

An Analysis of Factors Influencing Students' Academic Performance in Public and Private Secondary Schools in Rivers State-Nigeria

Levi Doe Kalagbor
Department Of Educational Foundations/Management
Ignatius Ajuru University Of Education, Rumuolumeni-Port Harcourt

Abstract

The study examined factors that positively influence students' academic performance in public and private secondary schools in Rivers State-Nigeria. One research question addressed the objectives and problem of the study. The instrument used for the collection of data was the "Students' Academic Performance Questionnaire" (SAPQ), structured on the 4-point Likert scale measurement. A sample size of 489 SS3 public secondary students and 213 SS3 private secondary students, representing 15 percent of the targeted population of 3,252 SS3 public secondary students and 1,420 SS3 Private secondary school students in 4 out of the 23 Local Government Areas of Rivers State were simple randomly selected. A table was constructed; frequency counts, percentage and mean compiled to provide answers to the research question. The results of the study revealed that students in private secondary schools with a mean agreement of 87 percent are more positively influenced in their academic performances by most of the factors examined in table 1 of this study than students in the public secondary schools with a mean agreement of 38 percent, although, public secondary students were better influenced by the quality of teaching manpower than their private secondary schools counterpart. Based on these findings, the researcher recommended among others, the need for the government to pay adequate priority attention to educational system, particularly, in the areas of making the public secondary schools satisfy the minimum education establishment standards and prosecuting proprietors of unapproved private schools to sustain minimum educational standards in Rivers State.

Keywords: Academic Performance; Factors; Minimum Standards; Private Secondary Schools and Public Secondary Schools.

Introduction

Public school is one entirely owned, financed and managed by the government. While private school means, a school other than those established by public authority which conform to the set minimum standards and may be approved by government. Both the public and private schools have the secondary schools that implement the secondary education curriculum specified in the National Policy on Education 2004.

Researches and the knowledge of the researcher have shown that before Nigeria independence in 1960, several private schools existed with few or no government established institutions of learning. But, due to the short-comings of these private schools, the government after the civil war in 1970 intensified the takeover of private schools from their original owners and also established new public schools to control educational standard.

In Rivers State of Nigeria, a legal instrument aimed to legalize government take-over of private schools was established; River State of Nigeria, Edict No. 3 of 1987. Subsequently, states government, including the Rivers State government, influenced by the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution that placed the establishment and control of education under the Concurrent Legislative List, saw the urgent need to collaborate with private individuals to establish and manage schools. The Rivers State government, however, enacted the "Education (Private Schools) (Amendment) Edict, No. 11 of the 1991 and the "Guidelines on Voluntary Agencies (Participation in the Establishment of Educational Institutions) in Rivers State, 1992" respectively.

At present, institutions of learning, whether public or private that can afford to give children good quality education have remain the major concern for parents and guardians. Parents sort for secondary schools that can develop effective foundation stage for the tertiary education of their children. Hence, the success of students in tertiary education is dependent on the quality of secondary education management, of which the public and private schools are directly concerned in Rivers State.

Statement of Problem

Social and economic mobility is a function of a good educational qualification of which an effective management of secondary schools plays a fundamental role. A good secondary education, either from the public or private schools, backed with complete O/Level papers, qualifies the candidate for admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This is the aspirations of most parents and secondary schools students.

Succinctly, it has been observed that the secondary education system in Nigeria is to an extent not

achieving its predetermined goals and objectives due to the problems of high rate of failures in public examinations. Researches have shown that there has been public outcry on students' poor performance in Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations.

However, the researcher has observed that parents in Rivers State believed that private secondary schools are of higher academic quality than the public secondary schools. This can be buttressed on the basis that, inspite of government assistance and low rate of tuition fees charged in public secondary schools, a lot of parents/guardians still desire that their children attend private secondary schools.

In view of the above backdrops, the elements of the problem of this study, border on the factors that positively influences students' academic performance in public and private schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. To further delineate the study, the researcher examined the following factors; Infrastructural facilities; teacher-student relationship; teacher welfare; student home background; principal-teacher relationship; teacher supervision; teaching periods; teacher quality; teacher discipline and teacher-student ratio respectively.

Purpose of Study

The specific purpose of study is to identify the factors that positively influence students' academic performance in public and private secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Question

The research question stated below addressed the problem and objectives of this study:

1. What are the factors that positively influence students' academic performance in public and private secondary schools in Rivers State?

Methodology

The study was basically a descriptive survey design. The population of study comprised of 3,252 and 1,420 SS3 students in the 245 public secondary schools and 620 approved private secondary schools in the 23 Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The sample size of the study consisted of 489 and 213 SS3 students representing 15 percent of the total population of respondents in 37 and 93 public/private secondary schools in 4 Local Government Areas in Rivers State. The selection of the sample size was done through the simple random sampling technique, with element of stratification.

The instrument for data collection was "Students' Academic Performance Questionnaire" (SAPQ). The response scale was structured in line with the 4-point Likert scale of measurement: strongly agree (SA) = 4 points; (A) = 3 points; Disagree (D) = 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point. The SAPQ designed by the researcher was validated by the judgement of some lecturers in the Department of Educational Foundations and Management, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt – Rivers State. The instrument was subjected to reliability test with the use of Pearson-Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, which yielded r – coefficient value of 0.80.

Out of the 489 copies of questionnaire administered to respondents in public secondary schools, 335 copies representing 68 percent of the sample size were retrieved and used. And out of the 213 copies of questionnaire administered to the respondents in private secondary schools, 136 representing 64 percent of the sample size were also retrieved and used.

The simple descriptive methods of analyses: frequency counts, percentage and mean were used. Tables were constructed and deductions from the results of the analyses were used in providing answers to the researcher question in the study.

Results

Research Question

What are the factors that positively influence students' academic performance in public and private secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1

Frequency, percentage and mean on factors that positively influence students' academic performance in public and private secondary schools in Rivers State.

S/N	ITEMS (FACTORS)	PUBLIC SCHOOLS					PRIVATE SCHOOLS				
		N	A	%	D	%	N	A	%	D	%
1.	The available school facilities and the extent they are put in to use in my school, positively influence students' academic performance.	335	80	24	255	76	136	36	24	100	74
2.	The friendly relationship between the teachers and students in my school positively influence students' academic performance.	335	122	36	213	64	136	95	70	41	30
3.	Prompt complaint to my school teachers' welfare needs, including payment of salaries; positively influence students' academic performance.	335	60	18	275	82	136	56	41	80	59
4.	Students' high parental status positively influences their academic performance.	335	100	30	235	70	136	120	88	16	12
5.	Principals' and teachers' good working relationships in my school positively influence students' academic performance.	335	192	57	143	43	136	115	85	21	15
6.	Teachers' supervision is prompt and effective, and this positively influences student's academic performance.	335	100	30	235	70	136	98	72	38	28
7.	The required professional and qualified teachers exist in my school, and it positively influences students' academic performance.	335	235	70	100	30	136	25	18	111	82
8.	The effective utilization of lesson periods by my school teachers positively influences students' academic performance.	335	120	35	215	65	136	100	74	36	26
9.	Teachers in my school do not engage in deviant conducts, and it positively influences students' academic performance.	335	110	33	225	67	136	112	82	24	18
10.	The number of students in each classroom in my school ranges from 1-50. This positively influences students' academic performance.	335	162	48	173	52	136	116	85	20	15
	Total	3350	1281	381	2069	619	1360	873	641	487	335
	% Mean	335	128	38	207	62	136	87	64	49	36

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, May 2016.

Key: (SA & A) = A; (D&SD) = D

Table I, items 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10 shows that 70%, 80%, 85%, 72%, 74%, 82% and 85% of the private secondary students agreed that factors such as: Student-teacher relationship, student home background, principal-teacher relationship, teacher supervision, teaching periods, teacher discipline and teacher-student relationship positively, influences their academic performance in their schools. While, 64%, 82%, 70%, 70%, 65%, 67% and 52% of the public secondary students disagreed accordingly.

Table I, items 1 and 3 shows that 24% and 18% of the public secondary students agreed that factors such as: infrastructural facilities and teachers' welfare positively influence their academic performance. The same low percentage agreement was shown by students in private secondary schools with 24% and 41% respectively.

However, in table I, item 7, 70% of public secondary students agreed that the quality of teachers in public schools positively influences their academic performance. But, only 18% private secondary students agreed in this perspective.

Discussion

Infrastructural facilities

Data in table I, item 1 indicated a negative influence of school infrastructural facilities on both students in public and private secondary schools, due to its inadequacy and some of the available ones, not been put to effective use. This finding requires serious discourse, because the inadequacy of school facilities affected the public and private secondary schools in Rivers State.

The above therefore suggest that, equipped school library, science laboratory; information communication technology, language, technical drawing and musical laboratories; including conducive classrooms for learning, sports/recreational facilities, etc were grossly inadequate to facilitate the implementation of secondary education and positively influence students' academic performance in the public and private schools.

It should be noted that these facilities constitute a range of predetermined indicators designed to measure aspects of schools' academic engagements and school effectiveness. Thus, researches have shown that the quality of education to a large extent is dependent on the scale of equipment/facilities and the use of which they are put. These infrastructures have direct significance in students' academic performance. Regrettably too, as a team leader in the 2016 accreditation and reaccreditation of private schools in Rivers State, the researcher observed that, most private schools were built on rented apartments, temporary school sites and some structures were batchers.

Further, the outcome of the present study have complicated Olutola (1981) research finding that, 85.5 percent of interviewees agreed that private schools offer better quality instructions than the public schools. There cannot be quality instructions without quality school infrastructures. The issue here is that, the public and private secondary schools in Rivers State have not, based on the poor quality of facilities demonstrated proactive concerns to enhance students' academic performance through this academic variable.

Teacher-Student Relationship

This factor positively influence students' academic performance in private secondary schools than in the public secondary schools. The characteristics of this factor which the private secondary students' benefit from, include: a sense of humour, consistent help (with high expectations) and active listening, and giving room to learner-centred practices. In other words, students appreciate when their teachers actively listened and encourage them, as well as provided a fun and supportive, yet challenging environment where the entire class could learn (Knoell, 2012); and when teacher-student relationships are classified as having the presence of closeness, warmth and positivity (Hamre, & Pianta 2001).

Students in the public secondary schools seem not to enjoy the behaviours and cordial treatment from their teachers, but do observe physical appearance of the teachers which do not matter to them in their academic activities. It should be stated therefore, that, through cordial teacher interactions with students, the teacher plays an important role in the trajectory of students throughout the formal school experience (Barker, Grant and Mulock, 2008). Also, students who have positive relationships with their teachers use them as a secure base from which they can explore the classroom and take on academics.

Thus, an improved students' relationship with teachers is an essential support for learning, and it has important implications for students' academic development. If a student feels a personal connection to a teacher, the student is likely to become more trustful of that teacher. These might be some of the major reasons for private secondary students' in Rivers State agreeing that the factor of cordial teacher-student relationship positively influences them in their academic performance.

Teachers' Welfare

It was shown in this study that the quality of teachers' motivation/incentives in public and private schools in Rivers State is too poor as to guarantee its positive influence on students' academic performance. Most private secondary schools do not pay their teachers' bargained entitlements; teachers' salaries are not paid during students' vacation periods and job security is not guaranteed. Although job security is guaranteed in the public secondary schools, teachers are not regularly paid their salaries and promotion entitlements too.

This research outcome shows that the government and private schools' proprietors do not attach much regard to teachers' motivation strategies. These motivation strategies it should be noted, acts as forces which energizes and direct human behaviour toward the achievement of organizational goals (Etuk, 1988). This implies an issue that would also spur public and private secondary students to a better academic performance.

Home Background

Students in Private secondary schools were academically assisted by their parents, than those in the public secondary schools. This finding is interdem with Nile (1981) research outcome on the effects of parental status on students' learning effectiveness in school.

Parental educational and occupational level of awareness about the best available schools; ability to supervise their children in school work, and knowledge of who is who, positively influences their children's academic performance in private secondary schools than in public schools. This is despite the high fees associated with the private secondary schools.

Principal-Teacher Relationship

The study revealed that, friendly principal-teacher relationships exists in both public and private secondary schools, and secondary students in both schools are accordingly, positively influenced in their academic performance. It is therefore obvious that democratic leadership and staff active participation in decision making process are encouraged in the public and private secondary schools. This encourages the spirit of oneness and makes the school environment conducive for teaching and learning.

Teacher's Supervision

Teachers' supervision in private schools is regular and more effective than in public secondary schools, because the teachers were directly and promptly checked by their respective principals and proprietors to enhance students' academic performance. Teacher's absence in classroom and in the school cannot be tolerated in private secondary schools. But, in public secondary schools, teachers can decide to be absent in school, even without permission, due to poor principal supervision and informal relationships that may exist between them in the school environment.

Quality of Teacher

This study indicates that teachers in public secondary schools are professionally qualified than those in private secondary schools in Rivers State. The poor teacher quality in private secondary schools, however, contravenes the established minimum education standards contained in the "Guidelines on Voluntary Agencies (Participation in the Establishment of Educational Institutions) in Rivers State, 1992 and the "Rivers State Private Schools' Accreditation Format" 2016, respectively.

The study further revealed that teachers in the Public Secondary schools have acquired useful knowledge, skills, and ideas to create desirable positive changes in students' character and in learning, than their counterparts in the private secondary schools. It has been observed that proprietors of private secondary schools cannot engage the services of qualified teachers, due to their high profit making intentions.

Teachers' Utilization of Teaching Periods and Teacher Discipline

The revelation of this study in item 6 that teachers are regularly and directly supervised in private secondary schools than in the public secondary schools have justified the outcome of this same study, that teachers in private secondary schools utilizes teaching/lesson periods than their counterparts in public secondary schools.

It also justifies the high level discipline of teachers in private secondary schools, stated in table 1, item 9 of this study. In otherwords, teachers' rate of absenteeism, in the classrooms, truancy, and negligence of duty are averagely minimized in private secondary schools, and it accounts positively on their students' academic performance.

Teacher-Student Ratio

The Rivers State guidelines on voluntary agencies specified that each classroom should be in the class-student ratio of 1:35 and teacher-student ratio of 1:35; ratio of 1:16 for practical class. This ratio standard is also specified in the National Policy on Education 2004.

This study shows that the private schools have maintained the minimum standard in this respect, while the public secondary schools have not. This is a surprise because; public schools are established, owned, financed and managed by the same government that enacted the legal standards.

In carrying out this research, the researcher observed that most public secondary schools in Rivers State have a class-student ratio of 1:200 and 1:250 respectively. A small class size makes for effective classroom management, which however, brings about positive influence on students academic performance. This is not realistic in public schools as resulted in this study.

Conclusion

The outcome of the study, "An analysis of factors influencing students' academic performance in public and private secondary schools in Rivers State" shows that, the public secondary schools which were established,

financed and managed by the government have not even met the minimum education establishment standards contained in Rivers State Edict No.3 of 1987; the Education (Private Schools) (Amendment) Edict No 11 of 1991; the “Guidelines on Voluntary Agencies (Participation) in the Establishment of Educational Institutions in Rivers State 1992 and “Private Schools’ Accreditation Format of 2016”, that were provided for proprietors seeking to establish and manage schools.

The above research outcome means that, the public secondary schools, inspite of their high quality in teaching manpower over the private schools, have not to a large extent provided the appropriate conditions for success and specifically for positive students’ academic performance.

The Private secondary schools, although have shown some supremacy in areas of teacher-student relationships; teachers’ welfare, students’ home background, teachers’ supervision, teaching period, teachers’ discipline and teacher-student ratio; much is still expected in the areas of provision of adequate infrastructural facilities and teacher quality. It has to be emphasized that these two variables which the private schools in Rivers State lacked, will inform the extent some of the positive factors are put to use for effective students’ academic performance.

Specifically, it is the conclusion of this study that, students in private secondary schools with a mean agreement of 87 percent are more positively influenced by the factors examined in table I, than the public secondary students. Hence, research findings revealed multifaceted factors influencing positively, secondary students’ academic performance in private schools in Rivers State.

Recommendations

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

1. Government should give adequate priority attention to the education industry, particularly, the public secondary schools to satisfy the minimum education establishment standards.
2. Government should always ensure that private schools are approved and mandate given before the operations and management of such schools by their private owners. This should be in accordance with the enabling laws to put a stop to proliferation of private secondary schools.
3. Further, owners of unapproved private schools should be prosecuted in the court of law.
4. The National Association of Proprietors of Private Schools (NAPPS) and the Rivers State Ministry of Education should partner for the purposes of training and retraining of teachers. This is because, teaching manpower, especially in private schools, requires urgent ‘surgical’ operation.

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