

# **Land Deals, Household Attributes and Quality of Life: The Untold Story from a Rural Community in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

*There is an expectation that land deals/acquisitions should bring about consistency of flow of income that improves the welfare of the household. This paper studies land deals, household attributes and quality of life in a rural community in Nigeria. The study aims to analyze the extent to which proceeds from land deals are able to translate to improved quality of life of Ota indigenes in Ogun State, Nigeria. Using the Cochran 1963 formula, 1200 households were surveyed through questionnaires and interviews. An econometric model that incorporates the measures of households' quality of life, occurrence of land deals and other covariates was formulated and estimated using both logistic regression and the fixed effect generalized least square technique. The study found the age of the respondents, educational attainment and income from other engagements to be significant. This implies that the probability of individuals sustaining their income is not significantly affected by income but these other significant variables. The study therefore recommends that the indigenes need to be better enlightened on how to manage their land profitably in relation to other personal attributes which matters most like education, physical engagement in other productive activities (representing age) and engagement in other income generating activities (income). This can further translate to improved lifestyle and eventual development of the community as a whole.*

**Keywords:** Land Deals, Household Attributes, Quality of Life, Rural Community, Welfare

## **Introduction**

The research on large acquisitions of land in Africa and its impact on households' quality of life have been growing in recent time. Most of the researches are concerned with the economic implication of these land deals on landowners and the community as a whole. Land as an economic asset is expected to contribute to poverty reduction at both the micro- and macroeconomic level. There has been a controversy about the effects of large scale land acquisitions by both domestic and foreign investors. These acquisitions are expected to translate to improved quality of life for land owners. This is in relation to the consistency of flow of income that improves the welfare of the household. Evidence reveals that contrary outcomes are being experienced by households involved in land deals. For instance, Liversage (2010) found that foreign land acquisitions pose potential threats to the land rights and livelihoods of smallholder farmers, pastoralists, indigenous communities and other vulnerable groups.

In developing countries, the rural poor make up the majority of the agricultural workforce, and in particular, they play a more crucial role in agricultural production. Furthermore, they constitute a large portion of the overall poor population, especially in African countries. This emphasizes the urgency for social and economic empowerment; especially from the proceeds from the land deals. This issue has earlier been taken up by Adams, Sibanda and Turner (1999), who concluded that the poor access to capital assets, including land and natural resources, determines how, and to what extent the quality of life of land owners can be enhanced. Also, Adato, Carter and May (2006) affirm that poverty traps in a locality can be reduced by ownership of productive assets such as land.

In Nigeria, the land Act of 1978 gives households the right to access and ownership of land, which includes the right to own, sell, lease, mortgage, inherit or exchange land. The rural community of Ota is a major beneficiary of this Act, owing to the fact that majority of the households in this community have ancestral lands. Most of these ancestral lands are sold to both foreign and domestic investors. For instance, after Lagos, she homes the largest concentration of manufacturing industries in Nigeria.

Ota presents a unique and interesting laboratory for studying the effects of land deals on the quality of life of households, because more than 80% of Ota indigenes are engaged in the sale and resale of ancestral lands for their livelihood. This has given rise to the maxim, “As crude oil is to the *Niger-Deltans*<sup>e</sup> so is land to the Ota people”, which depicts the importance of land as a principal economic resource to this locality. More so, inspite of the enabling environment for economic development, poverty still looms large among the residents. This assertion is based on anecdotal inference; however, the Nigeria Poverty Profile 2010 Report averred that the absolute, relative, and dollar per day poverty rates in Ogun state, where Ota represents a fraction of, were 62.3, 69 and 62.5 percent respectively (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). This poses an inquiry on the extent to which poverty can be reduced by ownership of physical assets.

The main objectives of this study are therefore, 1) to analyze the extent to which proceeds from land deals are able to translate to improved quality of life of Ota indigenes, 2) to underscore those factors that may hitherto impede/improve the transmission of land proceeds to improved quality of life. These objectives are important for policy makers, especially in the understanding of how land owners can maximize the proceeds from the land deals. This is especially by understanding possible investment outlets, which can help to abate poverty. Furthermore, investigating the issue of land deals by using sample from Nigeria will be instructive for other African countries facing similar challenges. This is because Nigeria is among the top 20 most targeted countries, in terms of land deals, around the world (Anseeuw *et al*, 2012).

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

In economics, land comprises all naturally occurring resources whose supply is inherently fixed. Land as a natural resource is fundamental to the production of all goods, including capital goods. In classical economics, land is considered one of the four factors of production (along with capital and labour) and enterprise. Land is sometimes merged with capital to simplify micro-economics and the income derived from ownership or control of land is referred to as rent (Wikipedia, 2014). According to Omolabi (2010), land is a fundamental asset for all classes of people and for all countries of the world. It is the platform on which all human activities are

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<sup>e</sup> The Niger-Delta region of Nigeria is known for large deposits of crude oil and the region is the major producers of Nigerian crude oil export.

performed. He opines that land as a natural resource provides not only a foundation for economic and social development, but when properly managed, can help to empower people to adjust to the challenges posed by urbanization and globalization. Land has also been identified as a function of virtually all forms of production and consumption in countries and as an ultimate source of survival. This ultimate source therefore has to be properly managed so as to maximize the benefits to the present and future generation. It is so important that in the sustainable development agenda, land policy issues lie at the root of solutions to many urban problems including, housing problem, poverty alleviation, urban productivity, good governance, participation by civil society and women's right (Deininger, 2004; Nalker, 1997).

Land deals define the process through which land is acquired by investors and delivered by the land owners. The acquirer and the land owners are the market land actors. Land deals in Nigeria can be done formally or informally. The formal system hinges on land policies and law by various governments and enforced by government agencies. The informal system follows customary rules and is dictated by social norms and practices. Leach et al (1996) states that the informal system of land deals are upheld by mutual agreement, or by relations of power of authority and rules that are enforced endogenously. Most land transaction in Ota are done informally while the head of the family has oversight role to ensure that acceptable moral rules governing the family land are upheld. However, this informal system is bedeviled with land disputes because of the breakdown of the rules and social relationships governing transactions. This becomes even worse when the remaining land of the *Omo-oniles* dwindles. Land that was genuinely acquired by individual or corporation but left undeveloped over a long time can then be impounded by the children of the land owning families because of the reality of the depletion of their inheritance. This and other violent activities of the *Omo-oniles* have been a major source of concern in Nigeria for a long time.

Though rural dwellers normally access land through a wide variety of different channels (de Janvry et al. 2001), land transactions can play an important role by allowing those who are productive but are either landless or own little land to access land. Land markets also facilitate the exchange of land as the off-farm economy develops and, where the conditions for doing so exist, provide a basis for the use of land as collateral in credit markets. Deininger (2003) said that

capital market imperfections and policy distortions have, in many instances, prevented land sales markets from contributing to increased levels of productivity or reduced poverty. He opines that To understand why in some cases land transactions may fail to contribute to improving productivity and equity, it is necessary to review the conceptual foundations that underlie the operation of land markets and how some of the market imperfections frequently encountered in rural areas of the developing world will have a differential impact on land rental and sales. According to him, imperfections in labor and credit markets, and the scope of economies of scale in production, will affect the way in which land markets function.

According to Liversage (2010), most of the land in Africa is already owned by rural communities under a range of diverse tenure systems, although often these rights are not registered. His study shows that frequently, national states consider underused land as being available for disposal to outside investors. However, this has changed in many developing countries as it is increasingly recognized that, while some land may be underutilized, very little is owned, vacant or unused. The study further established that there is still uncertainty as to the nature and scale of the demand for land and the actual number of acquisitions or long-leases realized.

Deininger and Byerlee (2010) also posits that many reported land deals have not materialized and of those that have, only a small portion of the land acquired is actually being realized. It was further established by Liversage (2010) that there is insufficient information on the impacts that realized land deals have had on the livelihoods of the rural communities in the affected – either negative or positive. At best there has been mixed results. While some researches suggest that some land deals have not met expectations but rather have had negative impact, there is also evidence to suggest that some smaller deals especially in agriculture have positive impacts (see Andrianirina-Ratsialonana and Teyssier, 2010).

Existing evidence in literature further reiterates that in most cases, land deals or transfers do not seem to be contributing to the livelihoods of a substantial share of the households involved (Valente, 2009). In a survey conducted by Ahmed et. al. (2003), only 8.1% of the household surveyed reported achieving a higher income and only 11.1 per cent achieving a more secure income as a consequence of participation in land redistribution. McCusker (2002) found out in

his study of communal land redistribution projects, that change in livelihoods following land reform is very minimal (only 21.1% off the beneficiary households experienced increase in income as a result of the communal land redistribution). This insignificant change is a result of farm size problems, lack of capital, skills and labour, gender bias, disorganization and skewed age distribution. Bradstock (2005) carried out a case study on land reform projects in Northern Cape of South Africa and found that majority of the household income that increased during the survey period was not as a result of land redistribution. Other studies in literature have also documented either negative or non-significant impact of land deals on the livelihood of beneficiary households (see van den Brink et. al., 2006; Borras, 2005; Deininger and May, 2000).

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Structure and Agency Theory:** According to this theory formal rule existing between the state organs that govern land delivery and land market actors, can be modified or changed. It allows land market actors to interpret, apply or challenge formal rules (Tripp, 1997).

**Theory of Institutional Analysis:** This theory postulates that the existence of institutions or rules can help in minimizing cost of land transactions. North (1990) emphasised the importance of institutions in minimizing cost of land transactions and in setting acceptable behavioural patterns among segments of a larger society. Pamuk (2000, cited in Oloyede, Ajibola and Oni, 2007 ) is also of the opinion that formal institutions dictate rules governing land deals i.e. state laws while informal institutions dictate social norms and practices.

### **Research Method**

This study is part of a larger project that concerns land deals in *Ota* and the implications on the livelihood of dwellers.

**Data:** both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in 2014, from a total of 22 rural communities in *Ota*. The qualitative data involves focus group interviews that include community leaders and heads of land association: this aspect was not included in this study. The second aspect is the quantitative data that involved the selection of the 22 communities, which was based on vast coverage/representation and capturing the heterogeneity across individuals/households in these communities. The sampling frame was designed in a way to

reduce the problem of exclusion bias from the sampling process, through random selection of individuals from the communities, which are our primary sampling units (PSUs). This process involve the following: the training of about 20 fieldwork assistants and a supervisor, who were mandated to cover the communities and distribute the questionnaire to individuals, without recourse to gender and other discriminatory criteria.

The survey team targeted to interview about 50 individuals that cuts across the 22 communities, to obtain an overall sample size of 1000 individuals from the rural communities in *Ota*. In the end, about 500 individual responses were successfully included in this study, with an uneven distribution across the 22 communities. We were unable to present the sample size per community because the section that shows the community were not tracked due to poor entries of this section. Most of the respondents entered *Ota* or a major community, instead of their actual community name.

**Analytical Approach:** in order to measure the impact of land deals on sustainable income of individuals in *Ota* community, we estimate a *probit* model based on an underlying response variable  $y^a_i$  that is defined by:

$$Y^a_i = X_i\beta + \mu_i \quad (1)$$

Where a categorical variable was only observed for the explained variable,  $Y$ , that takes the values  $Y=1$ , if  $Y^a_i > 0$  (i.e. if households report an outcome that shows that their income have improved after the sale of land and  $Y^a_i = 0$ , if otherwise). The justification for using this variable as our main outcome variable is based on the fact that we perceive that the extra fund from the sale of land can be used for investment into other income yielding ventures. For instance, apart from reckless spending and other forms of frivolous living that emanates from the extra cash and which will be controlled for, the fund can be used to start up new businesses, engage in capital formations like buildings and human development. All these have an effect on the improvement of the household welfare and income.

Therefore, we estimate the predicted probabilities of observing the outcomes of interest,  $Y$ , by computing the equation below:

$$Pr(Y=1|X_i) = \int_{-\infty}^{x_i\beta} \partial(t)dt = \theta(Z, x \beta) \quad (2)$$

Where the density of the distribution function and the cumulative distribution function of the standard normal distributions are  $\partial$  and  $\theta$  respectively,  $Z$  is the main explanatory variable, the occurrence of land deals in the past 12 months, while  $X$  is a vector of household characteristics that contains the following covariates: *age*, a continuous variable that captures the age of the individual; *education*, which captures the individual's educational attainment; the *number of children* of the respondent, which is used to capture the intra-household composition of the liquidity requirements for consumption expenditure. This variable is very useful since majority of the respondents are either household head or are in positions to head the household and the number of children that depends on them can explain their capacity to utilize funds from land deals for investment purposes. For example, an individual with more children is more likely to utilize land deal's fund for welfare or children education, which may not likely be enough for investment into income generating ventures. Finally, the *income* of the individual apart from funds from land deals, were included as a covariate. Prior to the estimation of the *logit* model, an in-depth descriptive analysis will be reported in order to portray the perspectives of the respondents pertaining to land deals. The main focus of this section is to underscore the responses of those that have been involved in land deals in relation to their income status. This will also be examined across age and other varying factors as included in the empirical model. Table 4.1 includes further details on the variables, their measures and a summary statistics.

**Table 4.1 Variables and Measures**

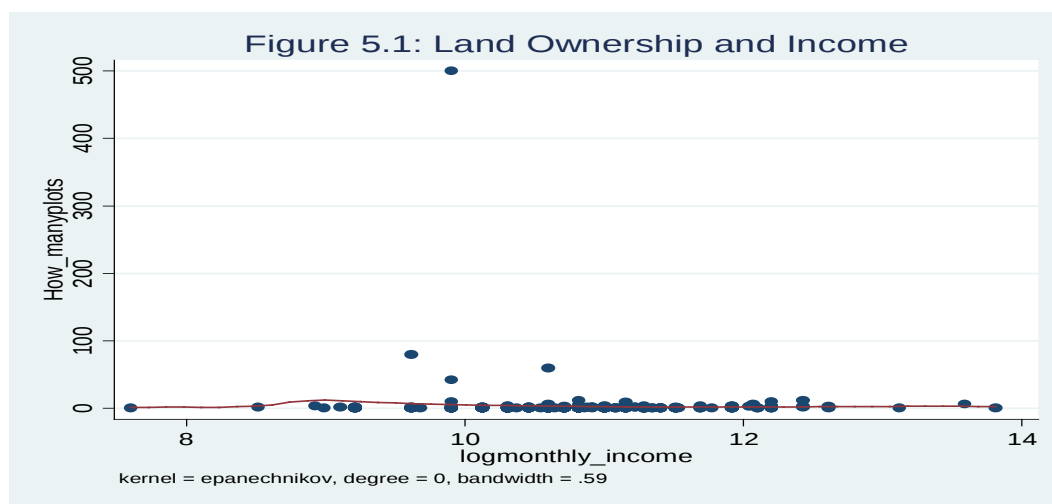
| Variables                                                   | Measures                                                                                                                                                                   | Summary                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Main Explained Variable</b><br>Sustainable Income        | 1, if there is an increase in the individual's aggregate income after the occurrence of land deals and 0, otherwise.                                                       | 0 = 56.76%<br>1 = 43.24%                         |
| <b>Main Explanatory Variable</b><br>Occurrence of land deal | 1, if the individual has been involved in the sale of land in the past 12 months and 0 otherwise                                                                           | 0 = 78.36%<br>1 = 21.64%                         |
| <b>Covariates</b><br>Age                                    | Continuous variable that captures the age of the individual                                                                                                                | 47 Years*                                        |
| Education                                                   | Highest educational attainment, measured as 1-no form of formal schooling; 2-attained only primary school; 3-attained only secondary school; 4-attained tertiary education | 1 =2.65%<br>2 =12.63%<br>3 =46.84%<br>4 = 37.88% |
| Number of Children                                          | A count variable that captures the number of biological children of the respondents and who depends on them for welfare.                                                   | 4 Children*                                      |
| Income aside land deal                                      | A count variable that is measured as the average monthly income of the individual in local currency Unit-LCU                                                               | 67, 679.83**                                     |

Note: \* connotes that the mean values was the item that was reported. \*\* To convert this value to the USD, we applied the exchange rate as at April, 2014 (1 USD @162.50 LCU i.e. 416.64 USD).

## 5. Empirical Results

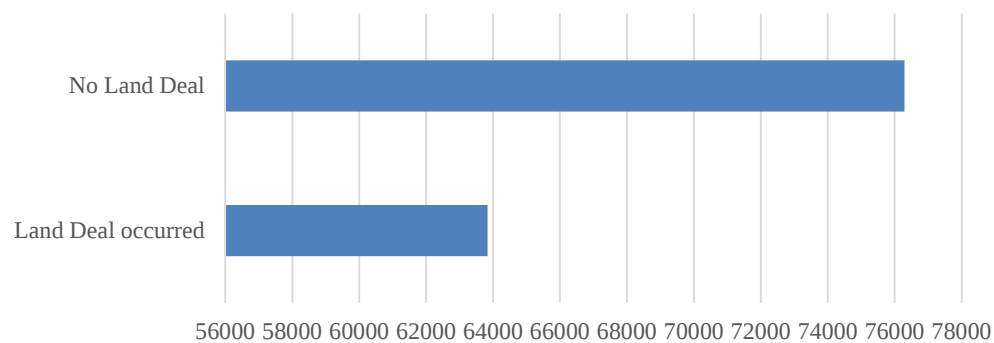
In considering the effect of land deals on the sustainability of the income of dwellers in *Ota*, there are multiple approaches that can be adopted. The first approach is to consider the responses of individuals who have earlier being involved in land deals and ask questions regarding their previous income, prior to the deal and their current income after the deal. Then consider, through graphical or tabular illustration, if there was an improvement or otherwise. The second approach is to use a regression analysis, in other to take care of alternative explanations to the relationship. In this section, we began by presenting an outlook of the linkage between land ownership and income, after which the improvement of income after the sale of land was considered.

As part of our descriptive analysis, we present in Figure 5.1 a non-parametric approach in underscoring the linkage between land ownership and income of individuals. This approach reveals smooth scatter plots and models the functions, by using each point of the logarithm of income, as a low-order polynomial weighted least square regression to fit the number of plots owned. In this case, we did not observe any tangible causal linkage between the income level and the number of plots owned by the individual. Most of the individuals, though own less than 100 plots, revolve around the middle income category. Just very few were at the higher income margin, but the number of plots were not patently different. There was just one individual, who owned about 500 plots of land and it was observed that his income level fell at the middle category. This raises a striking question: does land ownership not improve the income of individuals.



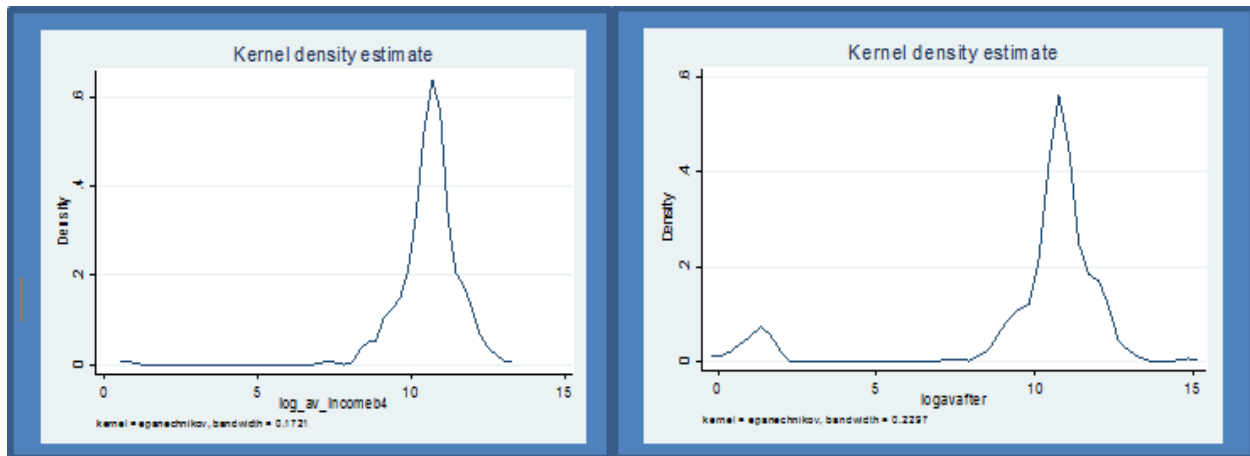
Running with this question, we went further to examine the relative change in the income of difference that exist between the average income of individuals who own land and have used the land for commercial activities like sales or lease, and those who have not. Figure 5.2 reveals that those who have not used their land for commercial activities earn more income than those who have used their lands for commercial activities. Taking a further view, those who had no land deal had about twice the relative income of those who were once involved in land deals. This further suggests the disparity, in terms of income, that exist between land dealers and non-land dealers.

Figure 5.2: Relative Income Based on Occurance of Land Deal



Having observed this trend, we go further to examine the relative income of individuals prior to and after engaging in land deals. We plotted a non-parametric plot to foretell the probability density function of income prior to engaging in land deals and after engaging in land deals. From this plot, we are able to ascertain the higher probability of individual respondents falling within each of the category of income. From Figure 5.3, the probability of the surveyed *individuals* having more income is higher prior to land deals than afterwards. This implies that the chance of the individuals earning more income reduces after land deals.

**Figure 5.3: Kernel Density Estimates**



To further buttress this outlook, the qualitative data, which is not reported in this study, reveals that some of the indigenes engage in land deals to meet pressing needs and not for future investments. This likely explains the relationships experienced between land deals and current income of indigenes. Since our interest in this study is on sustainability of income of *Ota* indigenes as a result of land deals, we are not able to conclusively assert that land deals does not have a positive effect on sustainable income of the indigenes. Therefore, we proceed to examine our logistic regression, which is reported in Table 5.1 in the next subsection.

### *Logistic Regression*

The logistic regression was presented in five (5) columns, where column 1 represent the combination of the entire variables that were presented in the model in the previous section. In this column, the land deal variable was not significant, although it was positive. Just the age of the respondents, educational attainment and income from other engagements, were found to be significant. This implies that the probability of individuals sustaining their income is not significantly affected by income but the other significant variables, especially when considering the model in this study holistically.

**Table 5.1: Logistic Regression**

|                         | 1                   | 2                   | 3                   | 4                   | 5                   |
|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Occurrence of land deal | 0.614<br>(0.222)    | 0.784***<br>(0.097) | 0.819***<br>(0.079) | 0.858***<br>(0.065) | 0.820***<br>(0.081) |
| Age                     | -0.067**<br>(0.019) | -0.029<br>(0.145)   |                     |                     |                     |
| Educational Attainment  | 0.703**<br>(0.059)  |                     | 0.099<br>(0.711)    |                     |                     |
| Number of Children      | 0.099<br>(0.534)    |                     |                     | 0.038<br>(0.753)    |                     |
| Income aside land deal  | 0.568**<br>(0.072)  |                     |                     |                     | 0.218<br>(0.387)    |
| Constant                | -1.294<br>(0.664)   | 1.209<br>(0.219)    | 0.059<br>(0.946)    | -0.114<br>(0.823)   | -2.647<br>(0.339)   |
| Pseudo R2               | 0.083               | 0.039               | 0.026               | 0.026               | 0.028               |
| Log likelihood          | -57.839             | -62.615             | -66.822             | -66.841             | -64.654             |

Note: \*, \*\* or \*\*\* represent 1, 5 or 10 percent levels of significance. The variable-income aside land deals is presented in its logarithmic form.

Surprisingly, when we consider the other columns in the Table (columns 2-5), we observed that the variable 'land deal' became positive and significant, while the other covariates were not significant. This is despite their levels of significance in column 1. The implication of this is that land deals and the other covariates are mutually exclusive, in terms of levels of significance. The significance of land deal on sustainability of income of indigenes will mean that the other covariates cannot significantly behave. This is not far-fetched from reality, where income from land-deals, renders other factors like education or other source of livelihood unimportant.

Some policy recommendation can be drawn from this outlook. First, the indigenes need to be better enlightened on how to manage their land profitably in relation to other personal attributes which matters most like education, physical engagement in other productive activities (representing age) and engagement in other income generating activities (income). This is based on the analysis, which shows that *Ota* indigenes allow the profit from land deals to becloud the development of capacity to sustain their income through other factors as earlier mentioned. If this is in place, then the mutually exclusive relationship between land deals and other covariates

will not be experienced. In essence, we can say that land inheritance may be bad for the younger generation, who is not properly enlightened on how to combine it with the development of other personal attributes.

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