

## Family Structure and Academic Achievement of Senior Public Secondary School Students in North-Central Nigeria

**GIDADO, Bello Kumo & ERI, Bernice Olohitai**

Department of Educational Foundations,

University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria

Emails: [1gbkumo@gmail.com](mailto:1gbkumo@gmail.com) & [2berniceeri80@gmail.com](mailto:2berniceeri80@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the family structure on the academic achievement of senior public secondary school students in North-Central Nigeria. Four research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. A correlational survey research design was employed for the study. The population of the study comprised 748,067 students (male and female) drawn from 1785 public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria. A sample size of 384 senior secondary students was selected for the study, using the Krejcie and Morgan determination Table. The proportionate sampling technique was employed for the study. The reliability of the questionnaires was determined using Cronbach's Alpha statistics, which yielded a reliability index of 0.64. The data collected was analysed using mean and standard deviation for research questions, while hypotheses were tested using simple regression and t-test analysis. Findings of the study show that there is a significant relationship between family structure and academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria. Findings revealed that there is significant relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement of students in public secondary schools in North-Central Nigeria; there is significant difference between male and female students in the family structure on academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria; and there is significant difference between urban and rural in the family structure on academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria. Recommendations made are that school counsellors in North Central Nigeria should take into account the diversity of family structures prevalent among students in North Central Nigeria when addressing students' academic, behavioural and psychological challenges.*

**Keywords:** Biological, Blended, Extended, Family, Structure

### **Introduction**

The family is the smallest unit of every society and the first school of a child. This means that the family is where a child learns their language, values and behaviours. A family is made up of a group of individuals who are connected by birth, marriage or adoption and live together (Oba-Adenuga, 2020). The family lays the psychological, moral and spiritual foundation for the overall well-being of the child. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a parent's most essential role is to provide a supportive home atmosphere characterised by love, happiness and understanding for the child's optimal growth and personality development (United Nations, 2017).

Family structure is the composition and organisation of the household in which an individual is raised, including present members and important figures from the past, as well as the quality of relationships among them. Kolawole (2024) defines family structure as the members of a household who are linked by marriage or bloodline. Examples of a family structure are the nuclear or traditional families, which consist of a child or children and both parents (genetic parents). The African traditional family is made up of a man, a woman and their biological children. This is a predominant family structure where there is a strong sense of interdependence among all members. Family structure consists of the biological, extended, blended and non-relative family. The type of family children live in plays a significant role in shaping their educational outcomes. The transition from one's biological parents' family to a non-biological family raises important concerns about how caregiver involvement might affect students' academic performance across diverse family structures. The researcher will be using non-traditional family structure interchangeably with non-biological family.

Literature review has shown that the family structure influences academic achievement. Tajudeen (2023) revealed that students from biological parents might be a crucial index to getting the necessary affection, care, education and love that help promote the child's development and academic performance. D'Onofrio and Emery (2019) found that children living with biological parents are at a higher risk of experiencing difficulties in school, including poor academic achievement and adjustment problems. Beal and Greiner (2025) discovered that children living separately from both biological parents are generally at a disadvantage concerning physical health, mental health, and access to healthcare. Njoroge and Kirori (2018) who shows that blended family dynamics influenced the academic performance outcome of children, with stepfather families having a more negative influence on the academic performance outcome of male and female students. Akinleke (2017) showed that there is a significant relationship between blended families and the academic performance of senior secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria, irrespective of their gender. Gidado (2020) has shown that gender does not play any role in the determination of academic success in examination and continuous assessment. The need to also find out the influence of the differentiated instrument based on academic performance is imperative. Gidado *et al.* (2024) have revealed that differentiated instruction has a significant influence on students' performance. Gidado and Diffang (2023) asserted that when parents abdicate their roles and fail with their responsibilities to mould and inculcate in their children the right norms, etiquette, values and belief system that are generally accepted within the society, the young adults become dangerous specie to the society manifesting alien, pervasive and uncultured behaviours such as truancy, restiveness, drug abuse, kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery, cultism and fraud amongst others. The way parents nurture, discipline, and communicate with their children has a direct impact on their aggression and hostility levels. Some delinquent children may be products of a low socio-economic background, which may have a psychological impact on their behaviour (Gidado & Anyio, 2025).

Several studies have shown that the proportion of traditional two-parent families (nuclear family) has a significant influence on the academic achievement of students in

secondary schools (Grüning *et al.* 2024). Ojo and Yilma (2020) demonstrated that parental income is incapable of influencing the behaviour of children from urban area than those in rural areas and determines their aspirations. They further note that nuclear families with high income status often have more success in preparing their children for school and encourage them in various learning activities at home. Njoku (2024) found that nuclear parenting structure, parental low income, lack of high qualification and low occupational status have mutable effects on their children's academic accomplishments based on their gender. Aliyu and Isa (2016) found out that children whose nuclear parents had an ordinary diploma, higher national diploma, or first degree in urban areas do better than their counterparts in rural areas. The non-traditional families include homes where children are raised by extended family members such as aunts, uncles, older siblings, or grandparents (Kolawole, 2024). Students from non-traditional family structures may experience challenges such as instability, reduced supervision, and limited resources, all of which can negatively impact academic achievement (Kolawale, 2024). Also, Apia and Olutola (2017) found that children raised in a two-parent family structure are often stable emotionally and suffer less emotional problems, thereby making them less anxious in the pursuit of their academic work. However, it should be noted that this situation might not be true all the time since there are some children in single-parent family structures who still perform academically better than children from two-parent family structures. Emeka (2020) found that there is a significant difference in geographical location (urban versus rural) in the impact of family structure, parental involvement and socioeconomic background on academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria. The study further indicates that early childhood problems may harm later life development.

In view of the various research efforts, there is a need to constantly investigate the impact of family structures on academic achievement as it will continue to generate interest among researchers and educationists, especially in the North-Central, Nigeria, where there is a huge influx of individuals with difference background, ethnic groups, tribes and religions into the city. It is on this note that the researchers were inspired to investigate the family structures and academic achievement of senior public secondary school students in North-Central, Nigeria.

### Statement of the Problem

Despite the several ongoing educational reforms and interventions by the Nigerian government in improving access and quality of education at all levels (from primary to tertiary level) in Nigeria's educational system, academic performance in national examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and the National Examination Council (NECO) exams continues to show significant disparities. Students' academic outcomes, particularly across the North Central region in Nigeria, vary widely, with many often failing below the expected standard. This consistent occurrence is more evident in public secondary schools across the North Central States in Nigeria. A more alarming problem is the increase in the rate of various forms of examination malpractice. This is significantly affecting Nigeria's educational system at tertiary institutions and impeding the attainment of

educational goals. It has become a national issue because the country's economy, societal development and moral standards are being affected as well.

The central issue of concern to the researcher is the disparities between examination grades of students and the scores of students who sit for the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and the National Examination Council (NECO) examinations. In spite of the several ongoing educational reforms and interventions by the Nigerian government in improving access and quality of education at all levels (from primary to tertiary), students' academic outcomes in internal school examinations are still low compared to the grades from WASSCE. This consistent occurrence seems to be more peculiar to public secondary schools. A more alarming problem is the increase in the rate of various forms of examination malpractice. This is significantly affecting Nigeria's educational system at tertiary institutions and impeding the attainment of educational goals. It has become a national issue because the country's economy, societal development and moral standards are being affected as well.

It is on this premise that the researchers investigate the family structure and academic achievement of senior public secondary school students in North-Central, Nigeria.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in this study.

- i. What is the family structure among senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria?
- ii. What is the relationship between family structure and academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North-Central, Nigeria?
- iii. What is the gender difference (male and female) in the impact of family structure on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria?
- iv. What is the difference in geographical location (urban versus rural) in the impact of family structure on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria?

### Null Hypotheses

In this study, the following null hypotheses were formulated.

- H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between family structure and academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria.
- H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference between male and female students in the family structure on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria
- H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant difference between urban and rural areas in the family structure on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria.

## Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is the correlational design. The correlational design allows researchers to find out the extent of the relationship that exists between two or more variables. Correlational design is the most adequate when investigating relationships between dependent and independent variables without the researcher controlling or manipulating any of the variables (Bhandari, 2023).

The total population for this study is 748,067 senior secondary school students (male and female) drawn from 1785 public senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria (Source: The Nigerian Digest Statistics, 2023). The main purpose of using public secondary schools in the North Central Region of Nigeria is the fact that these schools cover a wide range of students from different family types, socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographic settings, with a larger sample size, which can lead to a robust result. The North Central Region of Nigeria consist of Seven States, namely Benue, FCT, Kogi, Kwara, Niger, Nassarawa and Plateau.

The sample size for the study is three hundred and eighty-four (384) senior secondary school students (male and female) in North Central Nigeria. This was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan table. The Krejcie and Morgan Table help the researcher to determine the sample size of a population (Qhaireenizzati 2017). The sampling procedure for determining the sample size for each of the North Central States of Nigeria involved the use of the Proportionate Sampling technique. The number of participants from each subgroup is determined by their number relative to the entire population. The researcher identifies the population of senior secondary students in each of the seven states in North Central Nigeria. Thereafter divides this population into smaller groups by calculating the percentage of students from each of the seven states in the overall population. And finally, determine the sample size proportion for each state based on the size in the total population.

Two self-structured questionnaires were the research instruments used for the study. The first questionnaire is titled Family Structure of Secondary School Students Questionnaire (FSSSSQ). The questionnaire was divided into two sections; section A contained 10 items on the family structure of senior secondary school students in North-central Nigeria. The questionnaire was designed on a four-point modified Likert-type scale.

To ensure the reliability of the items in the instruments, the two questionnaires were subjected to pilot testing using SS1, SS2 and SS3 students in Crowther Memorial College in Lokoja, who were not part of the main study but within the geographical location of the study. The data collected were subjected to Cronbach's alpha statistics to determine the internal consistency of the items in the instruments. The reliability coefficient of the pilot test for the questionnaires yielded a reliability index of 0.64. The instrument is therefore reliable for this study.

The data collected for this study were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean scores and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. Regression analysis was used to test hypothesis one, while the t-test was used to analyse hypotheses two and three.

## Results

**Research Question 1:** What are the family structures of senior secondary school students prevalent in North Central Nigeria?

**Table 1: Family Structure of Senior Secondary School Students in North Central Nigeria  
n=384**

| S/N                   | Statements                                 | Mean        | Std. Dev.   | Decision     |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1.                    | I live with my biological parents          | 3.26        | .483        | Agree        |
| 2.                    | I live with my stepfather/stepmother       | 2.52        | .591        | Agree        |
| 3.                    | I live with my Grandparents                | 2.57        | .568        | Agree        |
| 4.                    | I live with my Aunt/Uncle                  | 2.76        | .540        | Agree        |
| 5.                    | I live with my older brother/sister        | 2.69        | .563        | Agree        |
| 6.                    | I live with a family friend/neighbour      | 2.08        | .405        | Disagree     |
| 7.                    | I live with my adopted parents             | 2.22        | .488        | Disagree     |
| 8.                    | I live with only my father/mother          | 2.44        | .566        | Disagree     |
| 9.                    | I live with a Guardian                     | 2.52        | .599        | Agree        |
| 10.                   | I live in a home with multiple generations | 2.40        | .570        | Disagree     |
| <b>Sectional Mean</b> |                                            | <b>2.55</b> | <b>.537</b> | <b>Agree</b> |

As shown in Table 1, the family structure of senior secondary school students in North-central Nigeria was presented. The table shows a sectional mean of 2.55, which indicated that over average of the respondents except for items 6, 7, 8 and 10 with disagree, all other items were agreed upon especially item 1 which indicated the highest mean which implies that most students in North-central Nigeria live with Biological parents family (3.26), extended family (aunt/uncle 2.76, older sibling 2.69 & grandparents 2.57), blended family (2.52) and non-relative family (2.52). Therefore, family structures prominently displayed among senior secondary students in North-Central, Nigeria are: Biological parents' family, extended family (aunt/uncle, older sibling & grandparents), blended and non-relative family.

## Testing of Hypotheses

The null hypotheses were tested using regression analysis and t-test analysis for all hypotheses. All the hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

**Null Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between family structure and the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria.

**Table 2a: Model Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis between Family Structure and Academic Achievement of Senior Secondary School Students in North-Central Nigeria**

| Model | R                 | R <sup>2</sup> Square | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .845 <sup>a</sup> | .821                  | .013                           | 10.15203                   |

As shown in Table 2a, the model summary of multiple regression analysis among family structure, parental involvement and academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North-central Nigeria was presented. The Table revealed an R value of .845<sup>a</sup>, which is a measure of the quality of the prediction of the dependent variable, with an R<sup>2</sup> - value of .821, which indicates moderate influence of family structure, parental involvement and students' academic achievement. The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> Square shows the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables. The Table further shows an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> square value of .013 which indicates that (13%) of the variability of the dependent variable (academic achievement) can be explained on the basis of the independent variables (family structure and parental involvement).

**Table 2b: ANOVA Analysis of Dominant Influence of Family Structure and Academic Achievement of Senior Secondary School Students in North-Central Nigeria**

| Model      | Sum of Squares | Df  | Mean Square | F     | Sig. | Decision |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|------|----------|
| Regression | 921.332        | 3   | 261.004     | 2.726 | .000 | Rejected |
| Residual   | 164.106        | 380 | 171.110     |       |      |          |
| Total      | 426.303        | 383 |             |       |      |          |

*Dependent Variable: Academic Achievement, Predictors: (Constant), Family Structure*

As shown in Table 4b, an ANOVA analysis to determine the dominant influence of family structure and academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North-Central Nigeria was presented. The table indicated a mean square of 261.004 and 171.110 with an F-value of 2.726. The table further revealed a significant value of .000 with  $p < 0.05$ , indicating that the hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that family structure had a dominant influence on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students.

**Table 2c: Coefficients Analysis of Family Structure on Academic Achievement of Senior Secondary School Students in North-Central Nigeria**

| Model               | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | T    | Sig. |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|------|------|
|                     | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |      |      |
| (Constant)          | 2.087                       | 13.478     |                           | .155 | .877 |
| Biological family   | 2.121                       | 3.004      | .036                      | .706 | .081 |
| Extended family     | 6.576                       | 2.697      | .124                      | .439 | .055 |
| Blended family      | 34.372                      | 0.378      | .348                      | .871 | .000 |
| Non-relative family | 19.438                      | 1.768      | .311                      | .432 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Achievement

As shown in Table 2c, a multiple regression analysis of family structure on academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North-Central Nigeria was presented. The table further revealed that the biological and extended family standardised coefficient of .036

and .124, with a significant value of .081 and .055, which is greater than .05, indicates insignificantly influence on academic performance. Also, blended and non-relative family standardised coefficients of .871 and .432 with a significant value of .000 and .000 significantly influence students' academic performance. The results indicate that blended and non-relative families are the dominant family structure influencing the academic performance of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria, while biological and extended families did not significantly influence academic performance.

**Null Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference between male and female students in the family structure on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria

**Table 3: t-test on the Difference between Male and Female Students in the Family Structure on Academic Achievement**

| Gender | Number | Mean | S.D. | t-value | Df  | Sig(2-tailed) | Decision |
|--------|--------|------|------|---------|-----|---------------|----------|
| Male   | 222    | 2.98 | .775 | .146    | 392 | .000          | Rejected |
| Female | 162    | 3.26 | .152 |         |     |               |          |

As shown in Table 3, the t-test on the difference between male and female students' family structure on academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria was presented. The table indicates a number of male respondents with a mean score of 2.98 and the number of female respondents with a mean score of 3.26. The table further reveals a significant of .000  $p < 0.05$  level of significance. This shows that there is a significant relationship between male and female students in the family structure on academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

**Null Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant difference between urban and rural students in the family structure on academic performance of senior secondary schools in North-Central, Nigeria.

**Table 4: t-test on the Difference between urban and rural students in the family structure on academic achievement**

| Location | Number | Mean | S.D. | t-value | df  | Sig(2-tailed) | Decision |
|----------|--------|------|------|---------|-----|---------------|----------|
| Urban    | 114    | 3.11 | .159 | .318    | 382 | .000          | Rejected |
| Rural    | 270    | 3.25 | .159 |         |     |               |          |

As shown in Table 4, the t-test on the difference between urban and rural students in the family structure on academic performance of senior secondary schools in North-Central, Nigeria was presented. The table indicates the number of respondents in urban areas with a mean of 3.11 scores, and the mean score of respondents in rural areas is 3.25. Therefore, there is a significant

difference between the urban and rural students in the family structure of academic performance of senior secondary schools in North-Central, Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study show a significant relationship between family structure and the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria. The finding is consistent with Tajudeen (2023), which revealed that students from biological parents might be a crucial indicator of receiving the necessary affection, care, education, and love that help promote the child's development and academic performance. The finding is in line with the findings of D'Onofrio and Emery (2019), who found that children living with biological parents are at a higher risk of experiencing difficulties in school, including poor academic achievement and adjustment problems. The finding is in agreement with the findings of Beal and Greiner (2025), who discovered that children living separately from both biological parents are generally at a disadvantage concerning physical health, mental health, and access to healthcare. The findings support the results of Njoroge and Kirori (2018), who show that blended family dynamics influenced the academic performance outcome of children, with stepfather families having a more negative influence on the academic performance outcome of children than stepmother families. The finding is consistent with the finding of Akinleke (2017) shown that there is a significant relationship between blended families and the academic performance of senior secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria. The finding support the finding of Gidado and Diffang (2023) asserted that when parents abdicate their roles and fail with their responsibilities to mould and inculcate in their children the right norms, etiquette, values and belief system that are generally accepted within the society, the young adults become dangerous specie to the society manifesting alien, pervasive and uncultured behaviours such as truancy, restiveness, drug abuse, kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery, cultism and fraud amongst others. The way parents nurture, discipline, and communicate with their children has a direct impact on their aggression and hostility levels. Some delinquent children may be products of a low socio-economic background, which may have a psychological impact on their behaviour (Gidado & Anyio, 2025).

The findings of the study show that there is a significant difference between male and female students in the family structure on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria. The finding is in line with the findings of Njoku (2024), who found that nuclear parenting structure, parental low income, lack of high qualification and low occupational status have mutable effects on their children's academic accomplishments based on their gender. Also, Akinleke (2017) showed that there is a significant relationship between blended families and the academic performance of senior secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria, irrespective of their gender. The finding contradicts the finding of Njoroge and Kirori (2018), who show that blended family dynamics influenced the academic performance outcome of children, with stepfather families having a more negative influence on the academic performance outcome of male and female students. However, there is a need to further interrogate the likely factors that influence academic

performance by gender. Similarly, Gidado (2020) has shown that gender does not play any role in the determination of academic success in examination and continuous assessment. The need to also find out the influence of the differentiated instrument based on academic performance is imperative. Gidado et al. (2024) have revealed that differentiated instruction has a significant influence on students' performance.

The findings of the study show that there is a significant difference between urban and rural areas in the family structure on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria. The finding is consistent with the finding of Emeka (2020), who found that there is a significant difference in geographical location (urban versus rural) in the impact of family structure, parental involvement and socioeconomic background on academic achievement of senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria. The study further indicates that early childhood problems may harm later life development. The finding is in agreement with the findings of Ojo and Yilma (2020), who demonstrated that parental income is incapable of influencing the behaviour of children from urban area than those in rural areas and determines their aspirations. They further note that nuclear families with high income status often have more success in preparing their children for school and encourage them in various learning activities at home.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study imply that family structure (biological parents, blended, extended families and non-relative families) may not be a determining factor in the academic achievement of senior secondary students. Hence, parents have a very important role to play in their children's education. The communication between parents and teachers must be maintained at a high level. When parents are actively involved in their children's education, they gain a better understanding of their children's behavioural and intellectual needs and the children, in return, feel more comfortable discussing their academic and personal challenges with them.

## Recommendations

1. School counsellors in North Central Nigeria should take into account the diversity of family structures prevalent among students in North Central Nigeria when addressing students' academic, behavioural and psychological challenges.
2. School administrators or principals can devise means for parents to attend school programs such as parents-teachers conferences, seminars and workshops with the intention of educating parents on parenting skills that can improve their level of involvement in their children's education.
3. Government and educational institutions should ensure there is equal access to educational resources and facilities for all students, regardless of school location.

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