MEDIATING ROLES OF SCHOOL BELONGINGNESS AND FAMILY FUNCTIONING IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAREER INDECISION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS.

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ABSTRACT: Academic performance is widely recognized as an indicator of students' knowledge improvement and mastery in their fields. However, several factors have been found to impede students' academic performance, preventing them from reaching their goals. This study investigated the relationship between career indecision and academic performance and whether this relationship is mediated by school belongingness and family functioning. The study adopted a cross-sectional design. Participants were 1408 secondary school students (males = 827, 58.7%; females = 581) drawn from 11 secondary schools from four states in Southeast Nigeria using a multi-stage sampling method. The mean age of the participants was 15.50 years ($SD = 1.27$ years). They completed the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale, Family APGAR questionnaire and Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire. Data on academic performance were obtained from the student's report cards from the previous third-term examinations in their various schools, which is usually a summation of the session's performance. Data was analysed using Pearson's correlation and Model 4 of the Hayes PROCESS Macro in SPSS. Results indicated that school belongingness and family functioning were positively associated with academic performance, while career indecision was negatively associated with it. Further, results indicated that the relationship between career indecision and academic performance was mediated by school belongingness but not family functioning. It was recommended that intervention programs that aim to improve students' academic performance be incorporated to improve students' sense of school belonging, family functioning, and career indecision.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Career Indecision, Family Functioning, School Belongingness, Secondary School Students

INTRODUCTION

Academic performance, alternatively referred to as academic success, is a term that relates to the degree to which students acquire knowledge, competencies, and attitudes through educational activities (Suleman et al., 2019). In Nigeria, students' inability to do well in school has increased recently despite efforts made by school leaders, teachers, parents, and governments to improve the trend, and this has remained a major source of concern to parents,

teachers, and significant others (Chioke, 2021; Hussain, 2006). For instance, the 2021 and 2022 NECO and WAEC results show that there was a 5 percent decline in students' performance from 81.7 percent in 2021 to 76.3 percent in 2022 for WAEC, and a decline of 10.9 percent from 71.64 percent in 2021 to 60.74 percent in 2022 in NECO results.

Research has shown that the recent decline in academic outcomes and engagement of students is not peculiar to Nigeria but a global problem (World Economic Forum, 2019). Despite intermittent reports of excellence of some graduates of Nigerian universities overseas (e.g., Luckson, 2022), Nigeria's education system ranked 124th out of 140 countries globally and 25th in Africa (World Economic Forum, 2019), placing the country among the poorest in academic engagement and performance in education despite its enormous human and material resources. According to the World Economic Forum (2019), only ten African countries out of the 34 countries sampled on the Global Competitiveness Report, were among the top 100 out of 140 countries with good educational systems. This trend is predicted to contribute to the poor academic performance of Nigerian students compared to their counterparts in other countries where education is seemingly more progressive. Although the government places a high priority on education by allocating up to 20% of the budget to it (World Economic Forum, 2019), the continuous decrease in academic engagement and performance among Nigerian students calls for more research into factors that improve their performance. Research of this kind will help to determine what other measures beyond budgetary allocations that the government and other stakeholders could utilise to improve academic outcomes among Nigerian students. By identifying factors that either improve or decrease students' academic performance, stakeholders will be well-informed about the necessary steps to take.

One important variable to be examined in the present study is career indecision. For decades, career decisions have probably been a source of concern to school management, teachers, counsellors, academic advisers, parents/guardians, and researchers. This is because the target of every parent and all concerned is to see the children excel in school and choose a good career that will enable them to become independent as adults. The school authorities see it as a great achievement when those who pass through their educational system are progressing in life. Making career choices is one of the most difficult challenges that students face when they move from secondary school to university schools. However, the student and society benefit from the quality of decisions made throughout these transitions.

An adolescent's career decision might either open or close doors for them in the future. Adolescents are expected to make a career decision or choice while still in high school, which is an important turning point in their lives. According to Tagay (2014), the choices that teenagers make about their educational path and the professions they want to pursue in the future are some of the most significant decisions that they will ever have to make in their whole lives. Despite the importance of this selection, secondary school students have been observed to have difficulty making a career choice (Boye, 2020). The term "career indecision" has been used to describe the inability of many secondary school students to make decisions on the job pathways they intend to pursue to achieve their goals in life. Family support has also been connected to career indecisiveness. Family members function as coaches, assisting the individual in overcoming existing barriers and challenges and connecting the individual with important personalities they may already know in their chosen profession. Peer interactions are also important in career development. According to Hellman (2014), when children begin to transition from being dependent on their parents to becoming independent, they tend to disassociate themselves from their parents, bond more with their peers and share most of their ideas with them, which underscores the important role of sense of belonging in school. Hellman

(2014) opines that more peer attachment correlates with less environmental exploration, which is a predictor of career indecision.

Having a sense of belonging is a fundamental human need, and it can help people achieve better mental and physical health. The need to belong is prominent in Maslow's (1962) hierarchy of human needs. The need to belong has recently been emphasised in the educational environment recently (Allen et al., 2021). Allen et al. (2018) highlighted the need for the provision of a loving and supportive educational environment to foster a sense of community and belonging among kids to thrive in. According to Goodenow (2013), school belongingness refers to how much a student personally feels integrated, appreciated, and empowered in their school social environment. It has been demonstrated that a strong sense of school belongingness is positively linked to improved student wellbeing, academic engagement, academic performance, and achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2009; Vargas-Madriz & Konishi, 2021). Many motivational metrics, including the expectancy of success, the value of schoolwork, and self-reported effort, are strongly and positively influenced by school belongingness (Molinari & Mameli, 2018). An increase in academic engagement and subsequent performance may be attributed to an increase in a student's sense of belongingness at school (Gillen-O'Neel, 2021). A positive relationship has been reported between involvement in extracurricular activities and a decline in absence from school (Korpershoek et al., 2020), positive social relations (Allen et al., 2021), and positive mental health (Arslan, 2021; Gopalan et al., 2022). This cluster of findings point to the roles school belongingness play in academic engagement and subsequent performance.

Some other factors which influence academic performance are not tied to the individual student. Some have dynamics that cut across the school and family-related environment, individual traits as well as society at large. Family functioning is one of those family-related variables that was considered in this study. Family functioning may be defined as how family members interact with, react to, and treat one another. According to Chukwuemeka and Obioha's (2023) definition of family dysfunction, contrary to family dysfunction, family functioning is a situation where the family functions well and fosters positive bond among members of the family. Communication methods, traditions, defined responsibilities and limits, degree of fusion, flexibility, adaptation, and resilience are only a few of the factors that contribute to the success of a family (Boston, & Warren, 2017). Many studies on student motivation in school have examined the role played by parents and other family members. Students' views of family support, parental actions, and socioeconomic and cultural traits all played roles in this study of the family setting (Hascher & Hagenauer, 2010). When a family is functioning well, members are more likely to work together to solve issues and show concern for one another. This was similar to the study of Silva, Vautero, and Usssene, (2021) who used Mozambique students as case study to explore the influence of family on academic performance. The results showed that the family impacts academic performance through perceptions of progress toward academic goals and academic self-efficacy. The result of the study by Gana, Rad, and Stoian, (2023) also affirms the influence of family functioning on academic performance among students. Adeniji, Akindele-Oscar, and Mabekoje (2020) investigated family functioning and academic engagement among secondary schools in Ogun state, Nigeria and noted that highly functioning families engage students more in academics.

The occurrence and severity of tension-type headaches can be lowered by enhancing all elements of family functioning. As life events change, families attempt to maintain their stability and continuity while responding to these changes in the family structure. A lack of flexibility in the family unit might make it difficult for a family to move through the many

phases of life. Teenagers in healthy homes are more likely to adapt when necessary than teenagers in dysfunctional families. Families that are well-balanced are likely to do better throughout their lives than families that are not well-balanced. In terms of communication, problem-solving, sensitivity, and involvement as measured by the student's attention, emotional regulation, and behavioural control, family functioning was highly correlated with child psycho-social adjustment (Hailikari & Parpala, 2014). It may be important therefore that school psychologists and other concerned researchers begin to look outside the context of the school itself and investigate other factors that may be negatively influencing students' academic performance in secondary schools. To fill this gap, this study therefore attempts to explore alongside other variables, the mediating roles school belongingness may be playing in students' career indecision and academic performance.
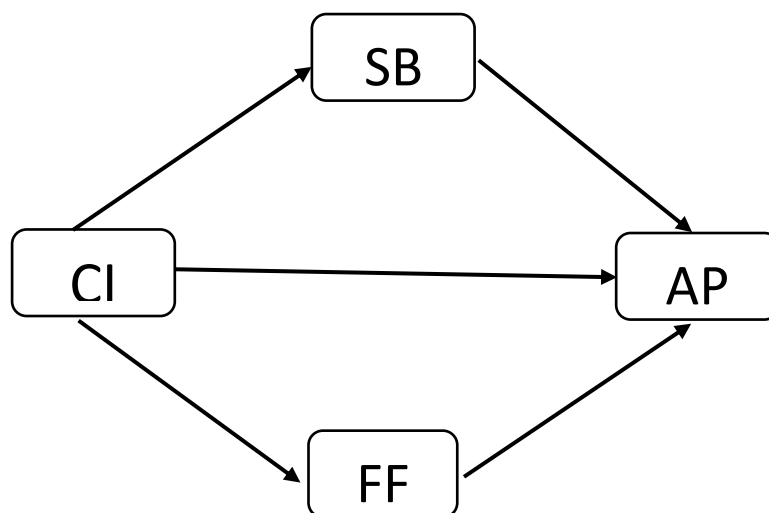
Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Mediating Roles of School Belongingness and Family Functioning in the Relationship between Career Indecision and Academic Performance of Secondary School Students.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature and the model of this study, it was hypothesized that:

1. Career indecision would negatively be associated with academic performance
2. School belongingness would be positively associated with academic performance.
3. Family functioning would positively be associated with academic performance.
4. School belongingness would mediate the negative relationship between career indecision and academic performance.
5. Family functioning would mediate the negative relationship between career indecision and academic performance.

METHOD

Participants

Participants in the present study were 1408 senior secondary school students who were drawn from 12 secondary schools from four Southeast states comprising Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi and

Enugu States. Imo State was excluded because of a high degree of insecurity during the time of data collection.

The ages of the participants ranged from 13 to 20 years, with an average age of 15 years ($SD = 1.27$). A total of 1289 (91.5%) students were living with their biological parents, 64 (4.5%) were living with their relations, 25 (1.8%) were living with non-relations, and 30 (2.1%) did not indicate who they were living with. On students' parental life status, 1128 (80.1%) had both parents alive, 116 (8.2%) had only their father alive, 92 (6.5%) had only their mother alive, 35 (2.5%) reported both parents dead, while 37 (2.6%) did not indicate their parental life status.

Instruments

Academic Performance

Students' school performance was measured using the student's results from the previously conducted third term examinations in their various schools. This method has been previously used by authors such as Zangmo et al. (2021) to measure academic performance. Other instruments used in the study are described below.

Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM)

The PSSM scale was developed by Goodenow (1993) to measure students' subjective feelings of belonging to their respective school communities. A Likert scale with five-point variations is used to rate each of the measures from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). It consists of 21 items: 13 items border on the student's sense of belonging to their school community and 8 items assess the student's feelings of being rejected by their institution. A sense of community and belonging at school is reflected in high scores. Goodenow (1993) reported an alpha of 0.85 for the feeling of belonging component of the PSSM, and 0.65 for the sense of being rejected component. Reliability analysis in the current study showed a satisfactory level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .70$).

Family APGAR Questionnaire

Family APGAR questionnaire developed by Smilksttein et al. (1982) was used to measure family functioning. It is intended to elicit data that represents a participant's assessment of the functioning status of their own family. Adaptability, partnership, growth, affection, and resolve are the five functional components that form the acronym APGAR. The scale has a three-point frequency rating scale: hardly ever = 0, sometimes = 1, and almost always = 2. Higher scores indicate higher family functioning. Campo-Arias and Caballero-Domínguez (2021) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .82 for the scale. The internal consistency obtained for the Family APGAR questionnaire in the current study was alpha = .72.

Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ)

Participants' career indecision was assessed using the CDDQ (Gati & Saka, 2001). The CDDQ is a 35-item self-report questionnaire that includes 32 CDDQ-revised items and 3 validity items that are not scored. Participants rate their degree of agreement with each statement on a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (does not apply to me) to 9 (fully applies to me). The CDDQ showed good internal consistency for the subscales of lack of information (.95) and inconsistent information (.89), as well as the overall scale (.94), but low dependability for the subscale of

lack of preparation (.63) (Gati & Saka, 1996). The internal consistency for the overall CDDQ scale in the current study was .82.

Procedure

A multistage sampling technique was adopted in choosing the schools and students for the study because it provides the opportunity for a probability sampling since the participants are large and dispersed populations. Multistage sampling is the taking of samples in stages using smaller and smaller sampling units at each stage. Specifically, the purposive sampling technique was used to select schools that matched the needed profile of participants, which was that the school must be co-educational and must comprise unity schools, state government schools and private schools. Secondary schools in each state were divided into two: co-educational/mixed schools and single gender schools. Only co-educational secondary schools were chosen by the researcher to reduce gender disparity in social context of learning (the interaction between boys and girls in co-educational schools could be different from interaction in single gender schools). The co-educational schools were further divided into three groups consisting of unity schools (Federal Government Colleges), public schools and private schools, following which one unity school, one public school and one private school were chosen from each State. The three different types of co-educational schools were chosen to accommodate probable infrastructural differences in learning related to the factors in the study. There was only one co-educational unity school in each state and each of them was included in the study.

Subsequently, simple random sampling was used to select one local government from each state to select participants from public and private schools. The technique was employed to select two secondary schools (one public school and one private school) from the selected local government areas.

Afterwards, purposive sampling technique was used to select the Senior Secondary 2 (SS2) class for the study. This was based on the expectation that students in SS2 classes would most probably be available for the study. It was considered that Junior Secondary School (JSS) students might find it difficult to fill the questionnaire, and some students of the Senior Secondary 1 (SS1) classes who transferred from other schools into the selected school with their Junior West African Examination Council (WAEC) results might not have immediate past class results in the selected schools' records. According to some of the school principals the researcher met before the commencement of the study, the Senior Secondary 3 (SS3) students were preparing for the Senior West African Examination Council examination and would not be available. This made the SS2 students the most likely participants.

The SS2 students were chosen from each of their classes using a systematic sampling technique. The researcher drew a sampling frame from the list obtained from the form teachers of the SS2 classes in the schools that were involved. The sampling frame comprised a list of all of the students who are eligible to be chosen as participants in the study. Due to the fact that each student had already been given a number, the class list was used to select a sample size of two. As a result, in each school, a random selection was made to select one of the first two people and then to select every other person in the same manner. Those that were not chosen were asked to step aside in some schools, while in some schools, the principal advised that we take the participants to the school hall. The researcher obtained ethical approval and an introductory letter from the Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The introductory letter was used to obtain permission and consent from the principals of the schools selected for the study. The consent of the principals were considered important as a result of

the age of the participants, The researcher selected and trained four (4) research assistants (two academic staff and 2 undergraduate students at a university in the study area) for data collection. In all the schools where students were sampled, a teacher was usually assigned to help to organise the students for the study. The students were approached in their classrooms during teaching hours. The researcher and the research assistants also introduced themselves to the students in their various classes and briefed them on what to do before the commencement of the exercise. They were informed to read the instructions carefully and not to copy from one another. After this, the instruments were distributed to the participants in their various classes during their respective break periods. They were also encouraged to respond to the items as honestly as possible and avoid any form of response bias as their personal information would remain confidential and whatever information they are giving will be strictly used for research purposes. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from taking part in the study. Each participant received a pen and a packet of biscuit for participating in the study. Data collection was done for 3 weeks and four working days.

Design and data analysis

This study adopted a cross-sectional design because a large number of participants were required to establish the hypothesized links among the variables (Aryal, 2022). Data were analysed using Model 4 of the Hayes PROCESS Macro. This enabled the researcher to determine the independent roles of school belongingness, family functioning, and career indecision in academic performance among secondary school students and to determine if the data meets the assumptions for mediation analyses.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 1. Means, Standard deviation and correlations of demographic factors, school belongingness, family functioning, career indecision and academic performance.

Variables		Mean	SD	1	2	4	5	6
1	Age	15.50	1.27	-				
2	Gender	-	-	-.05*	-			
3	School belongingness	51.96	11.87	.030	.01	-		
4	Family functioning	2.97	2.10	.03	.03	.13***	-	
5	Career Indecision	94.46	33.37	.01	-.01	-.12***	-.06*	-
6	Academic performance	62.03	12.66	.02	.00	.12***	.07*	-.08***

Note. ***$p<.001$; *$p<.05$; Gender (1 = Male, 2 = Female)

Table 1 showed that males in this study were significantly older than females ($r = -.05, p<.05$). However, age, gender, and employment status did not significantly correlate with any other variable in the study. School belongingness was positively related to family functioning ($r = .13, p<.001$) and academic performance, ($r = .12, p<.001$), but negatively related to career indecision, ($r = -.12, p<.001$). Family functioning was negatively associated with career indecision ($r = -.06, p<.05$), but positively correlated with academic performance, ($r = .07, p<.05$). Career indecision correlated negatively with academic performance, ($r = -.08, p<.001$).

Test of Hypotheses

Table 2: Hayes PROCESS macro results for predicting academic performance by P-value school belongingness, family functioning, and career indecision.

Predictor	B	β	t	95%CI	R^2	F
Career Indecision	-.04	-.12	-4.47***	[-.06, -.02]	.01	19.99 (1, 1378)***
Career Indecision	-.00	-.01	-2.03*	[-.01, .00]	.00	4.18 (1, 1378)*
Career Indecision	-.02	-.06	-2.19***	[-.04, -.00]	.02	9.48 (3, 1376)***
School Belongingness	.11	.10	3.84***	[.05, .17]		
Family Functioning	.32	.05	1.98*	[.00, .64]		
Career Indecision	-.03	-.07	-2.76**	[-.05, -.01]	.01	7.61 (1, 1378)***
School Belongingness	-.01			[-.02, -.01]		
Family Functioning	-.01			[-.01, .00]		

***$p<.001$, **$p<.01$, *$p<.05$; SB = school belongingness; FF = family functioning; academic performance; CI = confidence interval [lower level; upper level]

Results in Table 2 were presented in four different models, which were used to determine if a mediation analysis is appropriate. In the first and second models, we checked whether career indecision (the predictor variable) would be significantly associated with the two mediator variables, school belongingness and family functioning (second assumption of mediation analyses; the predictor must be significantly associated with the mediator variables). We found that career indecision was negatively associated with school belongingness (β = -.12, $p<.001$) and family functioning (β = -.01, $p<.05$), indicating that each unit rise in career indecision was associated with -.04 and -.01 decrease in school belongingness and family functioning, respectively. The R^2 of .01 in the first model indicated that career indecision explained 1% of the variance in school belongingness. In contrast, R^2 of .00 in the second model indicated that career indecision explained 0% of the variance in family functioning. However, the p value of .048 indicated that the link between career indecision and family functioning was significant.

In the third model, we checked whether career indecision, school belongingness, and family functioning would be significantly associated with academic performance (third assumption mediation analyses; the predictor, as well as the mediators, should be significantly associated with the outcome variable). We found that career indecision was negatively associated with academic performance (β = -.06, $p<.001$), indicating that each unit rise in career indecision was associated with -.02 decrease in academic performance. On the other hand, school belongingness (β = .10, $p<.001$) and family functioning (β = .05, $p<.05$) were positively associated with academic performance, indicating that each unit rise in school belongingness was associated with .11 increase in academic performance, while increase in family functioning was associated with .32 increase in academic performance. The R^2 of .02 in the third model indicated that career indecision, school belongingness, and family functioning collectively explained 2% of the variance in academic performance.

In the final model, we checked whether career indecision would be independently associated with academic performance (first assumption of mediation of analyses; there should be an established link between the predictor and outcome variables). We found that career indecision was independently and negatively associated with academic performance (β = -.07, $p<.001$), indicating that each unit rise in career indecision was associated with -.03 decrease in academic

performance. The R^2 of .01 in the fourth model indicated that %1 of the variance in academic performance was independently explained by career indecision.

The mediation effects of school belongingness and family functioning in the relationship between career indecision and academic performance were examined using the 95% confidence interval (CI) of the completely standardised indirect effects. We found that school belongingness mediated the association between career indecision and academic performance because the 95% CI of the completely standardised indirect effect did not contain zero (B = -.01, 95% CI = -.02, -.01), indicating that the association between career indecision and academic performance passes through school belongingness. However, we found that this association was not mediated by family functioning because the 95% CI of the completely standardised indirect effect contained zero (B = -.01, 95% CI = -.01, .00).

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the direct independent relationship between career indecision and academic performance among Nigerian secondary school students, as well as the indirect effects of career indecision on academic performance through school belongingness and family functioning. The indirect effects specifically refer to the mediating roles of school belongingness and family functioning in the association of career indecision and academic performance. The study obtained several relevant findings. First, the study found that career indecision was negatively associated with academic performance, thus confirming our first hypothesis. This finding may imply that secondary school students who have difficulty deciding their future careers may likely perform significantly low in terms of their academics. This finding is consistent with previous findings that suggest negative associations between career indecision and academic performance (e.g., Boye, 2020; Etiubon et al., 2018). With the consistency of this finding, it becomes very important that researchers carefully investigate the issue of career indecision among students. Students need to be properly oriented in a timely manner about making career decisions that they will be satisfied with.

We also found that school belongingness was positively associated with academic performance, indicating that a higher level of school belongingness was related to a higher level of academic performance. This also confirms our second hypothesis. This finding is consistent with the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002), which postulates that the fulfilment of three psychological needs, which also includes relatedness, can cause individuals to be self-motivated and cause them to engage in positive behaviours. As a result, a sense of belonging in school can satisfy a student's demand for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, which in turn leads to increased academic performance on the part of the students. Furthermore, the relationship between school belongingness and academic performance has been seen in previous studies (Carrie, 2017; Gillen-O'Neel, 2021; Vaccaro et al., 2015) which found positive relationships between academic sense of belonging and students' academic performance across different populations. According to Lam et al. (2015), the feeling of being rejected can have a detrimental impact on academic performance by making one more susceptible to negative emotions and less able to experience pleasant ones. The findings are also consistent with previous studies (Larson, 2009; Niebuhr & Niebuhr 1999; Raddysh, 1992; Riel & Fulton, 2001; Yau, 1995) indicating that a sense of belonging in school is of particular importance in academic outcomes. Khamis et al. (2008) findings also indicated that student's conceptions about their learning, along with their relationship with teachers, were indicators to a student's motivation toward learning. This also shows that students and others in the school, such as the teachers and counsellors, working together in a symbiotic relationship helps the

students' academic engagement and outcome such that even a student who is academically behind can be successful if allowed to be an engaged learner in a personalised way.

The study further revealed that family functioning was positively associated with academic performance. In agreement with the present study, previous findings showed that home background (Boateng et al., 2021; Kobugabe, 2018) and family structure (Azumah et al., 2018; Mante et al., 2021) are associated with academic performance. Families with fewer conflicts and greater support may devote more time to activities that stimulate a child's intellectual growth (Chukwuemeka & Obioha, 2024), which may, in general, improve academic performance. The study also supports the findings of Barker et al. (2001) that good family relationships form an important background for academic performance. The findings support the importance of the attachment theory of Bowlby (1958), that attachment is one of the basic determinants of adult personality. This invariably means that when an individual realises an attachment figure is available, he or she will value the bond and have a desire to continue the relationship.

The study also has two interesting mediation findings: school belongingness mediated the relationship between career indecision and academic performance, but this relationship was not mediated by family functioning. This indicated that the relationship between career indecision and academic performance passes through school belongingness, but in the presence of a functional family, career indecision will not significantly impact academic performance, especially negatively as it was initially observed. The finding that school belongingness mediated this association is surprising but not improbable. School belongingness is a positive factor, just like family functioning, that is expected to reduce or completely prevent the negative effect of career indecision on academic performance, but this was not the case. The finding that family functioning did not mediate the association between career indecision and academic performance implies that good or bad family relations at home may not necessarily be a simultaneous preoccupation with career decision-making and academic performance. In as much as family functioning may be important on its own as it trains the student in the discipline or building of character which helps them to develop beyond teacher's rating, the student's performance and career decisions maybe related to other things that have to do with their relationship with their peers in school, teacher-student relationship and esteem.

Although school belongingness was found to be a positive factor that increases academic performance, it may be another avenue for negative peer pressures that may influence academic performance among students. In this situation, where a student has sense of belonging in school due to association with peers that negatively influence their academic lives, the student's academic performance may depreciate especially if the student has history of career indecision. It is recommended that the school authorities in Nigeria, should establish psychological centres and employ school psychologists who would be counsellors to the students in other to address the issue of negative peer pressures on their career decision and academic performance.

It feels good for one to learn where they find comfortable and where they have a sense of belonging. Strategies such as offering emotional support to students, prioritizing high quality teacher-student relationship and learner-centred teacher practices which promote student voices are to be implemented to enhance academic engagement and performance among secondary school students. Talking with students about their lives outside of school is one of the ways teachers can show an interest in and appreciation for students. Teachers may ask students questions about how things are going in other classes, in their after-school activities, or at home. It is important for teachers to show genuine interest in students' responses by

spending time listening, asking follow-up questions, and remembering key information (such as the name of a subject that the student is having hard time on). On the part of the family, it is rather an important finding that suggests that the family is the first agent of socialization of the child as well as the primary caregivers. The family is instrumental in satisfying children's need to belong. It is in their day-to-day interaction with the family members that children learn whether they are valuable and important, appreciated and loved, which underscores the important roles of family members in the academic success of their children.

The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Ministry of Education and Universal Basic Education Board, should encourage school psychologists to create awareness on the importance of school belongingness and family functioning on the academic performance of Secondary School students. Seminars and conferences involving the students, parents/caregivers as well as school teachers should be organized in schools in order to enlighten people on the dangers of certain behaviours that could be detrimental to the academic performance of the school children.

Of utmost importance is the establishment of counselling units in all secondary schools across the Nation as well as constant supervision/update on what is going on in such unit as this will help the students who needs counselling on career choice to have access to someone to talk to. This unit will also serve as a place where students who may be having issues with their family and any member of the school authority can easily come to and lodge their complaints and the case will be taken up and resolved as non-resolved issues with any of the above mentioned can result to depression and withdrawal from academic activities.

Some limitations of this study should be noted; the study only selected senior secondary school students in Southeast Nigeria hence the generalizability of the study is limited. There is the possibility of self-report bias by the participants with the use of questionnaire. A non-probability sampling method (purposive sampling) was used based on the method of convenience which may have resulted in underrepresentation of certain groups. It is recommended that future studies should consider to explore the relationships between these variables in the other geopolitical zones of the country. A longitudinal study design should be employed to capture the effect of the relationships among the study variables, from adolescence to passage to maturity and adulthood. Future studies may also examine other demographic variables such as the economic status of the parents as well as their age and educational level.

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