniques of coping well with poverty, and related risks such as chronically ill parents, and being orphaned and/or neglected. Other active people that are residents in the mountain communities in Africa might have been able to move due to financial resources, and could be concluded to have been trapped in these mountain communities' despite the harsh living conditions confronting them.

Educational performance represents achievement outcomes that indicate the extent to which a child has achieved clearly defined objectives that were set in instructional environments, specifically in school, college, and higher educational institutions (Steinmayr et al. 2015). The impact of migration on children's educational performance in mountain communities remains under-researched in the 21st century educational treatise. OECD (2010) remarked that many nations often defaulted on the commitment to improve their educational quality because educational investments are seen only in the future. While this affects the urban centers and schools in friendly geographical terrains, it has led to the under estimation of the value and the need for improvements in learning ecologies in mountain societies in Africa.

Researchers have established the impacts of some factors on the educational performance of children. These factors are community bonding and bridged social capital (Menahem 2011), social position and absences (Considine and Zappala 2002), gender (Adigun et al. 2015; Ige 2012; Ige 2013, Ige 2016, Ige & Tsotetsi 2017; Ige 2017), as well as parental resources and sibship size (Tanskanen et al. 2016). Unfortunately, none of these studies examined the impacts of these variables on children in Afromontane communities or by extension other mountain communities in Africa regarding migration and healthcare. The healthcare of children left behind by a migrating parent in mountain communities in Nigeria is an understudied issue. Health care is the organized provision of medical care to children. The World Health Organization (2016) corroborated that health care is 'better health for all', which does not exclude teeming children in mountain learning ecologies. The identified five key elements to achieving that goal by WHO are reducing exclusion and social disparities in health (universal coverage reforms), organizing health services around people's needs and expectations (service delivery reforms), integrating health into all sectors (public policy reforms), pursuing collaborative models of policy dialogue (leadership reforms), and increasing stakeholders participation. Unfortunately, these five key elements could not be said or seen to have been achieved in rural mountain communities in Nigeria.

WHO (2016) in their highlights on ending childhood obesity declared that ensuring the healthy growth of children must be an ultimate concern for all nations, because children represent the future. This organization stated that children are vulnerable to malnutrition and infectious diseases, which can be adequately prevented or cured. With the streams of parental migration in mountain communities, the question is about who takes responsibility for the healthcare of children left by these economic migrants. Anderson (2005) acknowledges that childcare is central to social reproduction in all societies, consequently, beliefs and practices of childcare differ from one society to another in Africa.

Research has shown that grandmothers either paternal or maternal have been entrusted with the healthcare of children left behind (Peng and Wong 2016; Pantea 2012; Lutz and Palenga-

Mollenback 2012). Pantea (2012) pointed out that an arranged foster care system has been associated with physical exhaustion and psychological pressures on the 'aeons' of grandparents despite strengthening intergenerational attachment. Despite scholars' position on the likely denouements of being left behind that children might encounter, Toa et al. (2014) found no significant differences in the mental outcomes of left-behind preschool-aged children due to parental migration. Consequent on this background, it behooves the researchers to probe the impact of migration on early learners' educational performance and health care in a mountain learning ecology in Idanre Hill, Nigeria.

Study Area

The study was conducted in a model primary school in the environments of Oke Idanre. This mega school was one of the twelve ultramodern foundation learning centres constructed by the Ondo State Government. The model primary school offers free tuition, while pupils received free supplies of books, uniforms, shoes, and bags. The government provides a free shuttle to transport pupils to this model primary school daily (Johnson 2016). The residents of this community are basically sedentary cultivators, and cocoa farmers sent out of business by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) put in place by previous military regimes in Nigeria, and external shocks such as climate variability and intra-community clashes (Adefila 2013). UNESCO (2017) reported that the topography, vegetation as well as the flora and fauna of the communities in Oke Idanre remained scattered since the residents' emigrated downhill in 1923. Adefila (2013) indicated that the village in which this model primary school is located is between longitudes $5^0\ 00^{\text{I}}$ to $5^0\ 30^{\text{I}}$ east of the Greenwich Meridian and latitudes $6^0\ 20^{\text{I}}$ and $7^0\ 50^{\text{I}}$ north of the equator. This researcher further described that the spatial coverage of Idanre Hill is 2,000 square kilometers and it lies within the tropics. Oke Idanre comprises high plains with spectacular valleys interspersed with inselbergs that are three thousand feet above the sea level. In 2007, UNESCO declared Oke Idanre a world heritage site. Adefila (2013) declared that it is common to locate isolated blocks of high standing lustrous inselbergs completely polished by forces of denudation in the surrounding communities.

METHODOLOGY

The fieldwork conducted in March 2017 evaluated and catalogued the impact of migration on early learners' educational performance, health care, and immunization vaccinations. The study utilized a quantitative approach to assess the variables of interest, and researchers supported the findings with qualitative data as far as possible. The researchers and research assistants initiated meetings with the management of the model primary school, and afforded the officials detailed information about the study. The researchers subsequently sought informed consent from the teachers and pupils of the model primary school. The purpose of the study was unveiled to the teachers and pupils in the presence of the school management team. Twenty-nine pupils and three teachers participated in the study. The data collected from twenty-eight early learners were analyzed because the Body Mass Index program contained in the spreadsheet utilized to analyze the data for this study, is not meant for use with adults 20 years of age and older. The excluded early learner was 20 years old. This attested to the educational difficulties confronting an average child resident in mountain communities. All the pupils were in grade five.

Of the 28 early learners whose data was analyzed for the study, 17 were male, while 11 were female (X=1.39, SD=0.50). The average height of the participants was 52.88 (SD=4.25) inches, and average weight was 65.88 pounds (SD=12.40). The mean Body Mass Index of the respondents was 16.59 (SD=2.54), while average BMI-ILE was 34.96 (SD=25.84). Table 1 projects the Body Mass Index information of the selected early learners.

The summary of the BMI index of the children shows that 24 (86%) of the early learners have normal BMI, 2 (7%) are underweight, and 2 (7%) are overweight. It should be noted that the obesity noted in the sample is peculiar to female early learners.

The researchers utilized a research instrument tagged 'Montane Early Parental Care Activities Questionnaire' to acquire information on parental migration, health care, and indigenous techniques adopted by teachers to mitigate the impact of migration on pupils. The internal consistency of the parental migration and health

Table 1: Body Mass Index of the respondents

Summary of children's BMI-for-age	*Boys*	*Girls*	*Total*
Number of Children Assessed:	17	11	**28**
Underweight (< 5th %ile)	12%	0%	**7%**
Normal BMI (5th - 85th %ile)	82%	91%	**86%**
Overweight or obese (≥ 85th %ile)*	6%	9%	**7%**
Obese (≥ 95th %ile)	*0%*	*9%*	***4%***

*Terminology based on: Barlow SE and the Expert Committee. Expert committee recommendations regarding the prevention, assessment, and treatment of child and adolescent overweight and obesity: summary report. Pediatrics. 2007; 120 (suppl 4):s164-92.

care components using Cronbach alpha was 0.88 and 0.92, respectively. Key informant interviews were carried out with the three class teachers that participated in the study. These interviews focus on the coping strategies adopted by the school to salvage the healthcare and educational performance of pupils with migrating parents. The quantitative data obtained from the early learners was analyzed using frequency counts, mean, standard deviation, percentage, and inferential statistics like one way Analysis of Variance, and t-test. The Body Mass Index calculator developed by Barlow SE and Expert Committee (2007) was used to calculate the BMI index of the pupils. The Camry Body Fat/Hydration Monitor Scale was used to measure the weight of the students, while a standard meter rule was used to evaluate the height of the students.

RESULTS

Answering the Research Questions

Does migration have an impact on the educational performance of children in mountain learning ecologies in Idanre Hill?

Table 2 shows that parental migration has an impact on mountain early learners' academic achievement (t=1.803, df=22, P>.5). Mountain early learners that are residents with their parents performed better academically than learners under foster care. This result implies that migration has an impact on early learners' educational performance in mountain learning ecologies.

Does migration have an impact on the health care of children in mountain learning ecologies in Idanre Hill?

Table 3 shows that parental migration has an impact on mountain early learners' health care (t=-1.710, df=22, P>.5). Mountain early learners with intact parents' status performed better than early learners in foster care. This result implies that the migration of parents has an impact on early learners' health care in mountain learning ecologies.

Qualitative Analysis /Respondent Theme

Research Question 1: Does migration have an impact on the educational performance of children in mountain learning ecologies in Idanre Hills?

The Assistant Head Teacher, Ms. Kilani (not a real name), in one of the schools in Oke Idanre environment stated *absence of either or both parents affects the adjustment of notable pupils in her school. She further stated that most of the affected pupils live with either or both grandparents or* a *landlady, while their parents are away to search for greener pastures.*

Fathia, a female pupil with a weight of 34.8 kg (not a real name) opened up to say that *she stays with her Aunty, because her father works in the capital city. To her, the care she gets from her father cannot be compared to her Aunty's care.*

Research Question 2: Does migration have an impact on the healthcare of children in mountain learning ecologies in Idanre Hills?

A 10 year-old pupil in one of the learning ecologies named 'Esther' believes not staying

Table 2: Summary of t-test showing the influence of parents' migration on learners' educational performance

	Parents' migration status	*N*	*Mean*	*Std. deviation*	*T*	*df*	*Sig.*	*Remarks*
Academic achievement	Migrated	10	3.0000	1.414	-1.803	22	.000	Significant
	Intact	14	4.286	3.539				

Table 3: Summary of t- test showing the influence of parents' migration on learners' health care

	Parents' migration status	*N*	*Mean* .	*Std. deviation*	*T*	*df*	*Sig.*	*Remarks*
Academic achievement	Migrated	10	21.900	4.932	-1.710	22	.000	Significant
	Intact	14	24.643	2.925				

with one's biological parents can affect access to qualitative healthcare. She stays with her grandmother, and has not been vaccinated for measles or Polio.

Agbetoye (not a real name) whose father is a farmer in a far distant farm camp called 'Ayo' stated that *though he stays in that camp with his father, immunization workers* do *not always visit. He said the name of the medical service provider is Doctor one-five (this connotes a quack doctor that visited and when he treated farm settlers, he bills one thousand five hundred naira only). He stated that he had been vaccinated for measles and polio, but not for diphtheria, tetanus, and whooping cough.*

Simcn (not a real name) weighing 27.7 kg lives with his grandfather even though his mother works in Idanre (the location of his school). *He stated that his grandfather had no first aid box at home, and he does not keep any drug out of his reach. He stated he had been vaccinated for polio, but not whooping cough, measles, tetanus, and diphtheria.*

A pupil named Bosede with a height of 124.4 cm and a weight of 27.3 kg stated that *she lives with her grandfather, despite her parents' residence* being *in idanre where she is schooling, and he has no first aid box at home, and they have access to all drugs in her grandfather's home.* The name of her family physician is 'my damil' (a drug dispenser). She has been vaccinated against polio, but not measles, whooping cough, tetanus and diphtheria.

Research Question 3: What are the coping mechanisms evolved by stakeholders in the mountain learning ecologies to mitigate the impacts of migration on children's educational performance?

A teacher with twenty years' teaching experience teaching grade five who did not disclose her name stated that, s*eminar*s *had been held with the parents,* and a*dvice had been given to the concerned parents through a P.T.A. (Parents' Teachers Association) meeting.*

Another female teacher who did not disclose her teaching experience and class taught responded that, teachers called the parents and advised them to be taking care of their children, and to assist them whenever they were given homework.

DISCUSSION

*T*his study has exposed the potent impact of parents' migration on students' educational performance in a mountain learning ecology. In mountain communities, children are confronted with subtle academic difficulties, which this study has unveiled. This finding confirms the research outcome of Theron (2016) on innumerable difficulties confronting children in mountain communities in Africa. It also affirms the discovery of Van Blerk and Ansell (2006) that migration has dire consequences for several facets of children's existence with the characteristics of these consequences in the context within which migration was initiated by parents. Zhao et al. (2012) echoed that migration of parents without considering their children can truncate the children's educational performance, and called for empirical evaluation as demonstrated in this study. The realities of the effects of migration on early learners' educational performance in this study contradicts the affirmation of Toa et al. (2014) that found no significant differences in the mental outcomes of preschool-aged children left-behind due to parental migration.

Despite the increasing efforts at providing care 'in loco parentis' by teachers, the outcome of this enquiry affirms the findings of Khan (2016) that migration has the potency of altering the lives of dependents back home in mountain communities. Attention to veritable healthcare systems for underprivileged communities has gained momentum across the world. This study has shown that parents' migration has effects on the wellbeing of children in mountain learning ecologies. In addition, the discovery of the

WHO (2016) regarding obesity was also manifested in this study. The BMI index of the early learners implies that for every twenty-eight children in a mountain learning ecology, two are underweight, while two are overweight. This has implications for sustainable development in mountain communities consequent on World Health Organization's declaration that healthy growth of children must be an ultimate concern to all nations, because children represent the future. The qualitative data collected revealed that grandparents consulted quacks for the wellbeing of their wards. This study has demonstrated that mountain research initiatives should pay attention to educational performance and healthcare of teeming children in alpine learning ecologies. The researchers further discovered that the arranged foster parenting system in the learning ecology utilized for this study revolved around grandfathers, grandmothers, aunties and surprisingly landladies (female house owners that let houses to migrating parents). This confirms the findings of Peng and Wong (2016), Pantea (2012), and Lutz and Palenga-Mollenback (2012) that the healthcare of children left behind in mountain learning ecologies is entrusted to grandmothers either paternal or maternal. This study discovered that foster care by aunties either paternal or maternal, and female house owners are emerging in mountain communities as well.

CONCLUSION

This educational enquiry has implications for sustainable development initiatives in mountain and protected geographical locations. Mountain research initiatives across the world have overtly focused on technical geographical issues to the exclusion of educational development and health care of children resident in these communities. This study has revealed that migration has influenced mountain children's wellbeing and development. Stakeholders in mountain societies across the world should give the education and wellbeing of children the attention both deserve. As interesting as these implications are, the enquiry is however, not without some limitations. The sample of 28 early learners, and three teachers was delimited only to a learning ecology in Idanre, Nigeria. Therefore, caution should be exercised in what was a serious limitation to the study when generalizing the findings of this treatise to other mountain communities in Nigeria. Despite these limitations, the study has significantly contributed to the field of knowledge in mountain research initiatives.

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