

Emotional Neglect and Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Delta North Senatorial District

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between emotional neglect and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District, Delta State. The study was carried out because many students experience poor academic outcomes not only because of weak ability or poor teaching, but also because of limited emotional support, care, encouragement, and attention from parents or significant adults. One research question and one null hypothesis guided the study. A correlational survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 15,257 Senior Secondary School Two students in public secondary schools, while 375 students were selected through multi-stage sampling. Data were collected using the Emotional Neglect and Academic Performance Questionnaire (ENAPQ), while students' first term 2025/2026 overall scores were used to measure academic performance. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research question and Linear Regression Analysis were used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed a significant relationship between emotional neglect and students' academic performance. The study concluded that emotional neglect had a significant relationship with students' academic performance in secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District. Emotional support is important for students' learning, confidence, and academic success. It recommended that parents should guide students when they are faced with psychological and emotional challenges by paying attention to their feelings, provide warmth and support to them and functional counselling units in schools.

Keywords: Neglect, Emotional Neglect, Academic Performance.

INTRODUCTION

Academic performance is widely regarded as a central indicator of students' educational attainment and the effectiveness of the schooling process. It reflects the extent to which learners achieve prescribed educational objectives and acquire the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for personal and societal development. Across educational systems, academic performance serves as a critical criterion for promotion, certification, and access to higher educational opportunities. Consequently, improving students' academic outcomes remains a major concern for educators, policymakers, and researchers. Recent evidence suggests that academic performance is influenced by a complex interplay of personal, family, school, and environmental factors, highlighting the multidimensional nature of students' achievement (Costa et al., 2024). In secondary schools, where students undergo significant cognitive, social, and emotional development, understanding the factors associated with academic performance has become increasingly important.

Despite sustained efforts to improve educational quality, concerns about students' academic performance persist in many parts of Nigeria, including Delta State. Studies have shown that students' achievement is shaped not only by cognitive abilities but also by factors such as motivation, academic engagement, family background, and the quality of support available within their learning environments (Akorede et al., 2024; Nwanwukwu & Asiyai, 2024). Academic success is therefore not merely a product of intellectual capacity; it is also influenced by the social and emotional conditions under which students learn. As secondary school students navigate the challenges of adolescence, the presence or absence of supportive relationships may significantly affect their

concentration, motivation, persistence, and ultimately their academic outcomes. Understanding these underlying influences is essential for addressing persistent disparities in students' performance.

One family-related factor that has attracted growing scholarly attention is emotional neglect. Emotional neglect refers to a caregiver's persistent failure to provide adequate emotional support, affection, validation, attention, and responsiveness to a child's emotional needs. Unlike physical abuse, emotional neglect is often less visible, yet its developmental consequences can be profound. Children who experience emotional neglect frequently struggle with self-esteem, emotional regulation, social adjustment, and feelings of worthlessness, all of which may interfere with their educational experiences. Research has increasingly emphasized that supportive parent-child relationships contribute positively to academic development, whereas deficiencies in emotional care may hinder students' ability to engage effectively in learning activities and achieve their academic potential (Costa et al., 2024; Nnorom, 2024).

The relationship between emotional neglect and academic performance is particularly relevant among secondary school students, who are at a developmental stage characterized by heightened emotional sensitivity and increasing academic demands. Students who grow up in emotionally neglectful environments may experience reduced motivation, diminished confidence, poor classroom participation, and difficulties forming positive relationships with teachers and peers. These challenges can adversely affect their academic engagement and performance. Although previous studies have examined the influence of family and home-related factors on educational outcomes, empirical evidence specifically addressing emotional neglect and students' academic performance remains limited, particularly within secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District of Delta State. This gap in the literature underscores the need to investigate how emotional neglect relates to students' academic performance in the study area, with a view to providing evidence-based insights for educational and family interventions.

While considerable research has examined the influence of family-related variables on students' academic outcomes, scholarly attention has largely centred on factors such as parental involvement, socioeconomic background, parenting practices, and the general home environment. Consequently, emotional neglect has often been subsumed under broader family dynamics, leaving its unique contribution to students' academic experiences insufficiently explored. This gap is particularly evident within the context of secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District, where empirical evidence on the educational implications of emotional neglect remains scarce. Furthermore, existing findings on the relationship between emotional neglect and academic performance are not entirely consistent, suggesting the need for further investigation. Given that adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by heightened emotional needs and increasing academic expectations, it is important to understand how persistent emotional deprivation may shape students' attitudes toward learning, academic engagement, and educational achievement. Addressing this knowledge gap is essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence students' academic success within the study area.

Notwithstanding ongoing efforts to improve educational outcomes in secondary schools, the emotional realities experienced by many students remain a largely overlooked dimension of academic achievement. A significant number of students may be exposed to environments where emotional support, affection, encouragement, and understanding are inadequate or absent. Such experiences can negatively influence their self-worth, emotional stability, motivation to learn, and capacity to cope with academic challenges. Students who feel emotionally unsupported are often more vulnerable to disengagement from learning activities, reduced classroom participation, poor concentration, irregular school attendance, and declining academic performance. Beyond its immediate effect on examination results, emotional neglect has the potential to impede students' holistic development and diminish their prospects for future educational attainment. The persistence of these challenges raises concerns about the extent to which emotional neglect contributes to the academic performance observed among secondary school students. It is therefore imperative to investigate this phenomenon in order to provide empirical evidence that can guide parents, educators, counsellors, and policymakers in designing interventions aimed at fostering both students' emotional well-being and academic success in secondary schools.

Concept Of Emotional Neglect

Emotional neglect refers to a persistent pattern in which parents, caregivers, or significant adults fail to provide the emotional support, affection, attention, validation, and responsiveness necessary for a child's healthy development. Unlike physical neglect, emotional neglect is often characterized by what is absent rather than what is done, making it less visible but equally detrimental to a child's well-being. Children who grow up in emotionally neglectful environments frequently experience difficulties in recognizing, expressing, and regulating their emotions because their emotional needs are consistently ignored or inadequately addressed. Such experiences can weaken the development of positive self-perceptions, emotional competence, and adaptive coping mechanisms that are essential for successful functioning during adolescence. Recent evidence suggests that parental neglect is associated with deficits in emotional development and emotion-regulation capacities, which are critical for effective adjustment in academic and social contexts (Beyazit et al., 2024).

Within the context of this study, emotional neglect is conceptualized as a family-related condition that may significantly influence students' academic performance in secondary schools. The secondary school years represent a period of increasing academic demands, personal responsibility, and emotional sensitivity, during which students require consistent encouragement, guidance, and emotional support from significant adults. When such support is lacking, students may become vulnerable to reduced motivation, poor concentration, low academic engagement, diminished self-confidence, and difficulties in coping with school-related challenges. These outcomes may ultimately hinder their ability to attain expected educational goals. Evidence from a recent systematic review and meta-analysis further indicates that neglect and other forms of child maltreatment are negatively associated with academic achievement, underscoring the importance of examining emotional neglect as a factor that may contribute to variations in students' academic performance (Liu et al., 2025).

Dimensions Of Emotional Neglect

Lack of Emotional Support

Lack of emotional support refers to a situation in which parents or caregivers fail to provide the empathy, understanding, reassurance, and guidance that children require for healthy emotional and academic development. During adolescence, students frequently encounter academic pressures, social challenges, and emotional changes that necessitate supportive interactions with significant adults. When such support is absent, students may find it difficult to cope effectively with stress, develop resilience, and maintain positive attitudes toward learning. Research has shown that supportive parenting promotes students' learning engagement and academic achievement, whereas inadequate emotional support may weaken students' commitment to educational activities and their ability to perform optimally in school (Fute et al., 2024). Similarly, Çelik (2024) observed that parental support contributes significantly to the satisfaction of adolescents' psychological needs and enhances their academic motivation, which is essential for sustained academic success.

Lack of Parental Affection

Parental affection encompasses the expression of love, warmth, care, and emotional closeness that helps children develop a secure sense of self and belonging. Affectionate relationships between parents and children provide emotional stability and foster confidence, both of which are important for effective learning and academic adjustment. Conversely, when students grow up in environments characterized by limited affection and emotional warmth, they may experience feelings of rejection, loneliness, and insecurity that can negatively affect their motivation and educational aspirations. According to Yang et al. (2024), parental warmth serves as a protective factor that promotes adolescents' academic achievement and psychological well-being. Likewise, Deng and Luo (2024) found that students who perceive higher levels of parental warmth are less likely to experience emotional difficulties that contribute to academic burnout and declining educational performance.

Emotional Unavailability

Emotional unavailability occurs when parents or caregivers are physically present but consistently fail to respond

appropriately to their children's emotional needs, concerns, and experiences. In such situations, students may feel disconnected, misunderstood, or emotionally isolated despite living within a family setting. This lack of emotional responsiveness can undermine the development of trust, emotional security, and healthy coping mechanisms that are crucial during adolescence. Brandão and Simão (2024) noted that emotionally available parents foster stronger emotional connections with their children, thereby promoting healthier developmental outcomes. Similarly, Beyazit et al. (2024) reported that parental neglect is associated with difficulties in emotional regulation, suggesting that emotionally unavailable parenting may hinder adolescents' capacity to manage academic and social challenges effectively.

Lack of Validation and Encouragement

Validation and encouragement involve acknowledging students' feelings, recognizing their efforts, and reinforcing their strengths and accomplishments. These parental behaviors help students develop confidence in their abilities and motivate them to persist when faced with academic difficulties. However, when students' opinions, emotions, and achievements are repeatedly ignored, dismissed, or undervalued, they may begin to doubt their competence and lose interest in academic pursuits. Çelik (2024) emphasized that supportive parental interactions enhance adolescents' motivation and self-regulatory capacities, both of which are fundamental to academic achievement. In addition, Fute et al. (2024) found that positive parental engagement encourages greater learning participation among adolescents, suggesting that the absence of validation and encouragement may contribute to lower academic engagement and poorer educational outcomes.

Causes Of Emotional Neglect

Unlike physical neglect, which involves the failure to provide a child's basic material needs, emotional neglect occurs when parents or caregivers consistently fail to provide the love, attention, encouragement, and emotional responsiveness essential for healthy development. A child may have adequate food, clothing, and shelter yet still experience emotional neglect if their feelings, concerns, and emotional needs are repeatedly ignored. This form of neglect is often linked to parental stress, economic hardship, mental health difficulties, family conflict, or limited parenting skills. According to Mulder et al. (2024), adverse family conditions and parental challenges significantly increase the risk of neglectful parenting behaviors, thereby depriving children of the emotional support necessary for positive developmental and academic outcomes.

Concept Of Academic Performance

Academic performance occupies a central position in the educational process because it serves as a reflection of how effectively students are able to translate learning opportunities into measurable educational outcomes. It is often regarded as an indicator of students' mastery of subject content, acquisition of relevant skills, and capacity to meet established academic expectations. However, contemporary educational research increasingly recognizes that students' performance is shaped by more than intellectual ability alone. Academic success emerges from the interaction of cognitive, social, emotional, and environmental influences that collectively affect students' engagement with learning. Consequently, variations in academic performance are often viewed as outcomes of broader experiences within students' homes, schools, and social environments rather than merely differences in academic capability (Costa et al., 2024).

In recent years, concerns about students' academic performance have intensified as educators and researchers continue to observe disparities in learning outcomes despite improvements in educational resources and instructional practices. Many students struggle to sustain motivation, remain actively engaged in classroom activities, manage academic pressures, and achieve expected levels of success. These challenges suggest that academic performance is closely connected to students' emotional and psychological experiences, particularly during adolescence when developmental demands become more pronounced. Evidence from recent educational research indicates that neglecting students' socio-emotional needs can significantly hinder learning processes and educational attainment, highlighting the importance of examining non-cognitive influences on academic outcomes (Lichand et al., 2024).

Emotional Neglect and Academic Performance

The relationship between emotional neglect and academic performance has been widely recognized within educational research as a significant home-based factor influencing students' learning outcomes. Students who experience emotional neglect often struggle with reduced emotional stability, poor concentration, and limited engagement in classroom activities, all of which negatively affect their academic achievement. In a study conducted in Delta State, it was found that variations in students' academic achievement were significantly influenced by home background factors, including the emotional environment provided by parents, indicating that students from less supportive homes tended to perform poorly compared to their counterparts from emotionally supportive families (Omumu & Egbule, 2022). This suggests that the emotional climate within the home plays a critical role in shaping students' ability to succeed academically.

Furthermore, emotional neglect has been linked to poor academic engagement and reduced motivation among secondary school students. When students do not receive adequate emotional support, encouragement, or attention from caregivers, they are more likely to develop low self-esteem and diminished interest in academic tasks. In addition, emotional neglect contributes to persistent patterns of poor academic performance among secondary school students. Students who lack emotional support at home often experience difficulties adjusting to school demands, maintaining focus, and sustaining motivation over time.

Empirical Reviews On Emotional Neglect And Academic Performance

Chukwu, Tofi, and Achor (2025) examined the influence of child abuse on the academic performance of secondary school students in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of 8,670 students from 21 public secondary schools, while 382 students were selected using Taro Yamane's sampling technique. Data were collected with a structured questionnaire titled Child Abuse and Academic Performance Questionnaire (CAAPQ). Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while chi-square goodness of fit was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that child neglect had a significant influence on students' academic performance. The study is relevant because it shows that lack of care, support, attention to academic needs, and parental involvement can reduce students' motivation, engagement, and performance in school.

Onolemhenmhen and Osunde (2018) examined child neglect as a predictor of academic performance among senior secondary school students in Edo State, Nigeria. The study focused on senior secondary school students, with a sample of 1,505 students selected from 311 schools. The researchers used the Child Neglect Questionnaire and students' academic performance records as instruments. Percentages, mean, standard deviation, and multiple regression were used for data analysis. The findings showed that child neglect significantly influenced students' academic performance, particularly in the area of educational neglect. This study is relevant because it shows that students who lack proper care, attention, and support may find it difficult to perform well in school.

Li, Li, Lei, Yang, and Yu (2022) carried out an international study on psychological abuse, neglect, and academic achievement among children in China. The study involved 249 primary school children. The instruments measured psychological abuse and neglect, learning engagement, family background, and academic achievement. Data were analyzed using moderated mediation analysis. The findings showed that neglect and psychological abuse reduced children's learning engagement, which later affected their academic achievement. This study is relevant because it explains how emotional neglect can quietly reduce students' interest in learning, classroom participation, and academic commitment, thereby leading to poor academic performance.

Research Question

What is the relationship between emotional neglect and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District?

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between emotional neglect and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational research design to examine the relationship between emotional neglect and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District. The population for the study consisted of 15,257 Senior Secondary School Two students in public secondary schools, while a sample of 375 students was selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure involving the selection of local government areas, schools, and students. At the first stage, five local government areas were randomly drawn from the nine local government areas of Delta North Senatorial District, at the second stage, all the names of secondary schools were written and one will be selected for the study. Lastly, in each of the schools, 71 students responded to the instrument. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Emotional Neglect and Academic Performance Questionnaire (ENAPQ). The instrument consisted of section A and B on a four-point rating scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). Section A covers the students' demographic information such as sex, location and class, while section B covers the Emotional Neglect scale adapted from the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) originally developed by Bernstein *et al.*, (2003), with eleven items from Students' academic performance was measured using the students first term 2025/2026 overall results. The instrument was validated by the researcher's supervisor and two experts from the Department of Guidance and Counselling, Measurement and Evaluation Unit for vetting and corrections were made to reflect the views of the respondents. Th reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha and it yielded 0.80 indicating high internal consistency of the instrument. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to answer the research questions and linear regression to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Ethical consideration was emphasized to ensure voluntary participation, informed consent and anonymity of participants.

Presentation Of Results

Research Question: What is the relationship between emotional neglect and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District?

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Coefficient of Determination on emotional neglect and students' academic performance.

Variable	N	r	r ²	r ² %	Decision
Emotional Neglect Academic Performance	375	0.431	0.186	18.6	Positive Relationship

$\alpha = 0.05$

- a. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance
- b. Predictor (constant): Emotional Neglect

The result in table 1, shows the r-value of 0.431 as the extent of relationship between emotional neglect and students' academic performance in secondary schools. The coefficient of determination was 0.186 and the amount of contribution of emotional neglect on academic performance of secondary school students was 18.6%. This indicates a positive relationship.

Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between emotional neglect and students’ academic performance in secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District.

Table 2: Linear regression analysis on emotional neglect and students’ academic performance in secondary schools

Model	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	103.600	1	103.600	0.495	0.02
Residual	78089.733	373	209.356		
Total	78193.333	374			

$\alpha = 0.05, r = 0.431, r\text{-square} = 0.186$

- a. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance
- b. Predictor (Constant): Emotional neglect

Table 2 shows the F-value of 0.495 and a p-value of 0.02. Testing the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of 0.02 was less than alpha level of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This revealed that there was a significant relationship between emotional neglect and students’ academic performance in secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The result in research question 1 showed that there was a low positive relationship between emotional neglect and students’ academic performance. The finding in hypothesis 1 also showed that there was a significant relationship between emotional neglect and students’ academic performance in secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District. This could be because some students who experience emotional neglect often come to school feeling withdrawn, discouraged, and less willing to participate actively in classroom activities and this can largely influence students’ academic performance. This result shows that when students are neglected by parents and adults at home, they become emotionally unstable to focus in their learning activities and this will relate with how they perform in any examination and assessment. This result is anchored on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in 1985. This theory explains how human motivation is influenced by the satisfaction of three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to Deci and Ryan, when these needs are nurtured, individuals engage willingly and meaningfully in tasks, driven by internal interest and satisfaction rather than external pressures. Conversely, when these psychological needs are ignored or undermined, motivation becomes controlled by fear, obligation, or reward, leading to disengagement and diminished performance. In the educational context, SDT emphasizes that students perform best when they feel supported, capable, and emotionally connected to their learning environment (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The theory therefore provides a strong foundation for understanding the emotional and motivational experiences that shape students’ academic outcomes.

FINDING

The summary of the finding is presented below:

There is a significant relationship between emotional neglect and students’ academic performance in secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that emotional neglect had a significant relationship with students’ academic performance in secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District. The finding showed that students’ performance is not

shaped by academic ability alone, but also by the emotional care, encouragement, attention, and support they receive from parents and significant adults. When students feel ignored, rejected, or unsupported, they may become withdrawn, less motivated, and unable to participate actively in learning activities. Therefore, emotionally neglected students tend to perform lower than those from homes that are emotionally warmth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations were made that:

1. Teachers and parents should guide students when they are faced with psychological and emotional challenges by paying attention to their feelings, provide warmth and support to them.
2. Government should establish functional guidance and counselling units in secondary schools to help identify students experiencing emotional neglect, issues in developing interest to learning.

Contributions To Knowledge

The study has contributed to knowledge in the following area:

The study has reaffirmed that emotional neglect has an influence on students' academic performance in secondary schools in Delta North Senatorial District.

Limitations Of The Study

This study is limited in scope; it cannot be used for generalization in other senatorial districts in the state or Nigeria at large. It also failed to consider other variables that could influence students' academic performance.

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