

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY FUNCTIONING AND SOCIAL SKILLS OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NORTH-CENTRAL STATES NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*This study investigated the relationship between family functioning and social skills in senior secondary school students across four North-central states of Nigeria: Benue, Nasarawa, Niger, and Kogi. Guided by three research objectives and three hypotheses, a correlational research design was employed. The study's population included 58,508 students, from which a sample of 394 participants was selected using a multistage sampling technique. These participants were drawn from twenty government-owned senior secondary schools, with five schools randomly chosen from each of the four states. Data were collected using two questionnaires: the Family Functioning Scale, adapted from Olson, Portner, and Bell's FACES III, and the Social Skills Assessment Scale for Adolescents, adapted from the Children's Services Council of Broward County. Both instruments were validated by professionals and demonstrated strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.72 for both the family functioning and social skills scales. Inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 alpha level. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between family cohesion and social skills ( $r=0.796, p=0.001$ ), family adaptability and social skills ( $r=0.722, p=0.010$ ), and family communication and social skills ( $r=0.838, p=0.001$ ). Based on these findings, it was recommended that parents create supportive and nurturing family environments to foster social skill development. Additionally, psychologists and counselors should conduct workshops and seminars to provide resources for parents, teachers, and students to improve communication skills, which in turn promotes understanding, empathy, and conflict resolution abilities.*

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### Introduction

Students often navigate a journey from social awkwardness to confident self-expression. The ability to express oneself emotionally and interact easily with others is a crucial part of a person's overall adaptation to life. Social skills are the competencies that allow an individual to initiate and maintain positive relationships, gain peer acceptance, and cope effectively within a larger social environment.

In Nigeria, there has been increasing concern about school-based violence and general conduct disorders among students, highlighting an urgent need to address this issue. Some adolescents today struggle with social difficulties, such as limited social interaction, few friendships, and negative responses to their attempts at social engagement (Morin, 2024).

The study of social skills is important because they are a fundamental aspect of our personality. They are essential for managing interpersonal relationships, making sound decisions, communicating effectively, regulating emotions, and achieving professional development. A person's lack of social skills can hinder their productivity and ability to contribute positively to society. Social skills are also vital for harmonious social

interaction and successful socialization. Research shows that individuals with strong social skills are better at problem-solving and adapting to change, whereas those with insufficient skills can become overly dependent on others (Nash, 2023). Ultimately, social skills significantly influence the quality of a person's social life and their ability to navigate social situations.

The family is the first place a child learns self-representation and social skills. Parents, as primary agents of socialization, are primarily responsible for teaching their children the values and behaviors cherished by society (Grusec & Hastings, 2015). Social development continues throughout life, and social skills become more complex as individuals learn that certain behaviors are appropriate in some settings but not others. The family developmental model recognizes that adolescents need to develop social competence outside the family. It suggests that families should have flexible boundaries to allow adolescents to form relationships with people outside the family system. This is especially important today, as students are exposed to an overwhelming amount of information and diverse cultural influences. Developing strong social skills enables adolescents to understand what to say, make good choices, and behave appropriately in various situations (Minuchin, 1985; Gresham & Elliott, 2008).

One of the strongest predictors of positive social adaptation in adolescents is growing up in a supportive home with strong emotional bonds (Kurock, Gruchel, Bonati, & Buhi, 2022). Positive family functioning is a protective factor against adolescent social problems and has a positive impact on their overall well-being. A strong family instills positive qualities in its members and teaches them how to function in society by providing unwavering support and using effective problem-solving techniques. A positive family environment that balances setting limits with giving choices helps children develop a sense of initiative and contributes to their overall social development.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between family functioning and variables such as social competence, sense of belonging, locus of control, and aggression in adolescence (Shafiq, Hanif & Shafiq 2023; Ackerman, 2018; Duncan, & McLane 2022). Other studies have explored how specific aspects of family functioning, such as cohesion or conflict, are related to self-efficacy and social skills (Olson, 2000; Barber & Buehler, 1996; Baumrind, 1991). Building on this research, this study aims to investigate the relationship between family functioning—specifically the dimensions of cohesion, adaptability, and communication—and the social skills of senior secondary school students in the North-Central states of Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As a secondary school teacher, the researcher has observed that many adolescents struggle to interact freely with their peers. These students often face academic and behavioral challenges. Adolescence is a crucial phase marked by rapid emotional, cognitive, and social growth. Developing strong social skills during this time is essential for building peer relationships, achieving academic success, and preparing for future adult life. However, many adolescents have difficulty acquiring these skills, leading to problems such as peer rejection, academic struggles, and emotional distress. Family functioning, which includes communication, cohesion, and adaptability, is believed to be a key factor in shaping an adolescent's social abilities. Despite the

recognized importance of family dynamics, there is a lack of clarity on how family functioning specifically impacts the development and quality of adolescents' social skills. Without a clear understanding of this relationship, interventions designed to support healthy adolescent development may be ineffective. Therefore, exploring the connection between family functioning and adolescent social skills is essential to inform family-based support programs and improve psychosocial outcomes. This study will investigate the relationship between family functioning and the social skills of senior secondary school students in the North-Central states of Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Based on the three dimensions of family functioning, the objectives of this study are to determine the relationship between:

- i. Family cohesion and the social skills of senior secondary school students in the North-Central states, Nigeria.
- ii. Family adaptability and the social skills of senior secondary school students in the North-Central states, Nigeria.
- iii. Family communication and the social skills of senior secondary school students in the North-Central states, Nigeria.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated for this study:

- i. There is no significant relationship between family cohesion and the social skills of senior secondary school students in the North-Central states, Nigeria.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between family adaptability and the social skills of senior secondary school students in the North-Central states, Nigeria.
- iii. There is no significant relationship between family communication and the social skills of senior secondary school students in the North-Central states, Nigeria.

### **Method**

This study employed a correlational research design, a quantitative approach that investigates the relationship between two or more variables. According to Cherry (2023), correlational evidence allows researchers to use one variable to predict another. The independent variable in this study is family functioning, while the dependent variable is social skills. The participants were senior secondary two students in public schools. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select four states in Nigeria's North-Central region: Benue, Nasarawa, Kogi, and Niger. A simple random sampling technique was then used to select five schools from each of the four states, for a total of 20 secondary schools.

Two instruments were used for data collection. The family functioning scale was adapted from Olson, Portner, and Bell's Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale (FACES III). This 34-item self-report measure assesses family cohesion, adaptability, and communication. The social skills assessment for adolescents is a 17-item scale adapted from the Children's Services Council of Broward County (2006). This scale

measures social skills across various domains, including personal relationships, communication, cooperation, self-management, and problem-solving.

The instruments were validated by professionals in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and were modified to fit the study population. A pilot test was conducted with 50 students, and the Cronbach's alpha results confirmed the instruments' reliability. The family functioning scale had an internal consistency of .716, while the social skills scale had an internal consistency of .727.

### **Procedure for Data Collection**

Permission was obtained from the school principals via introductory letters. The researcher then met with school counselors to explain the study and identify eligible students. Consent was obtained from students who were 18 years or older. For students under 18, parental consent was secured. The instruments were then administered to students who voluntarily agreed to participate. The researcher was present during the administration to provide any necessary clarification, and the completed forms were collected immediately, resulting in a 100% return rate.

### **Results and Discussion**

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant relationship between family cohesion and social skills of senior secondary school students in North central states, Nigeria.

**Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) Statistics on The Relationship Between Family Cohesion and Social Skills of Senior Secondary School Students in North-Central States, Nigeria**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	P
Family cohesion	394	40.321	7.988	0.796**	0.001
Social skills	394	45.132	7.951		

*P = 0.010 < 0.05, correlation is significant at the 0.05*

The results from Table 1, based on Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics, revealed a significant positive relationship between family cohesion and the social skills of senior secondary school students in Nigeria's North Central geopolitical states. With a calculated p-value of 0.001 (which is lower than the 0.05 alpha level) and a correlation index (r) of 0.796, the null hypothesis—which stated there is no significant relationship between the variables—is rejected. The correlation coefficient indicates that higher family cohesion is associated with higher social skills among the students. Hypothesis 2. There is no significant relationship between family adaptability and social skills of senior secondary school students in North central Geo-political zone, Nigeria.

**Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) Statistics on Relationship Between Family Adaptability and Social Skills of Senior Secondary School Students in North Central states, Nigeria**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	P
Family adaptability	394	40.300	8.226	0.722**	0.010
Social skills	394	45.132	7.951		

$P = 0.010 < 0.05$ , correlation is significant at the 0.05

The results from Table 2 Pearson product Moment correlation (PPMC) statistics revealed that a significant positive relationship exists between family adaptability and social skills of senior secondary school students in the central states, Nigeria. Reasons being that the p calculated value of 0.010 is lower than the 0.05 alpha level of significance at a correlation index r value of 0.722. The correlation coefficient indicates that the higher the family adaptability, the higher the social skills of the students. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between family adaptability and social skills of senior secondary school students in the central states, Nigeria, is hereby rejected.

Hypothesis 3. There is no significant relationship between family communication and social skills of senior secondary school students in North central states, Nigeria.

**Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) Statistics on Relationship Between Family Communication and Social Skills of Senior Secondary School Students in North Central states, Nigeria**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	P
Family communication	394	37.214	4.687	0.838**	0.001
Social Skills	394	45.132	7.951		

$P = 0.001 < 0.05$ , correlation is significant at the 0.05

The results from Table 3 Pearson product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics revealed that a significant positive relationship exists between family communication and social skills of senior secondary school students in the central states, Nigeria. Reasons being that the p calculated value of 0.001 is lower than the 0.05 alpha level of significance at a correlation index r value of 0.838. The correlation coefficient indicates that the higher the family communication, the higher the social skills of the students. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between communication and social skills of senior secondary school students in the central states Nigeria, is hereby rejected.

## Discussion of Findings

This study examined the relationship between family functioning and the social skills of senior secondary school students in north-central Nigeria. To achieve its objectives, three hypotheses were formulated, tested, and their findings were compared with other relevant studies.

The first finding indicates a significant relationship between family cohesion and the social skills of senior secondary school students. This result is consistent with a study by Mousavi, Taran, Ebrahimi, Mohammadi, and Kalantari (2015), which found an association between social competence and family functioning among university students. Although that study's population was different—university students versus the current study's focus on senior secondary school students—both findings support the idea that family harmony significantly impacts adolescents' social skills.

Similarly, this finding aligns with Sitota and Tefera's (2023) research, which explored how family cohesion affects adolescents' disruptive behavior. Their study, while showing an insignificant direct impact, suggests that while family cohesion is vital for preventing disruptive behaviors, it may be ineffective without other positive family processes like parental control and conflict resolution skills. In line with this, the Olson Circumplex Model of marital and family systems posits that adolescents from families with moderate cohesion levels have more positive communication and are more comfortable with intimacy during social interactions. Additionally, Johnson, Lovoie, and Mahaney (2023) note that a loss of family cohesion can lead to feelings of loneliness, social anxiety, and avoidance of social interactions. The positive relationship found in this study suggests that strong family bonds contribute to the development of effective social skills.

The second finding reveals a significant positive relationship between family adaptability and the social skills of senior secondary school students. This result is supported by a review by Olszewski-Kubilius, Lee, and Thomson (2014), which found that gifted students who rated their families as cohesive and flexible, with high levels of satisfaction and communication, also rated highly on social competence. While that study focused on gifted students, this present research includes all senior secondary students, broadening the applicability of the finding. Other studies, such as Orthu (2018), also agree that a disturbed family atmosphere and family disintegration negatively affect a child's personality and social interactions.

The third finding shows a significant positive relationship between family communication and the social skills of senior secondary school students. This aligns with a study by Hematic, Abbasi, and Klani (2020), which investigated the relationship between parental communication patterns and self-efficacy in adolescents whose parents had substance abuse issues. Their study found a direct correlation, suggesting that adolescents with effective family communication are more likely to have good self-efficacy. Nasir and Adli (2023) also found significant relationships between family communication and social self-concept. Additionally, the results from Mousavi, Taran, Ebrahimi, Mohammadi, and Kalantari (2015) reinforce this, showing a link between family communication and social competence. Despite differences in the populations and study areas, these findings consistently support the current study's conclusion: effective communication within the family positively impacts adolescent interaction both inside and outside the home.

The findings of this study are supported by the Beavers Systems Model Theory (1977). This theory asserts that a family's primary function is to provide an environment conducive to the physical, psychological, and social development of its members. According to the Beavers Model, family functioning is a product of its style (whether members turn inward or outward for support) and its competence (the family's ability

to balance structure and flexibility). Healthy family functioning is found between the extremes of an overly enmeshed family (exclusively inward-focused) and one that is overly disengaged (exclusively outward-focused). The theory suggests that when there is a healthy balance between a family's style and its competence, members are more likely to develop a high level of self-efficacy and strong social skills.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that a significant positive relationship exists between family cohesion and social skills, between family adaptability and social skills, and between family communication and social skills among senior secondary school students in north-central Nigeria.

The findings have important implications for educators, parents, counselors, and policymakers. Strengthening family functioning—particularly through emotional bonding, flexibility in roles, and open communication—may significantly enhance students' ability to interact effectively, make appropriate decisions, and navigate social environments successfully.

At the policy level, there is a need for community-based initiatives that support positive parenting and family education, especially in the North-Central states of Nigeria, where cultural and socio-economic factors may influence family dynamics. Programs aimed at improving family functioning could serve as a preventive measure against social maladjustment, behavioral problems, and academic underachievement among adolescents.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

Parents should create opportunities for family bonding, such as having family time or eating at least one meal together each day. Adolescents should be encouraged to participate in family discussions that concern them, as these provide valuable opportunities to practice social skills and build self-efficacy. This can be achieved through a joint effort from policymakers, educational psychologists, counselors, and communities. For instance, parenting workshops and seminars could be organized, religious leaders could promote these ideas during sermons, and mass media campaigns could highlight the value of family meals and shared activities. Testimonials from families who have seen positive changes through family cohesion could also be a powerful tool.

Adults in the family should create an environment that fosters open communication. Adolescents should be allowed to voice their opinions and ideas about decisions that affect them. Parents can also model positive social behaviors, including active listening, cooperation, and empathy.

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