

Influence of Family Structure on Student's Academic Achievement in Secondary Schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the influence of family structure on the academic achievement of students in secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically; single parent families and two parent families as well as academic achievement of senior secondary school students were the variables involved in the study. Two hundred and twenty students of the public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria were involved in the study. The Multidimensional Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS), which was designed by Suldo and Huebner (2006), was used to gather information from the students and it was conducted in a classroom environment during school period. After collecting information from the students, their scores in Mathematics and English Language (which are compulsory subjects in all secondary schools) of the second term of 2021/2022 academic session were obtained from their class teachers with the permission of the principals of the schools. The scores were then converted to Z-scores in order to ensure their reliability and validity since they were collected from different schools. Results show a significant difference in the academic achievement of students from single parent families and those from two parent families. In other words, the academic achievement of children from two parent families is better than those from single parent families. The implications of the findings were that parental separation should be avoided and religious leaders, counsellors as well as government must engage in enlightening parents about the

importance of family structure on the life of children and in ensuring a well-ordered society.

Keywords: Family Structure, Academic Achievement, Senior Secondary School, Obio/Akpor, Rivers State

INTRODUCTION

Stakeholders in education such as the Government, Parents, Teachers, as well as significant others in the society agree that Education is a *sin-qua-none* to the progress of any society. Hence, there is the need to encourage the proper education of the younger generation in the society. Every society is made up of families, the accumulation of families constitutes the society and so, the family is the foundation of every society. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2018), the family is the basic unit in society, traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children or a group of individuals living under one roof and usually under one head. Family can be nuclear, extended family, step/blended family, single-parent family, adopted family and foster family and the contribution towards a child's education mostly depends on the type of family structure the child belongs to (Meleen, 2019). This makes parents very important in the academic achievement of children.

Academic achievement can be defined as comparing individual students' performance assessment scores from one year to the next,

aggregated to the school level. Various schools establish their Satisfactory Academic achievement standards as requested by the state. Satisfactory Academic achievement standards ensure that, students are completing their coursework and, in some cases, ensure that scholarship students can continue to receive financial aid. Several factors contribute to successful academic achievement, such as socioeconomic status, supportive teachers, student motivation, and language competency.

Academic achievement compares individual students' performance assessment scores from one year to the next, aggregated to the school level. Students' academic achievement is affected by many factors such as socioeconomic status, supportive teachers, student motivation, and language competency. However, the two most important factors are supportive school and classroom climate and family involvement (Collins et al., 2010). According to Epstein et al. (2009), the family plays an essential role in their children's academic achievement. These roles include parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaboration. Parenting involves child upbringing from childhood to adolescence and adulthood, while communication involves giving information about the child to the school. Volunteering involves supporting school projects and development; learning at home involves assisting the child to learn at home and do all assignments, while collaboration involves partnering teachers and the schools to initiate activities that enhance child growth and development (Epstein et al., 2009).

In Rivers State Nigeria, especially in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, every family wants its wards to perform academically well. However, economic pressure, among others, makes families less involved in their children's academic activities. This was made known in a survey done in the area where it was discovered that most families do communicate vital

information such as children health status and educational history to school authorities from time to time; volunteer to support school programs, support student excursions and information communication technology learning in the schools; help their children with their home learning and discuss their children's academic performances with teachers. Furthermore, the World Bank (2000) indicated that the extent to which families are involved in a child's education ultimately influences the child's academic achievement.

The management, norms, goals, teaching, relationships, culture, and learning experiences, collectively are the elements that create the climate of the school and classroom. Therefore, the classroom and school climate does not refer to only the physical structures of the school and well-organized classrooms. A supportive school and classroom create a safe environment for students and encourages student-teacher, teacher-parents relationships. Such an environment increases teachers' productivity and enhances students' understanding of lessons, leading to successful academic achievements.

Family/Parents' involvement implies that, members of the family work with teachers of the school and their wards. Parent involvement may be in the form of assisting their children with homework, volunteering for school activities, supporting their wards during sports and other club activities, attending parent, teachers, and students' events. Students of such families mostly feel cared for by their parents, which aids them in focusing on their academic work, leading to higher academic performance.

In Nigeria, family configurations are classified as nuclear, extended, step/blended, single-parent, adoptive, and foster. Family structures are crucial to some extent for children's academic progress. The family acts as a socializer and provides vital support in financial, social, emotional, and educational support. However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge and based on a literature review, preliminary studies have

been sanctioned in Nigeria to determine the effect of family structure on students' academic achievement in schools. Thus, this study examined the influence of family structure on academic achievement, focusing on Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria as the Study Area.

Aim of the Study

This study sought to investigate the influence of family structure on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria. Consequently, the following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the difference in the academic achievement of students from single parent families and those from two parent families?
2. What is the difference in the academic achievement of male students from single parent families and those from two parent families?
3. What is the difference in the academic achievement of female students from single parent and female students from two parent families?

LITERATURE

Family and Academic Achievement

Epstein et al. (2009) developed a theory that details parental involvement in their wards' academic outcomes. The theory outlines six types of parental involvement, which has remained the most helpful model that connects parents' involvement to academic achievement with three interrelated stakeholders (i.e., family, school, & community). Theory depicts that, an integrated interaction between the family, educators, and the community can promote the child's learning and development. According to Epstein et al. (2009), the six types of involvement are parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration.

Parenting: The theory stipulates that the school should assist families to create a home atmosphere that supports their children as students. This implies that the school should provide families information that can improve their parenting skills, which will advance their children's development and create a living environment that helps students' academic achievement. This includes information on discipline, adolescence, child's health and nutrition, which will help parents of students execute their roles at each stage of their lives. Such information should be made available to all families, not families who attend school events only. Most often than not, families who do not attend school events need such information the most. Likewise, the school must incorporate information gathered from families about their homes into lessons taught. The theory stipulates that parenting type of involvement improves student discipline, increases school attendance, and improves time for learning.

Communication: According to the theory, a two-way communication system should be established between the family/parents and the school concerning school programs and students' progress. The school has to develop several communication modes to transfer information between them and parents. These communication mediums may include Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meetings, sending termly students' report cards to parents, telephone conversations, messaging/emails, social media. Establishing constant communication between these two stakeholders will provide an avenue to discuss students' progress and shortcomings mutually.

Oral or written communication increases parents' comprehension of school policies and procedures, taking into consideration extra support of the school. The theory alludes that students who benefit from this communication link increase knowledge of their academic achievement, increase school

attendance, improve their understanding of school rules and policies, heighten communication skills, and give them a sense of direction towards which study field to major.

Volunteering: This type of parent involvement encourages parents to support the school's mission and goals and learning processes in any capacity within their fields of proficiency. Therefore, the school must develop and create avenues to encourage families to participate in school events/activities. Volunteers could be tasked to be class parents, mentor students at open forums, convene school visits with established role models, participate in school collaborative work and join students during sporting activities. Volunteering grants schools and families to work together for the child's best interest academically. The theory postulates that students whose parents volunteer improve their communication skills with adults become exposed to life outside school, emulate volunteers and utilize the knowledge in their future life development.

Learning at Home: The school can get parents involved by assisting them with materials and information about how to help children with curriculum-related subjects at home. These comprise assisting families to understand activities of school curriculum needed for academic achievement, devising means of informing parents on how to monitor children's practices and behaviors, educating parents on how to train their children on setting and achieving apt career goals, and how to choose best fitting school programs. Children are more likely to be actively involved in setting goals for academic success and planning post-secondary educational experiences when they are reassured by their parents. The theory states that students who benefit from this attain improved test scores, improved homework completion, and develop a positive attitude towards schoolwork.

Decision-Making: The fifth type of engagement demands parents' involvement in making decisions at the school, thus developing parent leaders and representatives. This implies that parents should be involved in the administration, governance, and decision-making roles. Parents can be involved through PTA and other parent organizations, councils, and advisory boards. Likewise, parents could be added to school management committees or assigned as school patrons or chairpersons. Being involved in the school governing board gives parents a voice in schools' affairs, policies, improvement and reforms. Students with this parental involvement have improved schooling and learning outcomes. Also, due to parents' representatives, some policies are established on the students' behalf, satisfying their interests.

Collaborating with the Community: This type of involvement identifies and combines resources bestowed in the community where, schools and families reside to support students' academic achievement. The head of the community may be included in any of the aforementioned parental engagements. Thus the school may provide families and students information on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and programs that can benefit the child. Engagement in this practice can expose students to more learning opportunities; associate with individuals other than their parents, schoolmates, and teachers. Moreover, this can improve students' learning outcomes, serve as tapping talents for extra-curricular potentials, and apply knowledge obtained from school to the real world.

For this study, parental involvement in terms of parenting and communication was focused on. As identified by various researches, parenting (monitoring school attendance, enrolling children into preschool, organizing extra classes) and communication (interaction with the school about child's performance, receiving and

checking students' report cards) affect a child's academic achievement.

Family Structure and Academic Achievement

Suleman et al. (2012) studied the Effects of Family Structure on the Academic Achievement of Students at Elementary Level in Karak District, Pakistan. The purpose of the study was to explore the effects of family structure on academic achievement of the students at elementary level in Karak District. All the students at elementary level in district Karak constituted the population of the study. Only 360 students at elementary level were selected as sample through simple random sampling technique. The study was delimited to the twelve male secondary schools. The study was further delimited to the students of class 08. The study was descriptive in nature therefore a self-developed structured questionnaire used for the collection of data. The researchers personally visited to the respective sample and distributed questionnaires among the sample. In this way data was collected. After collection of data, it was organized, tabulated and analyzed. Chi-square was used for the statistical treatment of the data. After analysis of data, it was concluded that large family size; large number of brothers and sisters; domestic issues and tension among the family members; low socio-economic status, lack of parent's participation effects student's educational attainment negatively. Based on findings, it was recommended that that importance of family planning should be emphasized and parents should be made aware of importance of family planning.

Olaitan (2017) investigated the extent to which family structure, specifically; single parent families and two parent families affect the academic performance of secondary school students. Two hundred and twenty students of the public secondary schools in Yewa Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria were involved in the study. The Multidimensional Life

Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS), which was designed by Suldo and Huebner (2006), was used to gather information from the students and it was conducted in a classroom environment during school period. After collecting information from the students, their scores in Mathematics and English Language (which are compulsory subjects in all secondary schools) of the second term of 2014/2015 academic session were obtained from their class teachers with the permission of the principals of the schools. The scores were then converted to Z-scores in order to ensure their reliability and validity since they were collected from different schools. Results show a significant difference in the academic performance of students from single parent families and those from two parent families. In other words, the academic performance of children from two parent families is better than those from single parent families. The implications of the findings were that parental separation should be avoided and religious leaders, counsellors as well as government must engage in enlightening parents about the importance of family structure on the life of children and in ensuring a well-ordered society.

METHODOLOGY

In order to obtain information about how family structure influences academic achievement of senior secondary school students, a total number of two hundred and twenty (220) students and ten teachers were randomly selected. The study was conducted in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. Twenty (22) students were randomly chosen from ten geo-political ward, making a total number of two hundred and twenty (220). All of them were in the Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) and their age ranged between 14 and 17 (Mean = 17.4). Out of the 220 students, 208 completed the questionnaire, which makes a response rate of 94.5%. Permission was sought from the authority of the schools before questionnaire were administered on the students. A total of ten

(10) classes participated in filling the questionnaires and each session lasted approximately one hour. The classes were visited during the regular teaching hours. A brief meeting was held with the students to explain the purpose of the research to them. The protection of their anonymity and confidentiality was also assured and none of the students was given any reward (whether cash or any other form of gift) to make them participate in the study. After explaining the purpose, the research work, students were asked to indicate if they were willing to participate in the study. Once a student signifies his/her willingness, a questionnaire is given to him/her. Examples of how to fill the questionnaire was shown to them so as to be sure that they understood how to provide their answers. As they filled the questionnaire, the researcher walked round the classroom to make sure that students were responding to the questionnaires correctly. Distributing the questionnaire, explaining the purpose and collecting them back took approximately one hour. Instrument both qualitative and quantitative data were collected for this study. To collect the qualitative information, in-depth interviews were conducted with the ten (10) teachers that were in classrooms at the time that the study was being conducted. Teachers were included in the population because they are also parents and are involved in the daily upbringing of children. To collect the quantitative data, the Multidimensional Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) that was designed by Suldo and Huebner (2006) was used. It is a 40-item scale, which was designed in Likert-type of six responses that range from 1 = completely disagree to 6 = completely agree. The scale was designed to measure five dimensions of life satisfaction, which include family, friends, living environment, school and self-satisfaction. Scores of each dimension is obtained through adding up scores and dividing it by the total number of items of that dimension. The scale had earlier been used by Mozghan and Mohammadreza (2011) in a study titled

“Family Structure and Multidimensional Adolescent's Life Satisfaction”. They claimed that the scale's reliability is satisfying.

To gather data on students' academic achievement, their scores in Mathematics and English Language (which are compulsory subjects in all senior secondary schools) of the second term of 2021/2022 academic session were obtained from their class teachers with the permission of the principals of the schools. The scores were then converted to Z-scores in order to ensure their reliability and validity since they were collected from different schools. Also known as a standard score, Z-score is a measure of how many standard deviations below or above the population means a raw score is. It is a way of comparing results from a test to a normal population and the scores range from -3 standard deviation to +3 standard deviation. For the current study, -2 standard deviation to +2 standard deviation were obtained. -2 represented a very poor performance; -1 represented a poor performance; 0 signifies an average performance; 1 represented good performance; and 2 represented brilliant performance. Data collected were analysed with mean, standard deviation and t-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the research questions earlier posed, each one was transformed into the following hypotheses and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The results are as presented in Table 1,2and 3.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the academic achievement of students from single parent families and those from two parent families.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the academic achievement of male students from single parent families and those from two parent families.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between the academic achievement of female students from single

parent families and those from two parent families.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the academic

achievement of students from single parent families and those from two parent families.

Table 1: T-test of the difference in the academic achievement of students from single parent families and two parent families

Family Structure	n	\bar{x}	Sd	df	t _{cal}	Sig.	Decision
Single Parent	104	37.51	4.92				
				206	4.63*	.020	Significant
Two Parents	104	39.64	5.68				

*p < 0.05

The result in Table 1 shows that the academic achievement of students from the two types of family is different. The calculated t value (4.63) has a significant value (p = 0.020) that is less than 0.05 level of significance at 206 degree of freedom hence, significant. Therefore, the state null hypothesis is rejected. The result is that there is significant difference between the academic achievement of students from single parent families and those from two parent families. The implication of this is that students from two parent families performed better than those from single parent families. This finding is in line with the conclusion of Peter (2016) that there is a significant and high positive relationship between two parent structure and academic performance of students. Also, the findings

is in line with past studies that students from two parent families are more satisfied with life generally (Mozhgan & Mohammadreza, 2011) and perform better in their academic pursuits than students from single parents (Uwaifo, 2008). However, Apia and Olutola (2007) noted that this position may not be true at all times as there are some children in single parent families that perform better academically than children from two parent families. According to them, such may be attributed to other factors inherent in the personality of such children.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the academic achievement of male students from single parent families and those from two parent families.

Table 2: Difference between the academic achievement of male students from single parent families and male students from two parent families

Family Structure	n	\bar{x}	Sd	df	t _{cal}	Sig.	Decision
Male (Single Parent)	52	53.41	7.03				
				111	2.26*	.000	Significant
Male (Two Parents)	61	77.70	12.68				

*p < 0.05

Table 2 reveals a significant difference in the academic achievement of male students from single parent families and male students from two parent families in favour of male students from two parents. Consequently the stated null hypothesis rejected. Specifically, the analysis shows that the t-cal value (2.26) has a p-value of 0.001 at 111 degrees of freedom. The result is that, there is significant difference between the academic achievement of male

students from single parent families and those from two parent families. This means that male students from two parent families performed better in academic engagements than those from single parents.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between the academic achievement of female students from single parent families and those from two parent families.

Table 3: Difference between the academic achievement of female students from single parent families and female students from two parent families

Family Structure	n	\bar{x}	Sd	df	t _{cal}	Sig.	Decision
Female (Single Parent)	46	68.45	6.99				
Female (Two Parents)	49	72.47	10.37	93	2.43*	.000	Significant

*p < 0.05

Table 3 indicates that there is a significant difference between the academic achievement of female students from single parent families and those from two parent families again in favour of female students from two parents; hence the null hypothesis is rejected also. Specifically, the result shows that the calculated t-value (2.43) has a p-value of 0.001 which is less than 0.05 significant level. The result is that there is significant difference between the academic achievement of female students from single parent families and those from two parent families.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The intention of this study was to examine whether there is a significant difference between the academic achievement of students from single parent families and those from two parent families. A significant difference in the academic achievement of students from single parent families and those from two parent families was confirmed. As stated earlier, this finding may be explained by the fact that children from two parent families experience sufficient care, attention, warmth, father- and mother-figure attachment and emotional stability that are characteristic of two parent families. On the other hand, children from single parent families may suffer distraction, emotional problems, disciplinary problems and insufficiency as the single parent may find it difficult to cater for the socioeconomic needs of the child/children alone.

In view of the above findings, parental separation (in the form of divorce or disagreement) should be avoided. This can be done when partners learn to tolerate each other's individual differences; do not allow matrimonial issues to degenerate and are

both committed to the welfare of their family. Also, religious leaders, counsellors and government must engage in enlightening parents about the importance of family structure on the life of children and in ensuring a well-ordered society.

Declaration by Authors

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