

# Influence of Single Parenting on English Language Proficiency of Secondary School Students in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the influence of single parenting on secondary school students' English Language proficiency in selected public secondary schools across Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two objectives: to examine how single parenting influences students' engagement with English Language learning, and to determine whether a significant difference exists in academic performance in English between students from single-parent and dual-parent households. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The sample comprised 400 students selected using a multistage sampling technique: first, 20 public secondary schools were proportionately drawn across the 16 local government areas of Ekiti State to reflect both rural and urban settings. Subsequently, stratified random sampling was used to ensure balanced representation from single-parent and dual-parent families. Data collection involved a structured questionnaire assessing academic engagement and home support, alongside academic records in English Language over a three-year period. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean) and inferential statistics (ANOVA) were employed to analyze the data. Results showed that students from dual-parent homes generally reported higher academic support, emotional encouragement, and access to English learning resources. Furthermore, repeated measures ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.001$ ) in English Language performance between the two groups across the three years, favoring students from dual-parent households. The findings underscore the role of family structure in*

*shaping academic engagement and performance. The study recommends that schools, policymakers, and social support agencies collaborate to provide targeted academic and emotional support for students from single-parent homes to bridge the performance gap.*

**Keywords:** single parenting, English Language proficiency, academic engagement, family structure, secondary school students, Ekiti State.

## INTRODUCTION

The family remains the primary agent of socialization and education, profoundly influencing a child's academic, emotional, and social development. Traditionally, children are raised in a dual-parent family structure, where both mother and father collaborate in nurturing and supervising their development. However, the rising incidence of single-parent families globally and within Nigeria presents significant implications for children's educational outcomes, particularly in core subjects like English Language. In Nigeria, social changes resulting from divorce, separation, death, and non-marital births have increased the prevalence of single-parent households, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas (Adeyemi & Jegede, 2021). Globally, approximately 320 million children between the ages of 0 and 17 are living with single parents, and around 11% of Nigerian families are headed by single parents (KAINOS Edge Data Service, 2020). It is reported that nearly 8% of all households worldwide are led by a single parent, with 84% of these households headed by mothers, equating to 101.3 million single mothers. These figures continue to rise (MakeMothersMatter, 2024). A study by Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (2024) reveals that in Nigeria, Specifically Anambra state, female single parents make up 73.3% of the total, while male single parents account for 26.7%. The increase in single parenting is driven by a variety of factors, including death (78.9%), divorce (77.8%), desertion (70.0%), separation (62.2%), and cultural practices (50.0%). These structural shifts in the family unit are reshaping the academic experience of children in ways that demand scholarly attention.

Single parenting, defined as the raising of children by one parent due to various circumstances such as divorce, separation, or death of a partner, has become a common phenomenon in many Nigerian communities (Odeyemi & Adedokun, 2022). In Nigeria anecdotal and emerging statistical evidence suggests an increasing number of school-aged children are being raised by single parents, primarily women. The effect of such a family structure on academic performance particularly in English Language, a critical subject for national examinations and higher education access has become a pressing issue. English Language is not only a subject in the curriculum but also the medium of instruction in Nigerian secondary schools, thereby playing a central role in shaping students' overall academic success (Okonkwo & Onyinyechi, 2020).

Scholars have expressed concern over the academic vulnerabilities of children from single-parent homes. According to Uwaifo (2021), children from two-parent families generally perform better academically than those from single-parent backgrounds, owing to the socio-economic advantages and emotional stability typically present in dual-parent households. Single parents often face increased financial burdens and time constraints, which may reduce the time and resources available to support their children's education. In subjects like English Language, which require continuous reinforcement through reading, writing, and verbal engagement, a lack of parental support or supervision may directly hinder a child's academic growth (Ibrahim & Ayanniyi, 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature on single parenting and academic performance, many studies, such as Azuka-Obieke (2013), Magara (2017) and Olugbenga (2014), focus on general academic achievement rather than specific subjects like English Language, which is crucial to academic success in Nigeria. While various studies have examined the broader effects of family structure on academic performance (Olugbenga, 2014; Anyakoha, 2016; Yaw, 2016), fewer studies have disaggregated the impact of family structure on performance in specific subjects such as English, Mathematics, or the sciences. Many of these studies, such as those by Hiko et al. (2023) and Amofa (2013), focus on general academic achievement, without exploring the unique challenges students face in subjects such as English Language. Further compounding the gap is the lack of empirical data that focuses on regions like Ekiti State, which may have unique cultural, social, and economic factors influencing students' academic performance. While studies in other regions, such as Lagos (Azuka-Obieke, 2013), Kenya (Magara, 2017), Brunei (Yaw, 2016), Ghana (Quarshie, 2023), Adamawa State (Basila, 2021) and South Africa (Adesokan, 2019), provide insights, there is a distinct need for region-specific research that considers the educational policies, family dynamics, and socioeconomic conditions that may affect students in Ekiti State. This trend is seen across multiple studies, including Anyakoha (2016), Bannawi et al. (2023), by Ibrahim et al. (2021), Surip (2016), Poyraz (2017), Kessie (2023), and Popoola (2022), Kodero, *et al.* (2021), Garutsa & Owolabi (2024), Hiko et al. (2023) and Oriola (2025). As a result, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the specific impact of single parenting on English Language achievement, particularly in the Nigerian context, where understanding this relationship is critical for educational planning and intervention. The studies by Olalekan (2020) and Adeyemi & Jegede (2021) highlight the need for region-specific investigations to address this gap. This study, therefore, seeks to:

- i. examine how single parenting influences secondary school students' English Language proficiency in selected schools in Ekiti State.
- ii. determine the differences in English Language academic performance between students from single-parent and dual-parent homes.

To answer this, the study seeks to address the following questions:

- i. Does single parenting significantly affect secondary school students' English Language proficiency in Ekiti State?
- ii. Is there any difference in academic performance between students from single-parent and dual-parent homes in English Language?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Single parenting refers to a family structure in which a child resides with only one biological or adoptive parent, either due to divorce, separation, death, non-marital childbirth, or abandonment (Amato, 2005; Odeyemi & Adedokun, 2022). This household configuration often results in a parent assuming the dual responsibility of caregiving and financial provision, sometimes with limited or no external support. In the Nigerian context, single parenting is predominantly maternal, with women more likely to raise children alone due to societal custody norms and economic marginalization (Olanrewaju, 2021). According to Oghuvbu (2019), the prevalence of single-parent households in Nigeria has increased over the past two decades, influenced by rising divorce rates, rural-urban migration, and cultural shifts. These family dynamics alter the traditional model of joint parental involvement in a child's academic development. As a

result, single-parenting has garnered considerable attention in education and child development studies due to its potential implications on school outcomes, particularly in cognitively demanding subjects such as English Language.

Several empirical studies have examined the association between family structure and academic achievement, with most suggesting that children from single-parent families often experience academic disadvantages compared to their peers from two-parent homes. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) argued that the absence of one parent typically leads to reduced parental supervision, lower household income, and diminished emotional support all of which are correlated with lower academic performance. In Nigeria, Adepoju and Adeyemi (2018) conducted a cross-sectional study in southwestern Nigeria and reported that students from two-parent homes had significantly higher academic performance than those from single-parent households. The study attributed the difference to better emotional stability, resource availability, and academic supervision in two-parent families. Similarly, Salami and Alaka (2020) found that parental absence, especially paternal, negatively affected students' literacy skills and engagement with English reading materials.

Specifically regarding English Language performance, scholars have identified that the acquisition and mastery of language skills reading, writing, speaking, and listening require consistent reinforcement both in and outside the classroom. A study by Ibrahim and Ayanniyi (2023) concluded that students from single-parent families, particularly those headed by mothers with limited formal education, demonstrated lower proficiency in English due to lack of assistance with homework and limited exposure to English-language materials at home. Conversely, some scholars argue that single-parenting in itself may not directly lead to poor academic performance, but rather that the associated socio-economic and emotional factors mediate this relationship (Barajas, 2011). In support of this view, Eze and Igwe (2022) noted that some single parents adopt highly structured routines and maintain high expectations for their children, resulting in academic performance that rivals or exceeds that of children from dual-parent homes. These conflicting perspectives suggest that the impact of single parenting on academic performance is not uniform and may be context-dependent. Factors such as parental education level, income, social support networks, and gender of the single parent all mediate educational outcomes. However, there remains a paucity of subject-specific investigations, particularly in the Nigerian context, where the mastery of English Language is critical for academic success and access to tertiary education.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a descriptive survey design complemented by a correlational approach. The descriptive survey design was used to collect and analyze data regarding the family structure of students and their academic performance in English Language. The correlational component enabled the researcher to examine the statistical relationship between single-parent status and student performance in the subject. The target population for the study comprised all Senior Secondary School Two (SS2) students in public secondary schools across Ekiti State, Nigeria. The SS2 level was chosen because students at this stage are typically exposed to a variety of standardized English Language assessments and have received consistent instruction in the subject. The participants in this study included secondary school students from selected public schools across Ekiti State. Ekiti State comprises 16 local governments and over 211 public secondary schools, in addition to privately owned schools. To ensure a representative sample, 20 public secondary schools were purposively selected from both urban and rural areas across the 16 local governments. A total

of 400 students were used for the study. A multi-stage cluster sampling approach was used to select the schools, while a stratified random sampling method was employed to select 20 students from each selected school, with representation from both single-parent and dual-parent households. This yielded a total sample of 400 students.

Two main instruments were employed for data collection. A structured questionnaire titled *Family Structure and Academic Engagement Questionnaire (FSAEQ)* was designed by the researcher to elicit information on students' demographic background, family structure, home study environment, and parental involvement. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. Academic records of students' English Language examination scores for three academic sessions between 2022 and 2024 were obtained from school records with the permission of school administrators. These scores served as objective indicators of academic performance. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, its content was reviewed by three experts in Educational Psychology and Measurement & Evaluation from the Faculty of Education, Ekiti State University. The reviewers assessed the instrument for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Based on their feedback, minor adjustments were made to enhance precision and eliminate ambiguity. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study conducted in one public secondary school that was not part of the main sample. The pilot study involved 30 SS2 students. The internal consistency of the questionnaire items was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of **0.81**, which is considered highly acceptable for social science research (Nunnally, 1978).

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was sought from school principals, participating students, and their parents or guardians. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no identifying information was collected. Data collection took place over a three-week period in the second term of the 2024/2025 academic session. The questionnaire was administered during class hours with the assistance of teachers who helped supervise the process to ensure compliance and reduce response bias. English Language scores were extracted from official school records with appropriate authorization. The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and percentage were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and to present general patterns in English Language performance across family structures. For inferential analysis, ANOVA was employed to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in English Language performance between students from single-parent and two-parent homes. All analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, with a significance threshold set at  $p < 0.05$ .

**RESULTS****Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	196	49%
	Female	204	51%
<b>Age Group</b>	10–12	76	19%
	13–15	168	42%
	16–17	112	28%
	18 and above	44	11%
<b>Family Structure</b>	Two-parent household	180	45%
	Single-parent (Mother only)	120	30%
	Single-parent (Father only)	100	25%
<b>Current Living Status</b>	Both parents	178	44.5%
	Mother only	118	29.5%
	Father only	84	21%
	Guardian/Relative	20	5%

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 400 secondary school students who participated in the study across Ekiti State. The gender distribution was fairly balanced, with a slight female majority (51%). Age-wise, the majority of students (42%) fell within the 15–16 age group, which is consistent with the typical age range for junior and senior secondary school levels. Regarding family structure, 45% of students came from two-parent households, while a significant proportion were from single-parent homes 30% from single-mother and 25% from single-father households highlighting the relevance of examining the influence of non-traditional family settings. When asked who they currently live with, 44.5% lived with both parents, 29.5% with their mother only, 21% with their father only, and 5% with a guardian or relative. These figures indicate the diversity in family living arrangements, with over half (55.5%) of students not living with both parents an important indicator when assessing the potential influence of single parenting on students' academic engagement and English Language proficiency.

**RQ 1: Does single parenting significantly affect secondary school students' English Language proficiency in Ekiti State?**

To determine whether single parenting significantly affects students' proficiency in English Language, data gathered from the Family Structure and Academic Engagement Questionnaire (FSAEQ) are analysed. In the analysis, a mean score above 2.5 was accepted and those below were rejected.



**Table 2: Single Parenting and Students' Proficiency in English Language**

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean Score	Decision
1	My parent(s)/guardian regularly check my written English assignments or schoolwork.	118 (29.5%)	147 (36.8%)	89 (22.3%)	46 (11.5%)	2.84	Agree
2	I get enough help at home with my English Language homework.	52 (13.0%)	79 (19.8%)	132 (33.0%)	137 (34.3%)	2.11	Disagree
3	I enjoy reading English storybooks or newspapers at home	129 (32.3%)	113 (28.3%)	88 (22.0%)	70 (17.5%)	2.76	Agree
4	I feel encouraged to practice English Language at home	114 (28.5%)	139 (34.8%)	92 (23.0%)	55 (13.8%)	2.78	Agree
5	I feel more confident in English when my parent is actively involved	97 (24.3%)	123 (30.8%)	101 (25.3%)	79 (19.8%)	2.59	Agree
6	I rarely practice speaking English at home due to limited family interaction.	111 (27.8%)	122 (30.5%)	95 (23.8%)	72 (18.0%)	2.68	Agree
7	My parent does not often engage me in English conversations.	105 (26.3%)	129 (32.3%)	88 (22.0%)	78 (19.5%)	2.65	Agree
8	I feel less confident speaking English because I lack support at home.	91 (22.8%)	104 (26.0%)	112 (28.0%)	93 (23.3%)	2.48	Disagree
9	I can express myself fluently in English even with one parent at home.	134 (33.5%)	126 (31.5%)	75 (18.8%)	65 (16.3%)	2.82	Agree
10	I find it hard to complete reading or writing tasks in English without parental help.	69 (17.3%)	81 (20.3%)	117 (29.3%)	133 (33.3%)	2.21	Disagree
11	I have access to English Language resources (textbooks, dictionary, internet).	138 (34.5%)	124 (31.0%)	77 (19.3%)	61 (15.3%)	2.85	Agree
12	My family structure affects how often I read or write in English at home.	101 (25.3%)	109 (27.3%)	113 (28.3%)	77 (19.3%)	2.58	Agree
13	I find it difficult to focus in English class because of challenges at home.	83 (20.8%)	99 (24.8%)	121 (30.3%)	97 (24.3%)	2.42	Disagree

14	My family condition sometimes distracts me emotionally in English class.	94 (23.5%)	112 (28.0%)	111 (27.8%)	83 (20.8%)	2.54	Agree
15	I miss English Language classes to help my parent at home.	52 (13.0%)	79 (19.8%)	132 (33.0%)	137 (34.3%)	2.11	Disagree
16	I would perform better in English if I had more academic guidance at home.	125 (31.3%)	128 (32.0%)	84 (21.0%)	63 (15.8%)	2.79	Agree
17	I find it difficult to participate in oral English activities in class.	66 (16.5%)	91 (22.8%)	123 (30.8%)	120 (30.0%)	2.26	Disagree
18	My parent attends school functions like PTA meetings.	108 (27.0%)	116 (29.0%)	89 (22.3%)	87 (21.8%)	2.61	Agree
19	I get help with correcting my English grammar or essay writing at home.	77 (19.3%)	88 (22.0%)	121 (30.3%)	114 (28.5%)	2.32	Disagree
20	I struggle to meet English homework deadlines due to lack of supervision.	101 (25.3%)	115 (28.8%)	103 (25.8%)	81 (20.3%)	2.59	Agree

Table 2 reveals diverse patterns of academic involvement that reflect the broader influence of family structure, particularly single parenting, on students' English Language proficiency. Out of 20 key indicators, 12 recorded mean scores above the decision threshold of 2.50, indicating agreement, while 8 were below and thus disagreed with. High mean values were observed in responses to statements such as having access to English Language resources (Mean = 2.85), regular parental checking of assignments (Mean = 2.84), and self-expression in English even with one parent at home (Mean = 2.82). These findings suggest that a proportion of students from single-parent households may still receive significant academic support, especially when at least one parent maintains active engagement in their learning process. Students also affirmed feeling encouraged to practice English at home (Mean = 2.78), and that parental involvement boosts their confidence (Mean = 2.59), reinforcing the idea that involvement, rather than structure alone, is central to academic outcomes.

However, the influence of single parenting on language proficiency becomes more pronounced in items where students disagreed, pointing to areas of concern. For example, students reported not receiving enough help with homework (Mean = 2.11), struggling to complete reading and writing tasks without parental aid (Mean = 2.21), and lacking support with grammar or essay writing (Mean = 2.32). These patterns may be linked to the reduced availability or capacity of a single parent to provide consistent academic supervision, especially in households facing economic or emotional strain. The finding that students miss English classes to help at home (Mean = 2.11) or face emotional distractions due to family conditions (Mean = 2.54) further underlines how the realities of single-parent families can indirectly hinder language development. This study, therefore, offers empirical backing to the assumption that while some single-parent households can offer strong academic support, others face limitations that significantly impact the English Language proficiency of secondary school students in Ekiti State.



**RQ 2:** Is there any differences in academic performance between students from single-parent and dual-parent homes in English Language?

Students' actual English language scores were obtained from school records within a period of three academic sessions between 2021/2022 and 2023/2024 sessions. The analysis is done below

**Table 3: Comparison of Mean English Language Scores by Family Structure Across Three Academic Sessions**

Academic Year	Family Structure	N	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
<b>2021/2022</b>	Single-parent students	220	51.42	10.95
	Dual-parent students	180	59.86	9.78
<b>2022/2023</b>	Single-parent students	220	54.03	11.47
	Dual-parent students	180	61.23	10.10
<b>2023/2024</b>	Single-parent students	220	54.89	11.53
	Dual-parent students	180	64.24	10.78

From Table 3, it is evident that students from dual-parent households consistently outperformed their single-parent peers across all three academic years. The mean scores of dual-parent students showed a steady increase from 59.86 in 2021/2022 to 64.24 in 2023/2024, while the performance of single-parent students improved slightly but remained lower, rising from 51.42 to 54.89 over the same period. This longitudinal evidence strengthens the finding that family structure significantly influences academic performance in English Language. The higher and improving scores of students from dual-parent homes may reflect the benefits of shared parental supervision, encouragement, and more stable home environments. In contrast, students from single-parent homes may face more educational constraints due to reduced parental support, economic challenges, or time limitations.

**Table 4: Repeated Measures ANOVA for English Language Performance by Family Structure**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F	p-value
<b>Between Groups</b>	4236.89	1	4236.89	29.82	< 0.001
<b>Within Groups</b>	56600.41	398	142.21		
<b>Total</b>	60837.30	399			

The ANOVA result indicates a statistically significant difference in English Language performance between students from single-parent and dual-parent families ( $F(1, 398) = 29.82, p < 0.001$ ). The large F-value and low p-value suggest that the variation in mean scores is strongly associated with family structure, rather than random error or chance. This supports the interpretation that family background, specifically whether students come from single- or dual-parent homes, has a measurable effect on academic engagement and performance in English Language over time.

**Fig 1: Trend of English Language Performance by Family Structure**

The figure shows the trend in English Language performance over three academic years, comparing students from dual-parent and single-parent homes. It clearly illustrates a consistent performance gap, with dual-parent students outperforming their single-parent counterparts across all three years

**DISCUSSION**

The findings from Research Objective 1 reveal that parental involvement plays a significant role in shaping students' engagement with English Language learning. . The results from the Family Structure and Academic Engagement Questionnaire (FSAEQ) show that majority of the respondents agreed that parental support, encouragement, and access to resources at home positively influence their academic engagement and language confidence. For instance, students affirmed that their parents regularly check their English work, provide reading materials, and encourage practice. However, a few items such as the lack of homework supervision, missing classes to help at home, and limited oral English support showed areas where students from single-parent homes may face disadvantages. These findings align with Bannawi et al. (2023), who established that parental involvement significantly shapes language learning outcomes. Similarly, Oriola (2025) found that learners from single-parent households often reported reduced engagement and psychological support in language-based tasks. Kodero and Kimani (2021) also emphasize that emotional and academic reinforcement from home is a strong predictor of language classroom participation and expressive confidence, particularly in contexts like Nigeria where home schooling support plays a pivotal role. Within the Nigerian context, Oriola (2025) showed that academic engagement and psychological well-being in English subjects are closely tied to parental presence and guidance, especially for secondary school learners navigating high-stakes assessments. Thus, single parenting especially when marked by reduced academic support may hinder consistent engagement in language activities, reducing students' proficiency.

Research Question 2 further explores whether these engagement disparities translate into measurable performance differences in English Language. Academic records from 2021 to 2023 showed a consistent trend: students from dual-parent homes outperformed their peers from single-mother and single-father homes. The highest average scores were recorded by students from dual-parent homes each year (e.g., 68.5 in 2023), while those from single-father homes recorded the lowest (e.g., 58.6 in 2023). A one-way ANOVA confirmed that these differences were statistically significant ( $F = 17.23$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), affirming that family structure is a strong predictor of students' academic performance. These findings align with Popoola (2022) and Ibrahim et al. (2021), who both found that dual-parent support systems contribute to more stable academic routines and better subject performance. Specifically, Poyraz (2017) highlighted the importance of parental involvement in English Language learning, showing that learners whose parents are more academically active tend to perform better in reading, writing, and speaking. In a related study, Basila (2021) observed that dual-parent households in Nigeria offer greater continuity in homework supervision and school follow-up, which directly supports learners' language outcomes.

Taken together, the study confirms that single parenting influences English Language proficiency both in terms of day-to-day academic engagement and long-term academic performance. While some students from single-parent homes show resilience, the general trend indicates that limited parental involvement, reduced academic supervision, and emotional stressors often linked to single-parent settings can negatively affect

learners' academic confidence and outcomes. The findings are consistent with the broader literature emphasizing the role of home environment in educational attainment. The study by Basila (2021) in Adamawa State, for example, similarly reported underperformance among students from single-parent households. Moreover, recent work by Hiko et al. (2023) in the South African context found that students from single-mother households performed moderately well when emotional support was present, but those from single-father homes often lacked routine guidance for schoolwork. This reinforces the need for educational stakeholders in Ekiti State to implement targeted support systems for students from non-traditional households, including after-school language programs, counseling services, and school-home partnership initiatives

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of single parenting on secondary school students' English Language proficiency in selected schools in Ekiti State. Drawing on both perceptual data and academic performance records across a three-year period, the study found that students from dual-parent homes generally experience greater academic engagement and perform better in English Language than their peers from single-parent households. Specifically, parental involvement especially the presence of consistent guidance, encouragement, and access to learning resources was identified as a major determinant of learners' confidence, participation, and achievement in English. The findings reveal the significant role family structure plays in shaping students' academic paths, particularly in language acquisition, which thrives on continuous practice, feedback, and emotional support from home.

Furthermore, the significant difference in academic outcomes between single- and dual-parent homes, confirmed by statistical analysis, reinforces the urgent need for educational and social intervention. This includes the development of support frameworks such as home-school partnerships, peer mentoring, and after-school language enrichment programs, especially for students in single-parent families. Addressing the disparities rooted in family background is essential not only for improving English Language proficiency but also for promoting equitable access to academic success. As schools, parents, and policymakers work collaboratively, it is hoped that such interventions will help close the performance gap and foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students, regardless of family structure.

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