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Original Research Article

Perceived Determinants of Poor Academic Performance in Selected Rural Community Secondary Schools in Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Poor academic performance in rural community secondary schools remains a major concern because it constrains educational progression, weakens human-capital development, and reproduces social inequality across already disadvantaged communities. Although recent African and Nigerian studies increasingly show that student achievement is shaped by interacting school, teacher, home, and learner conditions, there remains limited integrated evidence from rural community secondary schools in Nsukka, Enugu State. This study investigated students' perceived determinants of poor academic performance in selected rural community secondary schools in Nsukka. A quantitative descriptive survey design was adopted. The target population comprised 977 students from three selected schools, from which 280 respondents were selected through purposive school selection followed by proportionate simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire organized into demographic items and four substantive domains: parent/home-based, school-related, teacher-related, and student-related factors. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used for analysis. Mean scores of 2.75 and above were interpreted as major perceived factors, scores from 2.50 to 2.74 as minor perceived factors, and scores below 2.50 as non-significant factors. The results show that lack of parental encouragement, weak parent/guardian involvement, inadequate teaching and learning materials, distance from home to school, unsuitable home study environments, poor teacher–student relationships, teachers' failure to complete schemes of work, student lateness, and student absenteeism were the most salient perceived contributors to poor academic performance. The study concludes that poor performance in the selected schools is not reducible to individual learner weakness; rather, it reflects a multidimensional ecology of home support, school resources, classroom relationships, curriculum coverage, and attendance behaviour. The article recommends integrated rural school improvement strategies that combine parental engagement, instructional-resource provision, teacher relational competence, curriculum monitoring, and early attendance-support systems.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Rural Community Schools, School Environment, Parental Involvement, Teacher–Student Relationship, Absenteeism, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is widely understood as a public good and a private capability because it provides young people with knowledge, skills, credentials, and dispositions that shape their participation in social, economic, and civic life. Yet schooling does not automatically produce learning. Many students pass through formal institutions without attaining the level of academic competence expected for their age, class level, or educational opportunity. In rural community secondary schools, the problem is particularly important because poor achievement often intersects with poverty, distance, limited infrastructure, teacher shortages, and weaker access to enrichment opportunities. Poor academic performance therefore deserves to be examined not merely as an examination outcome, but as an indicator of the quality of the educational ecology in which students live and learn.

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Recent empirical work across Africa has moved beyond single-factor explanations of poor academic performance. Studies in Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Ethiopia, South Africa, Malawi, and Nigeria increasingly show that low achievement is produced by interacting conditions across the school, home, teacher, and student domains. Yahaya *et al*., (2025), for example, found that the built environment of rural basic schools in Ghana differed sharply across district capitals, roadside communities, and remote communities, with infrastructure disadvantage linked to weaker educational outcomes. Nyawira (2026), working in public secondary schools in Kenya, similarly demonstrated that school-based factors such as learning resources, infrastructure, teacher quality, and administrative policy jointly influenced academic performance. This broad pattern is important because it challenges the common assumption that poor performance is primarily a problem of learner effort.

The Nigerian literature also supports a multidimensional interpretation. Studies reviewed in the Nigerian empirical corpus show that poor academic performance in secondary and comparable school contexts is associated with weak school infrastructure and climate, uneven teacher quality and motivation, limited parental support, socioeconomic disadvantage, weak study habits, truancy, and negative peer influence. Kamar (2026) found that classroom environment and learning resources predicted students' academic achievement in secondary schools in Sokoto State, while Ogunfuyi *et al*., (2026) reported that school facilities and class size predicted students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Ogun-East Senatorial District. These findings suggest that the academic outcome of a student cannot be separated from the material and organizational conditions of schooling.

Teacher-related factors have also received renewed attention. Earlier discussions often treated teacher quality as a matter of certification or years of experience, but recent scholarship has expanded the construct to include motivation, emotional intelligence, instructional clarity, classroom management, curriculum coverage, and teacher–student relationships. Shittu (2024) reported that teacher-quality variables were related to academic performance in Osun State public senior secondary schools. Obikeze and Ezeanowai (2025) found that teacher–student communication and social interaction predicted achievement among public secondary school students in Anambra State. Dugassa (2026) made a similar argument in Ethiopia, showing the importance of teacher–student relationships for secondary school performance. These studies imply that the classroom is not only a site of curriculum delivery but also a relational environment that can either support or weaken learning.

Home and parental factors constitute another decisive layer of the problem. Students' access to encouragement, textbooks, quiet study spaces, parental monitoring, academic discussion, and basic material support shapes the extent to which school learning can be reinforced outside the classroom. Recent evidence shows that parental socioeconomic status and involvement influence academic performance in several African contexts. Ciingi *et al*., (2025) found that parental income and education influenced learners' performance in public secondary schools in Kenya, while Nakawuka (2025) reported that parental provision of scholastic materials, parenting, collaboration with school, and communication were positively related to performance in public secondary schools in Uganda. In Nigeria, Amore *et al*., (2026) found that family income and parental educational background were significantly related to English achievement among senior secondary school students. These findings support the view that academic performance is partly produced through the continuity between home and school.

Student-related factors also matter, although they should not be interpreted in isolation from social context. Lateness, absenteeism, failure to complete assignments, low motivation, unhappiness during lessons, weak study habits, and low self-efficacy are immediate behaviours through which educational disadvantage becomes visible. Aja *et al*., (2025) found that self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation were positively linked to student performance in Uganda, while anxiety and workload pressure hindered achievement. In Nigeria, Anierobi *et al*., (2022) reported positive relationships between motivation, self-efficacy, and academic performance, and Udeh *et al*., (2026) found that academic engagement predicted achievement among public senior secondary school students in Anambra State. These studies indicate that students' behaviours and psychological patterns contribute to performance, but they are often shaped by the quality of schooling, teacher support, household resources, and peer environments.

Despite the growing body of evidence, there remains a need for context-specific studies that examine these four domains together in rural community schools. Much of the literature isolates one factor, one subject, one district, or one respondent group. Such studies are useful but insufficient for understanding a problem that is inherently ecological. The present study therefore investigates students' perceived determinants of poor academic performance in selected rural community secondary schools in Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria. The study is guided by four research questions: What parent/home-based factors contribute to poor academic performance? What school-related factors contribute to poor academic performance? What teacher-related factors lead to poor academic performance? What student-related factors lead to poor academic performance? The article contributes to the literature by providing an integrated descriptive account of perceived determinants across the home, school, teacher, and

student domains while preserving the specific evidence generated from the selected schools.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

This study is framed by an ecological understanding of academic performance. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory explains development as the product of interactions between individuals and nested environments, including the immediate settings of family, school, peers, and community. Applied to schooling, the theory suggests that poor academic performance should not be located only within the student; rather, it should be interpreted through the relations among learning resources, teacher practices, home support, peer influence, school climate, and wider community conditions. This perspective is particularly appropriate for rural community schools, where learners' academic experiences are often shaped simultaneously by household resources, travel distance, school infrastructure, teacher availability, and classroom interaction.

School-environmental factors refer to the physical, organizational, and social conditions within which teaching and learning occur. These include the availability of textbooks, classrooms, libraries, laboratories, furniture, sanitation facilities, school climate, instructional supervision, class size, and the general orderliness of the learning environment. Recent African evidence consistently links these conditions with academic performance. Davis *et al*., (2022), in a study of Ghanaian public junior high school students, combined achievement tests with teacher questionnaires and found extremely weak attainment in English, Mathematics, and Science, partly connected to difficulties in curriculum coverage and student readiness. Aaron *et al*., (2025) also showed that environmental conditions such as classroom maintenance, organized spaces, and teacher–student interaction were associated with achievement in Ghanaian senior high schools. Yahaya *et al*., (2025) extended this argument in rural Ghana by showing that infrastructure shortages were more severe in remote communities, reinforcing the educational consequences of spatial disadvantage.

Nigerian studies reveal similar concerns. Nwobodo and Agusiobo (2017) found a significant relationship between school climate and students' academic adjustment in Enugu State, while Amaechina and Ezeh (2019) linked school environment with academic performance in Enugu Education Zone. Jegede (2022), working with rural secondary school students in Ekiti State, reported that environment, school facilities, class size, and location were related to students' chemistry performance. More recent work by Kamar (2026) and Ogunfuyi *et al*., (2026) further suggests that learning resources, classroom conditions, facilities, and class size remain significant predictors of achievement. These findings are relevant to the present study because they support the inclusion of teaching and learning materials, home study environment, school facilities, distance, and transportation as school-environment and learning-environment variables.

Teacher-related factors occupy a central position because teachers mediate the curriculum, interpret the needs of learners, model academic dispositions, provide feedback, organize classroom interaction, and maintain instructional continuity. Teacher influence is therefore not limited to qualification, although qualification is important. It also includes motivation, commitment, teaching method, attendance, relationship quality, interest in students' understanding, and completion of schemes of work. Mensah *et al*., (2024), in a case study of Wa Senior High School in Ghana, found that students' performance was shaped by personal factors, access to resources, and teachers' self-efficacy, supervision, motivation, and conditions of service. Bentsi-Enchill (2024) similarly used Walberg's educational productivity framework to show that teaching quality, school environment, student characteristics, and policy conditions interact in shaping high school performance.

Recent Nigerian evidence has become increasingly attentive to relational pedagogy. Shittu (2024) treated teacher quality broadly, including academic qualification, teaching experience, professional qualification, and in-service training. Obikeze and Ezeanowai (2025) found that teacher–student communication and social interaction significantly predicted academic achievement, while Ala *et al*., (2025) reported that teacher friendliness and tolerance influenced students' performance in Oyo State. These studies shift the discussion from credentials alone to the daily relational and instructional conditions students encounter in classrooms. This is important because students may disengage even in the presence of qualified teachers if the classroom climate is hostile, dismissive, or insufficiently supportive. Conversely, positive teacher–student relationships may strengthen students' confidence, willingness to ask questions, and persistence in difficult subjects.

Home-based and parental factors include parental education, income, encouragement, involvement, provision of textbooks and other basic needs, family size, study space, communication with school, and monitoring of attendance and homework. The literature indicates that home factors are consequential but must be interpreted with sensitivity. Low parental involvement may reflect indifference in some cases, but in rural communities it may also reflect poverty, limited literacy, work demands, or weak school outreach. Ciingi *et al*., (2025), in a Kenyan mixed-methods study, found that low parental income was associated with fee difficulties, absenteeism, and lack of materials, whereas higher parental education supported stronger learner support. Nakawuka (2025), in Uganda,

found significant positive relationships between academic performance and parental provision of scholastic materials, parenting, collaboration, and communication. Simweleba and Serpell (2020) provided stronger intervention evidence in Zambia, showing that a parent sensitization programme improved post-test scores in a rural basic school context. These studies indicate that parental support operates through both material and relational pathways.

Nigerian studies provide comparable evidence. Adelodun (2019) reported a positive relationship between home environment and academic achievement among high-achieving secondary school students in Abeokuta. Amore *et al.,* (2026) found that family income and parental educational background were significantly related to English achievement, and Olaifa (2026) showed that parental meeting attendance, homework assistance, school-event attendance, and academic-progress monitoring were related to academic achievement. Gidado *et al*., (2026) linked parental involvement and socioeconomic background with achievement using questionnaires and WASSCE scores. These studies support the present focus on parental educational qualification, encouragement, provision of basic learning materials, involvement, and number of siblings as possible contributors to poor performance.

Student-related factors are the most immediate behavioural and psychological indicators of academic risk. They include lateness, absenteeism, failure to complete assignments, lack of motivation, unhappiness during lessons, weak study habits, peer influence, anxiety, and low self-efficacy. Aja *et al*., (2025) found that psychological patterns such as self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, anxiety, and stress were associated with academic performance in Uganda. Anierobi *et al*., (2022) reported that academic motivation and self-efficacy were positively related to performance in Anambra State. Gidado and Lasisi (2025) found that study habit and self-efficacy supported achievement while test anxiety exerted a harmful influence. Nwizuzu (2026) also reported a relationship between study habits and achievement among public secondary school students in Anambra State. Together, these studies indicate that academic behaviour is a crucial proximate pathway through which wider conditions affect performance.

The conceptual position adopted in this article is therefore interactive rather than linear. School-related factors provide or restrict instructional opportunity. Teacher-related factors shape how that opportunity is translated into understandable learning. Parent/home-based factors determine the extent to which learning is encouraged, resourced, and reinforced beyond school. Student-related factors express the learner's attendance, engagement, motivation, and study discipline within those conditions. Poor academic performance is expected when deficits accumulate across these domains: when parents are unable to provide encouragement or materials, schools lack adequate teaching and learning resources, teachers have poor relationships with students or fail to complete schemes of work, and students arrive late or miss lessons. This integrated view guided the design, analysis, and interpretation of the study.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Setting

The study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey design. This design was appropriate because the aim was to describe students' perceptions of factors contributing to poor academic performance across four domains rather than to manipulate an intervention or establish causal effects. A descriptive survey allows data to be collected from a relatively large number of respondents at one point in time and summarized statistically. However, because the design is cross-sectional and perception-based, the findings should be interpreted as perceived determinants rather than as causal estimates. This distinction is important for maintaining analytical accuracy and publication-level caution.

The study was conducted in selected rural community secondary schools in Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria. Nsukka is an important educational area in southeastern Nigeria and hosts the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Nevertheless, many surrounding rural communities continue to experience educational constraints associated with resource limitations, transport challenges, and uneven learning environments. The selected schools were St Johns Secondary School, Community Secondary School Ekwegbe, and Community Secondary School Opi. These schools provided an appropriate setting for examining perceived determinants of poor academic performance within rural community secondary education.

3.2 Population, Sample, and Sampling Procedure

The target population consisted of 977 students drawn from the three selected schools. St Johns Secondary School had a population of 433 students, Community Secondary School Ekwegbe had 314 students, and Community Secondary School Opi had 230 students. A sample of 280 respondents was selected for the study. The sample size was considered adequate for a descriptive survey of the population and allowed each school to be represented proportionately.

A combination of purposive and proportionate simple random sampling was used. First, the three schools were purposively selected based on their relevance to the study problem and their location in rural community contexts. Second, proportionate sampling was used to allocate respondents across the three schools in accordance with their population sizes. St Johns Secondary School contributed 124 respondents, Community Secondary School Ekwegbe contributed 90 respondents, and Community Secondary School Opi contributed 66 respondents. Within each school, simple

random sampling was used to select students, giving eligible students a fair chance of participation and reducing selection bias within the chosen schools.

3.3 Instrumentation, Validity, and Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire contained five sections. Section A elicited demographic information, including school, gender, age, and programme of study. Section B contained five items on parent/home-based factors. Section C contained six items on school-related factors. Section D contained five items on teacher-related factors. Section E contained five items on student-related factors. The substantive items were rated on a four-point Likert-type scale. The four-point structure was useful because it encouraged respondents to indicate a direction of perception rather than selecting a neutral midpoint.

Content validity was established by ensuring that the questionnaire items corresponded with the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the four conceptual domains. Before the main fieldwork, the questionnaire was pretested on 50 respondents after supervisory review. The pretest helped to assess clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of items for the target student respondents. Data collection followed permission from the heads of the selected schools. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the respondents, administered the questionnaire, and retrieved completed copies within the fieldwork period. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that the information supplied would be treated confidentially and used for academic purposes.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis involved editing, coding, and statistical computation. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize demographic characteristics, including school distribution, gender, age, and programme of study. Means and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions relating to perceived determinants of poor academic performance. In line with the original scoring rule, mean scores of 2.75 and above were classified as major perceived factors, mean scores from 2.50 to 2.74 were classified as minor perceived factors, and mean scores below 2.50 were treated as non-significant factors. The use of descriptive statistics is appropriate because the study sought to identify the relative salience of perceived factors rather than to test predictive hypotheses.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the results of the study. The demographic profile of respondents is first summarized, followed by the results for parent/home-based, school-related, teacher-related, and student-related factors. The numerical values are retained from the original analysis.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents were drawn from the three selected secondary schools. As shown in Table 1, St Johns Secondary School contributed the largest proportion of respondents, with 124 students representing 44.29% of the sample. Community Secondary School Ekwegbe contributed 90 respondents, representing 32.14%, while Community Secondary School Opi contributed 66 respondents, representing 23.57%.

Table 1: Repartition per schools

Name of Schools	Frequency	Percentage
St Johns Secondary School	124	44.29
Community Secondary School Ekwegbe	90	32.14
Community Secondary School Opi	66	23.57
Total	**280**	**100.00**

Source: Survey Field (2024)

Table 2 presents the gender distribution of respondents. Male respondents were 178, representing 63.57% of the sample, while female respondents were 102, representing 36.43%. The sample was therefore male-dominated. This distribution is important because students' perceptions may be shaped partly by gendered experiences of school life, mobility, household expectations, and classroom interaction.

Table 2: Gender distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	178	63.57
Female	102	36.43
Total	**280**	**100.00**

Source: Survey Field (2024)

The age distribution is shown in Table 3. Most respondents were below 18 years of age, accounting for 176 respondents or 62.86% of the sample. Respondents aged 18–23 were 91, representing 32.50%, while 13 respondents, or 4.64%, were above 23 years. The distribution indicates that the majority of respondents

were within the conventional secondary-school age range, although a minority were older than expected for secondary schooling.

Table 3: Age Distribution of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Below 18	176	62.86
18–23	91	32.50
Above 23	13	4.64
Total	**280**	**100.00**

Source: Survey Field (2024)

Table 4 presents respondents' programmes of study. Science students constituted the largest group, with 116 respondents or 41.43%. General Arts followed with 78 respondents or 27.86%. Home Economics accounted for 35 respondents or 12.50%, Visual Arts accounted for 31 respondents or 11.07%, and Business accounted for 20 respondents or 7.14%. The distribution suggests that perceptions were drawn from students across several programme areas rather than from one academic track only.

Table 4: Repartition based on Programme of Study

Programmes of Study	Frequency	Percentage
Business	20	7.14
General Arts	78	27.86
Home Economics	35	12.50
Science	116	41.43
Visual Arts	31	11.07
Total	**280**	**100.00**

Source: Survey Field (2024)

4.2 Parent/Home-Based Factors

Table 5 presents parent/home-based factors perceived to contribute to poor academic performance. Lack of encouragement from parents for students to learn recorded a mean of 2.78 and a standard deviation of 0.671. This item was therefore classified as a major perceived factor. Lack of parent/guardian involvement in education recorded a mean of 2.76 and a standard deviation of 1.098, also placing it among the major perceived factors. Parent/guardian educational qualification recorded a mean of 2.73, lack of provision of textbooks and other basic needs recorded a mean of 2.70, and number of siblings recorded a mean of 2.54. These were classified as minor perceived factors. Overall, the parent/home results indicate that students perceived encouragement and involvement as more salient than parental education, material provision, or sibling number.

Table 5: Parents/Home based Factors

Statement	Mean	SD
Parent/Guardian Educational Qualification	2.73	0.679
Lack of encouragement from parents for students to learn	2.78	0.671
Lack of provision of textbooks and other basic needs	2.70	0.859
Lack of Parent/Guardian Involvement in Your Education	2.76	1.098
Number of Siblings	2.54	1.108

Source: Survey Field (2024)

4.3 School-Related Factors

Table 6 presents school-related factors. The lack of adequate teaching and learning materials recorded the highest mean score in this domain, with a mean of 2.93 and a standard deviation of 0.892. This indicates that students perceived inadequate materials as a major factor contributing to poor academic performance. Distance from home to school recorded a mean of 2.79, and home study environment recorded a mean of 2.76; both were also classified as major perceived factors. Quality of teaching facilities recorded a mean of 2.67 and was classified as a minor perceived factor. Two items fell below the major or minor threshold: lack of a conducive environment for teaching recorded a mean of 2.48, while transportation mode to school recorded a mean of 2.41. These results suggest that students distinguished between the distance they travel and the transport mode they use, with distance appearing more academically salient than transport mode.

Table 6: School-related Factors

Statement	Mean	SD
My school does not have adequate teaching and learning material (TMLs) to support lessons	2.93	0.892
My school lacks a conducive environment for teaching	2.48	0.956
Home Study Environment (e.g., Quiet, Well-Lit, Distracting)	2.76	0.895
Distance from Home to School	2.79	0.809
Transportation Mode to School	2.41	0.984
Quality of Teaching Facilities (e.g., Classrooms, Laboratories)	2.67	0.982

Source: Survey Field (2024)

4.4 Teacher-Related Factors

Teacher-related factors are presented in Table 7. Poor relationship between teachers and students recorded the highest mean score of all items in the study, with a mean of 3.12 and a standard deviation of 0.815. This was therefore a major perceived factor and the strongest single item across the four domains. Teachers' failure to complete their scheme of work recorded a mean of 2.75 and a standard deviation of 0.833, placing it at the threshold for major perceived factors. Teachers' lack of interest in students' understanding recorded a mean of 2.73, and teachers' poor teaching methods recorded a mean of 2.67; both were classified as minor perceived factors. Teachers' absenteeism recorded a mean of 2.45 and was below the threshold. The teacher-related results therefore point most strongly to relational quality and curriculum coverage rather than teacher absence alone.

Table 7: Teacher-related Factors

Statement	Mean	SD
Poor relationship between teachers and their students	3.12	0.815
Teachers' lack of interest in students' understanding	2.73	0.912
Teachers' poor teaching methods	2.67	1.093
Teachers' absenteeism	2.45	0.918
Teachers' failure to complete their scheme of work	2.75	0.833

Source: Survey Field (2024)

4.5 Student-Related Factors

Table 8 presents student-related factors. Lateness of students recorded a mean of 2.85 and a standard deviation of 0.692, while students' absenteeism recorded a mean of 2.77 and a standard deviation of 0.803. Both items were classified as major perceived factors. Students' failure to do assignments and class exercises recorded a mean of 2.52, students' unhappiness during lessons recorded a mean of 2.64, and students' lack of motivation recorded a mean of 2.59. These items were classified as minor perceived factors. The results show that attendance-related behaviours were the most salient student-related concerns, while motivation, assignment completion, and lesson-related happiness remained relevant but less strongly rated.

Table 8: Student-related Factors

Statement	Mean	SD
Lateness of students	2.85	0.692
Students' absenteeism	2.77	0.803
Students' failure to do assignments and class exercise	2.52	0.873
Students' unhappiness during lessons in my school	2.64	0.712
Students' Lack of motivation	2.59	0.842

Source: Survey Field (2024)

5. DISCUSSION

The findings support the central argument that poor academic performance in the selected rural community secondary schools is multidimensional. Students did not attribute poor performance to one isolated factor. Instead, their responses point to an interaction of weak home encouragement, limited parental involvement, inadequate learning resources, distance from school, poor home study conditions, teacher–student relationship problems, incomplete curriculum coverage, lateness, and absenteeism. This pattern is consistent with recent African and Nigerian studies that interpret low performance as the product of overlapping school, teacher, home, and student conditions rather than a single deficit (Asamoah, 2020; Nyawira, 2026; Togunloju, 2024).

5.1 Parent/Home-Based Factors

The parent/home-based results show that lack of encouragement from parents and lack of parent/guardian involvement were the major perceived factors. This is a significant finding because it suggests that students attach strong academic value to emotional, supervisory, and communicative forms of parental

support. The fact that lack of encouragement recorded a mean of 2.78 indicates that students perceived parental motivation as more than a moral issue; they viewed it as a learning condition. Similarly, the mean of 2.76 for lack of parent/guardian involvement suggests that students believed their academic outcomes were affected when parents or guardians were not visibly engaged in their schooling.

This finding aligns with recent research on parental involvement. Nakawuka (2025) found that parental provision of scholastic materials, parenting practices, collaboration with school, and communication were positively related to performance among public secondary school students in Uganda. Ciingi *et al*., (2025) reported that parental socioeconomic status influenced academic performance through school-fee difficulty, lack of materials, and absenteeism. Olaifa (2026) similarly found that parental meeting attendance, homework assistance, school-event attendance, and academic monitoring were related to achievement. The present findings are therefore consistent with the view that parental involvement is multidimensional, involving encouragement, supervision, communication, material support, and school participation.

However, the minor status of parental educational qualification, lack of textbooks/basic needs, and number of siblings requires careful interpretation. These items did not fall outside academic relevance; rather, they were rated less strongly than encouragement and involvement. One possible explanation is that students experience encouragement and involvement more directly than they experience parental educational qualification. A parent may have limited formal education but still encourage attendance, ask about schoolwork, provide moral support, and communicate with teachers. Conversely, a parent may be educated but not actively involved. The finding therefore supports a practical view of parental support: what matters for students is not only the background status of the parent but the visible academic support the parent provides.

The finding also cautions against blaming parents in rural communities. Low involvement may reflect constraints such as poverty, work demands, low literacy, distance from school, or weak school-family communication. Anazia *et al*., (2026) emphasized that barriers to home–school partnerships for at-risk rural students include poverty, communication difficulties, distrust, and role ambiguity. This suggests that schools should not interpret low involvement simply as parental neglect. Rather, school administrators should create realistic forms of parental engagement that fit the lives of rural families, such as flexible meeting schedules, community-based academic briefings, periodic progress messages, and structured homework-monitoring guidance that does not require high parental literacy.

5.2 School-Related Factors

The strongest school-related factor was the lack of adequate teaching and learning materials, with a mean score of 2.93. This was one of the highest mean scores in the study and indicates that students saw inadequate instructional resources as a major barrier to achievement. Teaching and learning materials are essential because they translate curriculum content into accessible learning experiences. Without textbooks, charts, laboratory materials, writing resources, and subject-specific learning aids, instruction easily becomes abstract, teacher-centred, and dependent on memorization. In such contexts, students may struggle to practise independently, complete assignments, understand difficult concepts, or prepare effectively for examinations.

This finding is strongly supported by recent literature. Yahaya *et al*., (2025) showed that rural school built environments and educational infrastructure influence performance outcomes in Ghana. Davis *et al*., (2022) linked weak performance in English, Mathematics, and Science partly to curriculum coverage and learning conditions. In Nigeria, Kamar (2026) found that classroom environment and learning resources predicted achievement, while Ogunfuyi *et al*., (2026) found that school facilities and class size predicted performance. The present finding therefore reinforces a well-established conclusion: material learning conditions remain central to academic performance in low-resource school settings.

Distance from home to school also emerged as a major perceived factor. This is particularly important in rural community schools where students may walk long distances or depend on irregular transport. Distance can reduce learning time by increasing fatigue, lateness, and absenteeism. It can also weaken students' readiness to learn when they arrive at school already tired or anxious about returning home. The fact that transportation mode scored below the threshold while distance scored high suggests that the issue may not be the type of transport alone, but the burden of travel itself. In rural contexts, walking, waiting, or moving through difficult roads may affect punctuality and attendance even when transport is technically available.

The home study environment also emerged as a major factor, with a mean of 2.76. Although this item appears under school-related factors in the results table, it reveals the continuity between school and home learning environments. A student who attends school during the day but returns to a crowded, noisy, poorly lit, or distraction-filled home may be unable to revise, complete assignments, or prepare for examinations. This finding connects with Amore *et al*., (2026), who found that home environment variables were related to English achievement, and with Simweleba and Serpell (2020), whose rural Zambian intervention showed that strengthening home learning support improved

outcomes. The implication is that school improvement cannot end at the school gate; schools may need to guide students and parents on how to create basic study routines and spaces even under resource constraints.

5.3 Teacher-Related Factors

The most striking teacher-related finding was poor relationship between teachers and students, which recorded a mean of 3.12. This was the highest-rated factor across the entire study. The result suggests that students perceived relational distance, harshness, poor communication, or weak interpersonal support from teachers as a central barrier to academic success. In a rural community school context, where students may already face limited resources, long travel distances, and weak home support, the teacher–student relationship becomes even more important. A supportive teacher may compensate partly for other deficits by encouraging persistence, clarifying difficult concepts, giving feedback, and building students' confidence. A poor relationship, by contrast, may discourage questions, reduce classroom participation, and increase avoidance of lessons.

The finding is consistent with recent relational-pedagogy research. Obikeze and Ezeanowai (2025) reported that teacher–student communication and social interaction predicted academic achievement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Ala *et al*., (2025) found that teacher friendliness and tolerance influenced students' academic performance in Oyo State. Dugassa (2026) also emphasized the influence of teacher–student relationships on achievement in Ethiopian secondary schools. These studies support the interpretation that the relational dimension of teaching is not secondary to academic instruction. It is part of the instructional process itself because students learn more effectively when they feel respected, supported, and able to seek help.

Teachers' failure to complete their scheme of work also emerged as a major perceived factor. This finding is academically important because curriculum coverage is cumulative. When schemes of work are not completed, students may enter examinations without exposure to required content. They may also progress to higher classes without foundational knowledge needed for subsequent topics. This can create a chain of underperformance that becomes more visible during internal and external examinations. In contexts where instructional time is already affected by distance, lateness, limited materials, and co-curricular interruptions, incomplete curriculum coverage can deepen learning gaps.

Teachers' lack of interest in students' understanding and poor teaching methods were classified as minor perceived factors, but their means of 2.73 and 2.67 remain substantively meaningful. These findings suggest that students perceived variations in how teachers explain, check comprehension, provide feedback, and adapt instruction to learner needs. Mensah *et al.,* (2024) found that teachers' self-efficacy, supervision, motivation, and conditions of service shaped student performance and teacher efficiency. Chibsa (2026) focused on classroom factors that enhance achievement in Ethiopian public secondary schools, reinforcing the importance of classroom-level processes. The implication for the present study is that teacher development should not focus only on subject qualification. It should include relational competence, formative assessment, feedback, learner support, curriculum pacing, and strategies for teaching under resource constraints.

5.4 Student-Related Factors

The major student-related factors were lateness and absenteeism. Lateness recorded a mean of 2.85, while absenteeism recorded a mean of 2.77. These findings are consistent with the logic of cumulative learning. Students who arrive late often miss lesson introductions, instructions, explanations, and early activities that frame the rest of the class. Students who are absent miss entire lessons and may find it difficult to recover missed content, particularly when textbooks, peer notes, or teacher remediation are limited. In rural settings, lateness and absenteeism may be linked to long distance, household labour, financial constraints, illness, poor motivation, or weak parental monitoring. Therefore, while lateness and absenteeism are student behaviours, they may have deeper structural and relational causes.

Recent studies support this interpretation. Gidado and Lasisi (2025) showed that study habit and self-efficacy supported achievement, while test anxiety had a harmful influence. Aja *et al*., (2025) found that self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation were positively associated with academic performance, whereas anxiety and workload pressure hindered achievement. These findings show that attendance and engagement are not simply matters of discipline; they are connected to motivation, self-belief, emotional state, and the level of support available to students.

The minor student-related factors—failure to do assignments and class exercises, unhappiness during lessons, and lack of motivation—should not be treated as unimportant. Assignment completion provides practice, consolidation, and feedback. When students do not complete assignments or class exercises, teachers have fewer opportunities to identify misconceptions and provide remedial support. Unhappiness during lessons may indicate discomfort, fear, boredom, poor teacher relationship, irrelevant pedagogy, or low confidence. Lack of motivation may reduce persistence, especially in difficult subjects. Udeh *et al*., (2026) found that academic engagement predicted academic achievement, and Nwizuzu (2026) reported a relationship between study habits and academic achievement. These studies

suggest that even "minor" student-related factors may become major over time if they persist.

The student-related findings therefore reinforce the need for school-level attendance and engagement systems. Schools should monitor lateness and absenteeism systematically, but monitoring should be paired with diagnosis. A student who is late because of distance requires a different intervention from one who is late because of peer influence or low motivation. Similarly, a student who misses school because of household responsibilities requires family engagement, while a student who avoids school because of poor teacher relationships requires classroom and pastoral support. Effective intervention must therefore connect student behaviour with home, school, and teacher conditions.

5.5 Integrated Interpretation

Across the four domains, the strongest perceived determinants were poor teacher–student relationships, inadequate teaching and learning materials, student lateness, distance from home to school, lack of parental encouragement, student absenteeism, lack of parental involvement, poor home study environment, and teachers' failure to complete schemes of work. These factors are not independent in practice. Distance from home to school can produce lateness and absenteeism. Lack of teaching materials can weaken teacher effectiveness and student motivation. Poor teacher–student relationships can reduce students' happiness during lessons and discourage assignment completion. Weak parental involvement can reduce attendance monitoring and study support. Poor home study environments can weaken revision and homework completion. The findings therefore describe an ecology of academic disadvantage rather than a simple list of disconnected causes.

This integrated interpretation is consistent with recent scholarship arguing that poor academic performance is multi-causal and cumulative. The Nigerian empirical literature indicates that school infrastructure, teacher quality, home support, and student behaviours interact in shaping performance. African studies similarly emphasize inadequate infrastructure, low teacher motivation, weak parental involvement, poor study habits, and student absenteeism as recurrent barriers (Bentsi-Enchill, 2024; Kule, 2025; Nakawuka, 2025; Nyawira, 2026; Yahaya *et al*., 2025). The contribution of the present study is that it identifies how students in selected rural community secondary schools in Nsukka rank these factors in their own learning context. Their perceptions point to the need for interventions that are coordinated across domains rather than fragmented.

A final point concerns the interpretation of mean categories. The distinction between major and minor factors is useful for prioritization, but it should not imply that minor factors are irrelevant. Several items classified as minor had means close to the major threshold, including parental educational qualification, lack of provision of textbooks/basic needs, teachers' lack of interest in students' understanding, poor teaching methods, quality of teaching facilities, and students' unhappiness during lessons. These factors may interact with major factors and intensify poor performance over time. For policy and practice, therefore, the categories should guide sequencing rather than exclusion. Immediate attention may go to the highest-rated factors, but sustainable improvement requires attention to the full learning ecology.

6. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated students' perceived determinants of poor academic performance in selected rural community secondary schools in Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria. The evidence shows that poor performance is multidimensional. In the parent/home domain, lack of parental encouragement and weak parent/guardian involvement were the major perceived contributors. In the school domain, inadequate teaching and learning materials, distance from home to school, and poor home study environment were the major perceived factors. In the teacher domain, poor teacher–student relationships and failure to complete schemes of work were major factors. In the student domain, lateness and absenteeism were the major perceived factors. These results demonstrate that poor academic performance should not be understood as a problem located only in students; it is shaped by conditions across the home, school, classroom, and learner behaviour.

The study has several implications. For education policy, rural school improvement should prioritize the provision of adequate teaching and learning materials, especially textbooks, subject-specific instructional resources, and basic classroom support materials. Resource provision should be accompanied by monitoring to ensure that materials are used in instruction rather than merely supplied. For school administration, distance-related barriers should be addressed through attendance monitoring, flexible support for students who travel long distances, community advocacy for transport solutions, and early identification of students whose attendance patterns place them at academic risk. Schools should also provide guidance to students and parents on creating manageable study routines within rural home conditions.

For teachers and professional development, the findings highlight the importance of relational competence. Teachers should be supported to build respectful, encouraging, and academically focused relationships with students. Professional development should include strategies for questioning, feedback, learner participation, classroom communication, and formative checking of understanding. School heads

should also monitor curriculum coverage more systematically to ensure that schemes of work are completed in a timely manner. Where schemes cannot be completed because of interruptions or resource constraints, remedial teaching plans should be developed before examinations.

For parents and guardians, the findings suggest that encouragement and involvement are highly valued by students. Parents do not need advanced formal education to ask about homework, monitor attendance, encourage punctuality, attend school meetings when possible, and communicate concern for their children's learning. Schools should therefore design parent-engagement strategies that are realistic for rural families and that distinguish between lack of willingness and lack of capacity. Parent–school communication should be regular, respectful, and practical.

For students, the study emphasizes the importance of punctuality, regular attendance, assignment completion, and active participation during lessons. However, student responsibility should be supported rather than merely demanded. Counselling, peer academic support, attendance follow-up, and teacher mentoring can help students develop stronger academic habits. In particular, students with repeated lateness or absenteeism should be identified early and supported through dialogue with teachers and parents or guardians.

The study also has limitations. It used a descriptive survey design and relied on students' perceptions; therefore, the results should not be interpreted as causal evidence. The study was limited to three selected schools in Nsukka, which constrains generalization to all rural schools in Enugu State or Nigeria. The use of means and standard deviations provided useful descriptive prioritization but did not estimate the relative predictive power of each factor. Future studies should consider mixed-methods designs, include teachers, parents, and school administrators, and use attendance records, achievement records, facility audits, and qualitative interviews. Such studies would help explain not only which factors are perceived as important but also how these factors interact to shape measurable academic outcomes.

Overall, the study concludes that improving academic performance in rural community secondary schools requires an integrated approach. Supplying materials without strengthening teacher–student relationships may have limited impact. Encouraging students without addressing distance and absenteeism may not be sufficient. Calling for parental involvement without considering rural household constraints may be unrealistic. A sustainable response must therefore coordinate home support, school resources, teacher practice, curriculum coverage, attendance systems, and student motivation. The evidence from Nsukka points to a clear policy message: poor academic performance is an ecological problem and must be addressed through ecological solutions.

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Data Availability: Data may be made available by the author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical and institutional restrictions.

Ethics Statement: Permission was obtained from the heads of the selected schools. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that the information supplied would be treated confidentially and used for academic purposes.

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