

**Differentials in Educational Attainment in Nigeria:  
Isolating The Effect of Ethnicity.**  
Blessing U. Mberu, Roland Pongou, and Olumide Taiwo.  
Population Studies and Studies Center  
Brown University, Providence, RI 02912.  
Email: [Blessing\\_Mberu@brown.edu](mailto:Blessing_Mberu@brown.edu)

Extended Abstract

**Background**

Nigeria's education system has grown astronomically since political independence in 1960, but concerns for educational imbalance among different regions of the country has remained, despite several government policies and programs addressing imbalances both in the supply of educational infrastructures and the demand for education. The nagging question that continues to beg for answers remains why so many Nigerians fail to participate in school after four decades of nation building and educational reforms promoting participation? There is a consensus among researchers in the country that the differentials are attributable to the historical role of ethnicity, which affected the supply of educational infrastructures and demand for education among the major ethnic groups dating back to the colonial period. However beyond the ethnic explanation, little attention have been devoted to examining the mediating roles of individual and household factors, and little is known about the role of more aggregate community level influences, all of which have been clearly identified as very important determinants of an individual's school enrolment decision. This paper seeks to clarify the relationship between ethnicity and educational attainment in Nigeria by isolating the role of ethnic identity from the mediating influences of individual, household and community level characteristics, accounting for the historical imbalances relating to educational supply. This approach,

which is consistent with social science literature on school participation in developing societies (Foster and Rosenzweig, 2004; Filmer and Pritchett, 2001; Mensch et al, 2001; Lloyd and Blanc, 1996; Lloyd et al, 1994), is expected to offer a more comprehensive overview of determinants of educational attainment in the country, relevant to relating policies to the goal of educational integration imperative for economic and political development of Nigeria.

### **Objectives/Significance of the study**

This paper will document the current overall imbalance in educational attainment associated with ethnic origin among all Nigerians; identify significant individual, household and community characteristics that predict educational attainment and examine the mechanisms that mediate these outcomes. The significance of the paper can be located in its potential to facilitate our understanding of the role of ethnicity in creating value systems and motivations that undermine participation in the pursuit of education, among subjects that are exposed to common policy initiatives. It also has the potential for facilitating national integration by providing evidence needed to address educational inequity in the country, as education is not only an element in state building but also an element in nation-building (Davis and Kalu-Nwaiwu, 2001). The more integrated a country is education-wise, the more cohesive such a country would be politically, socially and economically (Adeyemi, 2001).

## Data and Methods

This study utilizes data on 39,569 Nigerian youths and children aged 5-24 from the 1999 and 2003 nationally representative Nigeria Demographic and Health Surveys. The surveys used household and individual questionnaires to obtain information on housing characteristics, household composition, and individual background characteristics including data on educational attainment.

For our multivariate analysis, we estimate specifications of the form:

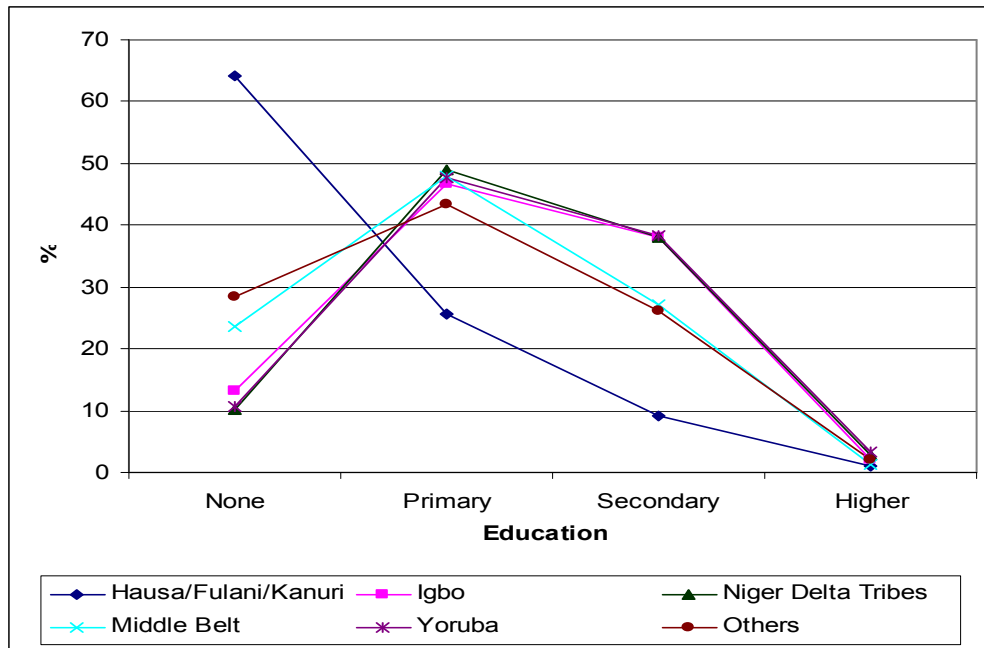
$$\text{Educyr}_{ir} = \text{Ethnic}_i \beta + X\alpha + u_r + e_i$$

where  $\text{Educyr}_{ir}$  is the number of years of education attained by a person  $i$  living in a region  $r$ , and  $\text{Ethnic}_i$  a vector of ethnic groups including Hausa/Fulani/Kanuri, Igbo, Niger-Delta, Middle-Belt and Others, Yoruba being the reference group.  $X$  is a vector of variables including individual, household and state levels characteristics,  $u_r$  captures the region effect, and  $e_i$  are individual heterogeneity.  $\beta$  and  $\alpha$  are parameters to be estimated, but our main interest is in  $\beta$ . Because of differential supply of education across regions and because of correlation of region with ethnicity (i.e.  $E(u_r, \text{Ethnic}_i) \neq 0$ ), we estimate region fixed-effects regressions. Region fixed-effects analyses ascertain that only individuals within the same region are being compared to each other, but another difficulty may arise from the fact that these individuals may have previously resided in different regions, implying that they might have faced different supply of education. This might likely bias the estimate of  $\beta$ . To resolve this issue, we restrict our analysis to non-migrants. This ensures that the supply side is similar for all individuals living in the same region and that only the demand for education might differ.

### Some Preliminary Results

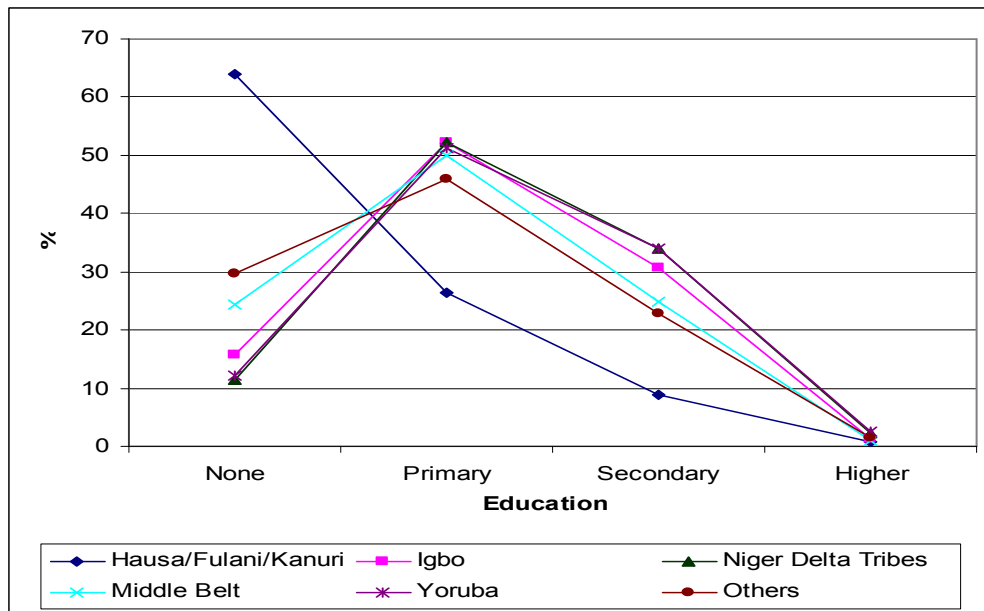
Our results show huge educational attainment imbalances among different ethnic groups as shown in Graph 1.

Graph 1 Educational Attainment for the whole sample



Netting out the role of historical supply of education to different regions during and after colonialism, we apply region fixed-effects and restrict our analysis to non-migrants. The result presented in Graph 2 does not significantly differ from the prior result above.

Graph 2 Educational Attainments of Non-migrants.



Further, our multivariate analysis finds that parts of the gap in educational attainment are accounted for by individual, household and community factors, but the effect of ethnicity remains significant and grows with age (results not shown here). Against the long history of Government policies and programs addressing educational inequities, we conclude that ethnic roots of educational imbalance remains an issue yet to be resolved in Nigeria, underscoring the importance of further research in understanding the mechanisms that produce educational imbalances along ethnic lines.