

Influence of Divorce on the Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils in Enugu East Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study x-rayed the influence of divorce on the academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu East Local Government Area, Enugu State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Two research questions and one research hypothesis guided the study. The total population of the study was 831 Primary six pupils in 23 primary schools in the study area. The sample size for this study was 249 Primary six pupils. The researchers used simple random sampling technique to select the sample of the study. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection and was face validated by three specialists in measurement & evaluation, curriculum studies, and guidance and counselling. The overall reliability index of 0.78 was determined using Cronbach Alpha. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while independent sample t-test statistics was used in testing the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The study found that pupils from divorced parents faced educational challenges like lack of sufficient textbooks, poor academic performance and lack of concentration while in school. It was recommended among other things that teachers should handle with care pupils from families that the parents are divorced, and encourage them in their academic work.

Keywords: Divorce, pupils, academic performance, family, broken home

Introduction

In life, teaching and learning cannot be properly conducted if all interacting and inter-relating variables are not properly manipulated. Some of these variables are school environment, home of the learner, teacher, curriculum, gender and so on. Any society that does not give preference to education and its inter-related variables will only be increasing criminal indices directly and indirectly, no wonder the axiom “No society can grow above the level of its education”. Among the variables mentioned, emphasis shall be laid on the home as the first institution of learning.

A home is seen as a family living together and the way it behaves. A family is referred to as a group consisting of one or two parents and their children

(Hornby, 2012). The family is the child’s first place of contact with the world. The child as a result, acquires initial education and socialization from parents and other significant persons in the family (Agwukwe – Oluoma, 2012). In the opinion of Agulana (2014), the family lays the psychological, moral and spiritual foundation in the overall development of the child. Structurally, family/home

How To Cite This Article:

Agusiobo, H. C., & Agukwe-Oluoma, C. (2023). Influence of Divorce on the Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils in Enugu East Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. *Godfrey Okoye University International Journal of Education*, 3(1), 102–108. Retrieved from <https://gojournals.gouni.edu.ng/index.php/gouijoe/article/view/40>

may either be intact or broken. A family that is intact has both parents and children living together but a broken home is that which is not intact as a result of divorce, separation, death of one of the parents and illegitimacy. According to Frazer (2014) such abnormal conditions of the home are likely to have a detrimental effect on school performance of the child. Most broken marriages end in divorce.

Divorce is marked by formal court proceedings and its decree. According to Havemann (2018) divorce is a legal process through which a marriage is dissolved. Divorce is also defined as the dissolution of a relationship which is recognized as marital relationship (Mac Donald, 2018). In divorce cases, property is shared and children are given to a parent for custody. The children from divorce homes may have difficulty adjusting to the situation. Divorce when viewed from the Interactionist perspective examines the choices that each individual has made, the interactions between husband and wife, and the symbolic meaning of marriage and divorce. Nothing is right or wrong; is simply a way of looking at society from a very small scale while determining how these interactions shape the larger group. They may experience grief, embarrassment, resentment, disappointment, intense anger and divided loyalty. Some get traumatized and some may rebel. McInahan (2014) pointed out that children of divorce parents are roughly two times more likely to drop out from school than their peers who benefit from living with their parents who are not divorced. This is presumably noticed more in basic education such as primary education.

Primary education can be defined in various ways. According to Iwuanyanwu and Anene (2011) it is defined as the education given in an institution for children aged 6-11 years plus and which constitutes the bed rock upon which the entire education system is built. This is in line with the Federal Republic of Nigeria that defined primary education as education given to children aged between 6 – 11+ years in an educational institution. Primary education is aimed at developing basic literacy, numeracy, communication skills and transmission of the culture of the people to younger generation. In the view of Adesina (2013) primary education provides a setting within which

children can grow intellectually. Children who attend primary schools in Nigeria are referred to as pupils, and their academic performance at that tender age is of paramount importance to the education sector and their families.

Pupils' academic performance can be explained in form of grades obtained from tests or examinations on courses taken. Academic performance has been described by Adeyemo (2015) as the scholastic standing of a pupil at the given moment, which states individual abilities. The level of pupils' academic performance in primary schools in Nigeria is determined through external examinations like first school leaving examination, common entrance into secondary schools conducted by Examination Development Centre (EDC) of the State for state secondary schools and National Examination Council (NECO) for Unity Colleges. Poor performance of pupils in these examinations has been linked to several factors ranging from teacher factors, school factors, parent factors and so on. Agukwe-Oluoma (2021) opined that unhappy marriage of parents may be associated with low performance because witnessing conflicts between parents heightens a level of stress on the children. This keeps them from focusing on school work. According to Astone and McInahan (2011), children with divorced parents score lower than children with continuously married parents on measure of academic success. That notwithstanding, gender plays an important role here.

The role of gender in parenting has received little attention. However, Majoribanks (2011) observed gender differences in children's behaviour. Neighbors and Wierson (2011) also found differential vulnerability for boys and girls throughout adolescence. Neilson (2019) observed that adolescent males do not adapt as well as females to their parent's divorce. In the opinion of Nwobodo and Agusiobo (2017) a well-adjusted student is one who does not get affected adversely by the interactions such as conflicts, emotions, and whose personality development goes through a healthy course of socialization. They continued to observe that emotional stress and gender could lead to poor academic performance. Also, studies by Parajuli and Thapa (2017) as well as Wallace (2007) have shown

that female students outperform male students academically.

Theoretically this study is hinged on two theories; Symbolic Interaction Theory (Blumer, 1969) and Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958). Symbolic interactionism is a sociological framework that illustrates the divergent meanings people place on objects, interactions and the corresponding behaviours that reflect this range of interpretations. According to the symbolic interactionist perspective, family problems often stem from the different understanding, perception and expectations that spouses have of their marriage and of their family. When these differences become too extreme and the spouses cannot reconcile their disagreements, spousal conflict and possibly divorce may occur. (Agukwe – Oluoma, 2021).

In the family, parents have differences which they try to deal with. In some cases, they fail to reach a compromise and the marriage breaks down leading to divorce. Exchange theory involves two persons each of whom provides some benefits to the other and contingent upon rewards from the other. In line with the theory in the family it is hoped that each member is giving and receiving items of value from each other equally. According to this theory the interaction breaks if one party feels they are giving more than they are receiving (Agukwe – Oluoma, 2021). This may account for breakup of many families.

A lot of relevant empirical studies reviewed focused on how divorce influences the performance of learners for example, a study conducted by Omoruyi (2014), on the influence of divorce on academic performance and personality development of the adolescents in Lagos State metropolis, revealed significant difference between divorce and academic performance of the adolescents. It further showed that pupils from divorced families performed poorly in relation to their counter parts. Several studies carried out in Enugu East Local Government Area have basically focused on the parental involvement in children's school activities, but not on how divorce affects their academic performance. Observation from similar studies reviewed, indicated that most of the studies were carried out ten years ago and beyond, the findings of ten years ago might no longer stand the

taste of time. Similarly, the researchers observed persistent increase in the rate of divorce in the recent time and this left the researchers in deep thinking on the effects this might have on the academic performance of the children, hence the need to investigate the influence of divorce on the academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu East Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria.

The study has geographical, level and content scope. The geographical scope of the study was all public primary schools in Enugu East Local Government Area in Enugu State. The study in its content covers all the prevalence of divorce in Enugu East Local Government Area, the challenges faced by pupils from divorced homes, the gender of pupils from divorced homes that is most affected academically, and how stake holders can assist pupils from divorced homes improve their academic performance. The level scope was primary six pupils who were the respondents.

Statement of the Problem

It is unarguably true that the rate of divorce in the society today is on a geometrical increase. Evidences abound in courts on how marriages are dissolved and several other applications waiting to be treated. Pupils from broken homes are greatly affected because they are traumatized, they suffer financial set back and play truancy in the school etc. On the other hand, children from families that are intact are balanced and they face less stress in the home. This study, therefore, shall investigate the effect of divorce on the academic performance of the pupils and how the educational stakeholders can assist the pupils from broken homes to achieve high academic performance.

Purpose of the Study

The Main purpose of this study is to ascertain the influence of divorce on the academic performance of primary school pupils in Enugu East Local Government Area in Enugu State, Nigeria. In order to actualize this purpose, the following specific objectives were formulated:

1. To ascertain the educational challenges faced by pupils in a divorced family.
2. To establish the most academically affected gender with regards to divorce

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the educational challenges faced by pupils from divorced family?
2. What gender is mostly affected academically by divorce?

Research Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study:

H₀: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female pupils on the influence of divorce on their academic performance.

Method

This study employed descriptive survey research design. This is because opinions of the respondents were sought to find out the influence of divorce on the academic performance of pupils. The study was conducted in Enugu East Local Government Area of Enugu State. Enugu State is one of the 36 States that make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The population of this study consisted of all the public primary school pupils in Enugu East Local Government Area. There are 23 public primary schools and 831 primary six pupils in the local government area. (Source: Enugu East Local Government Education Authority 2019/2020). The sample size of the study was 249 primary six pupils got by simple random sampling technique representing 30% of the entire population.

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Influence of Divorce on the Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils (IDAPPSP). Having reviewed relevant literatures on this study the questionnaire with two sections A and B was developed. Section A dealt with the biodata of the respondents while section B

contained items designed to generate data to address the research objectives and hypothesis. Section B was divided into two clusters each cluster addressed each research question. The questionnaire constructed had a four- point scale with the following responses Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Disagree (D) Strongly Disagree (SD) and with nominal values of 4,3,2,1, respectively.

Face validation of the instrument was done by three specialists in Measurement & Evaluation, Curriculum Studies, and Guidance and Counselling from the Faculty of Education, Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu. To determine the reliability of the instrument, it was trial tested on 20 pupils of community primary school coal camp Enugu, in Enugu North Local Government Area of Enugu State, which is from outside the study area. Cronbach Alpha method was adopted to measure the internal consistency coefficient of the questionnaire. The Cronbach Alpha value of .78 for all the clusters was got. The result indicated that the various sections were reliable.

The researchers engaged the services of two research assistants who helped in administering and collecting the instrument the same day. About 90% of the copies administered were collected. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The acceptable criterion mean was 2.5, and any response with a mean rating of 2.5 and above was considered acceptable while mean rating below 2.5 was rejected. The independent sample t-test was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Result

Research Question One: What are the educational challenges faced by pupils from a divorced family?

Table 1

Educational challenges faced by pupils from a divorced family

S/NO	ITEMS	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	DECISION
1.	Emotional distraction which makes it difficult for a child to focus on schoolwork.	3.1	0.37	Accepted
2.	Children of divorced parents are more likely to be held back a grade.	2.4	0.32	Rejected
3.	The effects of divorce on children can cause them to have lower cumulative average than pupils with married parents. Pupils of divorced parents are less likely to have prescribed textbook.	3.3	0.67	Accepted
4.		2.7	0.29	Accepted

5.	Divorce induces poor intellectual development in pupils Children from divorced families perform poorly in academics as a result of emotional instability and uncoordinated direction in life	3.4	0.54	Accepted
6.	Divorce promotes truancy among pupils. Children from divorced parents are more likely to attend class late than their counterparts.	3.1	0.37	Accepted
7.	Pupils from divorced parents are less consistent with school activities	3.4	0.54	Rejected
8.	Pupils from divorced parents are likely not to meet financial obligations.	3.3	0.67	Accepted
9.		2.7	0.29	Accepted
10.		3.4	0.54	Accepted

The result from the Table 1 indicated that respondents disagreed with item 2 while they agreed in items 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 that they faced educational challenges. This is because the mean ratings range from 2.7 – 3.4 which is above the criterion for accepting a statement. This suggested that the

Table 2

The most Academically affected Gender in respect to Divorce

S/NO	ITEMS	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	DECISION
1.	Boys exhibit more externalizing problems and less competence than girls in class as a result of divorce.	3.1	0.45	Accepted
2.	During mid-adolescence girls exhibit more Psychosomatic symptoms and are more likely than boys to express more dissatisfaction with available levels of social support during learning.	3.2	0.66	Accepted
3.	Boys exhibit more conduct disorders in class at the time of divorce while girls experience an increase in depression Female children from divorced families are more likely than their male counterparts to drop out of high school and college.	3.2	0.54	Accepted
4.	Males do not adapt in classroom activities more than females due to their parents' divorce	2.8	0.42	Accepted
5.	Boys experience greater maladjustment in learning at the time of divorce than girls.	3.3	0.78	Accepted
6.	Behaviors of boys as early as eleven years in school prior to separation or divorce were more noticeably affected by pre-divorce familial stress than girls.	2.8	0.84	Accepted
7.	Parental conflict has more adverse effects on boys than on girls. This may be due to the stronger emotional bond between fathers and sons than fathers and daughters.	3.0	0.51	Accepted
8.	Parental conflict seems to create more psychological stress in boys than in girls and appears to represent a bipolar continuum with parental agreement.	3.1	0.45	Accepted
9.	Boys are more likely to have problems when living in the custody of an un-remarried mother, whereas living with an un-remarried mother or with a father may be more detrimental for girls.	3.2	0.66	Accepted
10.		3.2	0.54	Accepted

educational challenges faced by pupils from broken homes often distracted them and made it difficult for a child to focus on schoolwork.

Research Question Two: What gender is mostly affected academically by divorce?

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The result from the Table 2 revealed that respondents agreed that the boy child is the mostly affected gender academically when parents are divorced. However, they do not experience greater maladjustment in learning than girls as a result of this divorce.

Table 3:

T-test Analysis of Mean Responses of Male and Female Pupils on the Influence of Divorce on their Academic Performance

Grouping	N	Mean	Std	T	Df	Sig. (2 tailed)
Males	115	3.6	0.65			
Females	134	3.5	0.87	8.763	153	0.66

Result: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female pupils on the influence of divorce on their academic performance ($t= 8.763$, $df = 153$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Discussion

The result obtained in the study on influence of divorce on the academic performance of Primary School Pupils in Enugu East Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria has shown that the male pupils do not adapt as well as females to their parents’ divorce. This finding is supported by the studies of Parajuli and Thapa (2017) as well as Sparks-Wallace (2007) which shows that ordinarily, female students outperform male students academically. According to this study underperformance of male pupils academically is even made worse when they are from a divorced home. It was also established that some of the educational challenges faced by pupils whose parents are divorced are: emotional distraction truancy among the pupils, parents’ failure to attend school functions, lateness to school, poor financing of school needs and so on.

A stable home is most likely to produced balanced children. According to Koenig (2012) religion may be a way to achieve this. The findings are also supported by Omoruji (2014) who noted that religion and spirituality play a role in coping with stress, encouraging forgiveness, providing support to the family and discouraging separation and divorce. Agukwe-Oluoma (2021) stated that seminars and workshops should be organized for couples to discuss issues that have to do with conflict resolution and

Research Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female pupils on the influence of divorce on their academic performance

marriage. These she opined will encourage couples to stay together and sort out their differences.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Pupils from broken homes face educational challenges like lack of sufficient text books, inability to meet education related financial obligations etc. these affect their academic performance. Boys are most affected gender in divorce situation. Parents who live together stand a better chance to support their children for better academic performance.

The existence of relationship between pupils from broken homes and academic performance suggest that stakeholders in the education sectors have a responsibility to pay special attention to pupils from broken homes with a view to increasing their academic performance. Teachers need to be innovative in their teaching by varying their methods and instructional materials to take care of the individual differences inherent in the pupil based on their different family background.

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