

INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL OWNERSHIP ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of school ownership on students' academic performance in secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study was guided by three objectives, three research questions, and one null hypothesis. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 18,640 principals and teachers in 472 secondary schools in Rivers State, consisting of 274 public schools, 134 private schools, and 64 mission schools. A sample of 325 respondents was selected using multi-stage and stratified random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled *School Ownership and Academic Performance Questionnaire (SOAPQ)*. The instrument was validated by experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation, while a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Scheffé post-hoc test were used to test the hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that public schools had a low influence on students' academic performance, whereas private schools and mission schools exerted positive influences, with mission schools recording the highest influence and a statistically significant difference in the mean ratings across school ownership categories, and the post-hoc test confirmed that all three pairwise comparisons were significant, with mission schools outperforming both private and public schools. The study concluded that school ownership is a significant determinant of students' academic performance in secondary schools in Rivers State, with mission schools demonstrating the most positive influence. The study recommends increased government funding and teacher capacity development in public schools, the sustenance of institutional discipline and moral formation in mission schools, and the enhancement of professional development practices in private schools to ensure equitable and improved academic outcomes across all ownership categories in Rivers State.

Keywords: *School Ownership, Public Schools, Private Schools, Mission Schools, Academic Performance.*

Introduction

Academic performance remains the central measure of educational productivity and the primary yardstick by which the success or failure of secondary education is evaluated. It refers to the degree to which students achieve educational goals, typically assessed through scores, grades, and other standardised evaluative tools across core subject areas. Academic performance is not merely a reflection of individual student ability; rather, it is a multidimensional outcome shaped by a complex interplay of cognitive, socioeconomic, institutional, and environmental factors. In the Nigerian educational context, academic performance at the secondary school level is commonly measured through results in internal and external examinations, most notably the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) examinations, which serve as critical gateways to higher education and employment (Ineye-Briggs & Kayii, 2024; Ineye-Briggs & Okwu, 2023).

The importance of students' academic performance in Rivers State secondary schools cannot be overemphasised. Rivers State, as one of the most economically significant states in Nigeria owing

to its oil-rich status, has invested considerably in the education sector. Yet, performance outcomes at the secondary school level have remained inconsistent and, in many instances, suboptimal. Data from the Rivers State Ministry of Education and the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) have periodically revealed mass failures in core subjects such as English Language and Mathematics, raising serious concerns about the quality of secondary education being delivered in the state. These outcomes signal the urgent need to investigate the institutional variables that may be responsible for the observed disparities in academic achievement across schools in the state.

Academic performance at the secondary school level is influenced by a wide range of factors, including teacher quality, school resources, student motivation, parental involvement, peer influence, and administrative effectiveness. Among these, institutional variables — particularly those relating to the governance and ownership structure of schools — have attracted growing scholarly attention. It is widely acknowledged that the administrative orientation and resource-allocation priorities of school proprietors significantly shape the learning environment and, by extension, the academic outcomes of students. Therefore, any serious inquiry into academic performance in Rivers State must necessarily engage with the structural conditions under which schools operate, including the dimension of school ownership.

School ownership refers to the proprietorship, governance, and funding structure under which a school operates. In Nigeria, secondary schools are broadly classified according to ownership into three main categories: public (government-owned) schools, private (individually or corporately owned) schools, and mission (faith-based or religious body-owned) schools. Each ownership type operates under a distinct administrative philosophy, funding mechanism, staffing policy, and accountability structure, all of which have direct implications for the quality of education provided and, ultimately, for students' academic performance. Public secondary schools are established, managed, and funded by either the federal, state, or local government. These schools are expected to provide accessible and affordable education to the general population. However, they are frequently characterised by inadequate funding, overcrowded classrooms, infrastructural decay, poor teacher motivation, and bureaucratic inefficiencies that collectively hinder effective teaching and learning.

Private secondary schools, on the other hand, are established and managed by individuals, corporate bodies, or non-governmental organisations with the primary aim of providing quality education, often at a profit or in pursuit of a specific educational philosophy. These schools typically enjoy greater financial autonomy, maintain smaller class sizes, enforce stricter discipline, and provide better facilities and teacher incentives. However, the high tuition fees charged by most private schools render them inaccessible to a large segment of the population, thereby raising equity concerns in the educational system. Mission schools, established by religious organisations such as the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Communion, and various Pentecostal bodies, occupy an intermediate position. These schools often combine strong moral and spiritual formation with academic rigour and have historically produced high-achieving students in Nigeria.

In Rivers State, all three ownership categories coexist and serve substantial student populations. The proliferation of private schools in the state, particularly in urban centres such as Port Harcourt, has been driven by perceived weaknesses in the public school system. Many parents who can afford private school fees have migrated their children out of the public system in search of better academic outcomes and more conducive learning environments. This trend raises critical questions about whether school ownership is indeed a significant determinant of academic performance and, if so, the magnitude and mechanisms through which this influence operates. The heterogeneity in academic outcomes across public, private, and mission schools in Rivers State makes this a compelling area for empirical investigation.

Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between school ownership and students' academic performance, both within and beyond the Nigerian context. Nwosu and Obi (2020) conducted a comparative study of public and private secondary schools in Imo State, Nigeria, and found that students in private schools consistently outperformed their public school counterparts in external examinations. The study attributed this performance gap to differences in teacher quality, school facilities, and the level of parental engagement. However, the study was limited to two ownership categories public and private and did not incorporate mission schools in its analysis, leaving a significant gap in the comprehensiveness of its findings.

Similarly, Adesoji and Olatunbosun (2018) investigated the influence of school type on students' achievement in science subjects in Ogun State, Nigeria. Their findings revealed that mission school students recorded significantly higher scores in science subjects compared to both public and private school students, a result they attributed to the holistic developmental approach adopted by mission schools and the strong culture of academic discipline embedded in such institutions. Despite its valuable insights, this study was geographically confined to Ogun State and focused exclusively on science subjects, making it difficult to generalise its conclusions to other states or subject areas. The specific socioeconomic and demographic context of Rivers State, which differs substantially from Ogun State in terms of economy, ethnic composition, and educational infrastructure, necessitates a separate investigation.

Etuk, Afangideh, and Uya (2019) examined the effect of school location and ownership on students' academic achievement in English Language in Cross River State. Their study found that urban private schools outperformed rural public schools, but noted that this gap narrowed considerably when controlled for socioeconomic status and teacher qualifications. The study recommended a broader investigation that accounts for the interplay between school ownership and other institutional variables. While this study was conducted in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, the same zone in which Rivers State is situated and the researchers it did not directly address Rivers State schools, and its findings cannot be uncritically transposed to that context without empirical validation.

At the international level, Tooley and Dixon (2006) examined the performance of private schools serving low-income populations in sub-Saharan Africa and found that, even in resource-limited environments, private schools demonstrated superior academic outcomes relative to government schools of comparable resources. More recently, Muralidharan and Sundararaman (2015) in India and Barrera-Osorio et al. (2022) in Latin American contexts demonstrated that school ownership interacts with governance quality, funding adequacy, and accountability systems to produce differential educational outcomes. These international studies, while theoretically instructive, are set in contexts with fundamentally different educational governance structures and cannot be directly extrapolated to the Nigerian situation.

A critical review of the extant literature reveals that, despite the growing body of research on school ownership and academic performance, there is a conspicuous paucity of studies specifically focused on secondary schools in Rivers State. Existing studies have been conducted in other states or countries, focused on specific subjects or ownership categories, or failed to incorporate mission schools as a distinct ownership category alongside public and private schools. Furthermore, few studies have examined this relationship within the unique socioeconomic and administrative milieu of Rivers State, where the simultaneous presence of oil-sector wealth and widespread educational inequality creates a distinctive context for educational research. This study, therefore, is designed to fill these gaps by empirically investigating the influence of school ownership encompassing public, private, and mission schools on students' academic performance in secondary schools in Rivers State, with a view to generating context-specific evidence that can inform educational policy and practice in the state.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the Influence of School Ownership on Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State. In specific term, the study addressed following two specific objectives:

1. To examine the Influence of public schools on Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State.
2. To examine the Influence of private schools on Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State.
3. To examine the Influence of mission schools on Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State

Empirical Review

Public secondary schools, being the dominant institutional form of secondary education in Nigeria, have attracted substantial empirical attention regarding their contribution or lack thereof to students' academic performance.

Ojimba (2022) conducted a comprehensive study in Delta State examining the effect of public school governance on students' performance in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). The study found that public school students recorded significantly lower credit passes in core subjects compared to their counterparts in other school types. The author linked this outcome to chronic underfunding, poor teacher remuneration, and the absence of performance-based accountability mechanisms in public schools. Although the study was contextually relevant, it was geographically limited to Delta State, and its findings may not directly mirror the situation in Rivers State, which has a distinct administrative and economic character.

Obasi and Amadi (2021) investigated the relationship between school ownership and academic achievement in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State, and found that public school students performed significantly below the benchmark in both internal and external examinations. The study noted that the persistent problem of teacher absenteeism, inadequate instructional materials, and dilapidated infrastructure in public schools were major contributors to the observed poor academic outcomes. While this study is geographically proximate to the present investigation, it was limited to urban schools in Port Harcourt metropolis, excluding rural public schools in other local government areas of Rivers State. This limitation undermines the generalisability of its findings to the entire state.

Ekeh and Okonkwo (2020) examined teacher-related factors in public secondary schools and their effect on students' academic performance in Anambra State. Their findings showed that the quality of instruction in public schools was significantly hampered by the use of unqualified teachers and the lack of professional development programmes. Although the study's geographic focus was Anambra State, its findings resonate broadly with the Nigerian public school experience and provide theoretical grounds for anticipating similar dynamics in Rivers State. Nonetheless, a direct empirical investigation specific to Rivers State remains necessary to provide locally valid evidence.

A study by Akanbi and Falade (2023) in Lagos State assessed the moderating role of school funding on the relationship between school ownership and academic performance. Their results showed that when public schools received adequate intervention funding, the performance gap between public and private schools narrowed considerably, suggesting that resource availability rather than ownership per se may be a proximate determinant of performance. This finding introduces an important nuance to the school ownership discourse and underscores the importance of examining public school performance within the specific funding context of Rivers State. The present study therefore seeks to provide empirical clarification on the specific influence of public school ownership on students' academic performance in Rivers State.

Eze, Igwe, and Obasi (2022) conducted a comparative study of private and public secondary schools in Enugu State and found that students in private schools recorded significantly higher mean scores in both Mathematics and English Language. The study attributed this superior performance to better school infrastructure, smaller teacher-to-student ratios, more rigorous academic supervision, and the competitive admission standards that characterise many private schools. However, the study was conducted in a predominantly Igbo-speaking cultural environment and may not adequately capture the dynamics at play in the culturally diverse Rivers State context.

Ugwu and Eze (2021) investigated the extent to which proprietorship type influenced students' academic achievement in private secondary schools in Imo State. The study found that individually owned private schools, profit-oriented corporate schools, and non-governmental organisation-owned private schools differed significantly in terms of the academic outcomes they produced, with NGO-owned private schools recording the highest performance indices. This disaggregation of private school ownership types adds a layer of complexity that many studies overlook, and highlights the heterogeneity that exists within the broad category of private school ownership. The implication for Rivers State, where diverse forms of private school proprietorship coexist, is those studies treating private schools as a monolithic category may produce misleading results.

Okafor and Nwachukwu (2023) examined parental socioeconomic status as a mediating variable in the relationship between private school attendance and academic performance in Cross River State, a state that borders Rivers State. Their findings confirmed that private school students outperformed public school students even after controlling for parental income, suggesting that the academic advantage of private schools was partly attributable to school-level factors such as management efficiency and teacher motivation, rather than solely to the socioeconomic profile of their student populations. Despite the relevance of this study, it was conducted in Cross River State and focused primarily on socioeconomic mediators, leaving the direct relationship between private school ownership and academic performance in Rivers State unexplored.

Internationally, Andrabi, Das, and Khwaja (2022) conducted a large-scale study in Pakistan and found that private school competition improved both enrolment and test scores in adjacent public schools, suggesting that private school presence has positive externalities beyond the immediate student populations they serve. While the Pakistani context differs substantially from Nigeria, the study's findings reinforce the theoretical proposition that private school ownership structures are associated with higher academic performance and competitive efficiency. Against this backdrop, empirical evidence from Rivers State is required to establish whether the academic advantages attributed to private schools in other contexts hold within the specific socioeconomic and educational environment of the state.

Umez and Wordu (2022) examined the academic performance of students in mission secondary schools in Rivers State and found that mission school students consistently outperformed their peers in both public and private schools across all subject areas assessed. The study attributed this outcome to the strong institutional culture of discipline, the moral and spiritual formation embedded in mission school curricula, and the relatively stable administrative structures that characterise most mission schools. While this study is highly relevant and contextually specific to Rivers State, it was limited to a single school category; mission schools and did not conduct a systematic comparative analysis involving public and private schools.

Akpan and Udo (2021) investigated the role of school ethos in determining students' academic outcomes in mission and non-mission secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. Their findings revealed that the religious and moral ethos of mission schools fostered a culture of academic seriousness, peer support, and teacher dedication that was largely absent in non-mission schools. The study noted that students in mission schools demonstrated significantly higher levels of

academic motivation and self-regulated learning behaviours, which in turn translated to superior examination performance. The geographic proximity of Akwa Ibom State to Rivers State lends some relevance to these findings; however, Rivers State's distinct educational governance structure, demographic diversity, and resource base necessitate a specific empirical inquiry.

Essien and Bassey (2020) compared the examination performance of students across public, private, and mission schools in Calabar, Cross River State, over a five-year period. Their longitudinal findings showed that mission school students recorded the most consistent performance over time, while private school students exhibited the highest peak performances but greater variability across years. Public school students, by contrast, recorded the lowest mean performance with the highest variability. The study was notable for its longitudinal design and three-way comparison; however, it was restricted to an urban area in a neighbouring state and did not account for rural-urban disparities or the specific educational context of Rivers State. The present study aims to address this gap by examining the influence of mission schools on academic performance across both urban and rural secondary schools in Rivers State.

Taken together, the empirical evidence reviewed across the three ownership categories reveals consistent performance differentials that broadly favour mission and private schools over public schools. However, the literature also exposes critical gaps: most existing studies are conducted outside Rivers State; few undertake a simultaneous three-way comparison of all ownership types; and none addresses the rural-urban dimension within the specific context of Rivers State. These gaps collectively justify the present study.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary education in Rivers State faces a persistent quality challenge, as evidenced by consistently poor and inconsistent performance outcomes in external examinations administered by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO). Despite considerable government investment in the education sector — facilitated in part by the state's substantial oil revenue base; the academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State has remained below acceptable national standards, raising fundamental questions about the effectiveness of the existing educational structures. Central among these structures is the tripartite system of school ownership, which comprising public, private, and mission schools which determines, to a significant degree, the administrative philosophy, resource endowment, and learning environment that student's experience.

Empirical observations and anecdotal evidence suggest that students in different school ownership categories in Rivers State do not achieve equivalent levels of academic performance. Mission and private schools are widely perceived to produce better examination results than public schools; yet the empirical basis for this perception within the specific context of Rivers State remains insufficiently established. The few available studies either focus on individual ownership categories in isolation, are conducted in other states with different socioeconomic and governance realities, or fail to control for important confounding variables. As a result, educational policymakers, school administrators, and parents in Rivers State lack reliable, context-specific empirical evidence on which to base decisions about school choice, policy reform, and resource allocation. It is against this backdrop that this study was designed. The problem, therefore, what is the influence of School Ownership on Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of School Ownership on Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State. In specific terms, the study addressed the following objectives:

1. To examine the influence of public schools on students' academic performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State.
2. To examine the influence of private schools on students' academic performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State.
3. To examine the influence of mission schools on students' academic performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the influence of public schools on students' academic performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State?
2. What is the influence of private schools on students' academic performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State?
3. What is the influence of mission schools on students' academic performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- H01.** There is no significant influence in the respondents mean ratings of public, private, mission schools on students' academic performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The choice of this design was premised on its suitability for investigating the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of a population without manipulating variables, which aligns with the objective of determining the influence of school ownership on students' academic performance in Rivers State. The descriptive survey design enabled the researcher to gather data systematically from a representative sample of the population and to generalise findings to the broader study population. The target population of the study comprised all principals and teachers in secondary schools in Rivers State. According to the Rivers State Secondary Education Board (RSSEB) and the Rivers State Ministry of Education (2023), there are a total of 472 secondary schools in Rivers State, classified as follows: 274 public secondary schools, 134 private secondary schools, and 64 mission secondary schools. The total population of teachers and principals across these schools is estimated at 18,640, comprising 10,820 in public schools, 5,140 in private schools, and 2,680 in mission schools. A sample of 325 respondents was drawn from the population using a multi-stage sampling and stratified random sampling techniques. In the first stage, purposive sampling was employed to select three senatorial districts (Rivers East, Rivers West, and Rivers South-East), ensuring geographic spread and representation. The sample comprised 120 respondents from 20 public schools, 108 respondents from 18 private schools, and 97 respondents from 16 mission schools, giving a total of 325 respondents.

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "School Ownership and Academic Performance Questionnaire (SOAPQ)", developed by the researcher based on an extensive review of related literature and the specific objectives of the study. The questionnaire was structured on a four-point rating scale: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The instrument consisted of 18 items organised in three clusters of six items each, corresponding to the three research questions. Cluster A (Items 1–6) addressed the influence of public schools; Cluster B (Items 7–12) addressed the influence of private schools; and Cluster C (Items 13–18) addressed the influence of mission schools.

The instrument was validated by three experts two from the Department of Educational Management and one from the Department of Measurement and Evaluation, all of Rivers State University who assessed the items for content validity, clarity, and relevance. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test administered to 30 respondents drawn from secondary schools in Bayelsa State (outside the study area). The data obtained were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha analysis, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87, indicating that the instrument was sufficiently reliable for the study. Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the three research questions. A mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted as indicative of agreement, while a mean below 2.50 was interpreted as disagreement, based on the four-point rating scale adopted. The null hypothesis was tested using a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at the 0.05 level of significance, given that the hypothesis involved comparing the mean ratings of respondents across three independent groups (public, private, and mission schools). A Scheffé post-hoc test was subsequently conducted to identify the specific pairs of groups that differed significantly. All analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25.0.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the influence of public schools on students' academic performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the Influence of Public Schools on Students' Academic Performance (N = 120)

Item – Public Schools (N = 120)	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
1. Public schools receive adequate government funding to support academic activities	18	24	42	36	2.20	0.98
2. Public school teachers are consistently present and professionally motivated	15	28	40	37	2.18	0.95
3. Public schools provide sufficient instructional materials to enhance students' learning	12	22	44	42	2.03	0.93
4. The physical infrastructure of public schools supports effective teaching and learning	10	20	45	45	1.96	0.91
5. Public school management enforces academic standards that promote student performance	16	25	41	38	2.16	0.96
6. Students in public schools have regular access to qualified and experienced teachers	19	26	38	37	2.23	0.99
Cluster Mean / SD					2.13	0.95

Note: Cut-off mean = 2.50; SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 1 presents the mean ratings of 120 respondents on the influence of public schools on students' academic performance. The individual item means ranged from 1.96 to 2.23, with a cluster mean of 2.13 and a standard deviation of 0.95. Since the cluster mean of 2.13 falls below the benchmark cut-off mean of 2.50, the respondents disagreed that public schools exert a positive influence on students' academic performance in Rivers State. Specifically, the lowest mean of 1.96 (Item 4) indicated strong disagreement on the adequacy of public school physical infrastructure, while Item 6 recorded the highest mean of 2.23, suggesting marginally more agreement that students in public schools have some access to qualified teachers. Overall, however, the results indicate that public school ownership is associated with below-average academic performance outcomes.

Research Question 2: What is the influence of private schools on students' academic performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the Influence of Private Schools on Students' Academic Performance (N = 108)

Item – Private Schools (N = 108)	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
7. Private schools provide well-equipped facilities that positively impact students' academic performance	48	34	16	10	3.11	0.96
8. Private schools maintain small class sizes that facilitate individualised attention and better learning outcomes	45	38	15	10	3.09	0.94
9. The competitive academic environment in private schools motivates students to perform at higher levels	43	35	18	12	3.01	0.97
10. Private school proprietors invest in teacher professional development to maintain high academic standards	41	37	18	12	2.99	0.96
11. Strict academic discipline policies in private schools contribute to students' improved examination performance	46	36	16	10	3.08	0.93
12. The management autonomy of private schools enables faster and more effective educational decision-making	42	36	18	12	3.00	0.96
Cluster Mean / SD					3.05	0.95

Note: Cut-off mean = 2.50; SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 2 presents the mean ratings of 108 respondents on the influence of private schools on students' academic performance. The individual item means ranged from 2.99 to 3.11, with a cluster mean of 3.05 and a standard deviation of 0.95. Since the cluster mean of 3.05 exceeds the cut-off mean of 2.50, respondents agreed that private schools exert a positive influence on students' academic performance. Item 7, which addressed the provision of well-equipped facilities, recorded the highest mean of 3.11, while Item 10, relating to proprietors' investment in teacher professional development, recorded the lowest mean of 2.99. Nonetheless, all items exceeded the cut-off mean,

indicating consistent agreement that private school ownership positively influences academic performance in Rivers State secondary schools.

Research Question 3: What is the influence of mission schools on students' academic performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the Influence of Mission Schools on Students' Academic Performance (N = 97)

Item – Mission Schools (N = 97)	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
13. The moral and spiritual ethos of mission schools fosters a culture of academic discipline and seriousness	52	30	10	5	3.33	0.87
14. Mission schools produce consistently high examination results owing to their stable administrative structures	50	31	11	5	3.30	0.88
15. The religious bodies that own mission schools provide adequate resources and support for academic excellence	46	33	12	6	3.23	0.90
16. Mission schools demonstrate stronger teacher commitment and dedication compared to public schools	48	32	11	6	3.26	0.90
17. The holistic developmental philosophy of mission schools contributes positively to students' academic motivation	47	33	11	6	3.25	0.89
18. Mission school governance frameworks ensure consistent quality of instruction across subject areas	45	34	12	6	3.22	0.90
Cluster Mean / SD					3.27	0.89

Note: Cut-off mean = 2.50; SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 3 presents the mean ratings of 97 respondents on the influence of mission schools on students' academic performance. The individual item means ranged from 3.22 to 3.33, yielding a cluster mean of 3.27 and a standard deviation of 0.89. All item means substantially exceeded the cut-off mean of 2.50, indicating that respondents strongly agreed that mission schools exert a positive influence on students' academic performance. Item 13, which addressed the moral and spiritual ethos of mission schools, recorded the highest mean of 3.33, indicating the strongest endorsement. Item 18, relating to governance frameworks ensuring consistent instruction quality, recorded the lowest mean of 3.22, though this too was well above the cut-off. Collectively, the results indicate that mission school ownership is associated with the most positive academic performance outcomes among the three ownership types in Rivers State.

Test of Hypothesis

HO₁: There is no significant influence in the respondents' mean ratings of public, private, and mission schools on students' academic performance in Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Table 4: One-Way ANOVA of Respondents' Mean Ratings across School Ownership Categories

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F-cal	p-value
Between Groups (School Ownership)	87.42	2	43.71	47.05	< .001
Within Groups (Error)	299.15	322	0.929		
Total	386.57	324			

*Significant at $p < .05$; Critical $F(2, 322) = 3.02$

Table 4 presents the one-way ANOVA results comparing the mean ratings of respondents across the three school ownership categories. The calculated F-value of 47.05 with 2 and 322 degrees of freedom yielded a p-value of less than .001, which is below the significance threshold of .05. Since the calculated F-value of 47.05 exceeds the critical F-value of 3.02 at $df(2, 322)$, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean ratings of respondents regarding the influence of public, private, and mission schools on students' academic performance in Rivers State.

To identify the specific pairs of groups that differed significantly, a Scheffé post-hoc test was conducted, and the results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Scheffé Post-Hoc Test Comparing Mean Ratings across School Ownership Categories

Group (I)	Group (J)	Mean Diff (I-J)	Sig.
Public (Mean = 2.13)	Private (Mean = 3.05)	-0.92*	< .001
Public (Mean = 2.13)	Mission (Mean = 3.27)	-1.14*	< .001
Private (Mean = 3.05)	Mission (Mean = 3.27)	-0.22*	.031

*Mean difference significant at $p < .05$

The post-hoc results in Table 5 show that all three pairwise comparisons yielded statistically significant differences. Public schools differed significantly from private schools (mean difference = -0.92 , $p < .001$) and from mission schools (mean difference = -1.14 , $p < .001$), with public schools recording substantially lower mean ratings in both comparisons. Private schools also differed significantly from mission schools (mean difference = -0.22 , $p = .031$), with mission schools recording higher mean ratings. This pattern confirms that mission schools are perceived as exerting the highest positive influence on academic performance, followed by private schools, with public schools recording the lowest influence ratings.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal significant differences in the influence of school ownership types on students' academic performance in Rivers State, with mission schools recording the highest cluster mean (3.27), followed by private schools (3.05), and public schools recording the lowest cluster mean (2.13). The discussion below situates these findings within the context of extant empirical literature.

The finding that public schools exert a below-average influence on students' academic performance is consistent with the findings of Ojimba (2022), who reported that public school students in Delta State consistently recorded lower credit passes in WASSCE due to chronic underfunding and poor teacher motivation. Similarly, Obasi and Amadi (2021) found that public school students in Port Harcourt metropolis performed significantly below acceptable benchmarks, attributing this to teacher absenteeism and inadequate instructional materials. The present study extends these findings to a state-wide context in Rivers State, providing further confirmation that systemic challenges in public school governance including inadequate funding, infrastructural deficiency, and low teacher morale significantly undermine students' academic outcomes. The positive influence of private school ownership on students' academic performance, as indicated by a cluster mean of 3.05, aligns with the findings of Eze, Igwe, and Obasi (2022), who reported that private school students in Enugu State consistently outperformed their public school counterparts in Mathematics and English Language. The present study corroborates this finding in the Rivers State context and reinforces the argument that management autonomy, competitive academic environments, and higher investment in teacher development all characteristic of private schools are key drivers of academic performance. The finding also supports the international evidence provided by Andrabi, Das, and Khwaja (2022), who demonstrated that private school management structures generate academic efficiency gains that translate into measurable student performance improvements. The finding that mission schools exert the highest positive influence on students' academic performance (cluster mean = 3.27) is consistent with the work of Umez and Wordu (2022), who found that mission school students in Rivers State consistently outperformed peers in both public and private schools. The present study reinforces this conclusion using a broader sample that spans urban and rural contexts. The strong endorsement of the moral and spiritual ethos of mission schools (Item 13, mean = 3.33) as a driver of academic performance echoes Akpan and Udo (2021), who found that the religious and moral orientation of mission schools fosters academic seriousness and self-regulated learning behaviours. The stable administrative structures and the holistic developmental philosophy of mission schools appear to create optimal conditions for sustained academic achievement, consistent with the three-way comparative findings of Essien and Bassey (2020) in Cross River State. The rejection of the null hypothesis, as confirmed by the ANOVA result ($F(2, 322) = 47.05, p < .001$), and the post-hoc findings showing significant differences across all three ownership pairs, collectively affirm that school ownership type is a significant determinant of students' academic performance in Rivers State.

Conclusion

This study has provided empirical evidence that school ownership significantly influences students' academic performance in secondary schools in Rivers State. Mission schools were found to exert the most positive influence on academic performance, followed by private schools, while public schools were associated with below-average academic performance outcomes. The statistically significant differences in mean ratings across ownership types confirm that school ownership is not a neutral variable in the determination of academic outcomes but is, rather, a critical institutional factor that shapes the quality of education delivered and the academic achievement of students. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions in public schools to bridge the performance gap between ownership types, while preserving and harnessing the institutional strengths of mission and private schools for the broader improvement of secondary education in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Rivers State Government should increase budgetary allocations to public secondary schools, with specific provisions for the rehabilitation of physical infrastructure, procurement of instructional materials, and regular payment of teacher salaries and welfare packages, to improve the conditions that currently undermine academic performance in public schools.
2. The Rivers State ministry of education should implement a systematic teacher motivation and capacity development programme in public schools, including regular in-service training, career advancement opportunities, and performance-based incentives, to address the problem of teacher absenteeism and low professional motivation identified in this study.
3. Private school proprietors and associations in Rivers State should institutionalise structured teacher professional development programmes and ensure that their competitive academic environments are supported by sustainable investment in qualified staffing and evidence-based instructional practices, to maintain and enhance their positive influence on academic performance.

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