



## CAUSES OF POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AS PERCEIVED BY SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ISEYIN LOCAL GOVERNMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government. The study also examined the influence of gender, religion, school type and school location on the respondents' views. The content validity of the instrument was done by five experts and the reliability was established using test re-test method, which yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.78. Findings revealed that the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by respondents include mental health problems, poor reading skills, poor concentration, poor parental support, financial constraints, lack of motivation, among others. Findings further showed that there were significant differences in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on gender, religion, school type, and school location. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that guidance and counselling programme should be strengthened in order to improve the academic performance of secondary schools in the area. Students should be encouraged by guidance counsellors, teachers and parents to make use of proper reading skills in order to improve their academic performance.*

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**Keywords:** causes, academic performance, secondary school, students

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Education at the secondary school level is considered fundamental and serves as the cornerstone for advancing to higher levels of learning in tertiary institutions. It is not only an investment but also a tool that can accelerate economic, social, political, technological, scientific, and cultural progress within a country. According to the National Policy on Education (2004), secondary education is recognised as a catalyst for national development, promoting the growth and

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enhancement of individuals for further educational pursuits and overall societal advancement. It aims to ensure equal access to educational opportunities for all Nigerian children, regardless of any existing limitations or disadvantages.

The primary purpose of secondary education is to establish the groundwork for further academic pursuits, and when this foundation is solidly laid, subsequent educational levels are less likely to encounter difficulties. The academic success of students plays a crucial role in producing highly capable individuals who will eventually become leaders and contribute to the workforce, thereby driving the social and economic development of their country. Academic performance serves as the fundamental measure of student achievement across various subjects. Educators and administrators typically evaluate performance through classroom assessments, grading systems, and standardized test scores. According to Usaini, Abubakar, and Bichi (2015), poor academic performance is characterised as a performance deemed by the examinee/testee and other significant individuals as falling below an anticipated standard, while Siachifuwe (2017) defines poor academic performance as any level of achievement that does not meet a desired standard. It manifest in various ways, such as low grades, insufficient understanding of subject matter, lack of engagement in learning activities, or failure to meet educational goals and objectives.

Stakeholders consistently express concerns about the declining quality of education, linking it to the underperformance of secondary school students in various subjects, notably English Language and Mathematics. This is evident in the results of annual public examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council and National Examinations Council. Multiple factors contribute to this problem, including overcrowded classrooms, insufficient supervision, irregular teacher training, inadequate school infrastructure and resources, variations in students' learning abilities, parental influence, peer pressure, teacher competence, and the adequacy of educational facilities. Siachifuwe (2017) highlights additional contributors to unsatisfactory academic performance, such as lack of motivation, family issues like broken homes, high rates of absenteeism or truancy, poor reading skills, substance abuse, academic stress, learning disabilities, bullying or harassment, and language barriers. Other factors include excessive academic demands, academic stress, difficulties in retention, parental influence, negative peer associations, feelings of loneliness or self-doubt, challenges in adjusting to new environments, and struggles with concentration—all of which can contribute to subpar academic achievements.

Several studies have investigated the underlying causes of poor academic performance in Nigeria. For instance, Usaini, Abubakar, and Bichi (2015) examined the influence of school environment on academic performance of secondary school students in Kuala Terengganu; Koroye (2016) investigated the influence of school physical environment on secondary school students' academic performance in Bayelsa State. Bahago, Fadipe, Asemota and Ebere (2021) worked on perceived impact of guidance and counselling services on academic performance of secondary school students in Kaduna South LGA. Despite the previous studies mentioned, the researchers have found no existing research specifically addressing the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by

secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government. This study filled this gap in the literature by investigating the factors contributing to poor academic performance in this specific locality.

## **2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES**

The objective of the study was to examine the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government. The study considered the influence of moderating variables of gender, religion, school type, and school location on causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government.

### **2.1 QUESTION**

The research question was raised and answered in the study:

1. What are the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government?

### **2.2 HYPOTHESES**

The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on gender.

2. There is no significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on religion.

3. There is no significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on school type.

4. There is no significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on school location.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The researchers employed a descriptive survey approach to investigate the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin local government. The study targeted all senior secondary school students II (SSS II) in the area. Ten secondary schools out of thirty-four were randomly selected using a ballot procedure. From each selected school, twenty students were chosen using a stratified random sampling technique based on school type, resulting in a total of 200 respondents for the study. Stratification was done according to school type.

Content validity was established by consulting five lecturers from the Department of Psychology at the University of Ilorin during the research process.

Reliability was assessed through a test-retest method, where the instrument was administered twice to a group of secondary school students at St. Anthony's in Ilorin Metropolis, with a two-week interval between administrations. The correlation between the two sets of scores was determined using Pearson's product moment correlation, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.78. The questionnaire used for data collection, titled "Causes of Poor Academic Performance Questionnaire (CPAPQ)," was developed by the researchers based on the literature review. The questionnaire comprised two sections: section A focused on demographic information, while section B addressed the causes of poor academic performance. Section B utilised a four-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree) to assess responses. Mean scores of 2.5 and above were considered indicative of factors contributing to poor academic performance, while scores below 2.5 were considered otherwise. Hypotheses were tested using a t-test at a significance level of 0.05.

#### 4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the data collected, focusing on the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government. Two hundred questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, all of which were completed and returned for analysis. The study examined four hypotheses using the t-test statistical tool at a significance level of 0.05.

**Research Question:** What are the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government?

Table 1 shows the mean and rank order of causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin local government. The table shows that all items were perceived as the causes of poor academic performance, because all the items were ranked above the mid-mean score of 2.50. Therefore, items with mean values of 3.89, 3.86 and 3.85 respectively preceded others and were ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>. The items were mental health problems (anxiety, substance abuse, and depression), poor reading skills and poor concentration. In addition, items 2, 6 and 3 with mean values of 2.66, 2.57 and 2.54 were the least ranked items, that is, 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. They indicated social media addiction, overcrowded classroom and inadequate time management skills.

**Table 1.** Mean and Rank Order of the Causes of Poor Academic Performance as Perceived by Secondary School Students in Iseyin Local Government

N	As far as I am concerned, poor academic performance is as result of:	Mean	Rank
1	Mental health problems (anxiety, substance abuse, and depression)	3.89	1 <sup>st</sup>
10	Poor reading skills	3.86	2 <sup>nd</sup>

9	Poor concentration	3.85	3 <sup>rd</sup>
13	Lack of parental support	3.44	4 <sup>th</sup>
14	Financial constraints	3.31	5 <sup>th</sup>
11	Excessive absenteeism	3.22	6 <sup>th</sup>
4	Lack of motivation	3.00	7 <sup>th</sup>
5	Lack of study materials	2.97	8 <sup>th</sup>
12	Academic stress	2.82	9 <sup>th</sup>
7	Ineffective teaching methods	2.74	10 <sup>th</sup>
8	Unconducive learning environment	2.71	11 <sup>th</sup>
15	Irregular sleep patterns	2.67	12 <sup>th</sup>
2	Social media addiction	2.66	13 <sup>th</sup>
6	Overcrowded classroom	2.57	14 <sup>th</sup>
3	Inadequate time management skills	2.54	15 <sup>th</sup>

Researcher's Fieldwork, 2024

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on gender.

**Table 2:** Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test showing the Causes of Poor Academic Performance as perceived by Secondary School Students in Iseyin Local Government based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Female	109	47.60	5.88	198	2.90*	1.96
Male	91	42.80	5.23			

\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 2.90 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96, thus, the hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there was a significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on gender.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on religion.

**Table 3:** Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test showing the Causes of Poor Academic Performance as perceived by Secondary School Students in Iseyin Local Government based on Religion

Religion	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Christian	102	37.75	6.03	198	2.10*	1.96
Muslim	98	35.21	5.78			

\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$

Table 3 presents that the calculated t-value of 2.10 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96, thus, the hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there was a significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on religion.

**Hypothesis Three:** There is no significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students based on school type.

**Table 4:** Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test showing the Causes of Poor Academic Performance as perceived by Secondary School Students in Iseyin Local Government based on School Type

School type	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Public	122	40.78	10.31	198	1.98*	1.96
Private	78	39.47	9.80			

\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows that the calculated t-value of 1.98 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96, thus, the hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there was a significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on school type.

**Hypothesis Four:** There is no significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students based on school location.

**Table 5:** Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test showing the Causes of Poor Academic Performance as perceived by Secondary School Students in Iseyin Local Government based on School Location

School location	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Urban	112	20.98	9.31	198	2.03*	1.96
Rural	88	19.90	8.80			

\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$

Table 5 presents that the calculated t-value of 2.03 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96, thus, the hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there was a significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on school location.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The research findings identified various factors contributing to poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students, including mental health issues like anxiety, substance abuse, and depression, as well as deficiencies in reading skills, concentration, and financial limitations. These results align with previous studies such as Al-Zoubi and Younes (2015), who associated poor

academic performance with academic failure, stress, and inadequate study habits. Adesemowo (2015) also found that an unfavorable learning environment contributes to students' academic struggles. The reason for this finding might be that school often discuss and share their challenges, leading to a common consensus on certain issues affecting academic performance. Also, some causes like academic stress, lack of motivation, financial constraints or poor reading skills, might visibly affect a large number of students, making it easier to agree upon these factors.

Finding revealed that there was a significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on gender. This implied that both male and female students were different in their perception on the causes of poor academic performance in Iseyin Local Government. Differences in perception between male and female students regarding causes of poor academic performance could stem from various factors, including societal norms, personal experiences, learning styles, and social expectations. These variations might be influenced by cultural stereotypes, differing educational experiences, individual challenges, or specific interests that lead them to attribute academic success or failure differently.

Another finding showed that there was a significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on religion. This implied that both Muslim and Christian students were different in their perception on the causes of poor academic performance in Iseyin Local Government. Perceptions of academic performance among Muslim and Christian students could be influenced by cultural, religious, and societal factors. These might include varying educational backgrounds, religious teachings impacting approaches to learning, family expectations, community values, and cultural norms related to education.

Findings revealed that there was a significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on school type. This implied that both students in public and private were different in their perception on the causes of poor academic performance in Iseyin Local Government. Differences in the perceptions of private and public school students regarding the causes of poor academic performance could be attributed to school facilities and resources. Private school might have better resources, smaller class sizes and more advanced facilities, leading their students to attribute poor performance to personal effort rather than inadequate resources. Public school students may see resource limitations as a primary cause.

Findings also showed that there was a significant difference in the causes of poor academic performance as perceived by secondary school students in Iseyin Local Government based on school location. This implied that both students in urban and rural were different in their perception on the causes of poor academic performance in Iseyin Local Government. Differences in the perceptions of urban and rural students regarding the causes of poor academic performance could be attributed to teaching quality and methods. Urban schools might benefit from a wider pool of experienced teachers and varied teaching methodologies, potentially

affected academic performance. In contrast, rural schools might face challenges in attracting and retaining qualified educators.

## **6. COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS**

The study suggests that school counsellors play a crucial role in addressing factors contributing to students' poor academic performance. They can organize counselling sessions to tackle issues such as student absenteeism in class, mental health issues like anxiety, substance abuse, and depression, as well as deficiencies in reading skills, concentration, excessive absenteeism, and lack of interest in learning. Counsellors should conduct comprehensive assessments to identify specific mental health challenges affecting students' academic success, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. Also, they should provide information and support resources to help students understand and manage their mental health conditions in relation to academic performance. Encouraging self-care practices like adequate sleep, healthy eating, regular exercise, and engaging in activities that promote mental well-being is also essential for counsellors in supporting students' academic achievement.

Effective guidance and counselling are crucial for enhancing academic performance, necessitating the active involvement of school counsellors. Also, parental engagement and support play a significant role in improving students' academic performance, emphasizing the importance of keeping parents informed about their children's progress in school. There should be clear communication and mutual understanding between school teachers and parents regarding their respective roles in supporting student performance. Counsellors should assist students in identifying their strengths, weaknesses, and preferred learning styles, empowering them to advocate for themselves and seek appropriate assistance when necessary. Strengthening guidance and counselling programs is essential for improving the academic performance of students facing challenges in schools. Additionally, teachers and parents should work together to mentor students on cultivating effective study habits, thereby boosting their academic performance.

When schools possess attractive classrooms, sufficient classroom furniture, well-stocked libraries, and fully equipped laboratories, both students and teachers are externally motivated. These physical amenities contribute to effective teaching and learning by providing the necessary resources to make lessons more engaging and academic objectives attainable. Consequently, school administrators should prioritize either expanding learning opportunities for underperforming students or enhancing overall academic performance while also improving the school environment to promote student concentration. Additionally, teachers and parents should work together to mentor students on cultivating effective study habits, thereby boosting their academic performance.

Counsellors have the opportunity to support students performing below academic standards by administering psychological tests in school. These tests offer valuable insights into the underlying factors contributing to students' poor academic performance. Examples of such tests include the Study Habit Inventory (SHI), Student Problem Inventory (SPI), Slosson Intelligent Test (SIT), Academic



Performance 5 – Factor Inventory, among others. By utilizing these tests, counsellors can identify specific learning disabilities, cognitive abilities, and other factors influencing students' performance. This information can inform tailored interventions, including specialized tutoring, therapy, accommodations, or adjustments in teaching methods to address individual needs and promote academic success. Counselling sessions can also assist students in managing academic stress, fostering resilience, and cultivating effective study habits, ultimately enhancing their academic performance. This approach aims to alleviate the stress of studying, maintain motivation, and accommodate differences in age, gender, school type, and location among students.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

The research findings concluded that secondary school students perceived mental health issues such as anxiety, substance abuse, and depression, along with insufficient reading abilities and focus, as major causes of poor academic performance. Moreover, there were noticeable differences in how students in Iseyin Local Government perceived the causes of academic performance based on gender, religion, school type, and location. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that;

- Students should seek counselling in school when facing with mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, or other conditions contributing to poor academic performance.
- Guidance counsellors, teachers and parents should encourage students to make use of proper reading skills in order to improve their academic performance.
- Students should concentrate and actively participate in class discussions, group work, and extracurricular activities in school. Engaged students often perform better academically due to increased interest and motivation.
- Parents should be educated about the importance of dedicating enough time to their children, as this assistance can enhance their academic performance in school.
- Students should minimise distractions such as social media, mobile phones, or noisy environments during study sessions to improve concentration.
- School management should assist students to have access to academic support services such as tutoring, study groups, or peer mentoring. These support services can assist students in comprehending difficult subjects and improving their performances.
- Government through the Ministry of Education should provide conducive and well equipped learning environment so as to enhance academic performance of students.

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