

***Family Structure and Emotional Stability as Correlates of Academic Performance in English Language among Secondary School Students in Abia State***

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**Abstract**

*This study, adopted correlational research design to investigate family structure and emotional stability as correlates of academic performance in English Language among secondary school students in Abia State. Two research questions and two hypotheses tested at the 0.05 significant level guided the study. The population comprised 8,739 Senior Secondary II students across 263 public secondary schools, from which a sample of 437 students (5%) was drawn through proportionate sampling. The research instrument titled Family Structure and Emotional Stability Questionnaire (FSESQ) was validated by three experts - two specialists in Guidance and Counselling and one from Measurement and Evaluation - from the Department of Psychological Foundations of Abia State University, Uturu. A reliability coefficient of 0.84 was established. Data were analysed using simple linear regression and associated t-tests. Results showed that nuclear family structure and stress management are significant predictors of students' academic performance in English Language. The study concludes that both family structure and students' capacity to manage stress are critical determinants of academic success. It recommends that parents, school counsellors, and educators should work collaboratively to foster emotionally supportive and academically enabling environments that enhance students' performance and holistic development.*

**Keywords:** nuclear family structure, stress management, academic performance, emotional stability, Abia state

**Introduction**

Education is universally regarded as the cornerstone for personal development, national progress, and global competitiveness. It is referred to as a fundamental structure of personal and national development, equipping individuals with the necessary skills, values and

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knowledge to contribute meaningfully to the society (UNESCO, 2021). In Nigeria, education serves as a strategic tool for shaping the intellectual, moral, and emotional capacities of citizens, particularly during adolescence, a crucial phase in human development. According to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), secondary education is designed to prepare individuals for useful living within the society and for higher education. It is during this stage that students acquire academic knowledge, emotional regulation, and personal identity skills that are foundational for future success.

One of the major objectives of secondary education as outlined in the National Policy on Education is to prepare learners for useful living within the society and for higher education (FRN, 2013). At this stage, students are expected to acquire cognitive skills, emotional resilience, and moral awareness that are necessary for personal development and societal integration. However, academic performance among secondary school students in Nigeria, especially in Abia State has remained a subject of concern. Despite educational reforms, academic performance among secondary school students, especially in Abia State, remains unsatisfactory. Reports from West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and National Examinations Council (NECO) reveal consistently low pass rates in core subjects such as English Language (WAEC, 2021). This alarming trend calls for a deeper understanding of the non-academic factors contributing to student underperformance.

Globally, the mastery of English Language has been recognized as a fundamental tool for community, education and socio-economic advancement. In countries where the English is the medium of instructions, studies have shown that proficiency in the language strongly predicts academic success across subjects and facilitates access to higher education and employment opportunities (Crystal 2019; OECD, 2021). Despite its importance, performance in English Language has remained persistently poor. Reports between 2017 and 2024 shows that fewer than half of secondary school candidates achieved credit passes in the subject. In Abia State, teachers and examiners continue to note challenges such as weak reading comprehension, poor writing skills, limited vocabulary, and test anxiety among students. Beyond these academic symptoms, however, lies the possibility that deeper psychosocial issues are at play. Many adolescents struggle with concentration, motivation, and confidence, difficulties that may be linked to the kind of family support they receive and their ability to regulate emotions in the face of stress. These challenges are particularly significant when viewed within the context of adolescence, a developmental stage during which learners are especially vulnerable to emotional, cognitive and social influences that can affect academic performance.

Adolescents, who constitute the majority of senior secondary school students, represent a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, and emotional changes. This period, typically ranging from ages 13 to 19, is marked by an increasing desire for independence, heightened sensitivity to social relationships, and the formation of personal identity (World Health Organization, 2022). These developmental transitions often influence how students respond to academic demands, family expectations and emotional challenges. In the school setting, adolescents' ability to manage emotions, adapt to stress, and maintain motivation directly affects their learning outcomes (Fan & Chen, 2021). Hence, understanding the interplay between family structure, emotional stability, and academic performance within this developmental context is essential for addressing the educational challenges of senior secondary school students in Abia State. Among the various factors that shapes the academic performance of students, family plays a vital role, which is influential though sometimes is being underestimated.

A family is a group of people connected by blood, marriage, adoption, typically forming a single household and interacting in their respective social roles such as spouses, parent, children, and siblings (Britannica, 2025); the family is widely acknowledged as the first agent of socialization. It is within the family that children acquire foundational values, emotional support, behavioural expectation and motivation for learning (UNICEF, 2017). As children grow into adolescents, the role of the family becomes even more critical in helping them navigate the academic and emotional demands of school life. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, the family forms part of the micro system that has a direct and significant effect on child developmental outcomes (Neal & Neal, 2013). A key dimension of the family influence lies in family structure.

Family structure refers to the composition and arrangement of members within a household and includes types such as nuclear, single-parent, polygamous, extended, blended, and child-headed families (Siddiqui & Dwyer, 2020). Each structure presents different emotional and socio-economic realities that shape the child's development. Among the various family structures, the research is interested in nuclear family.

The nuclear family is traditionally composed of two biological parents and their children living together in a single household. It is often considered the most stable and structured family form, providing children with dual-parental support for emotional, financial, and academic needs. Research indicates that children raised in nuclear families tend to exhibit higher levels of academic motivation and self-regulation, especially when both parents are actively involved in schooling (Fan & Chen, 2021). Children from stable family structures

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such as nuclear family are more likely to receive supervision, emotional support, and encouragement. The predictive value of family background is further emphasized by Igbokwe and Nwankwo (2019), who assert that student achievement is deeply rooted in the level of parental encouragement and supervision inherent in stable family settings. This suggests that the nuclear family structure serves as a primary predictor of academic success by providing the consistent support system necessary for core subject mastery. Conversely, students from unstable or disrupted family environments may experience stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and emotional imbalance, all of which negatively affect concentration, comprehension, and learning.

Closely connected to nuclear family structure is the emotional atmosphere within which a child grows, which directly influences their emotional development. Emotions are intense feelings that are directed at someone or something, involving physiological responses, cognitive appraisals, and expressive behaviours, which influence individual learning and social functioning (Gross, 2015). Emotions play a critical role in learning, regulating attention, enhancing motivation, and shaping social interactions. During adolescence, a period marked by identity formation and psychological sensitivity, the ability to maintain emotional balance or stability is especially crucial.

Therefore, emotional stability is “a person’s ability to maintain a consistent and balanced emotional state across various situations, responding proportionately and appropriately rather than being swayed by every emotional fluctuation” (Neuro Launch, 2024). It involves resilience, calmness, and adaptive responses to stress, allowing individuals to experience emotions without being overwhelmed and to return to a stable emotional baseline after disruptions. This denotes an individual’s ability to regulate emotional responses, withstand academic stress, and maintain psychological resilience. Emotionally stable students are more likely to stay focused, manage academic demands, and engage positively in classroom activities (Schunk et al., 2017). In contrast, emotional instability manifested through anxiety, aggression or social withdrawal which can disrupt concentration, motivation, and interpersonal relationships in the learning environment (Fernández Berrocal & Ruiz Aranda, 2016; Zhou et al., 2021). Among the indices of emotional stability, the researchers will focus on stress management.

Stress management denotes the ability to remain calm, focused and effective under pressure. In the school context, students who manage stress effectively are more likely to sustain motivation, engage positively with peers and perform better academically. Together, these

dimensions of emotional stability form a critical psychological foundation for learning and adjustment amongst secondary school students, particularly during adolescence.

Stress management refers to the deliberate use of skills and strategies to recognize, control, and reduce the physical and emotional tension that arises from daily pressures. It involves adaptive coping mechanisms such as planning, emotional regulation and seeking support when faced with academic or personal challenges (APA, 2022). It involves identifying personal stressors, adopting healthy coping techniques such as relaxation exercises, time management, positive thinking, and seeking social support, and developing habits that promote resilience, like regular rest, healthy routines, and balanced activities. Effective stress management helps individuals maintain emotional stability, improve concentration, and function productively, even when faced with challenging situations. The importance of these coping strategies is highlighted by Ogakwu et al. (2023), who found that school-based interventions focusing on stress-management training led to significant improvements in students' classroom participation and academic outcomes. Furthermore, Amaefule (2021) contends that specific self-regulation skills, such as time management and relaxation techniques, act as vital predictors of performance in secondary education, particularly in cognitively demanding subjects.

Although some studies exist on family background and academic achievement, few have specifically examined the combined influence of family structure and emotional stability on English Language performance in Abia State. This study seeks to fill this gap by empirically investigating these relationships. Several studies have been carried out by different authors on related variable. Aremu and Lawal (2020) conducted a descriptive survey to investigate the influence of family structure on the academic performance of secondary school students in South West Nigeria. The findings showed that nuclear family structure significantly influences the academic performance of secondary school students in English Language.

Ogunlere and Ojo (2021) investigated the influence of emotional stability and self-control on academic performance amongst secondary school students. The study found that stress can be a serious problem on students. Students who are unable to manage stress tend to have a significant lower performance in their studies which influence other parts of their life. To the best knowledge of the researchers, there appears to be a dearth of studies on family structure and emotional stability as correlates of academic performance in English Language in Abia State. This is the gap the study sought to fill.

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### **Research questions**

The following research questions were posed to guide this study:

1. To what extent does nuclear family structure predict secondary school students' performance in English Language in Abia State?
2. To what extent does stress management predict secondary school students' academic performance in English Language in Abia State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

**Ho1:** Nuclear family structure does not significantly predict students' academic performance in English Language in Abia State.

**Ho2:** Stress management does not significantly predict students' academic performance in English Language in Abia State.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study consisted of 8,739 senior secondary school II students (SSS2) in Abia State. The sample of this study was 437 senior secondary school II students selected using 5% of the total population for sample selection. Data were collected from the Abia State Secondary Education Management Board (SEMB) (2024).

Two instruments were used: the Family Structure and Emotional Stability Questionnaire (FSSEQ) and students' Academic Performance Scores for the 2024/2025 academic session were officially obtained from school records with consent, and handled confidentially. The questionnaire has two sections. Section "A" was used to elicit information on the biodata of the respondents, while Section "B" is on the family structure and emotional stability scale. The scale consists of five (5) items on nuclear family and five (5) items on stress management, totalling ten (10) items. The response format was on 4 points scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE), which weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively.

The validity was established by three experts, two from Guidance and Counselling and one from Measurement and Evaluation, all from the Department of Psychological Foundations, Faculty of Education, Abia State University, Uturu. It was found that the instrument was suitable for measuring what it was supposed to measure. The reliability index was 0.84 using Cronbach Alpha.

The instrument was administered by the researchers with the help of two research assistants who were briefed on the questionnaire. The data generated were analysed using linear regression. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

### **Presentation of results**

Research question 1: To what extent does nuclear family structure predict secondary school students' performance in English Language in Abia State?

**Table 1:** Linear regression on nuclear family structure and students' academic performance in English Language

<b>Model</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>R square*100</b>	<b>Adjusted r Square</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1	.625 <sup>a</sup>	.391	39.1%	.390	Moderately High

a. Predictors: (Constant), Nuclear Family

Table 1 presents the result of a linear regression analysis conducted to determine the relationship between the nuclear family and students' academic performance in English Language in Abia State. From the table, the correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) is 0.625, indicating a moderately strong positive relationship between the nuclear family and students' academic performance in English Language. This means that as the quality or stability of the nuclear family improves, students' academic performance in English Language tends to improve correspondingly. The coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) is 0.391, which implies that 39.1% of the variation in students' academic performance in English Language can be explained by the influence of the nuclear family structure. The analysis reveals that the nuclear family has a positive relationship with students' academic performance in English Language in Abia State.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Nuclear family does not have a significant relationship with academic performance in English Language among secondary school students in Abia State.

**Table 2:** Summary of t-test statistics associated with regression analysis of significant relationship between nuclear family and academic performance

<b>Model</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>df</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>t-crit</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Nuclear family Academic performance	437	435	.625	16.70	1.96	$\leq .001$	Reject Ho

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Table 2 presents the result of the regression analysis carried out to determine whether there is a significant relationship between nuclear family and academic performance in English Language among secondary school students in Abia State. The result shows a beta ( $\beta$ ) value of 0.625, indicating a positive relationship between nuclear family and students' academic performance in English Language. The t-value obtained (16.70) is greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at the 0.05 level of significance. The p-value ( $p \leq 0.001$ ) is less than 0.05, indicating that the observed relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) stating that nuclear family does not have a significant relationship with academic performance in English Language is rejected. An alternate hypothesis was thus established that the nuclear family does have a significant relationship with academic performance in English Language among secondary school students in Abia State.

**Research question 2:** To what extent does stress management predict secondary school students' academic performance in English Language in Abia State?

**Table 3:** Regression analysis on stress management and academic performance of students in English Language

Model	R	R Square	R square*100	Adjusted r-Square	Remarks
1	.733 <sup>a</sup>	.537	53.7%	.536	High Positive

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stress Management

Table 3 presents the result of a linear regression analysis conducted to determine the relationship between stress management and students' academic performance in English Language in Abia State. From the table, the correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) is 0.733, which indicates a high positive relationship between stress management and students' academic performance in English Language. The coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) is 0.537, implying that 53.7% of the variation in students' academic performance can be explained by their ability to manage stress. The result shows a strong positive relationship between stress management and students' academic performance in English Language.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Stress management does not have a significant relationship with academic performance in English Language among secondary school students in Abia State.

**Table 4:** Summary of t-test statistics associated with regression analysis of significant relationship between stress management and academic performance

<b>Model</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>df</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>t-crit</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Stress Management Academic Performance	437	435	.733	22.47	1.96	$\leq .001$	Reject Ho

Table 4 presents the result of the regression analysis carried out to determine whether there is a significant relationship between stress management and academic performance in English Language among secondary school students in Abia State. The result shows a beta ( $\beta$ ) value of 0.733, indicating a strong positive relationship between stress management and students' academic performance in English Language. The obtained t-value (22.47) is greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at the 0.05 level of significance. The p-value ( $p \leq 0.001$ ) is less than 0.05, indicating that the observed relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis (Ho) stating that stress management does not have a significant relationship with academic performance in English Language is rejected. An alternate hypothesis was thus established that stress management has a significant relationship with academic performance in English Language among secondary school students in Abia State.

### **Discussion of the findings**

The findings from research question one and the testing of the first hypothesis established that nuclear family structure significantly predicts secondary school students' academic performance in English Language in Abia State. The regression analysis revealed a moderately strong and positive relationship between the stability of the nuclear family and students' academic achievement. This indicates that a substantial portion of the variation in English Language performance can be explained by the influence of the nuclear family structure. The statistical significance of this relationship led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This predictive relationship suggests that the dual-parental support, supervision, and emotional stability typical of nuclear families create a foundation that accounts for a significant portion of a student's success. These results align with Aremu and Lawal (2020), who noted that nuclear family structures significantly influence English performance. They are also consistent with Igbokwe and Nwankwo (2019), who identified family background as a key predictor of achievement due to higher levels of parental encouragement and supervision.

The results for research question two and the second hypothesis demonstrated that stress management is a highly significant predictor of academic performance in English Language.

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The analysis showed a high positive relationship; meaning that as a student's ability to manage stress increases, their academic performance tends to rise accordingly. It was established that a majority of the variance in students' academic performance can be explained by their ability to manage stress effectively. This predictive relationship was confirmed to be statistically significant, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis. These findings indicate that students who employ effective coping mechanisms, such as time management and relaxation, are better equipped to handle the cognitive and emotional demands of the English Language curriculum. This is supported by Ogakwu et al. (2023), whose research showed that school-based stress training directly improves classroom participation and performance. Similarly, Amaefule (2021) established that stress-management skills are vital predictors of success in core subjects, highlighting the importance of self-regulation in academic settings.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that there is a significant relationship between nuclear family structure and academic performance. Also, the study further discovered that there is significant relationship between stress management and academic performance.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Educational institutions should recognize the influence of family cohesion when interpreting students' academic behaviours and performance levels.
2. Schools should incorporate activities such as goal-setting exercises, behaviour tracking, and classroom rewards for consistent effort. These strategies can help students develop better self-regulation, which is vital for academic success.

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