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**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY BACKGROUND AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG SPECIAL NEEDS LEARNERS**

**Alokan F.B. A. and Jenyo B. O.**

*Department of Guidance and Counselling*

*Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti*

*Corresponding Author Email Address and Phone Number:*

[alokanfunmilola@yahoo.com](mailto:alokanfunmilola@yahoo.com)

08030400954

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**Abstract**

*The study sought to find out the relationship between family background and academic performance among special needs learners in the three special schools in Ekiti State. A descriptive design of survey type was adopted for the study. Thirty-four special needs teachers were drawn by purposive sampling technique from the three special schools in the state. The instrument used for the study was a self-designed questionnaire tagged 'Relationship Between Family Background and Academic Performance Questionnaire' (RFBAPD). Expert judgements were used to ensure face and content validity of the instrument. The method used to test the reliability of the instrument was test-retest and a reliability coefficient of 0.70 was obtained. The instrument was found to be suitable for data collection. Data collected were analyzed by Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result showed that there was a significant relationship between family background and academic performance of special needs learners in Ekiti State. It was recommended that all parents of disabled children regardless of whether they are educated or not, should continue to get involved in their children's academic progress by monitoring their activities in and out of school, ensuring that homework is done, providing all necessary materials they need in school and meeting with their teachers when the need arises.*

**Keywords:** Family background, academic performance, special needs learners, special schools, special needs teachers.

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**Introduction**

Special Education (also known as Special Needs Education) is the practice of educating students with special needs in a way that address their individual differences and needs. Ideally, this process involves the individually planned and systematically monitored arrangement of teaching procedures, adapted equipment and materials, and accessible settings. These interventions are designed to help learners with special needs achieve a higher level of personal self-sufficiency and success in school and their community, than may be available if the students were only given access to a typical classroom education.

Special education is a process that is individually developed to address a specific child's needs that result from his or her disability. It is individualized for each child. Special Education programmes are designed for those students who are mentally, physically, socially and/or emotionally "delayed", broadly categorized as a developmental delay signifies an aspect of the child's overall development (physical, cognitive, scholastic skills) which place them behind their peers. Due to these special requirements, students' needs can not be met within the traditional classroom environment.

The family has the potential to influence a child's academic achievement. This is because it is the

first environment of the child. The initial experience that would mold the child's values, aspirations, emotions, interest and attitudes are offered by the parents/family (Okeke, 2009). What the child learns at home and how his family motivates him towards education contributes to the child's success in school (Essien, 2002). Similarly, Obasi (1999) observed that mere making sure that the children are prepared for school in the morning is important for the children's successful achievement at school. Among few studies that contradict this notion is the study of Osuafor and Okonkwo (2013). They found out that family structure, parents' occupation and parents' level of education did not have significant influence on students' achievement in biology.

Family background is a collective terminology comprising of social class/status, economic status, family size, family structure, parents' educational level, occupation and other factors pertaining to family life. Family background in the context of this study refers to parents' level of education, economic status, parents' attitude in upbringing their children and parents' attitude towards their children schooling.

The level of educational attainment of parents could influence the academic achievement of their children. It appears that those whose parents have a tertiary level of education perform better than those whose parents have only basic schooling. In a family where both the father and mother are educated, their children are always taken good care of in their academic activities. Such parents know the importance of getting educational materials for their children in school. They may go through the children's exercise books after school, or even employ a private teacher to teach them after school. By so doing, their academic performance will be improved; whereas in the case of illiterate family, the need to supervise the children's exercise

books is not there, hence their children's low academic performance in school is conspicuously noticed. Educated parents may also have library at home, stocked with novels, encyclopedia and other educational books and educational audio visual tapes. When children make use of these materials, it will enhance their intellect.

Egalite (2016) in discussing the Coleman Report's conclusion observed that the influences of home and family were at odds with the paradigm of the day. She said that the politically inconvenient conclusion that family background explained more about a child's achievement than did school resources ran contrary to contemporary priorities, which were focused on improving educational inputs such as school expenditure levels, class size, and teacher quality. She also stated that better-educated parents are more likely to consider the quality of the local schools when selecting a neighbourhood in which to live. Once their children enter school, educated parents are more likely to pay attention to the quality of their children's teachers and may attempt to ensure that their children are adequately served. By participating in parent-teacher conferences and volunteering at school, they may encourage staff to attend to their children's individual needs.

According to Ekber and Gokhan (2013), achievement at school is not only linked with school-related factors but also with the socio economic environment in which students are raised. They said social scientists have emphasized since the mid-1960s in their research that the socio economic conditions of the family is an important factor in students' academic achievement. Students' academic achievement is determined by the family's socioeconomic characteristics and social environmental factors that are outside the school. The environment that students come from largely influences their school

performance; children from low socio economic conditioned families do not have a study environment in their homes to have a positive influence on their academic achievement at school.

Studies show that the socioeconomic status of the family has an important effect on the student's academic achievement at school. Every action of the family is a determiner that has an effect on the children's educational outcomes. The studies conducted on the relationship between the students' academic achievement and the families' socioeconomic status concentrate on such topics as family income, parents' level of education and location of residence.

Egalite (2016) in discussing the Coleman Report's conclusion further observed that as with parental education, family income may have a direct impact on a child's academic outcomes. She said parents who are struggling economically simply do not have the time or wherewithal to check homework, drive children to summer camp, organize museum trips or help their kids plan for college. Working multiple jobs or inconvenient shifts may make it hard to dedicate time for family dinners, enforce a consistent bedtime, read to infants or toddlers or invest in music lessons or sport clubs. Even small differences in access to the activities and experiences that are known to promote brain development can accumulate, resulting in a sizeable gap between two groups of children defined by different family circumstances.

Exceptional children and adults have useful roles to play in the society if given the opportunity. Demographic factors such as age, family background and type of residence and institutions may influence the performance of special needs learners. It is common knowledge that the first teacher of a child, handicapped or otherwise is his/her parent. Special needs learners in regular schools and those in special education schools need to be

cared for especially by their parents; this will contribute greatly to their level of performance in schools and the society at large.

Physiological, psychological or sociological factors will most likely contribute to the academic performance of special needs population. Challenges facing the handicapped children in terms of their physical disability, psychological reactions like anger, poor interpersonal relationship, withdrawal, depending on others and lack of motivation will most likely influence the performance of special needs learners. Moreover, sociological factors like discrimination, violation of rights, denial of opportunities and unequal treatment will most likely contribute to the academic performance of special needs population.

Much has been said about students' poor performance generally. The implication of this persistent poor performance of students is that a great percentage of them fail to get grades that will take them to higher institution for higher studies. This has been a source of concern to well-meaning Nigerians, parents, researchers and educators. Thus researchers in education in Nigeria have continued to seek for ways of improving the educational situation and maximize meaningful learning by students. Hence, there is need to carry out this study to obtain an authentic and current information on how family background influences students' performance in special schools for special needs learners in Ekiti State.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Scholars have posited that the special needs population is found in inequalities of educational opportunities. There seems to be inadequate provisions for the special needs learners in terms of the number of special schools in both urban and rural areas, inadequate educational facilities, insufficient funds, inadequate number of qualified

teachers/experts to teach special needs learners, low level of training programmes for special needs teachers, inadequate plans for identification of special needs learners, inadequate school's architectural design, poor family background of most special needs learners and insufficiency of paraprofessionals/specialists. In Ekiti State, there are three schools established to cater for the needs of disabled children. There are two schools for the blind, deaf and dumb in Ikere-Ekiti and Ikoro-Ekiti. There is also the school for the mentally retarded in Ido-Ekiti. There seems to be the challenge of inadequate provision for special needs persons/disabled with the number of schools available.

One of the biggest areas in which the disabled persons have suffered is discrimination and victimization as well as deprivation. The handicapped children have problems with society, that is, the societal stigma. The society seems not to give them the adequate care and love they need; the society has misconceptions as to the cause of their handicap; they see a disabled child as one suffering as a result of parent's violation of one taboo or an offence to one's ancestor. Some parents likewise display feelings of hate, guilt, denial, depression, death-wish, and despair for their handicapped children. Also, some parents show excessive concern for them and treat them like invalids hence they are usually not given adequate opportunity to do things for themselves. Young people too will frequently not select handicapped children as friends. They often continue to be socially isolated. These show that they are not accepted with love from peers as well.

The societal stigma and the parental frustration result in the handicapped children not being well cared for like the normal child. Psychological/emotional imbalance or the vacuum created in handicapped children as a result of their not

being totally accepted by their peers and society all these put together, make such disabled children disadvantaged. This is because groups or individuals needed in their socialization processes as a means of attaining psychological balance and social interaction and development usually do not give their optimal support in helping them to overcome their physical, mental and emotional problems.

Accordingly, the Government of Nigeria has directed that all children including those with physical, mental and learning difficulties must be provided for under the educational system. In particular, government emphasizes the need for special arrangement for educating handicapped children and those that are exceptionally gifted. In other words, these children must be assimilated in the school and provided with all the services for disabled children. It is unfortunate to state that disabled children are not easily accepted in the normal school setting because of their disability which needs special attention. Since success in an education institution is measured by academic performance, there is need to find out the correlates of academic performance among special needs learners in the special schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The researchers set out to ascertain whether family background is a determinant of academic performance among the disabled students in Ekiti State. To this end, the following hypothesis was generated.

#### **Hypothesis**

There is no significant relationship between family background and academic performance among special needs learners in Ekiiti State.

#### **Methodology**

Descriptive research design of survey type was used. The plan of study involved the use of questionnaire to collect data in order to test the

hypothesis generated in the study. The target population for this study was made up of all teachers in special schools in Ido-Ekiti, Ikoro-Ekiti and Ikere-Ekiti of Ekiti State.

Population of special teachers in the schools for the handicapped is not too high. In view of this, purposive sampling technique was used so as to involve the total population of teachers in the above mentioned schools. In Ido-Ekiti, seven teachers were sampled; in Ikoro-Ekiti, nine teachers were sampled; in Ikere-Ekiti, 18 teachers were sampled; making a total sample of 34 teachers.

A self-designed questionnaire called 'Relationship Between Family Background and Academic Performance Questionnaire (RBFBAPO)' was used for the study. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items. Section A was designed to collect information on background characteristics of teachers. Section B consisted 12 items which required responses from teachers on the relationship between family background and academic performance.

The methods used in validating the research instrument were face and content validity. Experts judgements were used to determine both. A reliability test was carried out on 10 special teachers who were not part of

the sample. The scores obtained from two administrations of the questionnaire at two weeks interval were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 was obtained. The instrument was found to be suitable for data collection.

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed by the researchers and research assistants to a sample of 34 special needs teachers in special schools at Ido-Ekiti, Ikoro-Ekiti and Ikere-Ekiti. Copies of the questionnaire were collected back immediately after completion by the researchers.

The data obtained were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

#### Testing of Hypothesis

Ho: There is no relationship between family background and academic performance among special needs learners in Ekiti State.

In testing this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing the relationship between family background and academic performance among special needs learners.

Responses					df	rcal	rtable	Decision
X	Y	X <sup>2</sup>	Y <sup>2</sup>	XY				
29	11	841	121	319	2	0.96	0.95	Rejected
32	28	1024	784	896				
30	17	900	289	510				
32	23	1024	529	736				
Total	123	79	3789	1723	2461			

The table shows that the rcal is 0.96 while the rtable is 0.95 with the degree of freedom of 2 at 0.05 level of significance. Since rcalculated (0.96) is greater than rtable (0.95) the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between family background and academic performance among special needs learners in Ekiti State.

There are plausible reasons for thinking that family background is a factor of academic performance. The level of educational attainment of parents could influence the academic achievement of their children. Educated parents probably know the importance of getting educational materials for their children in school. Some educated parents may have library at home, stocked with novels, encyclopedia and other educational

books and education audio visual tapes that their children can easily access. On the other hand, in the case of illiterate family the need to supervise children's academic work is not there. The children may even have to work after school with their parents to augment the family income.

The environment that students come from largely influences their school performance. Children from low socioeconomic conditioned families do not have a study environment in their homes to have a positive influence on their academic achievement at school. The result of this study is in line with the finding of Ekber and Gokhan (2013) which stated that achievement at school is not only linked with school-related factors but also with the socioeconomic environment in which students are raised. This result also conforms with the finding of Essien (2002) which said that what the child learns at home and how his/her family motivates him/her contributes to the child's success in school.

On the other hand, this result of significant positive relationship between family background and academic performance contradicts the findings of Osuafor and Okonkwo (2013) which indicated that there was no relationship between family structure, parents' occupation, parents' level of education and students' achievement in biology.

### Conclusion

Result of this study showed that there is a significant positive relationship between family background and students' academic performance. It becomes clearer that small differences in access to the activities and experiences that are known to promote brain development can accumulate, resulting in a sizeable gap between groups of students from different family background.

### Recommendations

Based on the result of this study, the following recommendations were made. Parents should continue to get involved in their children's academic

progress by monitoring their activities in an out of school, ensuring that homework is done, providing all necessary materials they need in school and meeting with their teachers when the need arises. All parents should endeavour to do these regardless of whether they are educated or not.

Schools alone cannot level the vast inequalities that students bring to the school house door, but a combination of school programmes, social services and community organizations could make a major difference. Ensuring that all students, regardless of family background, have a decent chance of doing well in their academic activities is an important societal and policy goal. Innovative approaches such as those outlined above could help us achieve it.

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