

## EFFECT OF PARENTAL DIVORCE ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MUSHIN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF LAGOS STATE

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines empirically how parental divorce and the relationship between the parent and child influences academic success. Two specific objectives, from where two research questions and hypotheses were drawn, are stated for the study. The Ex Post facto research design was employed for the study. The population for the study is 1175 respondents in Mushin Local Government Area (LGA) of Lagos State. The sample size is 842 respondents. This comprised 89 parents and 753 pupils. Purposive sampling was used in sampling five of the schools across the LGA. Stratified random sampling technique was used to sample the students into those from divorced and those whose parents are living together. Researchers' designed instrument titled "Divorce and Academic Achievement of Pupils Questionnaire" was used for data collection. The instrument for the study was validated by three Experts in educational foundations from the University of Lagos. The reliability of the instrument was administered through an initial test of the instrument administered on 20 respondents from another local government area. Cronbach alpha was then used to calculate the reliability coefficient which gave a value of 0.83. The Mean and Standard deviation was used to answer the research questions and the t-test used to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. Findings of the study show that divorce as well as parent-child relationship has a significant influence on academic achievement of pupils. It was recommended that Parents, mostly those divorced, should ensure that they maintain good relationships with their children. This will help the child to continue their cognitive development.*

**Key words:** Divorce, Students, Academic Performance, Primary Schools.

### **Introduction**

Divorce is legal dissolution of marriage bond. Amato (2001) described divorce "as what is to be done when a marriage couple cannot live comfortably together. The author further explained that though most societies make provision for divorce, some make it very different or perhaps give the privilege of divorce only to men. There is no other place where people are facing hard time today than in their families. Since there are no perfect human beings, there cannot be a perfect marital union. Gottman (1994) stated that broken homes are due to either divorce or separation. They are responsible for the onset of abnormal, pattern of behaviour like delinquency, drug abuse, pathological gambling, alcoholism, poor academic work, truancy at school, sexual promiscuity, armed robbery and the development in the later life of schizophrenic disorders. From what Gottman said, it can easily be seen on some children and the effects of divorce on students' performance in schools. Due to divorce many homes have been separated.

The crude divorce rate in Nigeria has grown exponentially. The risk of divorce is higher for the less educated, whereby a couple where both have low levels of education run a risk that is more than four-fold in magnitude compared to couples where both have higher educational qualifications (Lyngstad, 2004). Previous research has shown that most children experiencing parental divorce describe the process as stressful and add that this experience may result in anxiety and depression (Amato, 2001). According to Hetherington (1993), a divorce does not refer to one event, but is more accurately described as one event of a complex transition process. Similarly, the stresses taking place during and after a divorce are important to note and for some this stress is persistent (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Thus, for children, the process of coping with such a stress as divorce may take time and understanding. Ross and Wynne (2001) add that the effects of divorce may impact later life functioning, rather than immediately.

In terms of the research study, it is certainly plausible to survey students that have experienced parental divorce to evaluate their academic achievement. In studying divorce and youth adjustment, it is essential to go beyond focusing on averages and try to ascertain the conditions under which divorce might have adverse outcomes on adolescents. Divorced fathers are less likely to have a close relationship with their children and the younger the children are at the time of the divorce and when the father is denied legal custody of the children he is more likely to drift away. Divorced and remarried fathers tend to become more involved with the children of their subsequent marriage. It was estimated that about one in five divorced fathers had not seen their children in the past years and less than half the fathers saw their children more than a few times a year.

Children who have divorced parents are more likely to have difficulty interacting socially with peers, siblings, teachers, and other adults. This is due to their innate fear that these people will also disappear as their parents do. These sorts of negative social interactions can deeply affect the child's academic performance. Amato and Keith (1991) in their studies involving over 13000 children ranging from pre-school to young adulthood found that children from divorced families are on average somewhat worse off than children who have lived in intact families. Children from divorced homes now have more difficulty in school, more behaviour problems, more negative self-concepts, more problems with peers and more trouble getting along with their parents.

Parenting style refers to how a single parent, or divorced couple parents their children. Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan (1999) examined the consequences of parental divorce for children in regard to their adjustment and the healthiest living situation for the child. It was found that the type of parenting style and relationship maintained between the parent and the child may determine how the child adjusts to the new divorce. Also, it was found that two-parent, intact families were the healthiest living environments for a child. However, following a divorce, one parent must control the household and a single-parent household that is harmonious and includes proper parenting, may be more effective than a hostile two-parent household. In the research compiled by Bulduc, Caron, & Logue (2007), although few participants reported things had changed for the better following the divorce, most reported a stronger relationship with the mother and weaker relationship with the father.

The interest for this study is in finding the relationship between these two phenomena (parental divorce and parent-child relationship) with respect to pupils'

academic achievement. Children are increasingly experiencing divorce earlier in childhood which may still play a role in their everyday lives. In exploring this issue, the focus is on ascertaining whether or not a certain degree of academic deficits are prevalent during early childhood and primary schools and if it could be linked to divorce. Apparently, pupils who lack parental support issues may struggle academically at pre and post primary education level and even into college. These individuals may have trouble coping with the large amount of stress and personal freedoms that come with school life. To compare parental divorce and the relationship between the parent and child to academic success, the study will survey students coming from families of divorce, as well as those of intact families

## Statement of the Problem

One of the social challenges and realities of modern Nigeria is the rise in divorced, separated and single parent homes. The direct consequences of divorce are just being assessed in Nigeria, however, more worrisome has been its impact on adolescents social and academic development. The issues surrounding divorce largely impact on the growth of children. From who will take custody of children, financial responsibilities as well as the social and emotional support, all these take their toll on the social development of children from divorced homes. Even when these children come from rich homes or parents as the case may be, the deprivation and emotional trauma cannot be quantified. They may struggle in school due to the stress of experiencing a divorce. As academic performance continue to plummet in Nigeria, it has become necessary to assess the impact of divorce on the academic performance of pupils in primary schools as well as the quality of relationship maintained by divorced parents with their kids and how this could influence academic achievement. If children suffer neglect as a result of divorce just as they may suffer neglect as a result of other causes, could it also influence performance? Marriage is viewed as a life-long contract that is not easily broken. When the contract is broken, the resulting divorce has an effect on the entire family. Children may be torn between parents, forced to live in one house and visit the other. The importance of this issue stems from the effect it may have on children. They may struggle in school due to the stress of experiencing a divorce. The question posed in this study is: when children experience parental divorce, does their academic performance decline as a result? These are pertinent issues that require empirical evidence giving the changing dynamics of families and divorce prevalence.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine the influence of divorce on academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area. Specifically, the study sought to

1. Determine the influence of parental divorce on academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area.
2. Determine the influence of parental-child relationship on academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area.

## Research Questions

The following research questions were stated for the study

1. What is the influence of parental divorce on academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area?
2. What is the influence of parent-child relationship and academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area?

## Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance

1. There is no significant influence of parental divorce on academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area.
2. There is no significant influence of parental -child relationship on academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area.

## Methodology

The Ex Post facto research design was employed for the study. The population for the study is 1175 respondents. The population consisted of 203 parents and 972 pupils from selected primary schools in Mushin Local Government Area of Lagos State. The sample size is 842 respondents. This comprised 89 parents and 753 pupils. Purposive sampling was used in sampling five of the schools from ten primary schools to cut across the Local Government Area. Stratified sample technique was used to sample the students into those from divorced or separated homes and those whose parents are living together. Researchers' designed instrument titled "Divorce and Academic Achievement of Pupils Questionnaire" was used for data collection. The instrument for the study was validated by three Experts in educational foundations from the University of Lagos. The reliability of the instrument was administered through an initial test of the instrument administered on 20 respondents from another local government area in Lagos State. Thereafter, Cronbach alpha was then used to calculate the reliability coefficient which gave a value of 0.83. The Mean and Standard deviation was used to answer the research questions and the t-test used to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance.

## Presentation of Findings

**Research Question 1:** What is the influence of parental divorce on academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area?

**Table 1: Summary of Descriptive Analysis of influence of parental divorce on academic achievement among primary school pupils**

|                                 | N   | Mean Performance Score | SD    | Remarks      |
|---------------------------------|-----|------------------------|-------|--------------|
| Pupils living with both parents | 618 | 50.14                  | 10.69 | Higher score |
| Pupils from divorced home       | 135 | 38.37                  | 11.64 | Lower score  |

Table 1 shows the summary of the academic achievement of pupils in social studies. The result shows that pupils from divorced homes had a mean performance score of 38.37 as against 50.14 for pupils living with both parents. This indicates that divorce has a negative influence on academic achievement of pupils.

**Research Question 2:** What is the influence of parent-child relationship and academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area?

**Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Analysis of influence of parental - child relationship on academic achievement among primary school pupils**

|  | N  | Mean Performance Score | SD    | Remarks      |
|--|----|------------------------|-------|--------------|
| Pupils living with good relationship with divorced parents | 87 | 46.72                  | 11.06 | Higher score |
| Pupils living with poor relationship with divorced parents | 48 | 42.77                  | 13.58 | Lower score  |

Table 2 shows the summary of the academic achievement of pupils in social studies based on the quality of relationship they have with their divorced parents. The result shows that pupils with poor relationship with their divorced parents had a mean performance score of 42.77 as against 46.72 for pupils with good relationship with their divorced parents. This indicates that parental - child relationship has a net influence on academic achievement among primary school pupils whose parents are divorced.

**Ho1:** There is no significant influence of parental divorce on academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area.

**Table 3: Summary of t-test Analysis for significant influence of parental divorce on academic achievement among primary school pupils**

|                                 | N   | Mean Perf. Score | df  | tcal  | Sig of t p-value | Decision |
|---------------------------------|-----|------------------|-----|-------|------------------|----------|
| Pupils living with both parents | 618 | 50.14            | 617 | 10.69 |                  |          |
| Pupils from divorced home       | 135 | 38.37            | 134 | 11.64 | 751 3.335 0.002  | *        |

*\*significant @ 751 df, p(.002)<.05*

Table 3 gives the summary of the t-test analysis for significant influence of parental divorce on academic achievement among primary school pupils. The result shows that the calculated t-value is 3.335. At an alpha value of .05, the probability value (p-value) is .002. Since probability value is less than the significant value of .05,  $p(.002) < .05$ , the result is statistically significant. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant influence of parental divorce on academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area.

**Ho2:** There is no significant influence of parental -child relationship on academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area.

**Table 4: Summary of t-test Analysis for significant influence of parental -child relationship on academic achievement among primary school pupils**

| N   | Mean Perf. Score | Std. Dev. | df  | tcal  | Sig of t p-value | Decision |
|---|------------------|-----------|-----|-------|------------------|----------|
| Pupils living with 87 good relationship with divorced parents | 46.72            | 11.06     | 133 | 1.993 | 0.023            | *        |
| Pupils living with 48 poor relationship with divorced parents | 42.77            | 13.58     |     |       |                  |          |

*\*significant @ 751 df, p(.023)<.05*

Table 4 gives the summary of the t-test analysis for significant influence of parental -child relationship on academic achievement among primary school pupils. The result shows that the calculated t-value is 1.993. At an alpha value of .05, the probability value (p-value) is .023. Since probability value is less than the significant value of .05,  $p(.023) < .05$ , the result is statistically significant. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant influence of parental -child relationship on academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area.

**Discussion of Findings**

Result of analysis shows that pupils from separated or divorced homes performed lower than the pupils whose parents were living together in social studies. This signifies that divorce has a negative influence on academic achievement of pupils. The corresponding hypothesis test shows that there is a significant influence of parental divorce on academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area. Most pupils from divorce home perform below the average level in their academic work due to the instability in their home. This findings is supported by Amato (2010) which found that Children and adolescents with divorced or separated parents are less well-adjusted on *average* across a spectrum of outcomes, including physical and mental health, and do less well in school compared to those who grow up with non-divorced parents. This finding is corroborated by Zajacova and Lawrence (2018) which found that adolescents whose parents’ divorce have been found to experience a decline in overall grade point average (GPA) of one quarter to one-third of a letter grade and to fail more classes than those continuously living with both parents

The result also shows that parental - child relationship has a net influence on academic achievement among primary school pupils whose parents are divorced. The

related hypothesis test confirms that there is a significant influence of parental -child relationship on academic achievement among primary school pupils in Mushin local government area. The quality of the relationship between divorced parents and their wards has a significant influence on academic outcomes of pupils. This finding is in line with Zajacova & Lawrence (2018) which established the contributing factor of good academic outcomes of children from divorced homes are the quality of relationship maintained by parents with the child. This will be evident in the oversight in terms of educational material provision, discipline, care and support for home work and assignments.

## Conclusion

This study shows that divorce impacts on the academic achievement of pupils. The study concludes that there is a significant influence of parental divorce on academic achievement among primary school pupils. Furthermore, the quality of the relationship maintained by divorced parents with their children is a determining factor in their academic outcomes.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made

1. Parents, mostly those divorced, should ensure that they maintain good relationships with their children. This will help the child to continue their cognitive development.
2. School administrators should use the services of counselors to help struggling pupils from separated, divorced or neglected children. This is to help build their self-esteem and improve both social and academic skills.
3. Communication among teachers, parents and counselor is important in helping to ensure that the needs of parents and teachers over their wards. Thus, feedback and communication between teacher, parents and counselors should be encouraged by the school administrators.
4. The teachers should maintain stronger relationship with the pupils in order to identify their problems and find a way of helping them out.

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