

Gender Differences in Student Attendance and Punctuality in Secondary Schools in Yenagoa Metropolis

Nwosu Francis Ifeanyi

Department of Educational Foundation
National Open University Yenagoa Study Center
08063319496 ifeanyinwosu09@gmail.com
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Abstract

This study examined gender differences in student attendance and punctuality in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State. The study was guided by two objectives: to compare the attendance rate of male and female students and to examine the difference in punctuality between male and female students. A descriptive comparative research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised secondary school students in Yenagoa Metropolis, while a sample of 300 students was selected using a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and a records extraction sheet titled Gender, Student Attendance and Punctuality Questionnaire and Record Sheet. The data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, mean, standard deviation, and independent samples t-test at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that female students had a slightly higher attendance rate than male students, with mean scores of 86.90% and 85.10%, respectively. The findings also showed that female students were slightly more punctual than male students, with mean punctuality rates of 85.19% and 83.61%, respectively. The t-test results showed significant gender differences in both attendance and punctuality. The study concluded that gender is an important factor in understanding students' attendance and punctuality patterns. It is recommended that schools should monitor attendance and punctuality records by gender and provide timely support for students with irregular school participation.

Keywords: Gender differences, student attendance, punctuality, secondary schools, Yenagoa Metropolis

Introduction

Student attendance and punctuality remain two of the most visible but often under-analysed indicators of school engagement in secondary education. In many schools, attendance is treated as a routine administrative record, while punctuality is treated mainly as a matter of discipline. This narrow view is problematic because regular presence in school and timely arrival for lessons are not just behavioural expectations; they determine students' actual access to instruction, teacher explanation, peer interaction, assessment preparation and classroom participation. Recent international evidence shows that school absence reduces exposure to instruction and peer learning and is linked with weaker academic, social and emotional outcomes (OECD, 2026). Similarly, Keppens (2023) found that unexcused absence, sickness absence and school exclusion negatively affect secondary students' academic achievement, especially when absences occur at sensitive

periods of the school year. The concern is more serious at the secondary school level because students are expected to adjust to more subjects, stricter timetables, examination pressure and higher expectations of independent learning. UNICEF Data (2022) reports that globally, only about two in three children of lower-secondary-school age attend lower or upper secondary school, while only about one in two children of upper-secondary-school age attend upper secondary school or higher education. The same source notes that inequalities widen as children grow older, particularly by household wealth, location and region (UNICEF Data, 2022). This means that attendance and punctuality should not be viewed simply as personal habits. They are also shaped by family resources, distance to school, transport conditions, safety, household responsibilities, health, peer influence and school climate.

In Nigeria, the problem of school participation remains a major educational challenge despite policy commitments to basic and secondary education. UNICEF Nigeria states that about 10.5 million children are out of school, even though primary education is officially free and compulsory (UNICEF, n.d.). More recent evidence from the UNICEF Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Nigeria shows that education access and learning quality remain pressing concerns, with poverty, inadequate public spending, insecurity and climate-related disruption affecting children's ability to remain in school (UNICEF, 2024). Although national data often focus on enrolment and completion, the daily realities of attendance and punctuality are equally important because a student may be formally enrolled but still lose learning time through irregular attendance or repeated lateness. Gender is a critical variable in understanding these patterns. However, gender should not be treated as a simple biological label or as an automatic explanation for school behaviour. Rather, it should be understood as a social factor that may influence how boys and girls experience school, home responsibilities, mobility, peer pressure and safety. UNICEF's 2024 analysis notes that while the national gender gap in school attendance is described as minimal in some areas, girls from the poorest households, rural areas and vulnerable backgrounds remain more likely to be excluded from education (UNICEF, 2024). The same report shows that junior or lower secondary completion stood at 68%, with males at 69% and females at 67%, while gender disparities became sharper at senior or upper secondary level, where 57% of males graduated compared with 51% of females (UNICEF, 2024). Recent evidence also suggests that the gender dimension of school attendance is not uniform across contexts. UNICEF Nigeria reported that the net attendance rate for girls in lower secondary school was 48.8% nationally, while girls' upper secondary net attendance was 49.2%, with much lower figures in some northern states (UNICEF, 2025). While such national figures are useful, they do not fully explain what happens in specific local settings such as Yenagoa Metropolis, where school attendance and punctuality may be shaped by urban transport patterns, family economic pressure, domestic responsibilities, school management practices and local social expectations. This makes localized research necessary rather than relying only on national averages.

Punctuality deserves particular attention because lateness is often less visible than absenteeism, yet it can gradually produce similar learning losses. A student who arrives late may miss assembly instructions, early morning lessons, class introductions, tests, homework review or teacher explanations that frame the rest of the lesson. Studies on lateness in Nigerian secondary school contexts have linked lateness to distance from school, early morning domestic duties, traffic, late sleeping habits and weak school supervision (Nwobodo et al., 2023; Doguwa & Oluwaniyi, 2023). Doguwa and Oluwaniyi's study in Kwali Area Council, FCT Abuja, specifically included gender differences in lateness and reported that female students were more affected in their study area, partly due to domestic chores, care responsibilities and safety concerns (Doguwa & Oluwaniyi,

2023). In contrast, Olowoyo (2021), in a South African study, found that male learners were more often late than female learners, with male lateness linked more to attitude and peer pressure, while female lateness was linked more to domestic factors. These mixed findings show why gender differences should be investigated empirically in each local context instead of being assumed.

In Bayelsa State, recent research has begun to examine attendance-related issues, but the focus has largely been on school management and academic performance rather than gendered patterns of student attendance and punctuality. Nwosu and Okuru (2025) examined attendance management strategies and students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State and identified monitoring, record keeping, incentives, disciplinary measures, meetings with parents, counselling and community collaboration as strategies used to improve attendance and performance. Similarly, recent Yenagoa-based research has examined infrastructural facilities as correlates of students' academic performance in public secondary schools, while another Bayelsa study considered school location and academic performance (Okenema & Timila, 2026; IIARD, 2025). These studies are useful, but they leave an important gap: they do not directly compare male and female students' attendance rates and punctuality patterns in Yenagoa Metropolis.

This gap is important because interventions that ignore gender may misdiagnose the problem. If boys and girls are absent or late for different reasons, then a single punishment-based approach may fail. For instance, lateness caused by household chores, transport difficulty, fear of harassment, peer influence or weak parental supervision requires different responses. A critical gender-based study can therefore help schools move beyond blaming students and instead identify whether attendance and punctuality challenges are connected to wider social, family and school conditions. Therefore, this study examines gender differences in student attendance and punctuality in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis. Specifically, it compares the attendance rate of male and female students and examines whether there is a difference in punctuality between male and female students. By focusing on Yenagoa Metropolis, the study contributes localized evidence that can guide school administrators, teachers, parents and education policymakers in designing fairer and more effective strategies for improving students' regular and timely participation in secondary schooling.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study examines gender differences in student attendance and punctuality in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis. Specifically, the study achieved the following:

1. To compare the attendance rate of male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis.
2. To examine the difference in punctuality between male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the difference in attendance rate between male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis?
2. What is the difference in punctuality between male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at a .05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the attendance rate of male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the punctuality of male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis.

Research Methods

This study employed a descriptive comparative research design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to compare male and female students' attendance and punctuality patterns as they naturally occur in secondary schools, without manipulating the gender of students or interfering with normal school activities. Descriptive comparative design is useful in educational research when the purpose is to examine whether two or more groups differ on selected variables within a real school setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). As noted by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), non-experimental designs are suitable for school-based studies where the researcher cannot ethically or practically control learners' characteristics, but can observe and compare existing patterns. In this study, gender served as the grouping variable, while student attendance rate and punctuality were the main variables examined.

The population of the study comprised male and female students in public secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State. The target population focused on students in junior and senior secondary classes because they are already exposed to regular school timetables, attendance registers, class monitoring, and punctuality records. A sample of 300 students was selected for the study using a multistage sampling procedure. First, public secondary schools within Yenagoa Metropolis were identified. Second, the schools were stratified based on location to ensure fair representation of schools across the metropolis. Third, ten secondary schools were randomly selected from the identified schools. Fourth, proportionate sampling was used to determine the number of students selected from each school, while simple random sampling was used to select the final respondents from class registers. The sample included both male and female students to allow meaningful comparison of attendance and punctuality patterns.

The instruments for data collection were a structured questionnaire and a records extraction sheet titled Gender, Student Attendance and Punctuality Questionnaire and Record Sheet (GSAPQRS). The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A collected demographic information, especially gender, age, class level, and school type. Section B collected information on students' attendance and punctuality patterns, including frequency of school attendance, lateness to school, missed classes, regularity in morning assembly, and arrival before or after the official school resumption time. The records extraction sheet was used to obtain official data from school attendance registers and late-coming records. Attendance rate was measured by the number of days students were present in school during the selected period, while punctuality was measured by the number of times students arrived late during the same period.

To ensure validity, the instrument underwent face and content validation by three experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation. The experts examined the items to ensure that they were clear, relevant, and appropriate for measuring gender, attendance, and punctuality among secondary school students. Their corrections and suggestions were used to improve the wording, structure, and coverage of the instrument. A pilot study was conducted using 30 students from a secondary school outside the main study area but with similar characteristics to the sampled schools. The reliability of the questionnaire items was determined using Cronbach's

Alpha, which produced a coefficient of 0.81. This indicated that the instrument had an acceptable level of internal consistency. The records extraction sheet was also cross-checked with class registers and late-coming books to ensure that the information obtained from school records was accurate and consistent.

Data collection was carried out by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants. Permission was obtained from the principals and relevant school authorities before administering the questionnaire and accessing students' attendance and punctuality records. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents, and they were assured that the information collected would be used strictly for academic purposes. Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that students' names were not used in the final analysis. The completed questionnaires and record sheets were retrieved, sorted, and checked for completeness before analysis.

Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency counts and percentages were used to present the demographic information of the respondents, while mean and standard deviation were used to describe the attendance and punctuality patterns of male and female students. The independent samples t-test was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. This statistical method was appropriate because the study sought to determine whether significant differences existed between male and female students in their attendance rate and punctuality. The decision rule was that any hypothesis with a p-value less than or equal to 0.05 would be rejected, while any hypothesis with a p-value greater than 0.05 would not be rejected.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the difference in attendance rate between male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis?

Table 1: Descriptive Comparison of Attendance Rate by Gender

Gender	N	Mean Attendance Rate (%)	Standard Deviation	Attendance Level	Decision
Male students	150	85.10	7.86	High	Female students had a slightly higher attendance rate
Female students	150	86.90	6.62	High	
Overall	300	86.00	7.31	High	

The data presented in Table 1 show that both male and female students recorded high attendance rates in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis. Male students had a mean attendance rate of 85.10%, while female students had a mean attendance rate of 86.90%. This indicates that female students had a slightly higher attendance rate than male students by 1.80 percentage points. Although the difference is not very wide, the result suggests that female students in the sampled secondary schools attended school more regularly than their male counterparts during the period covered by the study.

Research Question 2

What is the difference in punctuality between male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis?

Table 2: Descriptive Comparison of Punctuality Rate by Gender

Gender	N	Mean Punctuality Rate (%)	Standard Deviation	Punctuality Level	Decision
Male students	150	83.61	6.13	High	Female students had a slightly higher punctuality rate
Female students	150	85.19	5.61	High	
Overall	300	84.40	5.92	High	

The results in Table 2 reveal that both male and female students demonstrated high levels of punctuality. Male students had a mean punctuality rate of 83.61%, while female students had a mean punctuality rate of 85.19%. This shows that female students were slightly more punctual than male students by 1.58 percentage points. The result implies that female students in the sampled secondary schools were more likely to arrive on time than male students, although the difference was relatively small.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the attendance rate of male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test on Attendance Rate by Gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	α -level	Decision
Attendance Rate	Male	150	85.10	7.86	-2.15	0.033	0.05	Reject H ₀₁
	Female	150	86.90	6.62				

Significant at $p < 0.05$.

The result in Table 3 shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the attendance rate of male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis, $t = -2.15$, $p = 0.033$. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that gender has a significant difference in the student attendance rate. The mean scores further show that female students recorded a higher attendance rate than male students.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the punctuality of male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis.

Table 4: Independent Samples t-test on Punctuality Rate by Gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	α -level	Decision
Punctuality Rate	Male	150	83.61	6.13	-2.32	0.021	0.05	Reject H ₀₂
	Female	150	85.19	5.61				

Significant at $p < 0.05$.

The result in Table 4 reveals that there is a statistically significant difference in the punctuality of male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis, $t = -2.32$, $p = 0.021$. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that gender significantly

differs with respect to students' punctuality. The mean scores indicate that female students were more punctual than male students in the sampled secondary schools.

Discussion of Findings

The first objective of the study was to compare the attendance rate of male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis. The finding revealed that female students had a slightly higher attendance rate than male students. Although both male and female students recorded high attendance levels, the mean attendance rate for female students was higher, and the difference was statistically significant. This suggests that gender plays a role in students' school attendance patterns within the study area. The result implies that female students may be more regular in attending school, possibly because of stronger compliance with school rules, closer parental monitoring, or greater seriousness toward daily school participation. However, the difference was not very large, which means that attendance challenges affect both male and female students, even though the degree may vary. This finding agrees with the view that attendance is not only a matter of personal discipline but is also shaped by social and gender-related factors. UNICEF (2025) observed that gender continues to influence school participation, especially in contexts where family expectations, safety, poverty, and domestic responsibilities affect students differently. However, the present finding differs from studies that suggest girls are more likely to experience school attendance barriers due to household chores and cultural expectations. In Yenagoa Metropolis, the higher attendance rate among female students may suggest that girls in the sampled schools are becoming more consistent in school participation. It may also indicate that male students are more exposed to factors such as peer influence, street activities, informal work, or lower school commitment, which may reduce their regular attendance. This shows the need for schools to monitor attendance by gender rather than treating absenteeism as a general student problem. The second objective of the study was to examine the difference in punctuality between male and female students in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis. The result showed that female students had a slightly higher punctuality rate than male students. The independent samples t-test also showed that the difference was statistically significant. This means that female students were more likely to arrive at school on time compared with male students. The finding is important because punctuality determines how much instructional time a student can access. Students who arrive late may miss morning assembly, early lesson introductions, teacher explanations, class instructions, and important learning activities. Therefore, even when students are present in school, lateness can still reduce the quality of their learning experience.

The finding supports Olowoyo, Ramaila, and Mavuru (2021), who found that male learners were more often late to school than female learners in their study, with male lateness linked to attitude and peer influence. It also supports the argument that punctuality should be studied as a serious educational issue, not merely as a disciplinary offence. In the context of Yenagoa Metropolis, the lower punctuality rate among male students may be connected to weaker time management, peer distractions, transport delays, or lower sensitivity to school rules. However, the result should not be interpreted to mean that punctuality is only a male student problem. Since both male and female students still recorded cases of lateness, school administrators should strengthen punctuality monitoring, improve student counselling, involve parents, and identify the specific reasons why students arrive late. Gender-sensitive intervention is necessary because the causes of lateness among boys and girls may not always be the same.

Conclusion

The study concluded that gender differences exist in student attendance and punctuality in secondary schools in Yenagoa Metropolis. The findings showed that female students recorded slightly higher attendance and punctuality rates than male students, and the differences were statistically significant. This implies that gender is an important factor to consider when examining students' school participation patterns. Although both male and female students generally demonstrated high levels of attendance and punctuality, the observed differences suggest that schools should not treat absenteeism and lateness as uniform problems affecting all students in the same way. Therefore, school administrators, teachers, parents, and education stakeholders should adopt gender-sensitive strategies to improve attendance and punctuality, especially by identifying the specific factors that make some students miss school or arrive late.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were put forward:

1. School administrators should monitor students' attendance and punctuality records by gender so that male and female students with irregular patterns can receive timely counselling and support.
2. Parents and teachers should work together to reduce the factors that make students, especially male students, miss school or arrive late, such as peer distraction, poor time management, transport problems, and lack of supervision.

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