

INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of parental socioeconomic status on students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, it investigated the effects of parental income, educational level, and occupational status on students' academic outcomes. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study, targeting a population of 191,155 students across 311 senior secondary schools. A representative sample of 400 students was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique to ensure coverage across the senatorial districts. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and students' academic records, with the instrument achieving a reliability index of 0.83. The hypotheses were tested using one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine differences in academic performance across the categories of parental socioeconomic factors. The results revealed significant differences in students' academic performance based on parental income ($F(2, 397) = 12.45, p < 0.05$), parental educational level ($F(2, 397) = 15.78, p < 0.05$), and parental occupational status ($F(2, 397) = 9.02, p < 0.05$). These findings indicate that higher parental socioeconomic status positively influences students' academic outcomes, with children from families of higher income, education, and occupational standing achieving better results than their peers from lower-status backgrounds. The study concludes that parental socioeconomic factors are key determinants of academic success in senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Based on the findings, it is recommended that government and school authorities implement programs that provide financial, educational, and social support for students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds to improve equity in academic performance.

Keywords: Parental socioeconomic status, parental income, parental education, parental occupation, academic performance, senior secondary schools, Rivers State

INTRODUCTION

Academic performance in senior secondary schools remains a central concern for educators, families, and policymakers because it often determines students' future educational and career opportunities. Academic outcomes are shaped by a complex mix of individual, institutional, and environmental factors, among which parental socioeconomic status (SES) has consistently been identified as a significant predictor of student achievement (Akpan & Akpan, 2015). SES is a composite measure that typically includes parents' income, education level, and occupational status, all of which can create an enabling or constraining environment for learning (Bamidele, 2014).

In many contexts, children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to perform better academically than their peers from lower socioeconomic strata (Ibrahim, 2015). This pattern has been attributed to differences in access to educational resources, quality of learning environments, and parental involvement in schooling (Olaniyan & Singh, 2015). For example, parents with higher education levels are more likely to assist with homework, engage in school activities, and advocate for their children's educational needs, which can translate into better academic outcomes (Adewale, 2015).

Parental income also plays a role in shaping academic performance by influencing the material conditions that support learning. Families with higher income are often able to provide books, technology, stable housing, private tutoring, and healthier living conditions that reduce distractions and enhance study time (Uzoho & Ekine, 2015). Conversely, students from lower-income families

may experience stressors related to financial instability that hinder concentration, attendance, and overall academic engagement (Chukwuma, 2015).

Occupational status of parents intersects with income and education to affect academic achievement. Parents in stable, skilled occupations may model positive work habits and place a high value on educational success, which can motivate students to perform better in school (Eze & Okafor, 2015). In contrast, parents with unstable or low-status employment may struggle to create structured routines and educational support systems at home (Nwankwo, 2015).

In the context of Rivers State, where socioeconomic disparities are evident across urban and rural communities, understanding how parental SES influences students' academic performance has practical importance. Previous studies in similar Nigerian settings have shown that SES gaps correlate with differences in exam results and school participation (Obi & Igwe, 2015). These findings suggest that SES may be a key factor in addressing performance inequalities among senior secondary school students in the state.

Despite the attention given to SES and education, there remain gaps in localized research that specifically examine how parental socioeconomic factors affect academic performance in Rivers State secondary schools. This study seeks to fill that gap by investigating the relationship between parental SES and students' academic outcomes, offering insights that could inform targeted interventions and education policies aimed at improving equity and performance.

Statement of the Problem

Despite efforts to improve educational outcomes in Rivers State, many senior secondary school students continue to exhibit varying levels of academic performance. A significant factor often cited in educational research is the socioeconomic status of parents, which encompasses income, education, and occupational standing. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds generally have better access to learning materials, supportive home environments, and opportunities for extra-curricular academic engagement, whereas students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may face financial constraints, limited educational resources, and less parental support (Akpan & Akpan, 2015; Ibrahim, 2015).

In Rivers State, disparities in parental socioeconomic conditions are evident across urban and rural areas, potentially contributing to unequal academic outcomes among students. Schools may provide similar instructional content, but differences in home environments, parental involvement, and availability of learning resources may affect students' ability to perform optimally. This raises critical concerns about equity, as students' academic achievements may be influenced more by their family background than by their abilities or effort (Olaniyan & Singh, 2015).

Although some studies in Nigeria have highlighted the relationship between parental socioeconomic status and student performance, there is limited empirical research that specifically examines this phenomenon in Rivers State's senior secondary schools. Without this localized understanding, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders may struggle to design effective interventions to bridge the academic performance gap. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate how parental socioeconomic status influences students' academic performance in Rivers State, aiming to identify key socioeconomic factors that contribute to disparities in educational outcomes.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study aims to investigate the influence of parental socioeconomic status on students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

1. To examine how parental income influences students' academic performance in senior secondary schools.
2. To determine how parental educational level influences students' academic performance.
3. To assess how parental occupational status influences students' academic performance.

Research Questions

1. How does parental income influence students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
2. How does parental educational level influence students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
3. How does parental occupational status influence students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

1. Parental income has no significant influence on students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
2. Parental educational level has no significant influence on students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
3. Parental occupational status has no significant influence on students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Literature Review

Parental socioeconomic status is a well-established factor in educational research, often used to explain differences in students' academic performance. Socioeconomic status typically comprises parental income, education, and occupational status, each contributing uniquely to the learning environment at home and school. Studies have shown that socioeconomic status affects students' access to educational resources, the quality of academic support at home, and overall opportunities for learning outside the classroom (Akpan & Akpan, 2015). In contexts where families face financial constraints, these limitations can translate into poorer academic outcomes compared with peers from more advantaged backgrounds (Olaniyan & Singh, 2015).

Parental income directly influences the material conditions that support academic engagement. Higher household income allows families to afford textbooks, tutoring, technology, and safer study environments, all of which are linked with better school performance (Uzoho & Ekine, 2015). Conversely, low parental income has been associated with increased stress and reduced capacity to invest in educational resources, which can hinder students' ability to focus on schoolwork and participate fully in learning activities (Chukwuma, 2015). These financial aspects of socioeconomic status have been repeatedly correlated with measurable differences in students' grades and test scores.

Parental educational level is another critical sub-variable of socioeconomic status that shapes academic outcomes. Parents with higher education levels tend to possess better understanding of school expectations and are more capable of assisting with homework, engaging in school activities, and fostering educational aspirations in their children (Adewale, 2015). Research suggests that children whose parents have attained higher levels of education are more likely to demonstrate positive academic attitudes and perform well academically due to enriched intellectual environments at home (Ibrahim, 2015). Education can also influence parental engagement strategies that promote consistent study habits and curiosity.

Occupational status reflects both economic stability and social standing, and this too has implications for students' academic experiences. Stable, skilled occupations often come with structured routines, predictable schedules, and values that emphasize achievement, providing an environment that supports academic success (Eze & Okafor, 2015). Parents with unstable or low-status jobs may face irregular work hours and stressors that reduce their availability to support educational activities, which can indirectly affect their children's school performance (Nwankwo, 2015). Thus, occupational status intersects with income and education to influence the overall learning context at home.

The influence of parental socioeconomic status on academic performance has been documented across diverse settings, indicating that these relationships are not confined to particular regions or education systems. In Nigeria, studies have reported that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds generally attain better results in standardized examinations than those from

lower-status families (Obi & Igwe, 2015). This pattern underscores the interplay between family background and school achievement, where socioeconomic advantages translate into better preparation, engagement, and resilience in academic tasks.

Understanding how each component of socioeconomic status influences academic performance is essential for designing effective education policies. Interventions aimed at reducing performance disparities often focus on leveling the educational playing field by providing additional support to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Bamidele, 2014). By addressing gaps linked to parental income, education, and occupation, stakeholders can better promote equitable academic outcomes and enhance the overall quality of secondary education.

Theoretical Review

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed the Ecological Systems Theory to explain how a child's development is influenced by multiple layers of their environment, ranging from immediate surroundings to broader societal contexts. The theory identifies several interconnected systems: the microsystem (immediate environment, such as family and school), the mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), the exosystem (indirect environmental influences, such as parental workplace), the macrosystem (cultural and societal norms), and the chronosystem (temporal changes over the life course). The theory assumes that human development does not occur in isolation but is shaped by continuous interactions between the individual and these nested environmental systems.

The core assumptions of Bronfenbrenner's theory are that development is contextual, dynamic, and reciprocal. That is, children actively interact with their environment, which simultaneously influences and is influenced by them. Family socioeconomic status, including parental income, education, and occupation, is a critical element of the microsystem and exosystem. These factors shape the resources, expectations, and support systems available to the student, which in turn affect their learning experiences and academic performance. The theory posits that changes or differences in these environmental systems, such as low parental income or limited parental education, can directly or indirectly affect the child's development outcomes.

This theory is highly relevant to the current study because it provides a framework for understanding how parental socioeconomic factors influence students' academic performance. Parental income determines access to learning materials and extracurricular support; parental education shapes attitudes toward schooling and the ability to assist children academically; and occupational status affects time and stability available for home support. By applying Bronfenbrenner's perspective, this study can systematically examine how these interconnected parental factors create environments that either facilitate or hinder academic success in senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Empirical Review

Research by Adewale and Ayodele (2015) examined the *impact of parental socioeconomic status on secondary school students' academic performance* in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study aimed to determine how parental income, education, and occupation influence students' grades in core subjects. The researchers used a descriptive survey design. The population comprised all senior secondary school students in the selected district, numbering 6,200; a sample of 310 students was drawn using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across schools. Data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire and academic record checklist; the questionnaire's reliability index was reported as 0.82 after pilot testing. Data were analyzed using multiple regression and descriptive statistics. The key findings showed that parental education and income had significant positive influences on students' academic performance, while occupational status showed a weaker but still positive influence. The authors concluded that higher parental socioeconomic status tends to support better academic outcomes. They recommended that educational support programs target students from low-SES families to enhance equity. This study

is relevant to the present research because it highlights the specific ways parental socioeconomic factors are empirically linked to academic performance in Nigerian secondary schools, a context parallel to Rivers State.

In another empirical investigation, Chukwuma (2015) explored *socioeconomic disparities and academic success among secondary school students* in Enugu State. The study aimed to assess how parental income and educational level relate to students' performance in external examinations. A correlational research design was adopted. The population included 8,450 senior secondary students, and 400 students were selected through cluster sampling. The instrument used was a structured questionnaire combined with students' examination results; the reliability index from a pilot was 0.79. Data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation and ANOVA to test relationships. The major finding was that parental income and education were strongly correlated with students' examination scores, with higher SES associated with better performance. The conclusion emphasized the persistent influence of socioeconomic conditions on academic outcomes. The study recommended policy interventions to support low-income families with educational resources. This empirical work supports the present study by demonstrating measurable links between parental socioeconomic conditions and students' academic results, reinforcing the need to examine these variables within Rivers State.

Olaniyan and Singh (2015) conducted a study titled *Parental Background and Student Achievement in Urban and Rural Secondary Schools* to investigate how parental education and occupation influence student achievement in mathematics and English. The aim was to compare the effects of these socioeconomic indicators across urban and rural settings. The investigators used a cross-sectional survey design. The population was senior secondary students in the state, and a sample of 500 students was drawn by multi-stage sampling. They administered a validated questionnaire and obtained students' term scores; the reliability index reported after piloting was 0.85. Data were subjected to multiple regression and t-tests. The study found that parental education had a significant influence on student achievement in both subjects, while the influence of parental occupation was significant in urban schools but less so in rural contexts. The authors concluded that socioeconomic background plays a critical role in academic performance, with contextual variations. They recommended tailored support for rural students whose parents have lower educational attainment. This research is relevant to the present study because it demonstrates how specific components of parental socioeconomic status affect academic performance in different educational settings, underscoring the value of examining these influences in senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate the influence of parental socioeconomic status on students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The survey design was considered appropriate because it allows for the collection of data from a large population to examine existing relationships between variables without manipulating them. This approach also enables the researcher to generalize findings to the broader population of senior secondary school students in the state.

The population of the study comprised all senior secondary school students in Rivers State, totaling 191,155 students across 311 schools. The population was selected because it represents the full range of students whose academic performance may be influenced by parental socioeconomic factors, providing a comprehensive context for the study.

Given the large population, a sample size of 400 students was determined using Yamane's formula (1967) for precision and manageability, while maintaining representativeness. To select participants, a multi-stage sampling technique was employed. First, schools were stratified according to senatorial districts to ensure geographic representation. From each district, schools were randomly selected proportionally to the size of the district. Within each selected school, students were randomly chosen

from senior secondary classes using systematic random sampling to reduce selection bias and ensure equitable representation of students across different grade levels.

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire comprised sections covering demographic information, parental socioeconomic status (income, education, and occupation), and indicators of students' academic performance. The academic performance data were also supplemented with students' latest examination scores to validate self-reported performance. The instrument was reviewed by three educational experts for content validity and pilot-tested with 40 students from a school not included in the main study. Reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.83, indicating that the instrument was sufficiently consistent for the study.

Data collection was carried out with the permission of the Rivers State Ministry of Education and the selected school authorities. Respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study, and participation was voluntary. Completed questionnaires were retrieved, and students' examination records were collected from the schools' academic offices.

For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize students' demographic characteristics, parental socioeconomic factors, and academic performance. To test the hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the influence of parental income, education, and occupational status on students' academic performance. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 25, with a significance level set at 0.05.

Results

Hypothesis 1 (Ho1): Parental income has no significant influence on students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 1: ANOVA Showing the Influence of Parental Income on Students' Academic Performance

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	432.56	2	216.28	12.45	.000
Within Groups	6785.22	397	17.10		
Total	7217.78	399			

The ANOVA result shows a statistically significant difference in students' academic performance based on parental income ($F(2, 397) = 12.45, p = 0.000$). Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho1) is rejected. This indicates that parental income significantly influences students' academic performance, with students from higher-income families performing better on average compared to those from lower-income families.

Hypothesis 2 (Ho2): Parental educational level has no significant influence on students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 2: ANOVA Showing the Influence of Parental Educational Level on Students' Academic Performance

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	510.34	2	255.17	15.78	.000
Within Groups	6423.45	397	16.18		
Total	6933.79	399			

The ANOVA result indicates a significant difference in students' academic performance across parental educational levels ($F(2, 397) = 15.78, p = 0.000$). Since the p-value is below 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho2) is rejected. This finding suggests that students whose parents have higher educational attainment tend to perform better academically than those whose parents have lower educational levels.

Hypothesis 3 (Ho3): Parental occupational status has no significant influence on students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 3: ANOVA Showing the Influence of Parental Occupational Status on Students' Academic Performance

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	298.67	2	149.34	9.02	.000
Within Groups	6573.11	397	16.55		
Total	6871.78	399			

The ANOVA result shows a statistically significant difference in academic performance across different parental occupational statuses ($F(2, 397) = 9.02, p = 0.000$). With the p-value below 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho3) is rejected. This indicates that parental occupational status influences students' academic performance, with children of parents in higher-status occupations generally achieving better results than those with parents in lower-status occupations.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the influence of parental income on students' academic performance revealed a statistically significant effect ($F(2, 397) = 12.45, p < 0.05$). This indicates that students from higher-income families tend to perform better academically than those from lower-income families. The finding aligns with previous studies in Nigeria and other contexts, which show that parental income provides access to educational resources such as books, private tutoring, technology, and conducive learning environments, all of which enhance academic outcomes (Uzoho & Ekine, 2015; Chukwuma, 2015). Figure 1 illustrates the mean academic performance scores across income categories, showing a clear upward trend from low to high parental income levels. This underscores that financial capacity at home plays a pivotal role in facilitating academic success in senior secondary schools.

Regarding parental educational level, the ANOVA results ($F(2, 397) = 15.78, p < 0.05$) demonstrated a significant influence on students' academic performance. Students whose parents attained tertiary education recorded higher mean scores compared to those whose parents had only primary or secondary education. This result supports the assertions of Adewale (2015) and Ibrahim (2015), who found that educated parents are more capable of guiding homework, fostering learning habits, and motivating children toward academic excellence. Figure 2 depicts the mean scores across the parental education groups, highlighting the strong positive correlation between parental education and student performance. This finding reinforces the notion that parental knowledge and literacy levels directly shape the academic outcomes of their children.

The study also examined parental occupational status and its effect on academic performance, with ANOVA results showing a significant effect ($F(2, 397) = 9.02, p < 0.05$). Students whose parents are employed in skilled or professional occupations scored higher on average than those whose parents are in semi-skilled or unskilled jobs. This observation is consistent with findings by Eze and Okafor (2015) and Nwankwo (2015), which highlight that occupational stability and status influence the resources, time, and support parents can provide for their children's education. Figure 3 presents the mean academic performance across the occupational groups, showing a clear gradient where higher occupational status corresponds with better student outcomes.

Overall, the findings indicate that all three sub-components of parental socioeconomic status—income, education, and occupation—have significant effects on students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State. These results are consistent with studies by Akpan and Akpan (2015), Olaniyan and Singh (2015), and Obi and Igwe (2015), which collectively suggest that socioeconomic advantages create environments that foster better learning outcomes. The evidence from this study emphasizes that parental socioeconomic status is a key determinant of educational performance and should be considered when designing interventions to improve

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the influence of parental socioeconomic status on students' academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings revealed that all three components of parental socioeconomic status income, educational level, and occupational status have significant effects on students' academic outcomes. Specifically, students from higher-income families, with parents who have higher educational attainment and skilled or professional occupations, performed better academically than their peers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

These results indicate that parental socioeconomic factors create an enabling environment for learning, providing access to educational resources, guidance, and support that enhance academic performance. Conversely, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may face challenges that limit their ability to perform optimally, such as limited access to learning materials and reduced parental support.

Overall, the study concludes that parental socioeconomic status is a major determinant of academic performance in senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Addressing disparities in educational outcomes requires targeted interventions to support students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following were recommended based on the findings

1. The Rivers State Ministry of Education should implement programs that provide financial support and learning resources for students from low-income families to reduce the performance gap.
2. Schools should engage parents, especially those with lower educational attainment, in workshops and orientation programs to enhance their ability to support their children academically.
3. Career guidance and counseling services should be strengthened to help parents understand the importance of occupational stability and its role in creating conducive learning environments for students.
4. Policymakers should consider integrating community-based educational support initiatives, such as mentorship and tutoring programs, targeting students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.
5. Future research should explore additional factors that mediate the influence of parental socioeconomic status, including school infrastructure, teacher quality, and peer effects, to provide a holistic understanding of academic performance determinants.

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