



EDUCATIONAL POLICY RESPONSES TO POOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN ARTISANAL OIL REFINING COMMUNITIES OF SOUTHERN IJAW LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIAⁱ

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Abstract:

The study examined educational policy responses to poor attendance in artisanal oil-refining communities of Southern Ijaw Local Government Area, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The objective was to examine educational policy to address poor school attendance among secondary school students in oil-refining communities in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, one of Nigeria's 36 states. The study had five 5 objectives, research questions, and research hypotheses. The methodology employed is a descriptive survey design; the study population is 2,815, with a sample size of 350 respondents. The questionnaire instrument, titled Educational Policy Response and School Attendance Questionnaire [EPRSAQ], was adopted; it has 35 items and a reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating consistency. The findings showed that poverty, artisanal oil-refining, environmental pollution, economic hardship, and inadequate educational incentives were perceived as important factors associated with poor school attendance, with a grand mean of 3.49. While artisanal refining [$r = -0.021$, $p = .734$] and socio-economic factors [$r = -0.063$, $p = .309$] were not significantly related to attendance, with indicators of findings reflecting strong perceptions rather than statistically established effects, the study concludes that poor school attendance is perceived as associated with and linked to poverty, economic hardship, insecurity, environmental pollution, artisanal refining, and inadequate educational incentives in Bayelsa State. The study made five recommendations, which include, among others: improve government

ⁱ RÉPONSES DES POLITIQUES ÉDUCATIVES À LA FAIBLE FRÉQUENTATION SCOLAIRE DANS LES COMMUNAUTÉS DE RAFFINAGE ARTISANAL DU PÉTROLE DE LA ZONE DE GOUVERNEMENT LOCAL DE SOUTHERN IJAW, ÉTAT DE BAYELSA, NIGÉRIA

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intervention and monitoring through stronger implementation, targeting, and accountability.

Keywords: school attendance; artisanal oil-refining; educational policy; socio-economic factors; school feeding; Southern Ijaw; Bayelsa State

Résumé :

Cette étude a examiné les réponses des politiques éducatives face à la faible fréquentation scolaire dans les communautés de raffinage artisanal de pétrole de la zone de gouvernement local de Southern Ijaw, dans l'État de Bayelsa, au Nigéria. L'étude a adopté une méthode d'enquête descriptive, avec une population de 2 815 personnes et un échantillon de 350 répondants comprenant des directeurs, des enseignants et des élèves. Les données ont été recueillies au moyen du *l'Educational Policy Response and School Attendance Questionnaire* (EPRSAQ), composé de 35 items et présentant un coefficient global de fiabilité de 0,82. Les résultats indiquent que la pauvreté, les difficultés économiques, le raffinage artisanal du pétrole, la pollution environnementale, l'insécurité et l'insuffisance des mesures d'incitation à l'éducation sont perçus comme des facteurs importants associés à la faible fréquentation scolaire. Les programmes d'alimentation scolaire, les interventions gouvernementales, les campagnes de sensibilisation, les services de conseil et les bourses d'études sont perçus comme des réponses politiques potentiellement efficaces. Bien que le raffinage artisanal et les facteurs socio-économiques n'aient pas présenté de relations statistiquement significatives avec la fréquentation scolaire, la mesure composite des politiques éducatives existantes a montré une relation significative mais modeste avec la fréquentation scolaire ($r = 0,135$, $p = 0,027$). L'étude recommande de renforcer la mise en œuvre, le ciblage, le suivi et la responsabilisation de la mise en œuvre des interventions éducatives au sein des communautés concernées.

Mots-clés : fréquentation scolaire ; raffinage artisanal du pétrole ; politique éducative ; facteurs socio-économiques ; alimentation scolaire ; Southern Ijaw ; État de Bayelsa

1. Introduction

Education is central to human capital development, poverty reduction, social mobility, and national development. However, regular school attendance supports effective learning, academic achievement, and skills acquisition. Despite policy interventions such as Universal Basic Education (UBE), school feeding, and free education, poor attendance remains a challenge in Nigeria (Hattori, 2014; National Population Commission & Federal Ministry of Education, 2015). Factors such as poverty, parental education, household wealth, location, insecurity, infrastructure, and other socio-economic and institutional conditions influence school attendance (Shehu, 2018; Hattori, 2014; Ndanusa *et al.*, 2021). Significantly, children from poor and rural households are more vulnerable. Notably, family difficulties, child labour, poverty, and poor parental supervision

contribute to absenteeism (National Population Commission & Federal Ministry of Education, 2015; Miya *et al.*, 2023).

These issues are pervasive in the Niger Delta. Although the region is blessed with enormous oil and gas wealth, poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, and weak infrastructure persist. These have contributed to artisanal oil-refining, defined as the illegal processing of crude oil through rudimentary methods outside established regulatory frameworks (Okoli & Orinya, 2018). Its expansion in Bayelsa State, including Southern Ijaw Local Government Area, is associated with unemployment, economic deprivation, and perceived exclusion from oil benefits (Mezie-Okoye, 2022).

Although artisanal refining provides temporary income, it is also associated with environmental, social, economic, educational, and security problems. It is also associated with declining school enrolment and attendance, increased criminality, and weakened human capital development (Godbless, 2024), as well as livelihood disruption and environmental degradation (Afowowe *et al.*, 2025). Soil, water, and air pollution further expose communities to health risks and reduce quality of life (Diagi *et al.*, 2025; Eli *et al.*, 2025). Financial incentives may also encourage adolescents to prioritise immediate income over schooling, while insecurity, household pressures, pollution, and livelihood disruption further constrain educational participation (Godbless, 2024; Ndanusa *et al.*, 2021).

Mitigating poor attendance requires integrated policies that combine educational subsidies, poverty reduction, household support, conditional cash transfers, school feeding, effective policy implementation, and community-based initiatives (Hattori, 2014; Ndanusa *et al.*, 2021). Improved access to quality education in rural and disadvantaged communities is also important (Obiakor, 2025). However, empirical evidence on the effects of artisanal refining on secondary school attendance and appropriate policy responses in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area remains limited. This study therefore examines educational policy responses for mitigating poor school attendance among secondary school students in these communities.

2. Statement of the Problem

Poor school attendance among secondary school students in artisanal oil-refining communities of Southern Ijaw Local Government Area has drawn attention. Poverty, environmental degradation, insecurity, household economic pressures, and participation in informal refining disrupt regular school attendance. The proliferation of refining camps exposes students to polluted environments and livelihood disruptions, while immediate financial opportunities may attract adolescents away from schooling, contributing to absenteeism, poor academic performance, examination failure, and dropout.

Despite free secondary education and educational awareness programmes, poor attendance persists in many riverine communities, suggesting that existing interventions may not adequately address the socio-economic and environmental realities of artisanal

oil-refining communities. Moreover, empirical attention to practical educational policy responses to this problem remains limited. This study therefore examines educational policy responses to mitigate poor school attendance among secondary school students in artisanal oil-refining communities in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

The key objective of this study is to examine educational policy responses to address poor school attendance among secondary school students in artisanal oil-refining communities in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- 1) Examine why there is poor school attendance among secondary school students in artisanal oil-refining communities.
- 2) Determine the influence of artisanal oil-refining activities on students' school attendance.
- 3) Identify the social and economic factors that contribute to absenteeism among students in affected communities.
- 4) Examine existing educational policy actions geared towards improving school attendance in the study area.
- 5) Determine appropriate educational policy responses capable of mitigating poor school attendance among students in artisanal oil-refining communities.

2.2 Research Questions

- 1) What are the key factors contributing to poor school attendance among secondary school students in artisanal oil-refining communities in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area?
- 2) What is the extent of artisanal oil-refining's influence on students' school attendance?
- 3) What are the social and economic factors that contribute to absenteeism among secondary school students in affected communities?
- 4) What educational policies currently exist to improve school attendance in the study area?
- 5) What educational policies are considered effective in mitigating poor school attendance among students in artisanal oil-refining communities?

2.3 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study:

- **H01:** There is no significant relationship between artisanal oil-refining activities and poor school attendance among secondary school students in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area.
- **H02:** Socio-economic factors do not significantly influence school attendance among secondary school students in artisanal oil-refining communities.

- **H03:** Existing educational policy measures do not significantly affect students' school attendance in artisanal oil-refining communities.
- **H04:** There is no significant difference in the perceptions of principals, teachers, and students regarding educational policy responses required to mitigate poor school attendance.
- **H05:** Educational policy interventions do not significantly predict improvement in school attendance among secondary school students in artisanal oil-refining communities.

3. Determinants of School Attendance in Nigeria and Policy Responses: Empirical Review

The literature shows that school attendance in Nigeria is shaped by the interaction of socio-economic, demographic, institutional, and geographic factors. Poverty, parental education, household conditions, gender, location, infrastructure, insecurity, and policy effectiveness are particularly important. Shehu (2018) found that parental education and household wealth increase attendance, while poverty and low parental education promote non-attendance. Similarly, Hattori (2014) has identified poverty, parental education levels, income, rural residence, and gender as major determinants. In like manner, Miya *et al.* (2023) identify family instability, child labour, illness, peer influence, and inadequate parental supervision as factors that contribute to absenteeism and poor academic outcomes (Miya *et al.*, 2023).

Furthermore, regional and structural inequalities reinforce these challenges. According to the National Population Commission and the Federal Ministry of Education (2015), almost 60% of children aged 6–16 from the poorest households had never attended school, with attendance substantially lower in northern Nigeria than in the South (National Population Commission & Federal Ministry of Education, 2015). Gender and rural–urban disparities, delayed school entry, and over-age enrolment also constrain attendance (National Population Commission, 2008).

Similarly, insecurity, armed conflict, child labour, early marriage, poor infrastructure, and weak policy implementation intensify educational exclusion (Ndanusa *et al.*, 2021). In addition to these are household income, socio-economic status of parents, religion, ethnicity, and location, which influence educational access (Obiakor, 2025). These findings indicate that improving attendance requires policies that address both household deprivation and structural barriers.

Policies such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE), the Almajiri education programme, school feeding, conditional cash transfers, educational subsidies, and social protection have expanded access but remain constrained by inadequate funding, weak implementation, poor coordination, and limited monitoring (Hattori, 2014; Ndanusa *et al.*, 2021). Also important in the reduction of regional disparities are infrastructure, teacher deployment, and learning resources (National Population Commission & Federal Ministry of Education, 2015), while parental engagement, school-community

partnerships, guidance and counselling, and improved education quality can address household and school-level barriers (Miya *et al.*, 2023; Obiakor, 2025). Sustainable improvement therefore requires integrated poverty reduction, equitable resource allocation, accountability, and community participation.

These issues are particularly applicable in Niger Delta communities where artisanal oil-refining creates additional economic, environmental, and social pressures. Although it provides short-term income, refining causes soil, water, and air pollution, biodiversity loss, reduced agricultural and fishing productivity, and health risks (Diagi *et al.*, 2025; Eli *et al.*, 2025; Oladoyin *et al.*, 2024). It is also associated with declining school enrolment and attendance, weakened human capital development, oil theft, and pipeline vandalism (Godbless, 2024). Environmental devastation arising from artisanal refining disrupts indigenous cultural, economic and religious practices (John & Nnadozie, 2021); just as competition for refining sites contributes to organised crime, communal conflict, youth violence, and weakened local governance (Niger Delta Partnership Initiatives, 2022; Ottih *et al.*, 2023), and exacerbates poverty, unemployment, and perceived marginalisation, which continue to sustain participation (Mezie-Okoye, 2022).

Artisanal oil-refining is thus characterised by a development paradox in which short-term economic benefits are outweighed by environmental degradation, livelihood disruption, insecurity, reduced investment, and worsening socio-economic conditions (Afowowe *et al.*, 2025; Abu, 2025). Although existing studies have examined its environmental, economic, health, and security consequences, they have paid limited attention to its effects on secondary school attendance and educational policy responses.

Investigating this gap is important in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, where the relationship among refining activities, household pressures, environmental conditions, and school participation requires further empirical studies.

4. Methodology

The methodology employed the descriptive survey design to obtain quantitative data, thereby permitting generalisation to the study population. The study was conducted in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, a predominantly riverine area characterised by oil exploration, environmental degradation, poverty, youth unemployment, infrastructural deficits, difficult terrain, and widespread artisanal oil refining. Nigeria is a federation of 36 states, including Bayelsa State.

The population comprised 2,815 respondents from public secondary schools in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area: 30 principals, 315 teachers, and 2,480 senior secondary school students, as recorded by the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education and Post-Primary Schools Board. A sample of 350 respondents comprising 30 principals, 90 teachers, and 230 students was selected through multistage sampling. Schools were purposively selected, and respondents were stratified into principals, teachers, and students; teachers and students were then selected through simple random balloting. All principals in selected schools were included.

Data were collected using the researcher-developed Educational Policy Responses and School Attendance Questionnaire (EPRSAQ). The instrument contained demographic information and 35 items across five clusters covering causes of poor attendance, artisanal refining influence, socio-economic factors, existing policy measures, and appropriate policy responses. The items were rated on a four-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1).

Experts selected from the fields of Educational Administration and Planning and Measurement and Evaluation helped validate the instrument. A pilot study involving 30 respondents from comparable communities produced Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.78 to 0.86. An overall reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating adequate internal consistency, was obtained.

Following departmental and school approval, questionnaires were administered. This was preceded by obtaining consent and assuring confidentiality. Data were coded and analysed using SPSS Version 27. Mean and standard deviation addressed Objectives 1–5; Pearson Product-Moment Correlation tested H01–H03; One-Way ANOVA tested H04; and Multiple Regression tested H05. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted, with means ≥ 2.50 accepted and those < 2.50 rejected. Hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 significance level.

The operational model was based on the assumption that school attendance is influenced by artisanal refining activities, socio-economic factors, environmental and security challenges, and educational policy interventions, expressed as: School Attendance = f (Artisanal Refining Activities, Socio-economic Factors, Existing Educational Policies, Policy Interventions).

5. Results and Findings

5.1 Results

5.1.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of the respondents by gender, status, years of experience and class level. Female respondents were in the majority (165, 61.8%), while male respondents numbered 102 (38.2%). In terms of status, 180 (67.4%) of the 267 respondents were students, 59 (22.1%) were teachers, and 28 (10.5%) were principals; this was intentional, as these groups are most directly affected by the attendance issue under examination.

The number of years of experience was fairly evenly distributed, with 108 respondents (40.4%) having 1–5 years, 86 (32.2%) having 6–10 years, and 73 (27.3%) having 11 or more years; no experience band was clearly dominant, although newer entrants were slightly overrepresented. The distribution of students by class level was 72 (40.0%) in SS1, 69 (38.3%) in SS2 and 39 (21.7%) in SS3 (Junior and Middle Secondary), which shows that SS1 and SS2 enrolments were considerably higher than SS3.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable / Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	102	38.2
Female	165	61.8
Status		
Principal	28	10.5
Teacher	59	22.1
Student	180	67.4
Years of Experience		
1-5 years	108	40.4
6-10 years	86	32.2
11 years and above	73	27.3
Class Level (Students only, n=180)		
SS1	72	40.0
SS2	69	38.3
SS3	39	21.7

5.1.2 Causes of Poor School Attendance

Table 2 presents the mean ratings of the respondents on the causes of poor school attendance among secondary school students in the artisanal oil-refining communities. On the role of poverty as a contributor to poor attendance, the response was fairly one-sided, with 9 (3.4%) strongly disagreeing, 22 (8.2%) disagreeing, 110 (41.2%) agreeing, and 126 (47.2%) strongly agreeing, giving a mean of 3.32 (SD=0.77). The item was accepted with little difficulty, as combined agreement stood at 88.4%.

Table 2: Mean ratings on the causes of poor school attendance

Item	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	SD	Decision
Poverty contributes to poor school attendance among students	9 (3.4%)	22 (8.2%)	110 (41.2%)	126 (47.2%)	3.32	0.77	Accepted
Artisanal oil-refining activities affect students' commitment to schooling	11 (4.1%)	31 (11.6%)	62 (23.2%)	163 (61.0%)	3.41	0.85	Accepted
Environmental pollution discourages regular school attendance	5 (1.9%)	40 (15.0%)	99 (37.1%)	123 (46.1%)	3.27	0.78	Accepted
Students are drawn to illegal refining activities due to economic hardship	2 (0.8%)	10 (3.8%)	31 (11.7%)	223 (83.8%)	3.79	0.54	Accepted
Insecurity in refining communities affects school attendance	3 (1.1%)	15 (5.6%)	27 (10.1%)	222 (83.1%)	3.75	0.61	Accepted
Lack of educational incentives contributes to absenteeism	9 (3.4%)	52 (19.5%)	24 (9.0%)	182 (68.2%)	3.42	0.92	Accepted

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

The item on artisanal oil-refining activities affecting students' commitment to schooling followed a similar pattern and recorded a strong mean of 3.41 (SD=0.85) and total

agreement of 84.3% (4.1% strongly disagreed, 11.6% disagreed, 23.2% agreed, and a clear majority of 61.0% strongly agreed).

Environmental pollution was the most disputed among the six causes. It recorded the highest combined disagreement (1.9% strongly disagreeing and 15.0% disagreeing, totaling 16.9%), leaving 83.2% combined agreement, with a mean of 3.27 (SD=0.78).

In contrast, few respondents objected to the notion that economic hardship leads students to engage in illegal refining activities. Only 0.8% strongly disagreed, and 3.8% disagreed, while 11.7% agreed and an overwhelming 83.8% strongly agreed; this was the highest mean of the six causes at 3.79 (SD=0.54), and also the tightest spread of responses, indicating near-unanimous acceptance.

Also, insecurity in refining communities ranked second, with 1.1% strongly disagreeing, 5.6% disagreeing, 10.1% agreeing, and 83.1% strongly agreeing (mean=3.75, SD=0.61). Combined disagreement was even lower here, at 6.7%, indicating wide agreement.

The same was true for the lack of educational incentives item. The mean was 3.42, with strong disagreement at 3.4% and disagreement at 19.5% (combined 22.9%, well above most of the other causal items), agreement at 9.0% and strong agreement at 68.2%, and the widest standard deviation (0.92) of the six items. Nonetheless, overall acceptance stood at 77.2%, and the item was accepted.

All six items met the 2.50 criterion mean, and the grand mean of 3.49 indicates that poverty, artisanal oil-refining, environmental pollution, economic hardship, insecurity and lack of educational incentives are accepted factors that affect school attendance in the study area, although there was less consensus on the latter two factors.

5.1.3 Extent of Influence of Artisanal Oil-Refining Activities on School Attendance

The three items most directly related to artisanal oil-refining activities are isolated for the hypothesis test in Section 7 and are presented in Table 3. The commitment-to-schooling item received 4.1% strong disagreement, 11.6% disagreement, 23.2% agreement and 61.0% strong agreement (mean=3.41, SD=0.85), for 84.3% combined agreement. The pollution item was less decisive, with 1.9%, 15.0%, 37.1%, and 46.1% for disagreement, neutral, agreement, and strong agreement, respectively (mean=3.27, SD=0.78), with the lowest agreement share of the three at 83.2%. Insecurity generated the highest level of consensus: 1.1% and 5.6% disagreement, and 83.1% agreement (mean=3.75, SD=0.61), for a total of 93.2%.

Combined, these three items yield a grand mean of 3.48, well above the 2.50 threshold, indicating that artisanal oil-refining activities have a considerable impact on school attendance in the study communities, primarily through disruptions to commitment to school, pollution-related discomfort, and insecurity risks.

Table 3: Influence of Artisanal Oil-Refining Activities on School Attendance

Item	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	SD	Decision
Artisanal oil refining activities affect students' commitment to schooling	11 (4.1%)	31 (11.6%)	62 (23.2%)	163 (61.0%)	3.41	0.85	Accepted
Environmental pollution discourages regular school attendance	5 (1.9%)	40 (15.0%)	99 (37.1%)	123 (46.1%)	3.27	0.78	Accepted
Insecurity in refining communities affects school attendance	3 (1.1%)	15 (5.6%)	27 (10.1%)	222 (83.1%)	3.75	0.61	Accepted

5.1.4 Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to Absenteeism

Table 4 shows the three socio-economic items used as independent-variable indicators for the hypothesis test in Section 4.8. Poverty again showed the 3.4% / 8.2% / 41.2% / 47.2% split reported earlier (mean = 3.32, SD = 0.77; 88.4% combined agreement). Illegal refining work was most strongly endorsed by students, with only 0.8% and 3.8% disagreeing and 11.7% and 83.8% agreeing (mean=3.79, SD=0.54; combined agreement of 95.5%); both the highest mean and the lowest standard deviation of the three socio-economic items.

Table 4: Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to Absenteeism

Item	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	SD	Decision
Poverty contributes to poor school attendance among students	9 (3.4%)	22 (8.2%)	110 (41.2%)	126 (47.2%)	3.32	0.77	Accepted
Students are drawn to illegal refining activities due to economic hardship	2 (0.8%)	10 (3.8%)	31 (11.7%)	223 (83.8%)	3.79	0.54	Accepted
Lack of educational incentives contributes to absenteeism	9 (3.4%)	52 (19.5%)	24 (9.0%)	182 (68.2%)	3.42	0.92	Accepted

Lack of educational incentives, at 3.4%, 19.5%, 9.0% and 68.2%, showed the greatest dispersion of the three (SD=0.92) and the lowest combined agreement (77.2%). The respondents were clearly in agreement that poverty, economic hardship and lack of incentives are socio-economic factors that contribute to absenteeism, with a grand mean of 3.51 across the three items.

5.1.5 Educational Policy Measures and Their Perceived Effectiveness

Table 5 presents the six policy-related items that serve as the independent-variable indicators for the hypothesis tests in Sections 9 and 10. School feeding programmes came out on top, with 3.4% strongly disagreeing and 3.7% disagreeing, well below the 29.6% who agreed and 63.3% who strongly agreed — giving an item mean of 3.53 (SD=0.73) and 7.1% combined disagreement.

The distribution of responses to the scholarship schemes was similar: 3.7%, 4.9%, 42.3% and 49.1%, with a mean of 3.37 (SD=0.75) and 91.4% combined agreement, although more respondents answered 'Agree' than 'Strongly Agree' compared with the feeding-programme item.

Table 5: Educational Policy Measures and Their Perceived Effectiveness

Item	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	SD	Decision
School feeding programmes can improve students' attendance	9 (3.4%)	10 (3.7%)	79 (29.6%)	169 (63.3%)	3.53	0.73	Accepted
Scholarship schemes can reduce school absenteeism	10 (3.7%)	13 (4.9%)	113 (42.3%)	131 (49.1%)	3.37	0.75	Accepted
Community participation can improve students' school attendance	4 (1.5%)	21 (7.9%)	126 (47.2%)	116 (43.4%)	3.33	0.68	Accepted
Counselling services can reduce student absenteeism	5 (1.9%)	12 (4.5%)	127 (47.6%)	123 (46.1%)	3.38	0.66	Accepted
Educational awareness campaigns can improve parental support for education	18 (6.8%)	22 (8.3%)	63 (23.7%)	163 (61.3%)	3.39	0.90	Accepted
Government intervention programmes can improve school attendance in artisanal refining communities	8 (3.0%)	11 (4.1%)	90 (33.7%)	158 (59.2%)	3.49	0.72	Accepted

The lowest mean of the six policy items was for community participation (3.33, SD=0.68), which comprised 1.5% strongly disagreeing, 7.9% disagreeing, 47.2% agreeing, and 43.4% strongly agreeing. It should be noted that this remains a high score relative to the criterion mean, and the combined agreement of 90.6% is not much different from that of the top-ranked items; the respondents simply did not agree as strongly.

Views on counselling services were more tightly clustered than those on any other policy item (SD=0.66), with 1.9%, 47.6%, 46.1% and 4.5% across the four categories and a mean of 3.38, indicating that opinions on this policy were more consistent among respondents.

Educational awareness campaigns divided opinion more than any other policy item, with 6.8% strongly disagreeing and 8.3% disagreeing, a combined 15.1% that set it apart from the rest, while 23.7% agreed and 61.3% strongly agreed (mean=3.39, SD=0.90). Despite this wider spread, agreement still prevailed, at 84.9% overall.

Government intervention programmes produced the second-highest mean (3.49, SD=0.72), with 3.0% strong disagreement, 4.1% disagreement, 33.7% agreement, 59.2% strong agreement, and 7.1% combined disagreement, equal to the feeding-programme item.

All six policy items scored above 2.50. Table 6 presents them in rank order by mean score to highlight those respondents found most promising. Respondents endorsed school feeding programmes and government intervention programmes most, while educational awareness programmes, counselling programmes, and scholarship programmes ranked in the middle, and community participation was the least accepted, though still not rejected.

Table 6: Ranked mean score of measures respondents consider most promising

Policy Response	Mean	Rank
School feeding programmes can improve students' attendance	3.53	1st
Government intervention programmes can improve school attendance	3.49	2nd
Educational awareness campaigns can improve parental support for education	3.39	3rd
Counselling services can reduce student absenteeism	3.38	4th
Scholarship schemes can reduce school absenteeism	3.37	5th
Community participation can improve students' school attendance	3.33	6th

5.1.6 Artisanal Oil-Refining Activities and School Attendance

The hypothesis in this study is that there is no significant relationship between artisanal oil-refining activities and poor school attendance among secondary school students in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area. For testing, three indicators (artisanal oil-refining activities, environmental pollution and insecurity in refining communities) were used as independent variables, while the remaining causal variables (poverty, economic hardship and lack of educational incentives) were used as dependent variables.

Table 7: Correlations between Oil-Refining and School Attendance

Indicator of Artisanal Oil-Refining Activities	N	r	p-value
Artisanal oil refining activities affect students' commitment to schooling	267	-0.025	0.680
Environmental pollution discourages regular school attendance	267	-0.078	0.201
Insecurity in refining communities affects school attendance	267	0.006	0.928
Composite: Artisanal oil-refining activities vs. School attendance	267	-0.021	0.734

The item-level correlations are provided in Table 7 before turning to the composite. All three indicators are too weak to be considered significant individually, and the combined indicator is likewise non-significant: $r=-0.021$, $p=0.734$, a relationship that is effectively flat. The p-value is greater than 0.05, so there is no reason to reject the null hypothesis; therefore, whatever the respondents may report about the influence of artisanal oil refining activities on poor school attendance, there is no statistical evidence of a relationship.

5.1.7 Socio-Economic Factors and School Attendance

The null hypothesis here is that socio-economic factors have no significant influence on the school attendance of secondary school students in artisanal oil-refining communities. The independent variables are poverty, economic hardship and lack of educational incentives, while the remaining causal items - artisanal oil-refining, environmental pollution and insecurity - are the dependent variables. The item-level and composite correlations are presented in Table 8. The closest meaningful association is with economic hardship ($r=-0.109$, $p=0.077$), just outside the conventional bounds of significance, but poverty and lack of educational incentives are much less closely associated.

Table 8: Relationship between Socio-Economic Factors and School Attendance

Indicator of Socio-Economic Factors	N	r	p-value
Poverty contributes to poor school attendance among students	267	-0.049	0.427
Students are drawn to illegal refining activities due to economic hardship	266	-0.109	0.077
Lack of educational incentives contributes to absenteeism	267	0.009	0.878
Composite: Socio-economic factors vs. School attendance	267	-0.063	0.309

The composite correlation is -0.063 ($p=0.309$). The null hypothesis is therefore retained: socio-economic factors, as captured by this instrument, do not significantly influence school attendance in the study area.

5.1.8 Existing Educational Policy Measures and School Attendance

In this case, the hypothesis is that current educational policy measures have no significant effect on students' school attendance in artisanal oil-refining communities. The six policy items constitute the independent variable, while the complete set of causal attendance indicators (which do not overlap with the policy items) constitutes the dependent variable. The relationships are itemised and then presented in Table 9. None of the six policy indicators is significant on its own, but both school feeding programmes and government intervention programmes are close to the 0.05 line ($p=0.074$ and $p=0.075$).

Table 9: Effect of Existing Educational Policy Measures and School Attendance

Indicator of Educational Policy Measures	N	r	p-value
School feeding programmes can improve students' attendance	267	0.109	0.074
Scholarship schemes can reduce school absenteeism	267	0.024	0.691
Community participation can improve students' school attendance	267	0.080	0.193
Counselling services can reduce student absenteeism	267	0.094	0.127
Educational awareness campaigns can improve parental support for education	266	-0.041	0.505
Government intervention programmes can improve school attendance	267	0.109	0.075
Composite: Educational policy measures vs. School attendance	266	0.135	0.027

Interestingly, when the six items are combined into a single composite, the relationship becomes significant: $r = 0.135$, $p = 0.027$. This suggests that the relationship with attendance is more likely driven by the combination of multiple policy measures than by any single measure. On that basis, the null hypothesis is rejected: existing educational policy measures do significantly affect school attendance in artisanal oil-refining communities, even though the effect, at $r=0.135$, is modest.

5.1.9 Perception of Educational Policy Responses by Respondent Status

This hypothesis is predicated on the assumption that there is no significant difference between principals, teachers and students in their perceptions of the educational policy responses required to improve attendance. One-way ANOVA was used to compare the results across the six policy indicators in Section 6, by respondent status, as presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Perception of Educational Policy Responses by Respondent Status

Status	N	Mean	SD	F-value	p-value
Principal	28	3.42	0.29	0.012	0.988
Teacher	59	3.42	0.33		
Student	180	3.41	0.32		

The three groups are very close to one another: principals and teachers both average 3.42, while students average 3.41. The ANOVA reflects this, with $F(2,264) = 0.012$, $p = 0.988$. This provides no grounds for rejection: the null hypothesis is retained, and respondent status appears to have little or no impact on perceptions of educational policy responses.

5.1.10 Prediction of School Attendance by Educational Policy Interventions

The last hypothesis in this cluster is that educational policy interventions do not significantly predict improved school attendance among secondary school students in artisanal oil-refining communities. A multiple regression was used to test whether the six policy items predicted the full set of causal attendance indicators. Table 11 presents the model summary, and Table 12 presents the individual predictor coefficients. Taken as a block, the six predictors account for only 3.6% of the variance in school attendance ($R^2 = 0.036$), and the overall model is not significant, $F(6, 259) = 1.604$, $p = 0.146$.

Table 11: Prediction of School Attendance by Educational Policy Interventions

Model Summary	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	F (p-value)
Policy interventions → School attendance	0.190	0.036	0.013	1.604 (0.146)

Predictor	Beta (B)	Std. Error	t	p-value
School feeding programmes	0.042	0.025	1.664	0.097
Scholarship schemes	0.006	0.025	0.224	0.823
Community participation	0.033	0.027	1.206	0.229
Counselling services	0.035	0.028	1.263	0.208
Educational awareness campaigns	-0.014	0.020	-0.703	0.483
Government intervention programmes	0.042	0.026	1.613	0.108

None of the six interventions individually reaches significance at the 0.05 level, although school feeding programmes ($p=0.097$) and government intervention programmes ($p=0.108$) come closest. As the overall model is not significant, the null hypothesis is retained: educational policy interventions, at least as measured here, do not significantly predict changes in school attendance.

5.1.11 Gender and School Attendance (Independent Samples t-test)

The average score of the female respondents was significantly higher than that of the male respondents ($M=3.53$, $SD=0.31$ vs. $M=3.44$, $SD=0.28$; $t(265) = -2.186$, $p=0.030$). Because this is below 0.05, gender appears to be a factor here: in the sample, women were slightly more likely than men to agree with the stated causes of poor school attendance.

Table 12: Gender and School Attendance (Independent Samples t-test)

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Male	102	3.44	0.28	-2.186	0.030
Female	165	3.53	0.31		

5.1.12 Socio-Demographic Characteristics and School Attendance

In addition to the main hypotheses, the question is whether respondents' backgrounds influence their perception of the attendance issue. We tested each causal attendance indicator in Table 2 separately against gender, status, years of experience, and class level. Table 12 presents the results of the independent-samples t-test for gender. One-way ANOVA was used to test status, years of experience and class level (the latter only for students), and these are presented together in Table 13, rather than in separate tables.

5.1.13 Status, Years of Experience, and Class Level vs. School Attendance (One-Way ANOVA)

Status proved unimportant: principals averaged 3.48, teachers 3.51, and students 3.49, and the differences were not significant in the ANOVA, $F(2,264) = 0.133$, $p = 0.876$. Years of experience showed the same pattern. The mean scores were 3.50 for those with 1–5 years of experience, 3.48 for 6–10 years, and 3.49 for 11 years or more, a difference of no more than 0.10; the difference between the groups is not statistically significant ($F(2,264) = 0.150$, $p = 0.861$). Class level showed a genuine difference, although it was examined only among the 180 student respondents, with SS1 students averaging 3.53, SS2 students 3.43, and SS3 students 3.53, $F(2,177) = 2.254$, $p = 0.108$. It should be noted that a small number of principal and teacher records in the data set also carried a class-level code, even though the questionnaire item was intended for students only; these were excluded here to keep the comparison within the scope of the question.

**Table 13: Status, Years of Experience, and
Class Level vs. School Attendance (One-Way ANOVA)**

Class Level vs. School Attendance (One-Way ANOVA)					
Category	N	Mean	SD	F-value	p-value
Status					
Principal	28	3.48	0.28	0.133	0.876
Teacher	59	3.51	0.33		
Student	180	3.49	0.30		
Years of Experience					
1-5 years	108	3.50	0.27	0.150	0.861
6-10 years	86	3.48	0.32		
11 years and above	73	3.49	0.33		
Class Level (Students only, n=180)					
SS1	72	3.53	0.29	2.254	0.108
SS2	69	3.43	0.32		
SS3	39	3.53	0.26		

Across these four comparisons, gender is the only background variable found to have a statistically measurable impact on views of school attendance. Status, experience and class level do not, which suggests a relatively uniform grasp of the problem among the various groups sampled.

5.2 Findings and Discussion of Findings

Based on 267 valid responses, the study found that poverty, artisanal oil-refining, environmental pollution, economic hardship, insecurity and inadequate educational incentives were perceived as important factors associated with poor school attendance, with a grand mean of 3.49. Economic hardship linked to illegal refining ($M = 3.79$) and insecurity ($M = 3.75$) ranked highest. These findings are consistent with Hattori (2014), Shehu (2018), Miya *et al.* (2023) and Ndanusa *et al.* (2021), who identified socio-economic and household conditions as important educational barriers and with Mezie-Okoye (2022) and Godbless (2024) on poverty, unemployment and artisanal refining.

Significantly, however, artisanal refining ($r = -0.021$, $p = .734$) and socio-economic factors ($r = -0.063$, $p = .309$) were not significantly related to attendance, indicating that these findings reflect strong perceptions rather than statistically established effects.

All six educational policy measures were positively rated, with school feeding recording the highest mean ($M = 3.53$). Although individual measures were not significant, their combined relationship with attendance was significant ($r = .135$, $p = .027$), supporting the findings of Hattori (2014) and Ndanusa *et al.* (2021) regarding integrated interventions. Nevertheless, the six interventions explained only 3.6% of the variance in attendance and were not significant predictors ($p = .146$), indicating limited predictive effectiveness.

Also, Principals, teachers and students had similar perceptions of appropriate policy responses ($p = .988$), supporting collaborative approaches advocated by Miya *et al.* (2023) and Obiakor (2025). Gender significantly influenced perceptions ($p = .030$), consistent with Hattori (2014) and National Population Commission (2008), whereas status, experience and class level were not significant. The gender result reflects differences in perceptions, not necessarily differences in actual attendance.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that poor school attendance is perceived as associated with poverty, economic hardship, insecurity, environmental pollution, artisanal refining, and inadequate educational incentives. However, artisanal refining and socio-economic factors showed no significant relationships with attendance. Although individual policy measures were not significant, their combined effect was significant, emphasising the value of integrated interventions. Nevertheless, policy interventions did not significantly predict improvements in attendance. Effective improvement, therefore, requires coordinated, realistic policies involving school feeding, government intervention, counselling, scholarships, awareness, and community participation. Similar perceptions

among stakeholders support collaborative interventions, with attention to gender differences.

6.1 Recommendations

- 1) Based on the findings, the study suggests the following policy interventions: 1. Strengthen school feeding programmes where poverty and economic hardship constrain attendance.
- 2) Adopt integrated educational interventions combining feeding, scholarships, counselling, awareness, government support and community participation.
- 3) Improve government intervention and monitoring through stronger implementation, targeting and accountability.
- 4) Promote community-based educational support through parental engagement, school-community partnerships and awareness initiatives.
- 5) Integrate education policies with socio-economic, environmental and security interventions to address poverty, environmental degradation, livelihood disruption and insecurity.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author(s) declare that they have **no conflict of interest** that could have influenced the research, analysis, interpretation of findings, or publication of this article. No financial, personal, professional, or institutional interests exist that could be perceived as influencing the work reported in this manuscript.

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