



Family Factors and Academic Outcomes among Secondary School Students in Benue State, Nigeria: A Multivariate Analysis of Structural and Dynamic Configurations

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Abstract. This study, drawing from Bowen Family Systems Theory, investigated the predictive powers of both structural and dynamic family configurations on academic outcomes among secondary school students in Benue State, Nigeria. The study sought to address gaps in prior univariate studies as a result of which a multivariate approach was adopted to assess configurational effects on English Language, Mathematics and General Knowledge. Materials and methods involved survey-based multivariate design deployed to target a population of 16,076 Senior Secondary School III students in 772 public schools. The study relied upon a multi-stage sampling procedure for the selection 1,608 respondents (802 males, 806 females) across 23 Local Government Areas of Benue State. For data collection, two validated instruments were used: the Family Factors Questionnaire, a 30-item Likert-scale tool measuring structural and dynamic composites (reliability coefficient $r=0.81$), and the Educational Achievement Test, comprising 120 multiple-choice items (40 per subject). Reported reliability coefficients were $r = 0.81$ (for the FFQ instrument) and Kuder–Richardson Formula 20 ($KR-20$) = 0.87 for the achievement test. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 25 was utilised for multivariate regression analyses of null hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that both configurations significantly predicted outcomes ($p<0.001$). Family structure explained 49.5% to 66.4% of variance in academic outcomes across the three subjects while variance of 28.0% to 50.4% of variance was accounted for by family dynamics. Recommendations include: (1) implementing parental education programs to enhance household stability and resource management; (2) establishing school counselling for improving family communication and emotional support; (3) integrating family-oriented policies in education ministries; (4) conducting ongoing assessments of family influences; (5) creating home-school collaboration platforms like workshops; and (6) providing targeted aid, such as mentoring and scholarships, for students from unstable families.

Keywords: Structural Configuration; Dynamic Configuration; Family Structure; Family Dynamics and Academic Outcomes

1. Introduction

The family is the first and often the most proximate context that shapes the direction of events for individuals in all sectors of society, notably including education. In the context of schooling, the ecological system of the child is shaped through the provision of material resources, supervisory structures, caregiving practices and cultural meanings that collectively influence motivation, attendance and academic performance – a factor significantly contingent on structural and dynamic configurations within the family system. Benue State of Nigeria spans an extensive configuration of families drawn from diverse ethnic groups, the predominant ones of which are the Tiv, Idoma and Igede peoples. Comparable household organisations, rooted in patriarchal traditions and extended kinship, are prevalent among the various peoples from these and other ethnic groups in the state. Similarly, their daily operations – both as individuals and as members of their respective societies – are shaped by shared cultural norms and similar external pressures. Among the Tiv people, who form the largest ethnic group in the state, extended compounds, where multiple generations live under the authority of the eldest male, constitute the prevalent household system. Usually, the extended family compounds incorporate polygynous marriages and these expand family size and complicate resource sharing (Ugbem, 2013). Compact family clusters with strong lineage ties are similarly prevalent in Idoma households, where uncles or elders assume prominent roles in rural settings. Igede families are organised around villages and clans, where communal bonds led by senior males prevail, a structure that, together with the predominance of subsistence farming, ensures that investment in education is significantly limited. Nuclear households are somewhat uncommon. These family forms, however, appear in urban centres, particularly among wage-earning populations. Even in such settings, extended relatives are often incorporated for mutual support and shared domestic responsibilities (Adikwu, 2025).

Across the different ethnic groups in the state, there is a growing emergence of single-parent households. This pattern, resulting from conflict-related fatalities and

separations, places the full responsibility for livelihood and child-rearing on the single parent, usually the mother. The household balance is further complicated by polygynous arrangements prevalent among the Tiv and partly among the Idoma. Within such systems, children from different unions receive unequal levels of support, leaving those born to subordinate wives at a distinct disadvantage (Fasiku, 2020).

Grandparent-directed households are increasingly common. They emerge when parents die or relocate in search of safety. Though elders provide stability and emotional continuity, their limited strength often hinders consistent school supervision. Similarly to grandparent-directed households, sibling-managed families emerge when parents die or are suddenly absent, with older siblings assuming caregiving responsibilities. Opportunities for learning are shaped by these structural configurations in the family system, quintessentially evident in erratic payments for essentials or shortages of supplies, heightening withdrawal within extended or polygynous homes and elevating rates of non-attendance, while students from single-parent households tend to perform worse academically because there is less parental supervision and monitoring of their schoolwork (Adikwu, 2025).

These structural alterations are aggravated by farmer-herder and communal conflicts, which have displaced whole households and reshaped household compositions. In Tiv-dominated areas such as Guma, armed assaults have forced families to relocate to camps, resulting in family separations and the suspension of classes, with student enrolment plummeting (Ngbede et al., 2024). Relocated families across ethnic lines consolidate into enlarged extended collectives for defence, merging obligations but attenuating focus on studies. Across ethnic divisions, this collective adaptation – relying on kinship networks during periods of turmoil – reveals overlap: Tiv polygynous households may fragment into clusters led by elders or siblings, while Idoma networks frequently absorb orphans. Yet all endure curtailed schooling chances. Resources are prioritised for essentials rather than education, resulting in lower attendance and academic achievement among secondary school students (Okwori & Gbough, 2019).

Within these organisations, dynamic household configurations additionally direct the educational paths for students. Tiv households exhibit diverse forms of guidance, ranging from directive yet supportive approaches that foster order to rigid approaches during hardship, which demand strict adherence without assistance. Kinship connections can provide crucial support; however, role ambiguity in polygynous or elder-led households may destabilise family functioning, thereby adversely affecting academic outcomes. In areas marked by instability, caregivers often prioritise safety over recognising school achievements, which can elevate students' anxiety and attention difficulties (Ngbede et al., 2024). Academic

outcomes in Benue's secondary schools are jointly shaped by the structural and dynamic configurations of family households, where stable extended families and supportive interactions encourage initiative and higher achievement, frequently through collective monitoring. Yet, conflicts such as family disputes exacerbate these challenges as fragmented polygynous households increase pressures on members and heighten the likelihood of school dropout. Among the Igede, traditional exchange norms may restrict girls' contributions, and when coupled with organisational preferences favouring males, constrain girls' learning opportunities, while boys continue to receive greater support (Fasiku, 2020). Such recurring experiences underscore the need for targeted interventions to reinforce both structural and dynamic household factors, fostering more equitable learning outcomes. Across Tiv, Idoma and Igede families, there are many points where structure and relationship patterns merge. In a large polygynous household, for example, even if economic resources are scarce, strong cooperation among co-wives and siblings can sustain children's schooling. Conversely, a small nuclear family with constant quarrels or poor communication can still produce weak academic results. The real impact of the family on education therefore depends not only on its size or form but also on the tone and quality of daily relationships. There is, therefore, the compelling need to ground the described structural and dynamic configurations in empirical realities with particular reference to the influence they exert on academic outcomes among secondary school students in Benue State across multiple subjects – hence the multivariate character of the study.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the extensive studies in Nigeria that have examined how family factors shape students' academic outcomes, most have adopted single-subject or univariate approaches that fail to capture the range of academic outcomes. Similarly, most have focused either on family structure – the number of parents, family size, or type of household – or on family dynamics such as parenting style, communication, and supervision. In Benue State, Aye et al. (2019) found that family structure predicts academic achievement, and Nnome et al. (2022) linked communication patterns to self-efficacy. Yet, the extent to which family structure and family dynamics separately influence student achievement across different school subjects remains unclear. This gap propelled the application of a multivariate approach that regressed composite indices of family structure and family dynamics on outcomes from secondary school students across English Language, Mathematics, and General Knowledge (1) to determine whether these family factors demonstrated consistency or variance in effects across subjects and (2) to provide a more complete picture of how the organisation and relational atmosphere of families in

Tiv, Idoma, and Igede communities shape academic outcomes in Benue State.

1.2 Research Objectives

In line with the stated problem of the study, this research sought to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To determine the extent to which the composite measures of family structure predict student outcomes across English Language, Mathematics, and General Knowledge in Benue State secondary schools.
- To determine the extent to which the indicators of family dynamics predict student outcomes across English Language, Mathematics, and General Knowledge in Benue State secondary schools.

1.3 Research Questions

To meet the research objectives, the following questions guided the study:

- To what extent do the composite measures of family structure significantly predict student outcomes across English Language, Mathematics, and General Knowledge in Benue State secondary schools?
- To what extent do the indicators of family dynamics significantly predict student outcomes across English Language, Mathematics, and General Knowledge in Benue State secondary schools?

1.4 Null Hypotheses

To address the research questions, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

- The composite measures of family structure do not significantly predict student outcomes across English Language, Mathematics, and General Knowledge in Benue State secondary schools.
- The indicators of family dynamics do not significantly predict student outcomes across English Language, Mathematics, and General Knowledge in Benue State secondary schools.

1.5 Theoretical Framework: Bowen Family Systems Theory (1976)

Bowen family systems theory, developed by psychiatrist and researcher Dr Murray Bowen (1913–1990), is one of the first-generation theories developed in the 1960s and 1970s that focused on interactions among individuals, moving beyond the individual perspective (Cochran, 2011). The theory provides an invaluable lens through which the complex interplay between family dynamics, family structure and educational achievement can be grasped. Bowen family

systems theory treats individuals' functioning and behaviour as intricately linked to their family system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The word “system” means a set of interrelated and interdependent elements, which could be components, units, entities, factors, members, parts etc. "Set" as used here, according to Miller (1978) cited in Sillitto, Dori, Griego, Jackson, Krob, Godfrey, Arnold, Martin & McKinney (2017), implies that these elements share common characteristics that are essential for interaction and relationships. The health of each element depends on the well-being of the others, collectively forming a functioning whole. If one element does not function well, the other elements experience adverse effects. The elements are, therefore, highly integrated to accomplish an overall goal as they continually influence one another (directly or indirectly) to maintain their activity and the existence of the system. Therefore, the family functions like a system. It is actually a system – a system of individuals, each of whom has a part to play and rules to be governed by, and all of whom are expected to operate in a certain way informed by their role, which is determined by unconscious relationship agreements (Mind and Body Works, 2021).

The theory is significant in demonstrating that both family structure and family dynamics shape students' academic outcomes. Families spanning the diverse ethnic configurations of Benue State are organised into household forms: nuclear, extended or polygynous. These create varying conditions for supervision, communication, and emotional support. The effectiveness of these arrangements does not merely lie in their form but in how the family system functions as an integrated whole. Going back to observations from Mind and Body Works (2021), each family member operates according to implicit relational rules that sustain or undermine systemic balance. This is to say that a student's educational achievement reflects the family's capacity to maintain both organisational stability and emotional health, validating Bowen's proposition that individual competence in wider systems such as school originates in the adaptive functioning of the family unit.

2. Literature

A review of literature on the multivariate analysis of structural and dynamic configurations within the family system, in relation to their effects on academic outcomes, will focus on family structure, family dynamics, academic outcomes and empirical evidence for family structure and family dynamics as predictors of academic outcomes.

2.1 Family structure

Family structure refers to the formal organisation of household membership, roles, boundaries, and authority relationships (Amato, 2005; McLanahan & Percheski, 2008). It encompasses types such as nuclear, single-parent, extended, blended, or polygynous families. The

structural configuration establishes how time, resources and supervision are allocated among members (Cherlin, 2010). In theoretical accounts, structure is the scaffolding through which socialisation and resource flows take place, influencing children's exposure to supports or constraints in educational settings.

2.2 Family dynamics

Family dynamics denote the processes of interaction among household members: communication, conflict resolution, emotional support, cohesion and adaptability (Olson, 2000; Cox & Paley, 2003). These dynamics work wonders in managing stress, regulating motivation and shaping relational climate. Also dependent on healthy dynamics are openness, mutual respect, and effective problem-solving; dysfunctional ones show rigidity, withdrawal or persistent conflict (Minuchin, 1974; Bowen, 1978). As the engine of the family system, dynamics translate structural arrangements into lived experience, shaping how individuals respond to external demands such as schooling.

2.3 Academic outcomes

Academic outcomes can be defined as the measurable indicators of student performance, such as grades, standardised test scores, subject mastery, attendance and engagement (Wang & Eccles, 2013). This definition of academic outcomes includes both cognitive skills and non-cognitive factors that include effort, self-regulation and persistence. Because students engage with distinct curriculum areas, family influences may vary across domains (e.g. mathematics, language) depending on the nature of support and involvement. Academic outcomes, therefore, according to Eccles & Wigfield (2002), serve as the endpoint linking family environments to educational success.

2.4 Empirical evidence for family structure and family dynamics as predictors of academic outcomes

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that family structure and relational processes independently correlate with student achievement. For example, Oba-Adenuga (2020) found that students in nuclear families performed significantly better than those in non-traditional structures in Lagos. In Ogun State, students from two-parent homes outperformed peers from single-parent families (Impact of Family Structure, 2017). Research in Osun State by Adeleke and Akinloye (2019) established a positive association between family communication and academic outcomes among secondary school pupils. Uwaifo (2012) similarly demonstrated that university students from stable two-parent homes had higher academic ratings than those

from single-parent households. Together, these findings affirm that both structure and dynamics hold predictive value for academic performance in Nigeria.

2.5 Research gap

Despite this evidence, few studies adopt a multivariate design that treats composite measures of family structure and family dynamics as parallel predictors across subject-specific outcomes (e.g. English, Mathematics, General Knowledge). In the context of Benue State, no known study has compared how structural and relational configurations differentially influence performance in these multiple academic domains.

3. Research Methodology

A survey-based multivariate design was adopted for the study to determine the predictive powers of the composite measures of family structure on the indicators of family dynamics within of students' academic outcomes in English Language, Mathematics and General Knowledge. The study population comprised 16,076 Senior Secondary School (SSS III) students enrolled in 772 public secondary schools across Benue State. Following Nworgu's (2015) sample-size guidance, ten per cent of the population ($n = 1,608$) was selected using a multi-stage sampling procedure. First, all 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) were included. Second, ten per cent of schools within each LGA were randomly selected ($n = 77$ schools). Third, within each selected school, ten per cent of male and ten per cent of female SSS III students were randomly drawn, yielding 802 male and 806 female respondents. Two instruments were administered. The Family Factors Questionnaire (FFQ) comprised 30 Likert-type items divided equally between measures of family structure and family dynamics. The Educational Achievement Test (EAT) comprised 120 items. The 120 items were 40 multiple-choice questions each in English Language, Mathematics, and General Knowledge. Both instruments underwent content validation by subject-matter experts. Reported reliability coefficients were $r = 0.81$ (for the FFQ instrument) and Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 ($KR-20$) = 0.87 for the achievement test. Data collection proceeded sequentially: respondents first completed the FFQ and then the EAT. Students' admission numbers were used to match questionnaire and test data for each participant. Data were analysed using multivariate regression techniques to accommodate multiple dependent variables (subject scores in English, Mathematics, and General Knowledge, and overall achievement). All tests of null hypotheses were conducted at .05 significance threshold.

4. Results

H₀₁: *The composite measures of family structure do not significantly predict student outcomes across English Language, Mathematics, and General Knowledge in Benue State secondary schools.*

Table 1: Multivariate Regression Analysis of the Predictive Powers of the Composite Measures of Family Structure on Student Outcomes across English Language, Mathematics and General Knowledge

| Dependent Variable | R-Squared | β Coefficients | T | df | F | p-value |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|----|----------|---------|
| Performance in English Language | .664 | 2.958 | 55.026 | 1 | 3027.814 | 0.000 |
| Performance in Mathematics | .495 | 2.945 | 38.691 | 1 | 1496.980 | 0.000 |
| Performance in General Knowledge | .638 | 2.957 | 51.862 | 1 | 2689.631 | 0.000 |
| Performance across Three Subjects (Pillai's Trace Test) | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | 3 | 1028.645 | 0.000 |

Source: Data from researchers' fieldwork (analysed using SPSS Version 25 Output)

From the data presented in Table 1, it is evidently clear that the p-value of the multivariate regression analysis of the predictive powers of the composite measures of family structure on student outcomes across English Language, Mathematics and General Knowledge, at 0.000, is less than the significance level of 0.05. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that the composite measures of family structure significantly predict student outcomes across English Language, Mathematics and General Knowledge in Benue State secondary schools.

H₀₂: *The indicators of family dynamics do not significantly predict student outcomes across English Language, Mathematics and General Knowledge in Benue State secondary schools.*

Table 2: Multivariate Regression Analysis of the Predictive Powers of the Indicators of Family Dynamics on Student Outcomes across English Language, Mathematics and General Knowledge

| Dependent Variable | R-Squared | β Coefficients | T | df | F | p-value |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|----|----------|---------|
| Performance in English Language | .504 | 2.533 | 39.431 | 1 | 1554.794 | 0.000 |
| Performance in Mathematics | .280 | 2.180 | 24.411 | 1 | 595.902 | 0.000 |
| Performance in General Knowledge | .465 | 2.481 | 36.420 | 1 | 1326.423 | 0.000 |
| Performance across Three Subjects (Pillai's Trace Test) | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | 3 | 532.779 | 0.000 |

Source: Data from researchers' fieldwork (analysed using SPSS Version 25 Output)

From the data presented in Table 2, it is evidently clear that the p-value of the multivariate regression analysis of the predictive powers of the indicators of family dynamics on student outcomes across English Language, Mathematics and General Knowledge, at 0.000, is less than the significance level of 0.05. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that the indicators of family dynamics significantly predict student outcomes across English Language, Mathematics and General Knowledge in Benue State secondary schools.

5. Discussion

As indicated in the multivariate regression analysis reported in Table 1, the composite measures of family structure significantly predict student academic performance across English Language, Mathematics, and General Knowledge in Benue State. The rejection of the null hypothesis is confirmed by Pillai's Trace analysis of the overall result ($F = 1028.645, p = .000 < .05$). The R^2 values: .664 for English, .495 for Mathematics and .638 for General Knowledge – how that family structure explains 66.4%, 49.5%, and 63.8%

of the variance in student achievement, respectively. A one-unit increase in the composite measure of family structure yields about a 2.96-point rise in performance across all subjects, as signified by the corresponding β coefficients of 2.958, 2.945, and 2.957, with t-values of 55.026, 38.691, and 51.862, respectively. This to say that even a single-unit improvement in family structural stability – reflected in the Likert-based composite – translates into tangible academic gains across literacy, numeracy, and general knowledge domains. The present findings resonate with those of Mante et al. (2021), who observed that parental support and the organisation of family life played a decisive role in improving students' educational outcomes in Ghana. In a related study, Oba-Adenuga (2020) reported that differences in family structure were responsible for variations in academic performance among secondary school students in Lagos State, Nigeria. This pattern is further reinforced by the current data, where consistent β coefficients across subjects mirror these earlier observations.

As presented in Table 2, the multivariate regression results reveal that students' academic performance is significantly predicted by the indicators of family

dynamics across English Language, Mathematics, and General Knowledge in Benue State. The Pillai's Trace value ($F = 532.779$, $p = .000 < .05$) confirms a multivariate effect of family dynamics on student outcomes. This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The R^2 values: .504 for English, .280 for Mathematics, and .465 for General Knowledge – indicate that 50.4%, 28.0%, and 46.5% of the variance in student achievement, respectively, are attributable to family dynamics. Similarly, β coefficients of 2.533, 2.180, and 2.481 – with corresponding t-values of 39.431, 24.411, and 36.420 – demonstrate that approximately 2.53-, 2.18-, and 2.48-point improvements in academic outcomes across these subjects are associated with a one-unit increase in the composite indicators of family dynamics. As affirmed by the findings, positive family dynamics – characterised by stable relationships, conducive study environments, effective academic communication, parental support, time management, emotional security, and balanced family interactions – significantly enhance student achievement across subjects and overall performance. Okeke, Nwipko and Anierobi (2020) reported a strong positive association between parental expectations and adolescents' academic success in Southeast Nigeria. This lends a voice in support of the present findings. A similar lending of a voice in support of the present findings can be said of Zhao and Zhao (2022) who found that family atmosphere, parent-child interactions, and household rules significantly influenced adolescents' academic outcomes, with peer relationships serving as partial mediators. More to that, the findings resonate with Oladeni-Sakirudeen (2018). This is because their study reported that variations in family relational stability and parenting quality significantly shaped students' educational achievements in secondary schools.

6. Conclusion

The structural and dynamic configurations of the family system operate with significant predictive powers on students' academic achievement in English Language, Mathematics, and General Knowledge. While the organizational and material framework that anchors educational engagement find the centre of their reality in the structural construction, the relational, emotional and communicative processes that sustain motivation and learning stability are embodied in the dynamic configuration. When these configurations operate in harmony, a balanced environment that promotes cognitive focus, emotional security, and consistent academic performance becomes a generative result. Conversely, imbalance or dysfunction within any of the configurations generates an ecological system where the family's integrative role in educational attainment becomes significantly undermined. Therefore, an elevated strength in configurations across both the structural and dynamic dimensions of the family system is central to enhancing students' educational outcomes and fostering sustainable academic growth.

7. Recommendations

Educational authorities and community stakeholders should promote initiatives that can reinforce the organisational stability of families through parental education, time management and material support systems which can enable consistent learning conditions at home.

Counselling units in schools should collaborate with parents to build effective channels of academic communication, emotional support, and conflict resolution within families, ensuring that the dynamic configuration of the family sustains students' motivation and learning focus.

Ministries of Education should embed family-oriented programmes into school improvement strategies, recognising that balanced structural and dynamic configurations within families are vital determinants of students' educational achievement.

Continuous assessment of how evolving family structures and interaction patterns affect students' academic outcomes should be institutionalised to generate empirical evidence that informs responsive family-school policies.

Schools should create structured platforms, such as periodic family engagement workshops and joint academic review meetings, to encourage active parental participation in the learning process and strengthen home-school synergy.

Social welfare and educational agencies should identify and support students from structurally or dynamically fragile families. Achieving this objective compels an imperative for the implementation of targeted interventions – like counselling, mentoring and scholarship programmes – that should be designed to mitigate the educational disadvantages arising from unstable home environments.

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