

Relationship among Moral Development, Attitude and Academic Performance of Gifted Students in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship among moral development, attitude, and academic performance of gifted students in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central Nigeria. The study was guided by the general objective of determining the relationship among moral development, attitude, and academic performance of gifted students. A descriptive survey and ex post facto research designs were adopted for the study. The population comprised 2,486 gifted students in Senior Secondary Schools across the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Niger, Nasarawa, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, and Plateau States. A sample of 331 gifted students was selected using stratified random and proportionate sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which was validated by experts in the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Abuja. The reliability of the instrument was established through a test-retest procedure involving 35 gifted students who were not part of the main study, yielding a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.76. Data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and inferential analysis were used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed that gifted students perceived a positive relationship among moral development, attitude, and academic performance, with a sectional mean of 3.79. The study further revealed a statistically significant relationship between moral development and students' attitude, with an F-value of 3.45 and a p-value of 0.032, which was less than the 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. The study concluded that moral development plays an important role in shaping the attitudes and academic outcomes of gifted students. It recommended, among other measures, that schools should integrate moral and character education into the secondary school curriculum and that teachers should incorporate moral reasoning, ethical decision-making, and values education into classroom instruction to promote positive attitudes and academic success among gifted learners.

KEYWORDS

Academic performance, Attitude, Gifted students, Moral development, Senior Secondary Schools, North Central Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is fundamental to human capital development and national progress because it equips individuals with knowledge, skills, values, and competencies necessary for

meaningful participation in society. Beyond academic knowledge, contemporary education emphasizes moral values, positive attitudes, critical thinking, creativity, and responsible citizenship (UNESCO, 2024; OECD, 2025). Gifted students, despite their exceptional intellectual abilities, may experience educational, emotional, and social challenges such as perfectionism, boredom, heightened sensitivity, social isolation, and anxiety, particularly when their educational needs are inadequately addressed. Consequently, academic success among gifted learners cannot be explained by intellectual ability alone but may also depend on psychological, social, and behavioural factors, particularly moral development and attitude toward learning.

Moral development involves the acquisition of ethical principles, values, and standards that enable individuals to distinguish right from wrong and regulate their behaviour. It includes honesty, integrity, responsibility, empathy, fairness, respect, and self-discipline, which are important for ethical decision-making and constructive relationships within the school environment. Its relevance to gifted students is particularly important because advanced cognitive ability does not necessarily guarantee moral maturity. Similarly, students' attitudes toward learning, teachers, school activities, and academic tasks can influence their motivation, engagement, persistence, and willingness to overcome learning difficulties. Positive attitudes may promote academic involvement, whereas negative attitudes may contribute to disengagement and poor academic outcomes (OECD, 2025). Although gifted learners often possess strong intrinsic motivation, inadequate intellectual stimulation, inappropriate curriculum, and limited enrichment opportunities may result in boredom and declining attitudes toward school (NAGC, 2025).

Academic performance reflects the extent to which students attain expected educational outcomes through instruction, assessment, and examinations. Although gifted students are expected to demonstrate high academic achievement, their performance may be affected by moral values, attitudes, emotional well-being, family support, school climate, teacher competence, and available educational opportunities. In Nigeria, concerns about declining moral values, examination malpractice, indiscipline, poor learning attitudes, and inconsistent academic performance have increased the need to understand factors associated with educational success among gifted learners. The North Central geopolitical zone, with its considerable cultural, socio-economic, and educational diversity, provides an important context for examining these issues. Differences in school resources, teacher quality, counselling services, parental involvement, and instructional practices may shape gifted students' moral development, attitudes, and academic outcomes. It is against this background that this study examines the relationship among moral development, attitude, and academic performance of gifted students in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central Nigeria.

A. Statement of the Problem

Gifted students possess exceptional intellectual abilities, yet their academic performance may be influenced by factors beyond cognitive ability, particularly moral development and attitude toward learning. Concerns about unethical behaviours, poor social adjustment, boredom, disengagement, and inconsistent academic achievement among some gifted learners highlight the need to understand how moral values, ethical decision-making,

learning attitudes, and academic outcomes are connected. Although gifted education has received considerable research attention, the relationship among moral development, attitude, and academic performance remains insufficiently examined, particularly in the Nigerian context. This gap is especially relevant in North Central Nigeria, where diverse cultural, socio-economic, and educational conditions may shape the experiences of gifted students. Therefore, this study investigates the relationship among moral development, attitude, and academic performance of gifted students in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central Nigeria.

B. Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship among moral development, attitude and academic performance of gifted students in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- Determine the relationship between moral development and academic performance of gifted students in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central Nigeria.
- Research Questions
- The following research questions are formulated to guide the study
- What is the relationship among moral development and attitude of gifted students in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central Nigeria?

C. Research Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses are formulated and will be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H01: There is no significant relationship between moral development of gifted students and their attitude in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central, Nigeria.

II. RELATED LITERATURE

A. Concept of Academic Performance

Academic performance refers to a student's achievement and success in their educational pursuits. It typically encompasses various aspects, including their grades, test scores, class participation, completion of assignments, and overall mastery of the academic content. Academic performance is often seen as a measure of a student's understanding, skills, and knowledge in specific subject areas or disciplines. It is a way to assess how well a student is meeting the learning objectives and expectations set by their educational institution or curriculum. Academic performance can also extend beyond traditional assessments to include factors such as critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, creativity, and the application of knowledge in real-world contexts.

Achievement refers to the degree of success reached or attained in some general or specific area (Enyi 2014). In other words achievement is the extent of success attained by an

individual. According to Eze (2019) achievement could be referred to as something very good or difficult which was carried out successfully. Ajah (2014) regarded achievement as a change in behaviour exhibited at the end of a given period of time or within a given range of time. Achievement has also been described by Aniekwe (2016) as something which has been accomplished successfully especially by means of exertion, skill, practice or perseverance.

Aniekwe (2016) sees achievement as a test for the measurement and accomplishment of skills in various field of academic study. Also describing achievement Nwagu (2019) stated that achievement is a systematic and purposeful quantification of learning outcome. Nwagu explained that it involves the determination of the degree of attainment of individual in task, courses or programme of which the individual were sufficiently exposed. Achievement is accomplishing whatever goals one set for oneself which is doing what one wants to do within the limits of the law, overcome obstacles and attain a high standard (Nwachukwu, 2014). An individual with a high need for achievement is characterized as having a desire to take personal responsibility. Achievement requires drive and single mindedness and it is about completing goals one has set for oneself.

Academic achievement is the outcome of education, the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals and it is commonly measured by examinations or continuous assessment (Bossaert, Doumen, Buyse and Verschueren, 2021). Bossaert et al. (2021) maintained that academic achievement is an important parameter in measuring students learning outcome in various school discipline. Academic achievement is a key mechanism through which in-school adolescents learn about their talents, abilities and competencies which are important parts of developing career aspirations.

Usman, (2020) defined academic achievement as the measure of students learning acquisition of certain skills at the end of teaching and learning activities. It reflects in examination written by students after the process of learning. Academic achievement is based on the degree of intellectual stimulation that the child could receive from learning situations. Iwundu (2021) sees academic achievement as the degree or level of success attained at the end of an academic endeavour. The yardstick for measuring ones level of academic achievement is by assessing the academic performance of the individual through test and observation. The issue of academic achievement of students at all levels of Education in Nigeria especially at secondary school level is very crucial and has been addressed from different dimension by researchers over the years.

B. Concept of Attitudes

In psychology, an attitude is defined as a relatively enduring evaluation of an object, person, group, issue, or concept. It encompasses a person's beliefs (cognition), emotional responses (affect), and behavioural tendencies (intentions). Attitudes serve as cognitive schemas that help individuals organize complex information and guide evaluations and behaviors toward various attitude objects. They can be positive, negative, or neutral and are influenced by personal experiences, socialization, cultural norms, and inherited traits (Eagly and Shelly, 2019).

Attitudes are often analysed through the ABC model which includes three components:

- **Affective Component:** This refers to how the attitude object makes an individual feel emotionally.
- **Behavioural Component:** This involves the actions or intentions that result from the individual's feelings and beliefs about the attitude object.
- **Cognitive Component:** This encompasses the beliefs and thoughts that one holds regarding the attitude object.

These components may not always align perfectly; for example, an individual might have a positive feeling towards an object but may not engage in behaviour that reflects this positivity due to situational constraints or conflicting beliefs (Wood, 2020).

Attitudes are formed through various processes:

- **Direct Experience:** Personal interactions with an attitude object can lead to strong attitudes based on first-hand experience.
- **Social Learning:** Observing others' reactions and attitudes can shape one's own views.
- **Cultural Influences:** Societal norms and values play a significant role in shaping attitudes.
- **Conditioning:** Classical conditioning (associating positive feelings with certain objects) and operant conditioning (reinforcement or punishment affecting attitudes) also contribute to how attitudes are formed.

Understanding attitudes is crucial because they significantly influence behaviour. While there is often a correlation between attitudes and actions, this relationship can vary based on factors such as situational context, social pressures, and individual differences like self-monitoring tendencies. Stronger attitudes tend to predict behaviour more reliably than weaker ones. Attitudes are not static; they can change over time due to new information, persuasive communication, cognitive dissonance (the discomfort experienced when holding conflicting beliefs), or shifts in social norms. The ability to change one's attitude is essential for personal growth and adaptation within varying social contexts.

C. Concept of Moral Development

Moral development refers to the changes that occur as individuals grow and mature in their ability to distinguish right from wrong, to act on this distinction, and to experience emotions related to actions. It involves the development of a sense of justice and moral judgment, and the growth of moral feeling and moral behaviour. Moral development is influenced by a variety of factors, including cultural and societal norms, personal beliefs, experiences, and cognitive processes. It's important to note that not everyone reaches the highest stages of moral development, and moral development does not necessarily correlate with age.

Moral development is a process in which an individual progress from a simplistic understanding of right and wrong, often based on rules and consequences, to a more complex understanding of morality that considers others' perspectives, societal rules, and

ethical principles. This development typically occurs as a person grows from childhood into adulthood, influenced by various personal, social, and cultural factors. In the field of psychology, moral development is often associated with the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, who proposed the theory that moral development occurs in stages, each characterized by a specific understanding of morality and justice.

Moral development focuses on the emergence, change, and understanding of morality from infancy through adulthood. The theory states that morality develops across a lifespan in a variety of ways and is influenced by an individual's experiences and behaviour when faced with moral issues through different periods of physical and cognitive development (Ma and Keung, 2013). Morality concerns an individual's reforming sense of what is right and wrong; it is for this reason that young children have different moral judgment and character than that of a grown adult. Morality in itself is often a synonym for "rightness" or "goodness." It also refers to a specific code of conduct that is derived from one's culture, religion, or personal philosophy that guides one's actions, behaviours, and thoughts. The theoretical framework can be summarized while preserving the three theories and their relevance to gifted students. For a journal version, the discussion should focus on the theoretical ideas that directly explain moral development, attitude, and academic performance.

D. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three theories: Piaget's Theory of Moral Development, Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, and Felhusen's Theory of Gifted Students. The theories provide a basis for understanding how moral reasoning, behavioural dispositions, and the unique characteristics of gifted learners may influence their educational experiences and academic outcomes.

E. Piaget's Theory of Moral Development (1965)

Piaget's Theory of Moral Development views moral reasoning as a gradual process linked to cognitive growth, moving from rule-bound heteronomous morality to more independent autonomous morality. The theory is relevant to gifted students because their advanced cognitive abilities may support earlier understanding of complex moral concepts, influencing their attitudes and academic performance.

F. Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development (1973)

Kohlberg's theory views moral development as progression through six stages and three levels pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional morality. It explains how individuals move from self-centred reasoning based on punishment and consequences to more advanced reasoning based on social expectations, rights, responsibilities, and ethical principles. The theory is relevant to this study as gifted students' advanced moral reasoning may influence their attitudes, decision-making, behaviour, and academic performance.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey and ex post facto research designs to examine the relationship among moral development, attitude, and academic performance of gifted students. The designs were appropriate because the variables were studied as they naturally existed without manipulation.

B. Population of the Study

The study population comprised 2,486 gifted students in Senior Secondary Schools for gifted students across FCT-Abuja, Niger, Nasarawa, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, and Plateau States. The students were considered appropriate for the study due to their cognitive maturity and educational experience in reporting on moral development, attitudes, and academic performance.

C. Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across the seven states/FCT, followed by proportionate sampling of students from the selected schools. A sample of 331 gifted students was selected from the population of 2,486 using the Krejcie and Morgan sample specification, with proportionate allocation based on each school's population size.

D. Instrumentation

A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across the seven states/FCT, followed by proportionate sampling of students from the selected schools. A sample of 331 gifted students was selected from the population of 2,486 using the Krejcie and Morgan sample specification, with proportionate allocation based on each school's population size.

E. Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was validated for content by supervisors and lecturers from within and outside the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Abuja, to clarify ambiguous items and ensure coverage of study variables.

Its reliability was tested using a test-retest method with 35 gifted students not involved in the main study, administered twice over two weeks. The reliability coefficient, determined by Pearson correlation, was 0.76, indicating adequacy for the study.

F. Method of Data Collection

The researcher, assisted by two trained research assistants, visited the selected schools to administer and retrieve the questionnaires. Respondents were informed about the purpose

of the study and encouraged to provide honest responses. Confidentiality of the information supplied by the respondents was also assured.

G. Method of Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores to address the demographic information and research questions. Responses were scored on a four-point scale ranging from 4 for Strongly Agree to 1 for Strongly Disagree, with a 2.50 decision mean. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance, since the study focused on relationships among the variables.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Presentation of Data

The data includes demographic information, students' responses to Likert-scale items, and inferential statistics such as correlation and t-tests. Descriptive statistics like percentages, means, and standard deviations are used to summarize responses, while inferential statistics test the hypotheses.

B. Demographic Data of Respondents

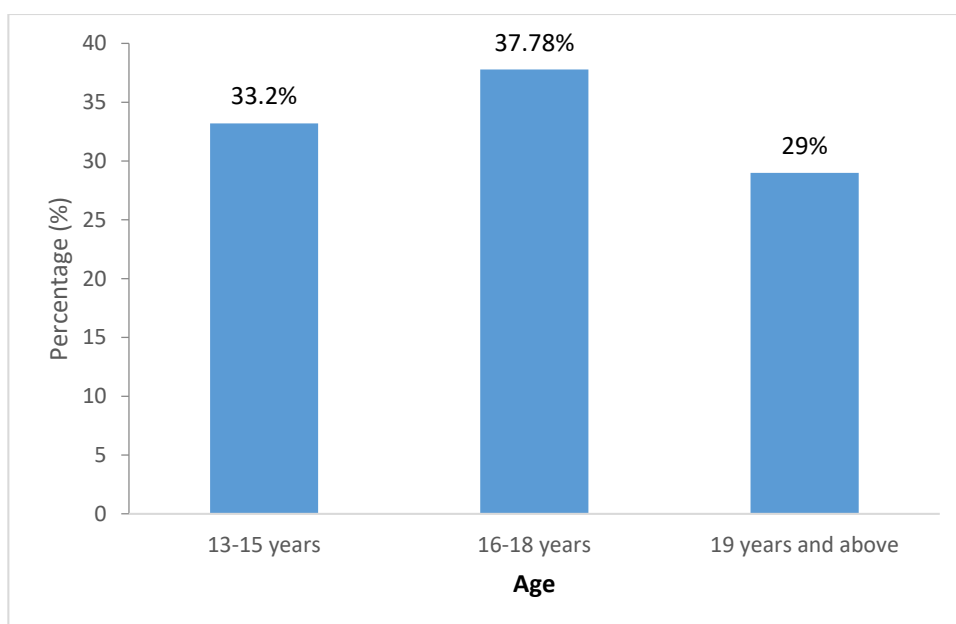


Figure 1: Chart of Age Distribution of Respondents

The age distribution of respondents in Table 2 and Figure 1 showed that the majority of gifted students are within the 13-15 years age bracket, accounting for 33.2%. Students between 16-18 years make up 37.78%, while those aged 19 years and above constitute 29%. This indicates that most respondents are in their early to mid-twenties, reflecting a relatively young population of gifted learners in the Senior Secondary Schools surveyed.

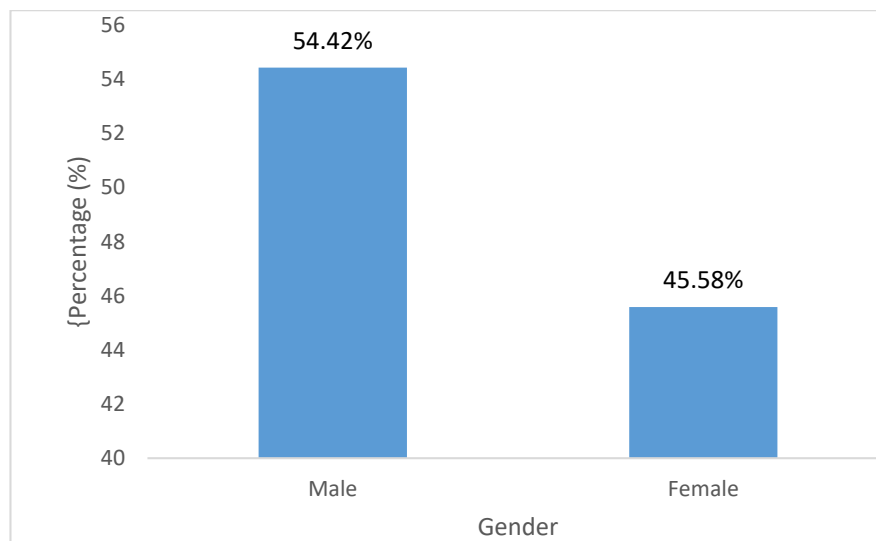


Figure 2: Chart of Gender Distribution of Respondents

The gender distribution of respondents in Table 3 and Figure 2 showed a nearly equal representation of males and females. Males constitute 54.42% of the total respondents, while females make up 45.58%. This balanced distribution indicates that both genders participated almost equally in the study, ensuring that the data collected reflects a diverse range of perspectives from both male and female respondents. The slight predominance of males suggests a marginally higher participation rate among males, but overall, the gender representation is fairly even, which enhances the reliability and generalizability of the findings across genders.

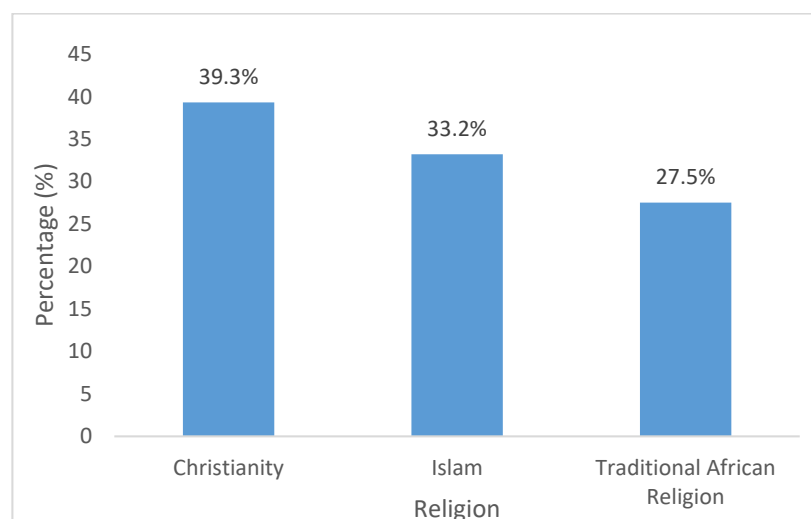


Figure 3: Religion Distribution of Respondents

Table 4 and Figure 3 showed the respondents' religious affiliations with Christianity being the most represented religion, accounting for 39.3%. Islam is the second most common, comprising 33.2% respondents. Traditional African Religion is also significantly represented, making up 27.5% respondents. This distribution indicates a fairly balanced religious composition within the sample, reflecting the presence of major religious groups in the

population. The diversity in religious beliefs among respondents indicates that the study captures a wide range of perspectives influenced by different spiritual and cultural backgrounds.

C. *Answers to Research Questions*

Research Question 1: What is the relationship among moral development of gifted students on attitudes and academic performance in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central, Nigeria?

Table 1: Relationship among Moral Development of Gifted Students on Attitudes and Academic Performance in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central, Nigeria
N=331

S/N	Item Description	N	Mean	SD	Decision
4	My understanding of ethical principles positively influences my academic decisions	331	3.85	0.48	Agreed
5	The moral development of my peers affects my own attitudes towards academic integrity	331	3.88	0.45	Agreed
6	My moral values motivate me to achieve higher grades in my coursework	331	3.75	0.50	Agreed
7	Participating in community service has enhanced my moral reasoning and positively impacted my academic performance	331	3.78	0.47	Agreed
8	My ability to resolve conflicts ethically contributes to a better learning environment in my institution	331	3.73	0.49	Agreed
	Sectional Mean		3.79	0.48	Agreed

The data in table 1 showed the relationship among moral development of gifted students on attitudes and academic performance in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central, Nigeria. According to the results, the gifted students in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central Nigeria perceive a significant positive relationship among moral development on their attitudes and academic performance. All items received high mean scores, ranging from 3.73 to 3.88 on a 5-point scale. These indicate strong agreement with the statements that their understanding of ethical principles influences their academic decisions (mean=3.85) and that their peers' moral development affects their attitudes toward academic integrity (mean=3.88). In addition, students believe their moral values motivate them to strive for higher grades (mean=3.75), and participation in community service has enhanced their moral reasoning and academic outcomes (mean = 3.78). The ability to resolve conflicts ethically is viewed as contribution to a better learning environment (mean =3.73). The sectional mean of 3.79 showed positive perception of the relationship among moral development on both attitudes and academic performance. This implies that moral

development contribute in shaping academic behaviours and attitudes among gifted students.

D. Test of Hypotheses

Research Hypothesis One (H01): There is no significant relationship between moral development of gifted students and their attitude in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central, Nigeria.

Table 2^a: ANOVA Analysis of Moral Development of Gifted Students and their Attitude in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central, Nigeria

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	45.678	2	22.839	3.45	0.032*
Within Groups	623.456	328	1.900		
Total	669.134	330			

Table 2^b: Age Group

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
13-15 years	110	33.2
16-18 years	125	37.8
19 years and above	96	29.0
Total	331	100

Table 2a presents the ANOVA result examining the relationship between the moral development of gifted students and their attitude in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central Nigeria. The analysis yielded an F-value of 3.45 with a p-value of 0.032, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between the moral development of gifted students and their attitude across the age groups. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H₀₁), which states that there is no significant relationship between moral development of gifted students and their attitude, is rejected. Therefore, the results showed that variations in age-related moral development are associated with differences in the attitudes of gifted students, implying that moral development plays an important role in shaping positive attitudes among gifted learners.

Table 2b shows the distribution of respondents across the three age groups included in the analysis. Out of the 331 respondents, 110 (33.2%) were younger gifted students, 125 (37.8%) belonged to the middle age group, and 96 (29.0%) were older gifted students. The nearly equal distribution of respondents across the age categories indicates a balanced representation of the different age groups in the study, thereby enhancing the credibility of the ANOVA results and ensuring that no single age group disproportionately influenced the findings.

E. Summary of Findings

The following findings were deduced from the results of the analysis:

- Findings shows that there is a positive relationship between the moral development of gifted students and their attitudes and academic performance in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central, Nigeria, with an overall mean of 3.79, indicating that moral development positively influences both students' attitudes and academic achievement.
- There was a statistically significant relationship between the moral development of gifted students and their attitudes ($F = 3.45$, $p = 0.032$); therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In view of the findings, it was revealed that moral development has a significant positive relationship with the attitudes and academic performance of gifted students in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central Nigeria. The respondents generally agreed that ethical principles, moral values, academic integrity, and community engagement positively influence their attitudes toward learning and academic achievement. This finding is consistent with the work of Oja et al. (2021), who reported that moral reasoning promotes students' sense of responsibility, self-discipline, and intrinsic motivation, thereby enhancing their academic engagement and performance. Similarly, Ahmed (2022) found that students with higher levels of moral development are more likely to demonstrate ethical behaviour, commitment to learning, and improved academic outcomes. However, Johnson (2020) argued that although moral development is an important predictor of academic success, its influence is strengthened when supported by favourable school environments, effective teaching practices, and parental involvement. This suggests that moral development works alongside other educational factors in promoting students' academic success.

VI. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that moral development is a critical factor in shaping the attitudes and academic performance of gifted students in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central Nigeria. The study established that gifted students generally possess positive perceptions of moral development and acknowledge its significant influence on their attitudes, academic honesty, ethical decision-making, motivation to learn, and overall academic achievement. These findings affirm that moral development extends beyond character formation to become an essential component of academic success, responsible behaviour, and personal growth among gifted learners.

The study further revealed that moral development has a significant positive relationship with both students' attitudes and academic performance. Students with higher levels of moral reasoning were found to exhibit more positive attitudes towards learning, greater commitment to academic integrity, stronger interpersonal relationships, and increased motivation to achieve academic excellence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to promote moral development and improve the attitudes and academic performance of gifted students in Senior Secondary Schools in North Central Nigeria:

- School administrators and educational authorities should integrate comprehensive moral and character education into the secondary school curriculum through structured lessons, seminars, workshops, and extracurricular activities that emphasize ethical values, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and respect.
- Teachers should deliberately incorporate moral reasoning, ethical decision-making, and values education into classroom instruction to strengthen students' positive attitudes towards learning and enhance their academic performance.

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